



## *RESEARCH ARTICLE*

### **GENDER MAINSTREAMING: A KEY STRATEGY TO GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Gender matters have become a vexed issue in contemporary times in our society. Gender mainstreaming remains a strategic approach to promoting gender equality as well as empowering women, as defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This involves integrating gender perspectives into all aspects and stages of the policy and programmatic process including design, implementation, monitoring, and of course evaluation. Gender mainstreaming is aimed at ensuring that both women and men can equally participate in, benefit from, and contribute meaningfully to sustainable development. It has been observed that our society has been dominated by male gender, and this does not make for egalitarianism. Mainstreaming gender, that is, ensuring that both female and male are given a level playing ground, by way of equal opportunities will give the women sense of belonging. This equal opportunity should be in almost all spheres of human endeavour including education, job opportunities, political arena among others. This paper sets out to investigate challenges hindering effective gender mainstreaming in Nigeria, assess the impact of gender mainstreaming and make proposals or recommendations on the strategies to actualize gender mainstreaming for sustainable development in Nigeria. In a bid to realize these lofty goals, secondary sources by way of internet and books were utilized extensively.

Keywords: Gender, sustainability, strategies, mainstreaming, equality

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**Received: 8/6/2025; Revised: 22/7/2025; Accepted: 28/7/2025; Published: 30/7/2025**



## **1.0. INTRODUCTION**

The notion of gender mainstreaming was initially introduced during the Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985. It was subsequently embraced as a strategy by the Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. This strategy aimed to integrate a gender perspective into legislation, policies, programs, and projects (Hosein et al., 2020). Gender mainstreaming, as a strategy for promoting gender equality, has gained increasing attention in international development discourse (Archibong et al., 2018).. It refers to the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programs, in all areas and at all levels (WEP, 2017). The goal is to achieve gender equality by ensuring that gender perspectives and the experiences of women and men are taken into account in policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation.

In Nigeria, gender disparities persist despite the country's commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. According to the National Gender Policy, women constitute about 49.4% of the population but continue to face various forms of discrimination and marginalization. In education, for example, the gender gap in literacy rates remains significant, with only 59.3% of women literate compared to 74.4% of men. Similarly, in the labor force, women are underrepresented, particularly in decision-making positions and high-paying jobs (Tallen, 2021).

These disparities have far-reaching implications for sustainable development in Nigeria. Women constitute a significant proportion of the agricultural workforce, yet they often lack access to land, credit, and other productive resources, limiting their contribution to agricultural productivity and food security. Gender-based violence, another critical issue, undermines women's health and well-being and hinders their full participation in social, economic, and political life (Olonade et al., 2021).

By integrating a gender perspective into all policies, programs, and activities, the goal is to ensure that both women and men can equally participate in, benefit from, and contribute to the country's development. Nigeria, like many other countries, faces significant gender disparities in areas such as education, healthcare, employment, and political representation. These disparities not only inhibit the full potential of women and girls but also hinder the overall development of the nation. Gender mainstreaming therefore seeks to address these disparities by promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls. Through this essay, we explored the concept of gender mainstreaming, its importance for sustainable development, and its implementation in the Nigerian context. By highlighting successful strategies and identifying areas for improvement, this essay aimed to demonstrate the critical role that gender mainstreaming plays in achieving sustainable development in Nigeria.



This essay aimed to explore the concept of gender mainstreaming and its significance in the context of sustainable development in Nigeria.

Sustainable development entails fulfilling the current generation's fundamental needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In the words of Adebosin et al., (2018), gender mainstreaming is a crucial component of this development paradigm. Gender mainstreaming is not just a matter of social justice; it is also a strategic imperative for sustainable development. Empowering women and promoting gender equality can lead to better economic outcomes, improved health and education, and enhanced overall well-being for society (Archibong et al., 2018). The rationale for this essay is on the basis that, by focusing on gender mainstreaming, Nigeria can unlock the full potential of its population and accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This essay focused on the Nigerian context, examining the challenges and opportunities for gender mainstreaming in the country. It drew on existing literature and empirical evidence to provide a comprehensive analysis of the topic.

