

# GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A SOCIOLOGICAL PANACEA TO ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISES IN GLOBAL TURBULENT ERA

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## Abstract

Due to the prevalence of ethno-religious crises in modern times, everyone feels uncomfortable in Nigeria. The United Nations (UN) established the seventeenth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to guarantee a better and sustainable future. Gender equality is the fifth of these goals. Gender roles must be equal for there to be gender equality. Based on this context, the study looked at how women's empowerment and gender equality may solve Nigeria's ethno-religious problems. The significance of gender equality, women's empowerment, and the ethno - religious crises in Nigeria were thus conceptualized in this study. The paper also determined how the UNDP's gender equality agenda has been used to facilitate women's participation in nation-building; both qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted in this research, and description approaches were used for data analysis. Additionally, the paper identified the causes of ethno - religious crises and their impacts on women's empowerment. The study's conclusions revealed that ethno-religious conflicts had crept into the nation's corners, impeding the advancement of women. The study also showed that women in Nigeria have been marginalized in the social, religious, and political arenas and that gender roles continue to play a significant role in influencing almost every area of Nigerian life, even in the twenty-first century. The article concludes that since women are typically recognized for being inherently non-violent, peaceful, and coordinated, they must be allowed to hold

leadership positions to combat these ills. Consequently, the nation's desired peace and togetherness will be achieved by elevating and putting women in leadership positions.

**Keywords:** Gender, Equality, Women, Empowerment, Ethno-Religious, Crises.

## INTRODUCTION

Among the global issue of turbulence are the gender inequalities that have robbed women of dignity and development. The concern over the last five decades is towards how women can be empowered and incorporated into leadership positions (ECOSOC, 2010). Gender Equality and Women Empowerment are the fifth of eight Millennium Sustainable Development Goals (MDGs) that have been focused on from a global perspectives. The ranking demonstrates that it is a crucial component of the Eight Millennium Sustainable Development Objectives and that it serves as an end in and of itself rather than a tool for accomplishing millennium development goals (Naila, 2005). The International Labor Organization (ILO) has worked with the United Nations System for many years to advance women's leadership and empowerment around the world and promote gender equality. Gender disparity, poverty, sexism, war, and natural disasters have all been linked to global unrest, and this has sparked protests on a global scale. Subsequently, the issue of serious prominence (SDGS) has been integrated into general development, peace, and resilience-related agendas and frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on peace and security, gender equality, and women's empowerment (ILO, 2022).

Globally, these international organizations agreed that providing equality and equity is the best way to create peace, development, and resilience, especially in the global turbulent era (ILO, 2022). Consequently, women's empowerment and gender equality are necessary for the realization of infrangible human rights, these are rights that are not transferable, and are common to all persons and as well as very important to effective and sustainable development outcomes in the global turbulence era (USAID, 2012). When people are treated equally there may be peaceful coexistence among the citizen even in a turbulent era. Meanwhile, women and girls need unhindered access to the legal system, commerce, instruction, health care, capital (both social and physical), innovation, water, and sanitation (UNICEF, 2022) Also, they should have the same opportunities and privileges to exercise these roles as male counterparts. So, even in a chaotic era, the quality of life for all people across their lifetimes is enhanced by gender equality (USAID, 2020). Although, there have been proponents of gender equality and women's empowerment in Nigeria's social, religious and political spheres all of these have always been a mouth say.

This is because women have always been on the receiving end. They are not fully empowered, particularly at the religious sphere, where equity ought to be encouraged. Also, the influences of gender inequality on the current ethno-religious crises, among all the ethnic groups in Nigeria, strongly bites women compare to men. This brought de-emphasis of the unity and love that once reigned. Gender role has been predominant in Nigeria in elective and leadership positions this is not unconnected with the social settings of the country which is patriarchal in nature even contemporary world while women in developed countries are ruling their worlds

(Roberts, 2016). Adedayo, A.M., Adabembe K.O. & Belo F.A. (2022), opines that, the unity, love, values and principles that bind Nigeria have been eroded. These scholars listed kidnapping for ransom, embezzlement of money meant for developmental projects, proliferation of fire arms and corruption as problem facing the country at present. Meanwhile, Adabembe (2023) affirmed that women have the potential to significantly impact on growth and development of a nation if given the opportunity. More so that, the zigzag of the flow of inequality between female and male genders represents the turbulences in this turbulent era (Robinson, 2017). Gender disparity is obvious in all aspects of life in Nigeria, such as religion, education, politics, as well as all leadership positions from local governments up to national level (Adesanya, 2010).

