

gender and development problems. We will continue to work with the student body through group, individual counselling and interactive sessions aimed at assisting students with academic, psychological and emotional problems.

We appreciate the fact that we are operating in a global village, characterized by knowledge explosion. We therefore, solicit for your advice, contributions, suggestions, and indeed we invite you to visit us at your convenience and share in our programmes and activities by:

- Providing internship opportunities for students
- Mentoring students
- Giving guest lectures for CWGDS classes
- Attending CWGDS functions
- Helping with publicity
- Co-developing programmes or events
- Providing other resources.

We wish to appreciate in a very special way, the University Community and Management under the distinguished and charismatic leadership of Prof. Chigozie C. Asiabaka, the 6th Substantive Vice-Chancellor of FUTO (a.k.a. Digital Vice-Chancellor). Vice-Chancellor Sir, your support and encouragement made it possible for us to get to this point. Thank you for being a caring father to all of us. We pray that God will continue to guide and guard you. We are grateful to Prof. Ike Nwachukwu our Guest Lecturer for accepting to give this lecture in spite of the very short notice.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, once again I welcome you to this occasion, and thank you all for honouring our invitation.

May the Good Lord continue to bless and guide you.

Dr. (Mrs.) Ihuoma P. Asiabaka
Director, CWGDS

Insight December, 2012

Gender Studies in Nigeria; Understanding the Gaps and Setting Forth an Agenda

By

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A Lecture Delivered at the Official Opening of the Centre for Women, Gender and Development Studies, Federal University of Technology, Owerri. 17th Dec. 2012

INTRODUCTION

The male domination of the female folks has been a global phenomenon which can be traced from the beginning of creation. From the Biblical account of creation, the woman was created to be in subjection to the man. This has been the situation till the present day. Two human institutions, *culture* and *religion* have helped to re-emphasize this dominance of women by men.

While culture, which is usually defined by men, as to how a wife (woman) should stay under the ruler ship of the man in the home (community), religion puts a stamp of authority over what the culture says. The women hardly have any objection to these dictates. Thus women were seen in the community as people who are married to the home and hence have no voice other than to obey the man. The



contributions of the woman to the household became unrecognized, not appreciated, or even rewarded.

This global unchallenged dominance of men over women continued until the industrial revolution in the First world, and the urban development in the Third world. The industrial revolution ensured that the men went to work in the industries to earn income. As labour demands continued to increase, women were drawn into the labour market where they were seen as labourers who were not qualified to earn as much as men for the same job done. In the Third world, as development began to spread to the urban areas, there were massive rural-urban migrations by men, thereby leaving the farm work largely in the hands of women.

The women became the dominant labour force in agricultural sector, accounting for about 80% of it.

Yet this contribution was not recognized or rewarded (FAO 2011). Today, women make up more than half of the world's population yet perform two-thirds of the work (UN, 2012)

However, in the 1960s, the women in Europe and America went into massive protests to liberate themselves from the male dominance and unfair treatment in the labour market. Though many successes were achieved by the women through these protests, such successes were not enough to bring women to the position they desired and ought to be. The United Nations has since taken up the challenge in raising global awareness as to the recognition of the women in global economic development. This led to the United Nations declaration of 'a decade for women , 1976-1985'(UN, 2012) This subsequently, led to the establishment of Gender studies Institutes and Centres as we have it at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri.

The challenge of gender studies therefore is to come up with

proposals and recommendations that would ameliorate gender inequalities in the world in general and Nigeria in particular, and most importantly, how those recommendations can scale through the economic, cultural and religious prejudices, to ensure gender equality in our society. That is the focus of this paper.

This paper is divided into four main parts;

- Introduction
- Conceptual definition of gender
- The condition of Nigerian woman today, and an
- Agenda for gender studies in the Federal University of Technology, Owerri.

Gender, a conceptual definition.

*According to the Dictionary, Gender as a noun, has been defined as the state of being male or female (typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones). The word **gender(from the Dictionary)** has been used since the 14th Century as a grammatical term, referring to classes of noun designated as *masculine, feminine, or neuter* in some languages. The sense 'the state of being male or female' has also been used since the 14th Century, but this did not become common until the mid 20th Century. Although the words **gender** and **sex** both have the sense 'the state of being male or female', they are typically used in slightly different ways: **sex** tends to refer to biological differences, while **gender** refers to cultural or social ones (WHO,2011).*

A **gender role** is a set of social and behavioral norms that are generally considered appropriate for either a man or a woman in a social or interpersonal relationship. There are differences of opinion as to which observed differences in behavior and personality between genders are entirely due to innate personality of the person and which are due to cultural or social factors, and are therefore, the product of socialization, or to what extent gender differences are due to

biological and physiological differences (WHO,2009)

