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GENDER INEQUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

BY

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Summary

This study examines the factors that hinder meaningful development in Nigeria in the midst of abundant human and material resources. Data were obtained from Ibadan, south western, Nigeria through a triangulation of Focus Group Discussion, In-depth Interview and Unobtrusive Observation. The study shows clearly that: (1) a very large majority of Nigerian women are poor and that this explains their ignoble involvement in development; (2) most women are unwittingly predisposed to the perception and attitude that suggest that their situation in the social system is normal; and (3) the patriarchal ethos of the Nigerian society impinges forcefully on the extent that developmental processes are democratic and socially inclusive. The implication of these findings is that attempts at achieving multidimensional development in Nigeria have been distorted by long years of gender propelled inequality, skepticism and contradictions within the social system. The study has some policy implications. First, there is need to re-orientate Nigerians, especially males, on the need

to involve women fully in development. Second, following from the former, is the necessity of dislocating those factors that sustain women exclusion from socio-economic and cultural activities and, ultimately, the development of underdevelopment.

Keywords: social system, patriarchal ethos, multidimensional development, re-orientation, women exclusion.

Introduction

Nigeria is a nation embedded in contradictions. Perhaps, her antithetical predisposition to circumstances and events explains her consistently apparent failure to achieve necessary developmental goals. This regrettable intergenerational feature of a country presumed to be the pride of the entire black race and Africa in particular, conjures for Nigeria an image that hardly differentiates it from other developing countries, and in particular those, that adopt *the anything goes approach* as a way of life. While it is obvious that some of these countries lack direction in the realm of development, the case of Nigeria, given her potentials, should rather be the exact opposite.

A review of Nigeria's development, however, in the midst of her interesting diversity and particularly in the abundance of human and material resources indicates clearly that the consequence of operating on the principle of negation cannot be overstated. The antithesis of attempts at achieving multidimensional development is in the selective inclusion of a class/category of individuals and not others in the process of development. The implication of such selectivity is that development becomes an activity that derives from lopsidedness and/ or polarization and inevitably loses the

capacity to all inclusiveness. Hence, the benefits of diversity are lost. The further consequence of an isolationist-approach to who gets involved in shaping a particular society is that those not selected or recognized, implicitly or explicitly, express their marginalization in various ways to sabotage the entire development agenda.

The effects of the above scenario are decomposable into other negating factors of development namely poverty, deviation from norms and values and general apathy to society goals. This paper sets out to make a diagnosis of failure of attempts at multidimensional development in Nigeria, focusing primarily on gender inequality. The motivation for isolating gender inequality for the present discourse derives from the fact that females constitute about 50 percent of the population of Nigeria (Nwokocha, 2004; 2005). Therefore, any attempt at explaining the reality of any aspect of the Nigerian social system that ignores the relevance of gender analysis is an invitation to an effort in futility. This point is explicated by reference to gender as the social dynamics that characterizes the way men and women relate to each other on a given historical time frame and through socially engineered identities, power and production relations” (Fall, 1999). By using gender issues as the point of incision into the whole gamut of development analysis, the paper makes important contributions to the methodological and analytical interests of development studies and advances understanding on how a micro-level investigation impinges upon a macro-phenomenon such development.

Revisiting Development: Understanding the Nigerian Dilemma

The concept of development is better understood in its relative status in time and space. This relativity explains the difficulty of suggesting a universal definition for the concept. The fact that individuals have different perceptions, orientations, motivations and expectations makes this difficulty more obvious. The consensus among scholars, however, is that any objective assessment of development must necessarily acknowledge its multidimensionality. The implication emphasized here is that for the concept to have a comprehensive meaning, it must be conceived in holistic terms: a sort of integrating various developable parts in that analysis. Development must be understood in the context of emancipating individuals from inequality of any kind, poverty, hunger, illiteracy, unemployment and deprivations. Attempts to emphasize any or some of these factors, and not all, limit the meaning and scope of the phenomenon.