This literature review examined key theoretical frameworks, policy frameworks, challenges, and success stories related to gender mainstreaming in Nigeria. Drawing on theories such as Technological Determinism, Social Learning Theory, and Cognitive Load Theory, this review explored how these frameworks can inform and guide gender mainstreaming efforts in Nigeria.

The review highlighted the importance of gender mainstreaming in sustainable development and its potential to create a more inclusive and equitable society. It also discusses the challenges and barriers to gender mainstreaming in Nigeria, including cultural norms, inadequate resources, and weak enforcement mechanisms. Additionally, the review identified success stories and best practices in gender mainstreaming, such as the Women's Empowerment and Livelihoods Project and the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, which demonstrate the positive impact of gender mainstreaming initiatives in Nigeria.

Through this literature review, this essay aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of gender mainstreaming in Nigeria and its implications for sustainable development. By highlighting the theoretical foundations, policy frameworks, challenges, and success stories related to gender mainstreaming, this review seeks to inform and guide future gender mainstreaming efforts in Nigeria.



## **2.0. CONCEPTUAL CLASSIFICATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Gender Mainstreaming in Sustainable Development**

Gender mainstreaming is a strategic approach to promoting gender equality and empowering women, as defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2020). It involves integrating gender perspectives into all stages of the policy and programmatic process, including design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The goal of gender mainstreaming is to ensure that both women and men can equally participate in, benefit from, and contribute to sustainable development (Adebosin *et al.*, 2018; Dupe, 2021).

In the context of sustainable development, gender mainstreaming is crucial for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensuring that development is inclusive and equitable for all. Dupe, (2021) had mentioned that a nation is as developed as its human capital in general, meaning that inclusivity across all genders is vital. One of the key aspects of gender mainstreaming in sustainable development is its focus on addressing the root causes of gender inequality. This involves identifying and challenging discriminatory practices and norms that limit women's access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes. By mainstreaming gender perspectives, sustainable development efforts can promote women's empowerment and enhance their contributions to development.

Gender mainstreaming also recognizes the different roles and responsibilities of women and men in society and seeks to ensure that both genders have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from development (Iwuchukwu, 2013). This includes addressing barriers that limit women's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, as well as promoting women's representation in leadership and decision-making positions (Ossai & Nwalado, 2015). Gender mainstreaming in sustainable development also involves recognizing and valuing the unpaid care work that women often perform, such as caregiving and household chores. By acknowledging the importance of this work and ensuring that women have access to support services, such as childcare and eldercare, gender mainstreaming can help reduce the burden of care work on women and promote their economic empowerment (Britwum *et al.*, 2018).

Particularly, for Nigeria, gender mainstreaming is particularly important due to the country's significant gender disparities in areas such as education, healthcare, employment, and political representation. These disparities not only limit the potential of women and girls but also hinder the overall development of the nation. By mainstreaming gender perspectives into policies, programs, and projects, Nigeria can address these disparities and create a more inclusive and equitable society.



## **2.2. Challenges and Barriers**

Despite these successes, gender mainstreaming in Nigeria faces several challenges and barriers. One of the main challenges is the persistence of cultural norms and stereotypes that discriminate against women and girls (Dupe, 2021). These norms often limit women's participation in decision-making processes and hinder their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Another challenge is the lack of adequate resources and infrastructure to support gender mainstreaming initiatives. Many gender-focused programs and projects in Nigeria are underfunded and lack the necessary resources to achieve their objectives effectively. This is compounded by weak enforcement mechanisms and limited capacity among policymakers and implementers, which hinder the implementation of gender equality laws and policies. In more details the perceived challenges hindering effective gender mainstreaming in Nigeria include:

**Cultural Norms and Practices:** Deep-rooted cultural norms and practices often perpetuate gender inequalities in Nigeria. These norms dictate gender roles and responsibilities, leading to unequal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power for women.