The influences of gender inequality on the current ethno – religious crises among all the ethnic groups in Nigeria where unity and love once reined cannot be over emphasize. Nigeria is a country that has allowed gender roles to be predominant in leadership and elective positions even in the contemporary world while women in developed country are ruling their worlds (Adesanya, 2010). Moreover, the agitations for women’s empowerment and inclusion in leadership positions were made popular by the feminist movement also known as women’s movement (Stacey, 2014). The agitation includes the development of women in all areas of life, be it socially, economically, educationally, financially, or politically. Unfortunately, since the beginning of fourth republic democratic rule in Nigeria, women in both appointive and elective positions have not gone beyond 6.7 percent, which is below the Africa Regional Average of 23.4, West Africa Sub-Regional of 15 percent, and the global acceptable average of 22.5 percent (Oloyede, 2015). Nevertheless, both government and non-governmental organizations have been agitation for an increase in the number of women’s political participation in Nigeria because; the National Gender Policy (NGP) endorsed 35% inclusion of women in appointive and elective positions (Oloyede, 2015).

Meanwhile, patriarchal practices which are still prevalent in contemporary Nigeria are part of the factors mitigating women’s involvement and participation in politics. (Opaluwa, 2005). The impact of the fourth Beijing conference that advocated for 30 percent affirmative action has not been felt by Nigerian women. Consequently, the majority of Nigerian women do not have the opportunity to contribute their quota to the growth and development of the nation and few women that have such opportunities are often time discriminated against in the decision-making process (Okpe, 2005 & Sultana, 2011). For example in most of the African societies women are seen as part of the husband’s properties or to say the least as tools that can be used anyhow than partners in development efforts (Ebirirn, 2004). Fortunately there are noticeable improvements in gender awareness worldwide; meanwhile, data on women’s empowerment in Nigeria has not been encouraging given the numbers of awareness about the subject matter both at local, national, and international levels (Adesanya, 2010). Moreover there are evidences that women are denied their rights, abused, discriminated against, and marginalized in Nigeria, this issue affects nearly all Nigerian women most especially those that are not educated. These women are tools in the hands of their husbands because they can be heard but must not be seen (Ebirirn, 2004).

Women's total participation and involvement in decision-making is crucial to attaining sustainable development goals and can bring about the solution needed for curbing ethno-religious crises at this turbulent era in Nigeria. Women's empowerment is necessary for active participation in politics which would improve decision makings. Thus, the objectives of this article are to identify the causes of ethno-religious crises and their impacts on women's empowerment, discuss ways in which the gender equality agenda has been used to facilitate women's participation or involvement in peace building, and to explore ways in which women are marginalized in Nigeria.

## THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section reviews the overall issues of gender equality and women empowerment from global perspectives and Nigeria. The section, therefore, examines gender equality, ethno-religious crises ad how gender inequality influences ethno- religious crises in the global turbulent era from scholarly perspectives. The segment concludes with the understanding of parity versus disparity of gender.

### *Gender*

Gender is a societal distinction constructed on sex. Several writers have attempted to provide definitions for the concept of gender. A symbolic structure is another way to put it. One's internalized notion of one's biological sex is the definition of this term. Gender, to Iwuoha & Anusiem (2013), denotes a cultural and societal sense of what it is to be male or female, in addition to the biological characteristics that make one sex or the other. In this context, the term "gender" refers to culturally established norms on the appropriate roles and conduct of men and women.

