



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



## Women in leadership, gender inequality in Nigeria, diversity and new trend of women in leadership positions in industries around the world

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### Abstract

**Background:** Leaders are the people who help to define the aims and goals of groups and organizations and then help to channel the energy of the group or organisations' members to achieve those stated aims. Many women are rising to positions of leadership around the world and in traditionally male-dominated industries. There is an upsurge in women leadership, however gender inequality, bias and discrimination still exist.

**Objective:** This paper has reviewed the concept of women leadership, gender inequality in Nigeria and around the world, exploring the situation in the different continents and sub-continent of the world in a snapshot manner. The paper also reviewed diversity in the workplace and the different way that men and women lead their organizations.

**Conclusion:** Despite the rise of women leaders, more inclusion and diversity in the work place, disparities still exist and is widespread around the world. This is worsened by poverty. A society that has more gender equality, diversity, and inclusiveness is better and would lead to a sustainable and meaningful growth in the economy. It is hoped that companies and governments around the world would take reducing gender inequality and promotion of women leaders seriously for a better equal and just society

**Keywords:** Women leadership; Inequality; Diversity; Economy; Gender; Companies

### 1. Introduction

Leaders are the people who help to define the aims and goals of groups and organizations and then help to channel the energy of the group or organisations' members to achieve those stated aims [1].

Through leadership, people can address challenges and difficulties so as to obtain results in situations that are complex, and it is about responsibility, and not about ranks or privileges [2].

Rhode [2] argues that many women are rising to positions of leadership around the world and in traditionally male-dominated industries. The evidence to support this, is the increase in the number of women who are now attending colleges and universities and the increasing number that are starting their own businesses and being employed in previously male dominated industries.

### 2. The upsurge of Women in leadership positions in recent times and some benefits

Massive globalization and empowerment of women at the different levels of leadership in both private and public institutions and organizations around the world has led to a rapid growth in the last few years / decades, of the

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involvement of women in leadership positions and policy making in the public and private sector in many industries and organizations around the world [3].

According to United Nations [4], women in the parliaments around the world are just a mere 24%, though this is an increase from 11.3% in 1995. There is also an increase in the number of women who have become heads of government and heads of state of their respective countries. This is mostly in technologically advanced countries with high GDP and low mortality rates such as the United Kingdom and Germany etc.

Hodges [5] argues that globalization and modernization efforts around the world has led to policymakers having a strategic direction to deliberately encourage more participation of women both in policy formulation and governance around the world.

The more visible participation of women in policy and governance of global institutions and organisations serve as role model and a rallying point for women and encourages the promotion and aspiration of more women into leadership and managerial positions [6].

Organizations and institutions that women are represented in the leadership and policy making tend to be more diverse and inclusive. The rulings and the decisions in those organizations also tend to be more diverse, more representative, and inclusive of the different views and modern views of society [7].

Abalkhail [8] notes that countries that have more women in leadership positions tend to have lower levels of income inequality and discrimination.

Thompson [9] asserts that women in leadership positions tend to yield more benefits for the general population especially in the general health of the population.

However, despite the advances that have been made regarding the position of women in leadership roles, women are still grossly under-represented especially at the height of the leadership ladder though they may have more representation in the lower levels of power in many organizations.

## **2.1. Gender Inequality**

Athey [10] notes that despite progress made in the numbers of women aspiring to and securing leadership positions, inequalities still exist. Inequality can be defined as a phenomenon where there is an unequal and or an unjust distribution of the opportunities or resources that is available among the members of a group or society and means different things to different people [11].

European Institute for Gender Equality [12] defines gender inequality as legal, social, and cultural situations, where gender or sex determines a different set of rights and dignity for men and women, which then shows in an unequal access to the practice or enjoyments of those rights, including an assumption of a stereotype of roles for different gender based on social and cultural ideas.

Kolb [13] states that gender inequality is a situation that people who are made to have different opportunities and outcomes based on the issue of their gender and further defines gender discrimination as prejudicial treatment of a person or a group of people based on their gender.