**Lack of Awareness and Understanding:** There is often a lack of awareness and understanding of gender issues among policymakers, implementers, and the general public (Omotoso & Enweremadu, 2022). This hinders efforts to mainstream gender perspectives into policies, programs, and projects.

**Inadequate Institutional Capacity:** Many institutions in Nigeria lack the capacity to effectively mainstream gender into their operations. This includes a lack of gender-disaggregated data, limited expertise on gender issues, and inadequate resources for gender mainstreaming efforts.

**Limited Resources:** Budgetary constraints and competing priorities often limit the resources available for gender mainstreaming initiatives. This hinders the implementation of gender-responsive policies and programs.

**Weak Enforcement Mechanisms:** While Nigeria has enacted laws and policies aimed at promoting gender equality, weak enforcement mechanisms often undermine their effectiveness. This includes a lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure compliance with gender equality laws and policies.

**Political Will:** Despite commitments to gender equality at the policy level, there is often a lack of political will to implement gender mainstreaming initiatives. This can be attributed to competing political priorities and a lack of understanding of the benefits of gender equality (Omotoso & Enweremadu, 2022).





Institutional Resistance: Some institutions may resist efforts to mainstream gender, viewing it as a threat to existing power structures and norms. This can hinder the adoption of gender-responsive policies and programs.

### **2.3 Gender Inequality in Nigeria**

Gender inequality remains a significant challenge in Nigeria, particularly in education. According to UNICEF (2020), girls in Nigeria face barriers such as early marriage, poverty, and lack of access to quality education, which limit their educational opportunities and future prospects. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty and gender inequality, as educated women are more likely to earn higher incomes, have better health outcomes, and participate more actively in decision-making processes. In more specificity, this discussion explores key dimensions of gender inequality in Nigeria as follows:

**Education:** Gender disparities in education persist in Nigeria, particularly in Northern regions where cultural and religious factors contribute to lower female enrollment and retention rates. Early marriage, poverty, and lack of access to schools further hinder girls' education. According to UNICEF (2020), only 59% of girls aged 6-11 attend primary school, compared to 65% of boys. This disparity widens at the secondary level, with 40% of girls attending compared to 47% of boys. Additionally, cultural beliefs that prioritize boys' education perpetuate gender inequality in educational opportunities.

**Healthcare:** Access to healthcare services remains a challenge for women in Nigeria, especially in rural areas. Maternal mortality rates are high, with approximately 512 deaths per 100,000 live births (WHO, 2020). Factors contributing to this include inadequate healthcare facilities, shortage of skilled birth attendants, and limited access to reproductive health services. Cultural beliefs and practices, such as traditional birth attendants and home births, also contribute to poor maternal health outcomes. Also, these challenges are exacerbated by practices that discriminate against women and girls, such as female genital mutilation and child marriage.

**Employment:** Women in Nigeria face limited access to formal employment opportunities and are often relegated to low-paying, informal jobs. According to the World Bank (2018), the female labor force participation rate in Nigeria is 50.7%, compared to 75.1% for males. Discriminatory practices, such as gender-based hiring and promotion criteria, further marginalize women in the workforce. Lack of access to financial resources and entrepreneurship opportunities also hinder women's economic empowerment.

**Political Representation:** Women are underrepresented in Nigeria's political sphere, accounting for only 4.8% of parliamentary seats (UN Women, 2018). Cultural and societal norms, as well as institutional barriers such as limited access to political resources and party structures, contribute to this underrepresentation. The low level of women's political



participation limits their ability to influence decision-making processes and advocate for gender-responsive policies.

**Cultural Norms and Practices:** Deeply ingrained cultural norms and practices, such as early marriage and female genital mutilation, perpetuate gender inequality in Nigeria. These practices reinforce traditional gender roles and limit women's autonomy and decision-making power. Despite efforts to eliminate these harmful practices, they continue to affect women and girls, particularly in rural areas.