### *Gender Equality*

Gender equality is a notion in which all human beings girls, and boys, women and men are given same opportunity and avenue to develop their abilities, make choices, and contribute to their societies without facing biases and stereotypes as a result of rigid gender roles (Shanti & Kakarla, 2020). The concept of gender parity refers to the elimination of discrimination based on a person's gender in order to ensure that all citizens have equal access to public services and opportunities. This may be a chance to advance one's career or business, or to gain political or economic power (Adesanya, 2010). For women and men to achieve equality, gender disparity and discriminations based on gender roles and traditional gender roles must be eliminated.

According to Schlegel (1977), gender differences in social standing are not due to differences in the extent to which men and women are involved in the production of goods and services. He comes to the conclusion that both women's equal involvement in religious positions and a more objective appraisal of mythological and cultural traditions are necessary. Adeoluwa, (2022) believes that gender equality will decrease gender discrimination in occupational roles for the attainment of opportunities for all.

### ***Empowerment***

The word empowerment has diverse meanings related to freedom, power, decision-making, independence, self-strength, self-control, self-power, self-reliance, personal choice, the capability of fighting for one's rights and independence (Bhadra, 2001). Empowerment is the procedure and the outcome of the procedure whereby the helpless or fewer privileged members of a society have access and control over material and knowledge to which previously they were denied access (Medel-Anonuevo, 1997).

### ***Women Empowerment***

Women's empowerment has become an important issue in economic development (Mosedale, 2005). Meanwhile, (Kabeer, 2005), view women empowerment as an effort to raise the status of women through awareness, training, literacy, and education by investing and engaging women in several ways which include accepting their views. Women's empowerment, according to Mosedale (2005), enables and encourages ladies to make major choices in spite of all the challenges that face modern society. Women empowerment has always been included in the National Development Plan in Nigeria, which aims to build a nation that is full of opportunities for all citizens. Women empowerment has a central role in the management of ethno-religious crises in present-day Nigeria.

### ***Turbulence Era***

It is a scientific term to describe a certain complex and unpredictable period. It means a period of confusion without order. A turbulent era is an era in which there is a lot of change, confusion and disorder. It involves numerous confusion, events, and feelings. An example of turbulence can be said to be a period of an unsolved problem in a nation or state as will have in contemporary Nigeria. For instance, the ongoing war of invasion in Ukrainian propelled by Russia and resisted by the Ukrainians (Fasiku & Adedayo, 2023).The turbulence era is characterized by political, economic, social and cultural turbulence.

### ***Gender Equality and Women Empowerment from Global Perspectives***

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other international organizations like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the International Labor Organization (ILO) have made multiple attempts to educate the public about the fact that gender is a cultural and social concept that discriminates between men and women, girls and boys, and thus refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women according to this social and cultural construction rather than biological givens. (UNICEF, 2017). More so, the concept of gender refers to the innate abilities, personality traits, and societal norms that are associated with being a woman, a man, a boy, or a girl. That's according to (UNICEF 2017). The feminist movement on a global scale has known for a long time that women still face significant obstacles to progress in the development arena, and this is a conclusion that has been reached by numerous international organizations (WID). Hence, the UNICEF project on gender and development (GAD) was founded as a reaction to the observed constraints faced by women throughout development. When women and men are



treated equally in all areas of society, we can reduce poverty, raise living standards, and maximize the return on public investments (Muhammad, 2006). In the meantime, gender equality policy has been officially recognized as one of the 17 global goals of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. For the UNDP to accomplish its many goals related to human development, growth, and advancement, it is crucial that a consistent strategy be used. According to Adedayo, Adabembe& Belo (2022), a country's overall progress and development can be stimulated and articulated by a focus on gender equity and sensitivity.

Moreover, promoting gender equality is acceptable throughout the world as a means of solving some fundamental problems associated with human beings Muhammad (2006). Gender equality has proven to have the ability to boost and improve standards of living, health and the effectiveness of public investments. Gender parity is one of the condition necessary for the achievement and attainment of sustainable development. Ojo&Adedayo (2021), argue that, gender inequality in some establishments has contributed to non-performance of the workforce and this has impacted on social, political and economic conditions of the general public.