This view about emancipation locates Nigeria in the realm of incapacity to liberate from anti developmental components such as poverty, visionlessness and inequity. The reality of the situation in the country is such that none of the development variables presented earlier is improving. Hence, the case of Nigeria in this context, it can be argued, is a holistic failure. The variables rather indicate the country's consistency at developing underdevelopment. In Nigeria, each successive government leaves office with the majority of citizens becoming more impoverished, with women as the most affected. The reason is obvious. Women participation in politics and by implication the sharing of "national cake", due to some cultural and religious reasons, is lower in Nigeria than in most other countries of the world. Condemnable as such looting is, in reality, it has become one of the quickest ways of becoming a *nouveau rich*. So, Nigerian women, with

minimal or no representation, are among the most disadvantaged. Although there are situations where men are also disadvantaged as women, "generally women and girls have fewer opportunities, lower status and less power and influence than men and boys" (DFID, 2002). It was argued somewhere that the basic consequence of feminizing poverty is that the links between gender equality and sustainable development are undermined (Nwokocha, 2004). The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency - SIDA, in the same vein stated:

Gender-based inequalities deprive women of their basic rights (including sexual and reproductive rights), disempower them and constrain their access to resources, opportunities and security. It also impairs overall development. Constraints on women's productive potential reduce individual and household incomes as well as economic growth at national levels (SIDA, 2002a: 32)

Ostensibly, men and society at large bear specific costs arising from prevailing gender relations. The time has therefore come for genuine efforts towards addressing the situation, for as Short (1999) noted, "there is an irrefutable common interest in doing so". In that vein, Akande (2000) argued that there is need to challenge existing social structures that limit women from realizing their inherent potentials. SIDA (1998) also stated that "equal relationships need to be based on a redefinition of the rights and responsibilities of women and men in all spheres..." These views speak directly to the situation in Nigeria, especially, when it is realized that women make up a very large

proportion of the country's population and yet, do not contribute commensurately to development (Nwokocho, 2004). Akande's apprehensions that efforts by women for equal treatment in education, health, occupation and legal rights are not reachable in rugged patriarchy was justified. The same position was expressed by Abumere when he noted:

Unequal access can seriously undermine national unity and make the task of national integration difficult ... inequality, in addition to threatening national unity, also stands in the way of sustainable development (Abumere, 1998: 26 – 27)

The above statement underscores the dilemma in African development. Investigation reveals that among all the continents, Africa is credited with the highest amount of natural resources, yet the least developed (Akinjide, 2000). The meaning conveyed by this situation is that something is, obviously, wrong with the management of these resources. When the human capital within a social system does not indicate sufficient equipment to effectively manage peculiar natural endowments in that society, there is bound to be retrogression. Excluding women from social and economic activities contributes significantly to such incapacity. Unfortunately, most scholars analyze African development at the macro-level without reference to internal contradictions within societies in the continent arising from women exclusion.

In fact, most writers locate underdevelopment of Africa at modernization, dependency, slavery, colonization and neo-colonization (Gboyega, 2003; Olutayo and Bankole, 2002; Ekeh, 1983). Although Otite (1992) observed that

“every society is a living record of its past”, that assertion remains wholly consistent only if we agree that individuals in the continent either do not have the capacity to handle the society as though it is a synchronic phenomenon or unable to chart a new course without reference to preceding events that may in themselves undermine development. This study argues quite forcefully that these components of development processes experienced in Africa namely slavery, colonization, modernization, dependency, and neo-colonization have little relevance compared to gender inequality. We have not here tried to re-awaken Karl Popper’s argument that historicism as a perspective is poor (Adesina, 2000), but rather to demonstrate that a misleading past should be treated as though it never existed. The central thesis of this paper is that African underdevelopment is homegrown: it has internal components with gender inequality as the most basic. Nigeria and other countries in these contradictions need to do the right diagnosis of the problem as the only way to finding right solutions to this development dilemma.

With her complex features, Nigeria had and still has the potential of becoming a model for a combination of countries that make up the continent, on one hand, and the highest contributor to the African character on the other. The efficiency and extent to which this African leadership has been discharged by Nigeria is a function of peculiar factors that require specific understanding and handling. An insight into the crises in Nigeria and their connections to those of Africa was aptly given by Okunmadewa when he observed:

As the most populous and one of the largest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the issue of poverty in Nigeria is of concern not only in itself but also as a challenge for poverty reduction

mandate in the whole of the African continent. Despite Nigeria's physical and human resources potential, its socio-economic and political situation has been unstable for more than two decades with adverse consequences for welfare and poverty of its population... one often ignored reason for the persistence and pervasiveness of poverty in Nigeria is the lack of popular participation in governance and decision making (Okunmadewa, 2001: 1)