Villa-Torres et al [14] observed that around the world, the participation of women, adolescent women and young girls in policy making and leadership was impaired by power dynamics that is related to their gender, their age, class, and their social position.

Gender inequality causes decrease in the wellbeing of people and can be viewed as form of injustice from ethical prisms [15; 16].

## **2.2. Gender Inequality in Nigeria**

Nigeria is the country with the largest population in Africa with an estimated population of about 200 million people and the country's statistics bureau have an estimate that about 40% of the population live in poverty with low human capital development index [17]. In many parts of Nigeria, women are considered sub-ordinate to the men especially in northern part of Nigeria [18].

Ferrant [19] notes that gender inequality can be hindrance to development, hence it is important to explore the situation of gender inequality or equality in Nigeria and around the world.

### *2.2.1. Gender inequality in different sectors of Nigerian economy*

There is gender inequality in the education sector of Nigeria just like in many other sectors of the economy of Nigeria. One of such is the disparity in educational and leadership access with girl child education being threatened.

Akinbi and Akinbi [20] noted that cultural beliefs, cultural practices, financial and religious constraints all contribute in worsening the gender inequality in the country. There are differences in the access to basic amenities and educational opportunities based on gender due to some held beliefs.

There is poor participation of women in the politics and leadership of Nigeria as women are heavily discriminated against and have poor access or capacity to contest elections or seek positions [21].

Gender inequality in Nigeria contributes to earning disparity, adversely affecting females. Some areas of Nigeria have more gender disparity and inequality compared to others and those areas that have more gender inequality have more earning disparity among women who are poorly educated [22].

Surprisingly amid the gloomy information on gender inequality in Nigeria, it is noted that more women have been able to head top listed Nigerian companies and serve at the level of the chief executive of listed and quoted Nigerian companies than some countries in the G20 group of countries, though there remains many gaps in gender at the leadership levels, workforce and other aspects of private industry in Nigeria [23].

### *2.2.2. Causes of gender inequality in Nigeria*

In Nigeria, gender inequality is believed to be influenced by the different beliefs and cultures that are practised by different tribes and peoples that constitute Nigeria. Nigeria is inhabited by many tribes and peoples with different cultures and traditions. This is also replicated in many sectors of the economy of Nigeria, such as the arts, politics, education etc. Many of these tribes and cultures portray women as home keepers only [24].

There have been many arguments in the past for or against gender equality and some literature had been of the view that economic growth might be better in a setting of gender inequality [25; 26]. Other authors hold a contrary view and note that gender inequality has a negative effect on the economy of the country or region that it is more prevalent in [27; 28].

Some the factors that cause gender inequality in political life in Nigeria include the culture and norms of the different tribes and peoples of Nigeria which in a large part favour male candidates in elections more than the females. Educational backgrounds and level of education of the people contesting for political office or seeking leadership positions in Nigeria, reflect that compared to males, females have less educationally advanced candidates for elections hence worsening the relegation of many women in Nigeria to doing only household chores and childbearing, as situation worsened by the lack of the rule of law [21].

Nigeria is a highly patriarchal society hence the preference of males over females in leadership and managerial roles. Other causes of gender inequality in Nigeria include corruption, misgovernance, lack of political will and commitment to address the issues of gender inequality in Nigeria [29].

Corruption in the Nigerian leadership circle involves the personalization of public resources and discourages equity, fairness and justice and leads to nepotism and lopsided appointments in both public life and private and can cause worthy females who have merited a position to be denied that position.

### *2.2.3. Suggestions on how to promote gender equality in Nigeria*

In recent times, there has been a lot of education and advocacy by concerned associations: non-governmental and governmental, to make people aware of the need to train the girl child and provide equal opportunities for the growth of males and females in the society. This advocacy needs to continue and be strengthened [30; 31].

There should be a deliberate effort at promoting policy and programmes to train, educate and elevate women to leadership positions within private and public organizations and this should be backed up with legislation.