### ***Ethno-Religious Crises in Nigeria***

Being the "giant of Africa," Nigeria takes great pride in its diverse cultural traditions. With the largest population on the African continent, it is a major economic and political power. As of the end of 2016, the total populace was well over 178.5 million. 2016 Population Report, World Health Organization. Meanwhile, the country is as religiously diverse as it is culturally diverse. Since African Traditional Religion, Islam, and Christianity are the three most widely practiced faiths in the country, it is not surprising that there has been a steady rise in ethno-religious strife there in recent years. Ethnicity and religious intolerance have led to an increase in ethno-religious crises, which in turn has resulted to lack of trust in the police, military and para-military consequently, there are many ethnic militias like the Arewa People's Congress (APC), Ohanaeze N'digbo, Odua People Congress (OPC); the Bakassi Boys; the Egbesu Boys; the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), the Igbo People Congress (IPC) and Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) (Daily Trust, 2002: p16). Recently some of these ethnic groups in Nigeria have resulted to a security network of their own. In South West Nigeria there is Western Nigeria Security Network popularly known as *Amotekun*, the Eastern Security Network (ESN) for the Eastern Nigeria and Arewa Youths security Network (AYSN) for the Northern Nigeria. These are done to forestall the challenges of ethno- religious crises in Nigeria which has hampered women empowerment in Nigeria. The most vulnerable in the country has always been women and children.

Despite the fact that Nigeria is widely regarded as one of the world's most devout nations, the country has become fertile ground for ethno-religious conflict. However, religion, which is intended to be a unifying factor (Adabembe, 2022), is increasingly becoming a source of strife in Nigeria. This is despite the fact that, religion especially Christianity came with civilization which helped in ameliorating some fundamental health issues (Adabembe, 2022). Although, multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies are designed to enrich a society, but in practice they have often backfired by fueling intolerance, violence, and other social ills. In light of this, Dukor (1988) draws the conclusion that religious preachers, preaching, propagandists, and

religious propagandists constitute a corrosive influence. According to him, religion is a unifying force, and the concept itself is not bad.

Meanwhile scholars have over time (Hiskett 1987, &Afolabi, 2016 ) acknowledge the fact that, ethno-religious crises has a root cause in socio- economic and political problems, a school of thought is of the view that, the basis of ethno- religious violence in Nigeria is struggle and not religion (Afolabi, 2016).This struggle can either be economic or political. Meanwhile, religious violence in Nigeria is fast running into lawlessness without restraint.Ffor instance, killing as in the recent case of gruesome murder of Deborah Yakubu in a college of Education campus in Sokoto who was accused of blasphemy, destroying of public and private properties, religious places, disruption of peace and security of the whole country all these characterized a turbulent era (Obadare, 2022). Religious issues were reported to be responsible for the rise of violent deaths in Nigeria (Akinola, 2014). Importantly, the poverty level particularly in the Northern part of the country where children are left to fend for themselves early in life without proper education and empowerment and some female children are married out early in life has impacted on the peace and unity of Nigeria in recent times. This is because some scholars have long concluded that, street children popularly called Almajiri's have intrinsic impacts on ethno-religious crises in Nigeria. Hiskett (1987) noted that, some of these people were from neighboring countries such as; Chad and Niger republic. Isichei, (1987) described them as people who were brought in from country sides with no means of livelihood, homeless, and mostly involved in petty trading, cap knitting, barbing and cobbling.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that, these children were products of teenage pregnancy and marriages. The mothers of these children were not empowered because they were married out when supposed to be in school or learning a trade. However, social stratification and high level of poverty especially in the northern part of the country has contributed immensely to the present situation of Nigeria. Female children are not save in some parts of the country, for instance a lady was killed and burnt in a campus in Sokoto State in the Northern part of the country for blasphemy (Jannamike, 2022). Unfortunately, Shiite movement and Maitatsine or Yan Tatsine sect of the 1970s movements were the roots and sources of motivations for Boko Haram and Isis that is presently bedevil Nigeria and Nigerians. It is unfortunate that, the problem of ethno- religious crises has not been adequately approached in the country, more so, that the nation is presently under the siege of terrorists and kidnappers.