Limiting good men and women of a society from active participation in social activities for Edmund Burke, is all that is required for evil to triumph in any community; a situation that inevitably enthrones mediocrity, visionlessness and corruption (Babalola, 2000). At the centre of Burke's argument is the recognition that excellence and meritocracy should be perceived as virtuous in achieving sustainable growth, rather than from constructions that find meaning only when a certain category of individuals is excluded from participating in shaping societies. The introduction and sustenance of patriarchy, even though largely responsible for the feminization of poverty, has also unwittingly accounted for the dislocation of the entire social structure (Nwokocho, 2004). To address this socially constructed injustice (male-domination), feminism highlights the nature, form and extent of man's inhumanity to woman (Okome, 2003) as a way of comprehending the retrogressive implication of patriarchy for development.

It is asserted that women's empowerment conceived in their ability to make strategic life choices in contexts where this ability was hitherto denied is a necessary step towards

development (SIDA, 2002b; 2003). Investing in female education and health care contributes to sustainable poverty alleviation (SIDA, 2002a; Ottong, 1993), which impacts positively on development. Akande in addition suggested that:

In productivity, women must be enabled to increase their productivity and to participate fully in the process of income generation and remunerative employment. They must have equal access to equal opportunities... In sustainability, their access to opportunities must be ensured not only for the present generation but for future generations as well... As long as it is accepted that women are people too, then it follows logically that human development is impossible without gender equality. As long as women are excluded from the development process, development will remain weak and lopsided (Akande, 2000: 5)

Akande's thesis is that the culture of exclusion, which limits women, contradicts genuine efforts at sustainable development and therefore should be abandoned. Doing that, however, requires bravery, tact and consistency from individuals and groups that share the aspiration of dismantling gender inequality. Embracing these change components will show equipment, adjustability and readiness to confront underdevelopment headlong. Achieving the required cooperation has been made easier by globalisation, which is shrinking time and space (Spybey, 1996). With people of different communities and continents interacting in

a world that has become implicitly narrower, the parochial regime is fast losing relevance to hybridity. Knowledge, attitudes and inclinations are now shared as never before and the dynamics of introducing gender equality can be learned from groups and societies where gender differences are almost vague.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study combines the components of liberal feminism, patriarchal perspective, circulation of elite and stakeholders' theories. The synthesis is presented in Figure 1 below.

The framework indicates that patriarchy is at the centre of human relationships and largely shapes activities of individuals in the society. The implication is that gender inequality is sustained, leading to the circular flow of male ideology in almost every sphere of human endeavor. The consequence of such male-exclusive ideological society is mediocrity resulting from women exclusion from the economic, political and religious activities and family decisions, including on reproductive health. It follows then that notwithstanding the capability of women on one hand and the inability of men to contribute to development on the other in certain circumstances, the latter is, in most cases, still preferred in that enterprise.

The non-inclusion of women in these activities translates to infliction of poverty on womenfolk – feminization of poverty. The reality of the situation in Nigeria is that until very recently, women were excluded almost entirely from developmental activities for religious, cultural and social reasons – as defined and sustained by patriarchy. The one-sidedness that accrues from male-dominance has

links with the failure of past attempts at development, as it were, considering the teeming population of women in Nigeria. The position of this paper is that patriarchy more than any other phenomenon has the greatest effect on the development of underdevelopment in Nigeria and most other countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