The affirmative action that has been agreed around the world to increase the number of women in policy making organizations and the boards of companies and parastatals should be domesticated as a law for private and public organizations to ensure adequate representation of women and hence gender balance in leadership positions in Nigeria and around the world [29].

The successes of women leaders should also be better celebrated by the media and the society to dispel the myth and erroneous belief that women are meant only for the kitchen and that they are not fit for policy making and leadership positions. This will encourage younger women and the wider society, as these successful women will serve as role models.

### **2.3. Gender Inequality and Equity around the world – Europe, Asia, Africa, Middle East, and America**

#### *2.3.1. Europe*

Even though many young women have recently joined the labour market in many European countries, very few senior positions are held by women in many companies and industries [32].

European countries have made remarkable progress in gender equality compared to many other countries. There has been structured and concerted efforts in many European countries to counter gender inequality, however despite the best efforts there remains room for improvement. Women are still underrepresented in many leadership, business, political and policy making positions and there is a gender pay gap in Europe that needs to be addressed. The gender pay gap can be linked to working hours and patterns between males and females. Women tend to work more part-time hours, have more childcare and family commitments and more women work in sectors of the economy that pay lower salaries, as recent studies show that men on average earn 23% higher than females due to working hours and patterns [33].

#### *2.3.2. Asia (South Asia and South-East Asia)*

Basu et al [34], note that in developing economies such as Asia (South Asia and South-East Asia) there is a preference for male children and son targeting fertility practices. This practice leads to large number of siblings for girls known as the 'sibling effect' and higher family birth order for boys 'birth order effect' which worsens gender inequality via monetary and non-monetary factors.

Many women in Asia have difficulties in the attainment of gender equality, though in recent years, there has been some progress [35].

However, the Asia-Pacific region has witnessed improvement in gender equality since the adoption of the 'Beijing Platform of Action'. This was adopted about 25 years ago. There have been improvements in maternal mortality rates, girl child education and reduction in infant mortality including better representation of women in national parliaments [36].

Challenges remain in enhancing the economic empowerment of women, reducing the gender pay gap and achieving better representation of women in policy making positions, leadership positions and parliament.

#### *2.3.3. Africa*

Africa has very low gender equality with gender parity measures in the continent currently at 0.58 (measure of 1 is full parity). It is estimated that up to 70% of African women are excluded in terms of finance in the economy and that without urgent targeted action, it could take up to 140 years before Africa attains gender parity [37].

Poverty is linked with gender inequality and the poverty in Africa has been increasing in the last few years, with countries like Nigeria now having one of the largest number of poor people of any country in the world, apart from India [38].

There is widespread gender-based violence, gender inequality and discrimination and untoward practices towards women in the African continent including Sub-Saharan Africa, in every sector of the economy and leadership / policy making organizations. Governments across Africa are committing towards the reduction of gender inequality, and this is linked with the intention of reducing poverty in the continent.

No country in Sub-Saharan Africa has achieved gender parity or equality in education despite attempts by governments in these places to support measures to reverse the trend [39].

#### *2.3.4. Middle east*

In many countries of the Middle East, women are relegated to the background in political, social, and economic life and repressive laws struggle to keep the status quo. The 'male guardianship system' in many of these countries make it difficult for women to aspire to leadership positions or be appointed into policy making organizations. Women face discriminatory conditions and must depend on their male relatives to supervise their day-to-day activities. Hence, women face abuse: domestic and otherwise with some of the male abusers as their guardians [40].

Though poverty is linked to gender inequality, many of the countries in the Middle East that have wide gaps in gender equality such as Saudi Arabia, cannot be classified as poor, though gender equality in those countries would be better for the growth of their economies [41].

#### *2.3.5. Americas*

Women in America, especially North America may fare better than their counterparts like say in Africa, however issues of gender inequality are topics of great concern and government attention in the Americas, especially North America.