### ***Effects of Ethno Religious Crises on Nigerian Women***

Effects of ethno religious crises on Nigerian women and girl child cannot be over emphasis. In fact, it can be said that they are mostly affected by this evil that has eaten deep into the fabric of the nation. Women and girls child has always been the target of these religious fanatics. About 276 mostly Christian girls were abducted from their hostels in Government secondary school at a town in Chibok in Borno State Nigeria in 2014, by some religious fanatics called Boko Haram. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without sound education. There is no way a crisis laden nation can advance educationally. Adebayo, (2020) posits that, education in the Northern part of the country which is earlier tagged as an educationally disadvantage area is far going down the drain as a result of ethno- religious crises. Many young girls of

school age have been married away due to the issue of Chibok girls and attacks on educational institutions. Education, which is an integral sector for achieving sustainable development is been threatening to it is foundation in the country.

The economic implication of ethno religious crisis has a gruesome implication on the economy of Nigeria women. Majority of women in the Northern part of Nigeria and the middle belt had lost their husbands who are mostly the bread winners to the cold hand of death as a result of these crises. Also, business and farm lands had been destroyed while many women are rendered financial incapacitated. The end result of all these is poverty. Many homes, villages and towns has been destroyed which has forced many women to live in IDP camps. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), recorded about 1,538,982 internally displaced persons' (IDPs) as at April 2015, and the number has continued to grow as the issue is left unabated. (Eni&Obaji 2016). Women are the home keepers and managers as the result of running away from farm lands and killings is being felt in nearly all areas of Nigeria economy as staple foods are very expensive and almost out of reach for the commoners and women are most affected by this. As a result of this development, many women find it difficult to handle these challenges and their children especially the girls suffer most as they are forced into prostitution, trafficking and early marriage. All these societal vices contributed immensely to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion and HIV/AIDS.

Ethno-religious crises has contributed immensely to unemployment in Nigeria, this in turn has affected sustainable development goals. In its assessment on the Nigerian labour market for the third quarter of 2018, the National Bureau of Statistics (2020) found that 23.1% of the country's population was unemployed. According to this data, joblessness is rising across the country. The reason for this is not farfetched. Many international and local investors have left their investments for greener pastures outside the shores of Nigeria. Also, women who established small-scale business or farmers and who used to be employers of labour have lost everything to crises and in turn becoming unemployed this has contributed to the present economic situation in the country. The new trend in the country now is 'Japa' meaning run out of the country to an advanced or safer country. Unfortunately, this phenomenon can result to economic distress if left unabated. It is noteworthy that, ethno-religious crisis has influenced and fueled the present unemployed state of some Nigerians. In addition, many people have lost their means of live hood as a result of ethno- religious crisis, unfortunately women are mostly affected by this evil being the home manager, many of them has lost their means of livelihood, supports, husbands and children to this evil that permeates Nigeria. (Adabembe & Adedayo, 2022).

### ***Gender Equality as a Sociological Strategy for Curtailing Ethno-Religious Crises***

Since both men and women play essential roles in social and economics regardless of their gender, parity of gender is a crucial component of any nation's peace building efforts. Women, are often side lined in discussions of national progress, even though their participation is crucial to achieving the best possible results (Adabembe, 2019). Women's small-scale businesses, trading activities, farming and domestic duties, all over the world are making enormous contributions to the prosperity, welfare, and general advancement of their country in which



they are sometimes not given recognitions, remuneration or credit for their efforts. More so that women in addition to their family responsibilities, are credited with performing 75% of all subsistence farming which has been a panacea to hunger and food scarcity (FAO, 2011).