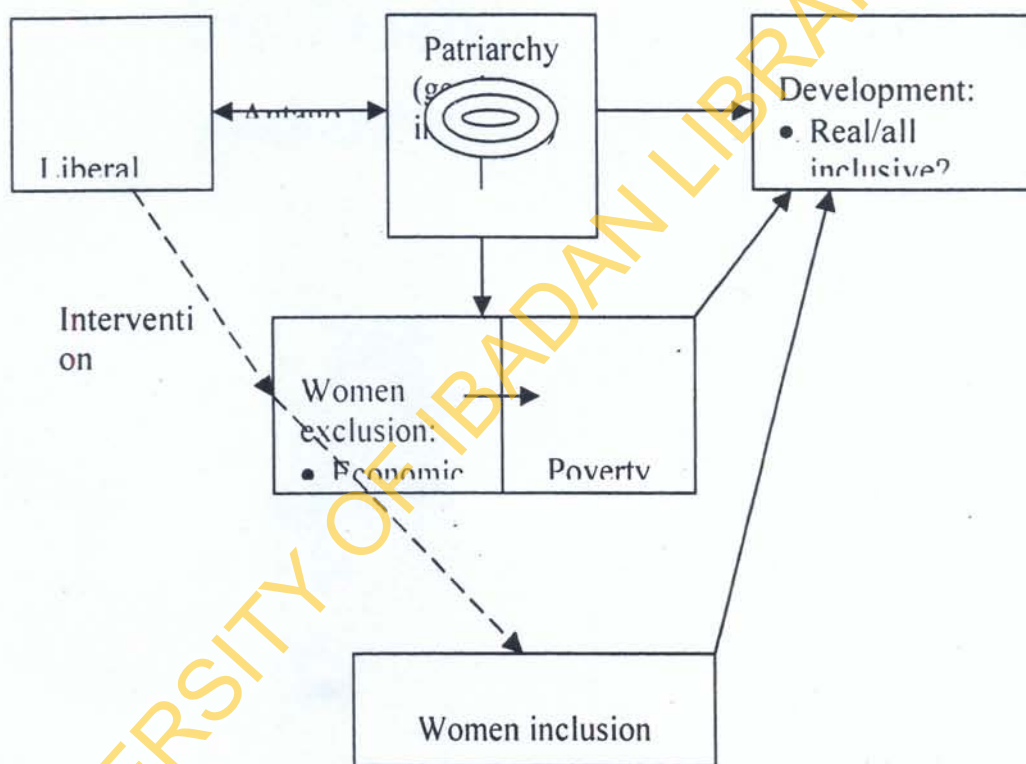


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Nwokocho 2006.

Liberal feminist perspective is opposed to patriarchy and inter-generational discriminatory practices against women sustained through gender-specific socialization processes. Ritzer while highlighting the basic view of liberal feminism noted:

The true rewards of social life – money, power, status, freedom, opportunities for growth and self-worth – are to be found in the public sphere. The system that restricts women's access to that sphere burdens them with private sphere responsibilities, isolates them in individual households and excuses their mates from any sharing of private-sphere drudgeries is the system that produces gender inequality (Ritzer, 1996: 450).

The inadequacies surrounding such gender-dependent limitations signal a need for intervention towards attitudinal and behavioral change. Engaging the above issue, Nwokocha (2004) argued that given that the effects of patriarchy have for long impacted on every aspect of life, a gradual but sustained approach to introducing gender equality is, necessarily, the most feasible route to entrenching "centriarchy" – a synthesis of both patriarchal and matriarchal components. The proposed centriarchal relationship will both redefine and redirect the perception, attitude and behaviour of individuals towards a broader and more objective view of social reality. Thus, liberal feminism as an intervening perspective supposes that women's inclusion in all sociocultural activities is not only imperative to gender equality but also a prerequisite for sustainable development.

The feminist theory suggests that women should be stakeholders in society especially in countries like Nigeria where they constitute about 50% of the population. Stakeholding in this case implies belongingness and acceptability of women as individuals with full potentials that can contribute significantly to the development of their societies. On the contrary, where the "partners in progress" notion is

not conceived by women as a result of suspicion and skepticism towards men, given antecedents, the likelihood is high that women will be disinterested in development activities. This tendency to abandoning almost all efforts for men alone negates the principle of unity in diversity. The framework shows that it is only when the necessary contradictions between patriarchy and feminism are resolved that multidimensional development can be realized in Nigeria and other societies that are still subsumed within the patriarchal enclave.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted in Ibadan, Southwestern, Nigeria. Data were collected through intra-method triangulation of focus group discussion (FGD), in-depth interview (IDI) and unobtrusive observation. A total of 13 FGDs were conducted among various category of women and men. Of the 13 groups, 9 sessions were conducted among women of different categories which include: civil servants – 3; market women – 4; and unemployed – 2. More women were included in the discussions to elicit their views pertaining to women's contributions to development in a patriarchal society. A further justification for engaging more women in FGDs was due to the centrality of understanding gender inequality which affects women more than their men counterpart. In order to make comparisons, 4 FGDs were conducted among men in the following manner: 2 among civil servants, while 1 session each was conducted for businessmen and the unemployed respectively. Those classified as unemployed are people who at the time of this research were not engaged in any definable economic activity. Individuals in this category were identified through household investigation that covered part of the study area.