Women earn less than men and are still under-represented in government and boards of companies despite many women entering the work force in these countries. In the United States, women earn about 81 cents for every 1 dollar earned by their male colleagues, though there has been efforts at improving this in the years ahead by concerted action [42].

Latin America appears to be the area in the Americas and indeed the planet with the least indexes of gender equality and it is worsened by belonging to the Afro-Caribbean or black ethnic groups with wide spread poverty and gender based violence limiting opportunities for women [43].

### **2.4. Suggestions on how to address Gender inequality**

Areas of the world with the most gender inequality have the highest rates of poverty hence the reduction of gender inequality has ties to reducing poverty in those regions especially in Africa. Poverty reduction measures that are done in a balanced, equitable manner without discrimination against male or female gender is recommended to address gender inequality [44].

In Europe, women tend to earn less than men, work in sectors of the economy with poorer pay and have increased family care responsibilities. European governments should explore sharing the responsibilities in the family more equally between the males and the females and encourage women employment through targeted programmes such as advanced training and leadership mentorship, as unemployment rate is higher for women compared to men [45].

Encouraging women participation in leadership is not only an issue for human rights but presents a pragmatic way of utilizing the achievements of women and harnessing the resourcefulness of the population better [46].

Governments should make mandatory legislation to address women participation in the different sectors of the economy including political participation, political parties, boards of government agencies, private companies and policy making organizations.

Making education free, especially for children and young people, encouraging women participation in schooling and knowledge acquisition, integrating gender issues into policies and programmes of governments, tacking of gender-based violence etc will serve to reduce gender inequality around the world [39].

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### **3. Definition of Diversity in the workplace**

Diversity in the workplace can be defined as organizations that have an intentional policy of employing people to form a workforce that has people with different characteristics such as different gender, race, religion, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education [47].

### 3.1. Challenges and importance of diversity in the workplace

Diversity in the workplace / the implementation of diversity in the workplace can encounter challenges. There could be difficulty in the alignment of the unique goals of the organization with diversity principles/goals. There could be challenges with moving from a lofty design to implementation, providing adequate training and management, internal resistance from members of the organization and overcoming bias [47].

However, diversity in the workplace engenders innovation, new perspectives, a wider talent pool for the organization, better employee performance, as the employees are encouraged to do more, knowing that they are valued and their characteristics respected and treated with dignity, hence leading to better productivity and efficiency for the organization [47].

### 3.2. Current state of diversity in the workplace in some major companies around the world

Many companies in many industries around the world are embracing diversity in the workplace and reaping benefits from them. A few multinational companies in different industries around the world would serve as examples. Sodexo, a company that operates in the service industry has ‘gender balance as their business’, a deliberate policy that has seen women inclusion and diversity increase from 17% of women as employees in the 1990s to over 58% of women as employees in 2021 for a company with staff strength of 460,000 plus worldwide [48].

In the pharmaceutical/medical equipment industry, companies like Johnson and Johnson run a ‘diversity university’ a website resource for staff and encourage diversity and inclusion amongst the workforce of the company.

Companies such as Mastercard and Accenture that operate in the financial services and consulting space also encourage diversity by having dedicated staff that teach and mentor other staff on need for diversity at the workplace with amazing results for this effort [48].

**Table 1** Differences in diversity among some sectors of the world economy

Services eg Finance, marketing, Education, Health, hotels, ICT entertainment	Manufacturing & construction	Agriculture	Mining and utilities	Politics
The service industry has the largest number of women in employment around the world compared to other sectors with health and education having one of the highest participation of women in employment and leadership positions (Knutson, 2012).	Manufacturing industry ranks low in rates of female employment and diversity compared to other sectors but ranks higher than mining and utilities (Knutson, 2012)	Has one the best diverse settings with many rural farmers operating family-based systems of farming with labour provided by the children and women.  Lowest in geographical distribution	Has the lowest in uptake of women and diverse background of the workforce (Knutson, 2012).	There is less women and diversity in the political sector of many economies around the world compared to other sectors of the world economy.