Gender roles differ according to cultural-historical context, and while most cultures express two genders, some express more. Androgyny, for example, has been proposed as a third gender. Other societies have been claimed to have more than five genders (Graham, 2001) and some non-Western societies have three genders man, woman and third gender .Gender expression refers to the external manifestation of one's gender identity, through "masculine," "feminine," or gender-variant or gender neutral behavior, clothing, hairstyles, or body characteristics. In our society today, it is increasingly becoming difficult to classify gender into strictly male and female. We have hermaphrodites from birth, but much more, we have people who have altered their biological make up through surgery to have both the male and female organs as well as the biological characteristics of both sexes. In Nigeria today as in the western countries, we have boys who wear ear rings and plait their hairs like women. Somehow, these aberrations are gradually being accepted in the society. From our definition of gender, the role of culture becomes very clear as to the definition of who is a 'man' and 'woman'

This is the behaviour, practices and beliefs of a group of people or nation. It is the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group .It is very much related to Tradition, which is the long time hand down of culture from generation to generation (sourced from internet). It therefore means that what role a man or woman plays in the society is defined by that particular culture. Therefore, gender roles are specific to a particular culture and also dynamic. This cultural definition is very strong and can hardly be resisted by individuals because it is translated from generation to another until it acquires a force of law.

In the Igbo cosmology the word for tradition is 'omenani' which means accepting what is done in one's community. The essential requirement of *omenani* on the part of the individual is the identification of the individual with the totality of being. The individual complies with the specific beliefs and customs prevalent in the community. Values based on individual's exclusive self interest are not acceptable. That is why negative gender roles are difficult to change, especially in the traditional setting.

Religion also plays a significant part in how ideas of gender roles are created and perceived. Religions have large impact on those who practice and follow them, and those practices and beliefs filter down into our everyday lives, which can inevitably alter our view on topics such as gender. Most of us in this part of the country are largely Christians. Here, the Bible teaches that the woman should submit and be in subjection to her husband. It will be difficult for an adherent to the Christian faith to go against this injunction or to even see it as gender inequality. The same applies to the Islamic religion. It must be stated here though that gender studies is not about resolving the 'conflict' between husband's and wife's roles in the family.

Gender theories

In any attempt to analyse and study gender issues, one should be abreast with some theories that have been propounded by authors. This will help in situating such analyses within a theoretical framework. Here, some gender theories are highlighted (see Nnodim, 2011, for details).

The Sex Theory

Generally, sex refers to anatomical and physiological differences between man and woman, while gender is taken to mean the socially constructed differences, as seen in behaviour, values etc. In this theory a casual relationship is established

between sex and gender with the idea that the characteristics of masculine gender or masculinity and female gender or femininity are automatically determined by the anatomical differences between males and females (Giddens, 2000).

This theory also known as biological determinism depicts that biological differences determine to a large extent the social and cultural differences observed between men and women. The proponents believe that there exist two sexes which can be clearly differentiated from a genetic, anatomical and physiological point of view and that the behaviour of each social group is largely determined by such biological differences. To them, such biological differences determine a binary divide in all areas of social life, from the norms associated with physical and aesthetic appearance to intellectual ability and behavior. The reality of today's sex change challenges this categorization.

The Male Breadwinner Theory

This refers to the position and responsibilities of the man in terms of providing the household needs. The male-breadwinner theory sees the man as the sole provider and the woman as the dormant entity who remains in the house to enjoy what the man brings, or rather plays a complementary role carrying out domestic activities and caring for the children. The theory refers to both material provisions and the collective and ideological representation of women's employment outside home. Manson (2006), opines that the theory enables the analysis of the current developments in the dominant gender norms in each social context, offering an analytical continuum marked strong and weak versions.

The Gender Difference Theory

There are four dimensions of explaining this theory. The first dimension is based on the cultural perspective. The centralists believed that the development of gender difference in human history is the product of male patriarchy to assert man's superiority over women. They

inclined their expositions more towards asserting and crystallizing the values of women's differences than with providing answers to the question of its origin.

Explanation of gender differences from the perspective of culture is that structures and roles assume that behaviour is largely directed and determined by culture, which is the learned recipes for behaviour shared by members of a society (Haralambos and Heald, 1980). From this perspective, gender roles are a product of culture rather than biology. Individuals learn their respective male and female roles. The sexual division of labour is supported and justified by a belief and value system which states that gender roles are normal, natural, right and proper.

Iheanachor (2004) argues that if biology determines gender inequality, then gender inequality should be universal. But given the wide disparity which exists in gender inequality from one society to another, the writer contends that gender inequality should be sought in different cultures of societies. Thus, activities such as weaving, pottery making, tailoring are thought to be naturally men's task in some societies. The issue is not the differential or complementary roles of male or female, but that in cultures where a role is peculiar to men, it carries higher prestige than in cultures where it is performed by women. This he asserts as male domination. In his words, "male domination is a situation in which men have highly preferential access, although not always exclusive rights, to other activities to which society accords the greatest value and the exercise of which permits a measure of control over others".