A total of 10 unstructured in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted among a cross section of women in the study area. Of this total, 3 interviews were conducted among civil servants, 4 among traders in two markets in the study area and 3 among economically unemployed women in Ibadan. In-depth Interview was used as a tool for comparing responses from FGDs and insights from unobtrusive observation. Mixed-method of data gathering ensured that the flaws of each of these techniques were covered by other methods. Apart from the problem of locating respondents that were willing to talk on the subject, the emotions and subjective views expressed by most of these participants were obvious. Some of the respondents/participants misunderstood some of the questions and it took a lot of patience and persuasion from the interviewers and moderators to collect the data.

Data analysis began with the translation and transcription of tapes and notes of FGDs and IDIs. Analyzing information generated through these techniques requires tact, patience and expertise because qualitative data are far-reaching but given their unstructured textual character, are not straightforward to analyze (Bryman, 2001). This difficulty presented the challenge of browsing through a conger of analytical methods. In the final analysis, data were analyzed using manual content analysis.

Summary of Research Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study derive from three main objectives. These include: (1) to examine the relationship between poverty and development; (2) to assess the interaction of patriarchy and development in Nigeria; and (3) to investigate the position of women generally within the social system.

On Poverty and Development

A large majority of FGD participants among male and female groups agreed on the fact that poverty affects development and that non realization of the later is dependent on the former. A female FGD participant who belongs to the civil service category explained the above position by stating:

Development does not occur in a vacuum. No miracle would make a poor country become developed without human efforts. It is people that introduce and sustain development and unless these people are adequately catered for, their thought patterns would be guided by the quest to provide their families with the basic necessities of life rather than on how to move the country forward. Development must begin with the people; human development.

Extending the above view was another civil servant male FGD participant who argued that development without education is not feasible. His position was that poverty limits the capacity of most families to defray the cost of education which is a prerequisite to development. He further stated: "it is even annoying that in the midst of abject poverty, government is still increasing the cost of education. Where are we heading to in this country". One of the IDI respondents noted that there is an agenda by a particular ruling class to sustain poverty in Nigeria. This class she maintained "has an instruction to either maintain the status quo or, even, widen the gap between the rich and the poor without any reflection on the implications".

These assertions are subsumed in the economic conception of poverty only. Reference was not made to other aspects of social life. This linearity presents just a partial view

of reality. Such selective perception of poverty implies that that contradiction also impinges on our thought patterns. Poverty should rather be seen as any situation when individuals or groups are incapacitated or disempowered or disenabled to maximize their inherent potentials as a result of limitations imposed directly or indirectly by the physical and/or sociocultural environment (Nwokocha, 2004). It is only when the other significant components of poverty are strongly highlighted that a proper intervention strategy could be worked out.

On Patriarchy and Development in Nigeria

A comprehensive understanding of patriarchy as a concept among study respondents was achieved by disaggregating its elements to convey specific meaning to non-literate respondents. In sum, it was conceived as a form of social relationship that allows men dominance over women and females generally. Most female FGD participants were of the view that the effect of patriarchy is felt beginning from individual families to the extent that socialization, attitudes and behaviour are defined by it. One of the female FGD discussants who incidentally is a lecturer noted:

Right from childhood, the role of boys and girls are separated. Each sex group begins to form attitudes that conform to society's definition of the differences between what boys/men and girls/women should and ought to do in the community. This learned behaviour in turn guides their later dispositions and activities. It is this socialization that introduces most males to autocracy and the culture of female exclusion in the

society. The danger is that unless a wife is very patient and forgiving, spousal communication is grossly undermined...such situation heightens vulnerability of marriages on one hand, and unwillingness to pull family resources together, on the other.

Easily identifiable from this statement is that gender inequality although, explicitly, places women at a disadvantage also affects the other sex in a variety of ways. For instance, there is no guarantee that breakdown down in communication among couples would affect women more than men. In most cases, other members of the family suffer the consequences of the situation they may not have in any way contributed to. From the micro analytical point of view, it means that such individuals and families would not be able to contribute meaningfully to the development of their immediate environments as a result of these distractions.