As demonstrated in the table above, diversity and achieving diversity remains a front burner issue for many industries and economies around the world [49].

## 4. Is this new trend of hiring women into leadership roles evident in industries?

The hiring of women into positions of leadership and allowing better gender representation in the leadership of organization and industries is closely linked with reduction in gender stereotypes [50]. The representation of women is not just a way to improve the gender imbalance in many sectors of the economy of the world today but is also a means to change the stereotype and show that women are competent and likable, and this result is evident in many industries of the world today [50].

In many industries around the world today, female leaders at the helm of many competitive industries outperform companies dominated by men and there is a growing trend to hire females into leadership positions despite that women remain underrepresented in many industries around the world [51].

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## **5. Track record of women in leadership roles versus men: Are men better leaders compared to women?**

In a survey done by Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends, many Americans believe that women do have the essential skills to become or function as effective leaders and policy makers. Respondents rated women higher than men on leadership traits such as honesty, intelligence, hard work, decisiveness, ambition, compassion, outgoing nature, and creativity.

For the performance of people in public office, women ranked higher than men in areas of working out compromises, honesty, representing the interests of the people that they lead, dealing with social issues, dealing with national security and dealing with public safety.

The paradox then is that despite the public having a more favourable view of women in leadership compared to men, why then do women remain underrepresented in leadership positions and policy formulation? The answers according to the respondents reflect that gender stereotyping and the lack of opportunities for women leaders are the reason for this paradoxical situation arising [52].

The findings above are supported by other authors who state that women have more leadership skills and capacity compared to men and women leaders are better liked by their followers [53].

### **5.1. Who has more trust with handling money between men and women?**

In some polling done around the world, asking people who has more trust between men and women, the polls note that many people believe that women are more trusted with money compared to men [54].

Cole [55] argues that women tend to spend less, handle money better and are more cautious with money, despite that female-led businesses doesn't garner as much interest in investment as male led businesses.

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## **6. Gender differences in leadership styles and effectiveness – between men and women**

Many studies that have explored the differences in leadership styles between males and females have noted that there is indeed a difference in leadership styles between males and females. Female leaders are more open to a leadership style that is relational in style in comparison to male leaders who are more inclined to use a controlling and task-oriented leadership style. The composition of the leadership teams led by men and women also reflect these choices in leadership styles [56].

According to some research done to explore these gender differences in leadership, men are also more prone to choosing a destructive type of leadership with deleterious effects on the team spirit and organisation compared to women [56].

Kuchynková [57] observe that men showed higher capacity for flexibility in leadership compared to women, however women showed better leadership efficiency and effectiveness when the leadership styles of women and men heading organizations was evaluated using the Leader Behaviour Analysis tool that was developed by Ken Blanchard Companies.

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## **7. Conclusion**

This paper has reviewed the concept of women leadership, gender inequality in Nigeria and around the world, exploring the situation in the different continents and sub-continent of the world in a snapshot manner.

Recommendations has been made for more gender equality, diversity, and inclusiveness as this is better for sustainable and meaningful growth in the economy.

The differences in leadership styles between male and females and the paradox of women ranking higher in public perception as better leaders yet occupying less leadership offices around the world have also been briefly described.

It is hoped that companies and governments around the world would take reducing gender inequality and promotion of women leaders seriously for a better equal and just society.

### *Recommendation*

Gender inequality is endemic in many countries around the world from the American continent to Africa and Middle East. The cost to the economic growth of nations and industries is huge and economic recovery and sustainable growth is linked to the elimination or reduction of gender inequality and poverty.

Governments, companies, organizations and policy making bodies around the world should make the reduction of gender inequality in their countries a top priority so as to spur and sustain economic growth.

Legislation and measures should be applied across board, including implementing affirmative action policies towards women so that more women are promoted into leadership and policy making organisations. This is important as this review has shown that when gender inequality is reduced, equality and diversity promoted, companies and industries tend to do better. Companies doing better will then translate to bigger and better economic growth.

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## **Compliance with ethical standards**

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