Another perspective of explaining gender difference is the institutional and socialization perspective. These paradigms are based on a belief that gender differences result from the different roles that men and women are exposed to (socialization) or come to play (institutional) within

various institutional settings (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1996). In the family setting, socialization recognizes gender division of labour, and by the differential socialization, boys are prepared towards manhood and girls towards womanhood. Thus, in the process of socialization in the society, children as well as adults through reinforcement, initiation and observation acquire roles and skills that correspond to their sexes. Therefore, to the theorists it is sexual division of labour that links women to function as wives, mothers, household keeper and other series of events and experiences that are different from those of men.

Also there is the biogrammar theory or perspective in explaining gender difference as postulated by Tiger and Fox in Haralambos and Heald (1980). The biogrammar explained the gender differences as a genetically programme system which has the capacity to predispose and condition human being towards certain patterns of feelings and actions. According to them, the differential characteristics in male and female sex which the biogrammar shows are accounted for, by the difference in the male and female hormones, and partly inherited genetically from man's primate forebears and partly through genetic adaptation to the aggressive activity of hunting.

In support of this theory, Haralambos and Heald (1980), observed that the existence of male and female biogrammars in modern society confirms the theory, and that attempts to abolish gender roles and replace them with unisex roles, however desirable it may be, would go against nature. Again is the great functionalist postulated by Talcott Parson, and cited by Haralambos and Heald (1980). Parsons, believe that the nuclear family performs two identifiable roles: the socialization of the young and the stabilization of an adult personality. Thus, within this family institution, the woman is responsible for the socialization of the young. This role is sequel to the

female biological disposition of bearing and nursing children. This leads to stronger ties between mother and children, in contrast with the father who is always away from home trying to fulfill his function as the bread-winner. This makes the roles of the woman in the family expressive.

Another critic of biological explanation of gender difference is Sherry Ortner. Ortner (2006), based her arguments on cultural factors. The critics refused to accept the assumptions that biology accounts for the universal devaluation of women, but rather cultural definition and evaluations. Ortner believes that if the cultural definitions and evaluation of women change for better, the basis for female subordination would be dismantled. The argument is that, there is unnecessary attachment of high value to culture than nature, hence culture is the channel through which man controls and regulates nature. In this vein, women are seen as closer to nature than men and therefore are inferior to men. This closer to nature as defined are attributed to their bodies and physiological functions which are more concerned with the natural processes surrounding the reproduction of the species. Though Ortner may not be excellent in her assumption, but her theory beamed light on a universal explanation for the second-class status of women in the society. If her argument is accepted, the status of women can only be attributed to culture rather than biology. Culture being man made especially in a patriarchal society becomes the basis for the dehumanization of women and perpetuation of harmful widowhood rights against women.

Analyses of these theories would help in appreciating the different phases of the struggle to bring gender issues to global attention

Development of gender studies

Gender studies as we have it today developed over the years in phases. The first phase was the Women's

Liberation Movement.

In the mid-1960s, almost half a century after women won the right to vote, women's rights activism joined the explosion of civil rights, anti-war, and student movements (Evans, undated). For well over a decade hundreds of thousands of American women turned out for massive demonstrations, overturned discriminatory laws through legislation and court action, broke new ground by entering male dominated professions (law, medicine, clergy, corporate and blue-collar), and initiated a vast array of new institutions such as rape crisis centers, shelters for battered women, feminist journals, health clinics, and coffee houses. The movement was marked by the breadth of its challenge to traditional roles as thousands of women joined "consciousness-raising" groups to share with others the process of re-thinking the meaning and potentials of womanhood.

Though the Women's Liberation Movement achieved some successes in Europe and America, however, these were limited to these regions and did not address the global suffering of women. Also, the 'Libbers', as they were called adopted a radical approach that questioned the authority of the man and his masculinity. So the libbers faced much opposition until the movement fizzled out.

In spite of the gains of the Women Liberation Movement, the lots of women globally, especially in the developing world, still remained unimproved and no attention was given to it. This brought about the second phase, that of Women Development or Women Empowerment. Nations began to realize that national development would not be realized until women were given special consideration for improvement. This led to the establishment of special Ministries for Women Development and specialized departments in different sectors of the economy that looked into specific problems of women.

An example of this was in the agricultural sector in Nigeria where women dominate in the labour force. Women-in-Agriculture was the Unit carved out to address the problems of women in the agricultural sector. However, it was soon realized that carving out this department would not achieve its goals. The majority of the women in Nigeria reside in the rural areas. Establishing any programme for women alone, without the approval or participation of the husbands was bound to fail. For example, establishing adult literacy class for women alone will not succeed if men are not involved, else, there will not be an approval for the women to attend.