Following from the above argument and considering that the macro-society is an agglomeration of individual families, development becomes extremely difficult to achieve without meaningful contribution from these families. This analysis confirms the retrogressive feature of patriarchy and the need for adjustment. Another IDI respondent working with an NGO in Ibadan reiterated that the justification to fully accommodate women in the scheme of things derives from the fact that individuals notwithstanding their sexes have different potentials, endowments and abilities. She further stated that the best and strongest approach to development is for men to treat women as partners in progress in all spheres of life rather than as spectators whose primary role is to watch

events. This proposed democratic and socially inclusive character of the society will negate the antithetical components consistent with patriarchy. The position of this paper is that sustainable development can only be achieved in Nigeria when women have fairly equal access to power and other opportunities in all matters related to human and material development in society. Equality in the sense proposed here implies involvement in activities and events on the basis of capacity rather than sex.

On Women's Position within the Social System

The issue of women's position was discussed by respondents from their individual points of view. The responses largely indicate that women's status is normal and that the situation in Nigeria affects the men as well. One of the market women that was engaged in IDI stated:

I do not see any difference between men and women's position in Nigeria, except that our culture ascribes to men the responsibility of leading their families. This position automatically places the household financial and other responsibilities on the shoulders of these men. At times they are stretched to the limits where their wives would not have any option than assist them. Personally, I had to take the responsibility of financing the education of two of my children, while my husband in addition to sponsoring the education of four others also provides money for feeding. He equally pays the rent. I pity him (Biodu, Y. 04/02/04: Pers. Comm.).

The statement was affirmed by a male FGD participant who incidentally was unemployed during the time of the

study. He pointed out that "no sane person will like to see his wife and children suffer in situations he can provide them with comfort...the government has failed totally in taking care of its people". Similar view was expressed by a female civil servant who participated in one of the FGDs by contending that:

I blame the thieves that call themselves government. I will suggest that we throw our prisons open because those who populate as well as languish there are people who have committed the least of crimes. Those who steal and impoverish the nation and inflict unnecessary pain, hypertension and poverty on the majority of the people live in big mansions, ride the best of cars and send their children to the most expensive schools in the world. We can only develop when these real criminals are given befitting treatment so that others will learn. How do you explain a situation where a couple and even their children engage in various economic activities to augment household economy, yet necessary family obligations are not adequately met?

These assertions suggest that something is wrong with the socioeconomic and political environment in Nigeria. However, the condition of women, as understood by the majority of respondents including women, is not considered as quite different from that of men. In that sense therefore, the position of women is seen as normal. The antithesis is in the consensus by both sexes that the problem is with leadership at the societal level and not gender inequality beginning from

the micro family level. The position of this study is that, although there is fundamental inadequacy at the level of leadership in Nigeria, male-superiority and dominance has contributed more to poverty among Nigerians than leadership. Even then, governance and its processes are better embraced as well as make more meaning when members of a given community embrace it without unnecessary inhibitions arising from gender-propelled discrimination. Women in Nigeria for various reasons are limited from active participation in politics. This situation speaks directly to both political culture and socialization.

The major consequence of women themselves not perceiving the inherent disability in excluding women from leadership is that the need for restructuring the existing social system would not be fully appreciated. That would, however, mean chasing shadow when there is substance to grapple with. At the core of campaigns for equality is emphasis on the essence of dismantling structures that negate fairness, humanism and development (Akande, 2000; SIDA, 1998). This paper argues that until the psyche of women are revisited; unless women are sufficiently de-briefed from their man-made deprivations, they would be unable to speak with one voice to challenge their domination by men (Omololu, 1997), and so long would development be a mirage.

Conclusion

This study has dealt with gender inequality and its relationship with the underdevelopment of Nigeria. Its purpose is to awaken in scholars, policy makers and other stakeholders in the quest for sustainable development in

Nigeria the consciousness that will encourage them to appreciate the often ignored but important aspect of development analysis – the gender aspect. The approach employed in this diagnosis was seemingly different from established tradition that emphasized macro analysis of the social system that thrived in shifting blames. Exonerative models that hoodwinked individuals and groups against proper perception and activities towards sustainable development became excuses for incompetence and indolence.

It has become clear that development paradigms that located African underdevelopment in modernization, dependency, slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism caved in towards the end of the 20th century. Even before then, Nigeria had lost touch with reality by the introduction of various contradictory economic policies that negated genuine quest for development. These policies, implicitly, were designed to further the interests of one group against the other. The country inevitably became an epitome of contradictions. Nigeria can only achieve sustainable development by restructuring every aspect of her social system in order to accommodate all facets of the society. If Nigeria records sustainable development without such restructuring, she would be defiling the natural course of development which has not worked any where in the world.

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