**Legal and Policy Framework:** Nigeria has made efforts to address gender inequality through legal and policy frameworks, such as the National Gender Policy and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act. However, implementation challenges persist due to weak enforcement mechanisms and lack of awareness. Efforts to strengthen these frameworks and ensure their effective implementation are crucial to advancing gender equality in Nigeria.

## **2.4. Policy and Legal Framework**

Nigeria has made efforts to promote gender equality through various policies and legal frameworks. The National Gender Policy, for example, outlines the government's commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment (UN Women, 2021). The policy recognizes the importance of mainstreaming gender perspectives into all sectors of society and calls for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

The Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act is another important legal framework that aims to protect women and girls from gender-based violence. The act criminalizes various forms of violence against women, including rape, domestic violence, and female genital mutilation, and provides for the prosecution and punishment of offenders. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in the implementation of gender equality laws and policies in Nigeria. These challenges include inadequate funding, weak enforcement mechanisms, and limited awareness and capacity among policymakers and implementers.

## **2.5. Theoretical Review:**

### **Technological Determinism Theory**

Technological determinism theory posits that advancements in technology can lead to societal changes, including shifts in gender roles and norms (Jan *et al.*, 2020). In the context of gender mainstreaming in Nigeria, this theory suggests that technological advancements, such as increased access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), can empower women by providing them with new opportunities for education, employment, and participation in decision-making processes.



### **Social Learning Theory**

This theory suggests that individuals learn by observing others (Stalburg, 2016). This theory is relevant to gender mainstreaming in Nigeria because it highlights the importance of social modeling and reinforcement in promoting gender equality. By showcasing successful examples of gender mainstreaming and highlighting the benefits of gender equality, social learning theory can be leveraged to encourage more individuals and organizations to adopt gender mainstreaming practices.

### **Cognitive Load Theory**

The Cognitive Load Theory emphasizes the importance of presenting information in a clear and concise manner to facilitate learning (Asma & Dallel, 2020). In the context of gender mainstreaming in Nigeria, this theory suggests that effective communication strategies are essential for raising awareness about gender issues and promoting gender equality. By presenting information in a way that is easy to understand and remember, gender mainstreaming efforts can be more successful in achieving their objectives.

## **3.0. METHODOLOGY**

This study employed literally analysis in assessing key strategies to gender equality and sustainable development in Nigeria. The key findings are drawn from contemporary literature and logically present qualitative arguments in favour of the need to forestall gender equality as surrogate for the attainment of egalitarian society in Nigeria.

## **4.0. DISCOURSES OF THE FINDINGS**

### **4.1. Implications of Development Plans on Gender Inequality**

Development policies and plans have varying impacts on the lives of women, men, girls, and boys, either reinforcing or challenging unequal power dynamics in institutional settings and interpersonal relationships. Without the Gender and Development approach, inequalities could persist, limiting fair access, participation, influence, and benefit from development for girls and women, while subordinating boys and men. Gender mainstreaming begins with a gender analysis, which examines the differential effects on women and men of any planned action, including legislation, across the entire policy and program cycle from design to evaluation. This analysis begins by identifying the current roles and contributions of both women and men to social development. It involves exploring the differences in socially constructed roles and learned behaviors and expectations associated with females and males, how these differences can lead to unequal rights, resource access, and voice, and how such inequality impacts the quality of life of women and men. Gender analysis forms the foundation of gender mainstreaming.





## **4.2. Success Stories and Best Practices**

There are several success stories and best practices in gender mainstreaming in Nigeria that can serve as examples for future initiatives. One such example is the Women's Empowerment and Livelihoods Project, implemented by the World Bank (2018). This project aims to empower women by providing them with skills training, access to microfinance, and support for income-generating activities. The project has been successful in improving the economic status of women in Nigeria and enhancing their participation in decision-making processes at the community level. Another example is the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, which, if passed, could further promote gender equality in Nigeria's legal framework (Premium Times, 2020). The bill seeks to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all spheres of life and promote their full participation in society. If implemented effectively, this bill could help address many of the gender disparities and challenges faced by women and girls in Nigeria.