Thus, it was globally accepted that development for women cannot be realized when women are targeted alone. The development of the women cannot be exclusive and isolated, but be in conjunction with that of men. This gave rise to the issue of gender and gender studies.

The Nigerian Woman

In Nigeria today, out of the population of 165.5 million, women make up almost 50% of it (80.2 million) (UNFPA, 2011). Nigeria has also established laws aimed at abolishing gender inequality, and has also signed global treaties like the Child's Right Laws (JICA, 2011). In spite of these, women are still faced with a lot of challenges. According to Ferreira (2004) for the vast majority of Nigerian women, gender inequity and women's subordination continue to pervade their lives a phenomenon that is widespread across the continent and indeed, internationally. In Nigeria, this takes the form of pervasive beliefs that women are (men's) 'property', and by extension, minors, whose adult status is mediated via men, primarily the father or husband, but also uncle, brother and so on. In addition, there is the widespread denial of education, land and property rights, and access to credit. In defiance of these oppressions, Nigerian women have

continued to organize against a range of oppressive and inhumane practices that do violence to women's bodily integrity and their humanity - such as the battery of women, widowhood rites, child marriage and female genital mutilation. It has also been established that women face gender inequality in the area of health, education and politics (WEF, 2010)

Women play vital roles in food production, processing and marketing in Nigeria; producing about 60-80% of food in the country (Rahman *et al.*, 2004), and contributing about 60-80% of agricultural labour force (Mgbada, 2000). They also contribute to household well being through their income generating activities (Ayoola *et al.*, 2011). Despite the immense contributions of women to agriculture, various findings have reported that women farmers generally, and particularly in Nigeria, lack access to adequate productive resources such as land, credit, agricultural inputs, education, extension services, and appropriate technology, due to several factors including socio-economic factors (Rahman, 2008). They also undertake 60-90% of the rural marketing, thus making up more than two-third of the workforce in agricultural production (FAO, 2000).

Women and girls' data in Nigeria today (British Council, Nigeria, 2012) give the following summary of the situation of Nigerian woman.

- * Nigeria ranks 118 of 134 countries in the Gender Equality Index
- * Women make up only 21% of the non-agriculture paid labour force
- * Nigeria has one of the lowest rates of female entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa
- * Only 7.2 of women own land they farm. This limits their access to credit
- * Only 15% of women have bank account
- * In 8 Northern states over 80% of

the women are unable to read

- * Nigerian girls who enroll in schools leave schools earlier than their male counterpart
- * Only 4% of females complete secondary school in Northern Nigeria
- * Nigeria has 2% of the world's population but 10% of global maternal deaths (1100 per 100000 live birth. FMH, 2011)
- * Each day, 144 Nigerian women die in child birth, equivalent of one death every 10 minutes
- * Women are politically under represented. Their upper and lower house representative fell from 7% in 2007 to 6% in 2011 (African average is 19%)
- * Most 15-24 year old women in Nigeria think that it is reasonable for a husband to beat his wife if she burns food, refuses sex or goes out without his permission
- * Nearly half of unmarried women in parts of southern Nigeria have experienced physical violence

Setting agenda for gender studies

From the analysis of the report on the situation of the Nigerian women, the agenda for gender studies become manifest. In all things, the goal should be how to attain Gender mainstreaming as enunciated by the United Nations.

Mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implication for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres. So that men and women benefit equally and inequity is not perpetrated. The attainment goal is to achieve gender equality.

I therefore highlight the following research/ programme themes for your consideration.

Marriage and family life- marriage systems and how they impact on the wellbeing of individual in the system. Inheritance of family estate, who benefits from it? Violence against women in the home.

Agriculture. Equitable ways of ensuring that women have adequate secured access to farm inputs with special reference to credit and agro-chemicals. Access to land ownership by women has been a big problem over the generations. This problem should be given special attention.

Education. Girl-child education is not as challenging in the south east as in the other regions of the country. Research results indicate that it is a big problem nationwide.

Women empowerment. Livelihood activities of our women are very low. How many women in this part of the country have medium scale businesses? How can they be empowered to get the resources to start sustainable businesses?

Politics. Women need to be educated on political awareness and participation. They need to know how to demand for their rights within the political setting. Of utmost importance is the rural traditional governance. How can the voice of the women be heard and accepted?

Health. The issue of high maternal mortality is very crucial. Women's access to healthcare facilities. Alternative and safe healthcare sources must be pursued

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Issn Print: 2151-7517, ISSN Online: 2151-7525, doi:10.5251/abjna.2011.2.6.1010.1014 © 2011, ScienceHuâ, <http://www.scihub.org/ABJNA>

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