As it was recorded that ninety (90) percent of Chinese women worked outside the home, the country was catapulted from the position of 3rd world economy to the position of 1st world international economy, despite the fact that scholars have long (Awe 1999 & Deckard, 1975) agreed that, mass involvement and contribution of women to production was accountable for the huge success in Russia, Sweden, Holland, the Scandinavian countries, Germany, and China. Women in Nigeria, for example, are the backbone of the informal sector despite facing discrimination in the formal economy. This is because 46% of Nigerian women are in the labour market, according to a 1990 assessment by the World Bank. Former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo, affirmed that women in his country face discrimination due to gender bias. This is especially true in the workplace, where women are underrepresented. According to Awe (1999), women in Nigeria face discrimination and marginalization at every level of society, while men are privileged with more opportunities for advancement. This is true even when women are employed, where they are disproportionately represented in low-paying, low-status occupations.

Women were excluded from occupations like road building, mining, and processing industries, in colonial era, which resulted in being gradually pushed out of the workforce and towards the margins of society (Global Gender Gap Report, 2018). Women continue to feel the detrimental effects of this one act into the present day, and it has prevented them from becoming politically active and contributing to the growth of their country. Women in Nigeria were destined to work in fields that would constantly remind them of their submissive place in society (Umar & Abubakar, 1997). According to the Global Gender Gap report from the World Economic Forum, discrimination against women was also blatant in parliamentary posts (2011). According to Ayisha, (2012), out of 129 nations, Nigeria has the lowest representation of women in parliament. Despite the efforts of women's rights activists and multilateral organization's leading up to and during the 2011 general election, Nigeria still did not reach the necessary 35% representation outlined in the national gender strategy adopted in 2006. The research added that the number of women in the federal legislature actually declined, from 9% to 7%, placing it below the 20% regional norm in sub-Saharan Africa and the 19% global average. According to Nnoruga's (2009), research, gender disparity across sectors and in families is exacerbated by the fact that men are disproportionately assigned leadership positions in African societies, particularly in Nigeria. Women's input on Nigerian society's decision-making was traditionally ignored (Nnoruga, 2009). They are routinely disregarded in crucial gatherings, be they family, neighborhoods, or governmental (Nnoruga, 2009).

Meanwhile, from the above postulations, it can be deduced that the relegation of women to the background in Nigeria has contributed to the unfortunate situation the country occupies presently. Women are known to be naturally peaceful and coordinated, empowering and involving women in socio-political and economic decisions would have brought solutions to the present ethno-religious crisis that is ravaging the country (Odudele & Babalola, 2018).

Women permeate every aspect of existence in the universe. Similarly, they are the mothers, the home keepers of the environment they care for and nurture including their husbands and children. Moreover, women are closer to members of their community and they are aware of economic, political and socio- cultural situations of their people. Although, they may be passive, they still find the time to rise to their responsibilities if allowed to serve. Women are custodians of cultural heritages, and no culture in the history of mankind has ever preached violence. Being the custodian of culture they inculcate this into their children early in life. In religious cycle, women have been discovered to be more religious than their men counterparts that is why they populate any religious gathering be it Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. Meanwhile, all these religious advocates and preach peace and peaceful co-existence of all citizens. Women, if properly empowered and given opportunities in leadership positions can use all these religious teachings to the advantage and enhancement of their society at large. Thus, the ability of women in curtaining the present ethno-religious crisis cannot be over emphasized. Women ensures the continuous existence and survival of the Society with their tolerant nature, and if properly empowered and treated equally with their male counterparts can influence them to be tolerant and co- exist in a peaceful atmosphere (Odudele, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

This study examines the Effects of Ethno-Religious Crises on Nigerian Women in the global turbulent era; discusses the Ethno-Religious Crises in Nigeria and the Gender Equality as a Sociological Strategy for curtailing Ethno-Religious Crises in the global turbulent era. The study concludes that there is the need for strengthening resilience efforts through gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria. In working towards attaining gender equality and women empowerment, ethno-religious crises will be reduced to the barest minimum while further enhancing nation-building and national integration in Nigeria in the global turbulent era.

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