## **4.3. Perspectives and Contributions**

One of the key contributions of this paper is its exploration of theoretical frameworks such as Technological Determinism, Social Learning Theory, and Cognitive Load Theory in the context of gender mainstreaming. By drawing on these theories, the paper provides a theoretical basis for understanding the role of gender mainstreaming in promoting sustainable development in Nigeria. This theoretical framework can inform future research and policy development in the field of gender equality and sustainable development.

Additionally, the essay contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the policy and legal framework related to gender mainstreaming in Nigeria. By discussing key policies and laws aimed at promoting gender equality, such as the National Gender Policy and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, the essay provides insights into the current state of gender mainstreaming efforts in Nigeria and identifies areas for improvement.

Furthermore, this discussion of challenges and barriers to gender mainstreaming in Nigeria, such as cultural norms and inadequate resources, contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in promoting gender equality. By identifying these challenges, the essay provides valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to overcome these obstacles and advance gender mainstreaming efforts in Nigeria.

Overall, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature on gender mainstreaming and sustainable development in Nigeria by providing a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical foundations, policy frameworks, challenges, and success stories related to gender equality. By highlighting the importance of gender mainstreaming in achieving sustainable development, the paper contributes to the ongoing efforts to promote gender equality and empower women in Nigeria.



## **5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1. Conclusion**

Gender mainstreaming emerges as a fundamental strategy for fostering sustainable development in Nigeria. From the foregoing, this work has elucidated the multifaceted nature of gender mainstreaming, drawing on diverse theoretical perspectives to underscore its significance. These theories underscore the potential of technology in driving societal change, the role of social learning in promoting gender equality, and the importance of clear communication in facilitating gender mainstreaming efforts.

Despite progress made, Nigeria still grapples with deep-rooted gender inequalities, particularly in education, healthcare, employment, and political representation. These disparities not only impede women and girls' full participation but also hinder Nigeria's overall development. However, the study also highlighted the country's commitment to promoting gender equality through policies such as the National Gender Policy and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act.

Success stories such as the Women's Empowerment and Livelihoods Project and the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill serve as beacons of hope, demonstrating the transformative power of gender mainstreaming initiatives. Nevertheless, significant challenges persist, including cultural norms, limited resources, and weak enforcement mechanisms, which hinder the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming policies and programs.

Moving forward, it is imperative for Nigeria to prioritize gender mainstreaming in its development agenda. This necessitates increased investment in education and healthcare for women and girls, strengthened enforcement mechanisms for existing gender equality laws, and enhanced awareness and capacity-building efforts. By mainstreaming gender perspectives into all policies, programs, and activities, Nigeria can create a more inclusive and equitable society, thereby accelerating its progress towards sustainable development.

Therefore, gender mainstreaming is a key strategy for achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. By integrating gender perspectives into all policies, programs, and activities, Nigeria can address the root causes of gender inequality and create a more inclusive and equitable society for all its citizens.

### **4.0. Recommendations for Improvement**

Similar to the recommendations of Ossai & Nwalado, (2015), this work strongly recommends the increased investment in education and healthcare for women and girls, encouraging gender mainstreaming in order to drive towards sustainable development in Nigeria. This includes providing girls with access to quality education, ensuring that women have access to



reproductive health services, and addressing the underlying social and economic factors that contribute to gender inequality.

Strengthening enforcement mechanisms for existing gender equality laws is also crucial. This includes ensuring that laws and policies are effectively enforced and that offenders are held accountable for their actions. Additionally, raising awareness and building capacity among policymakers, implementers, and the public is essential for promoting gender equality and empowering women in Nigeria.

### **Competing Interest**

The Author declares that no conflicting interest exist in this manuscript/.

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