# Women's Role In Reproductive Health Decision Making and Vulnerability To STI and HIV/AIDS Infection in Ankpa LGA of Kogi State

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## Abstract

This study is a contribution to the debate on the political and socio-economical empowerment of African women in the era of democratic awakening. The thrust of this study examined and analysed impediments to the political and socio-economical empowerment of the African woman in the 21stcentury, with emphasis on Nigeria, and how to emancipate female Nigerians from political mediocre and stagnancy through education and participation in the socio-economic and political development of the nation. It argued that whereas various factors impede the advancement of women in politics and other spheres of the society, these factors are partly contributed by female Nigerians. The study further revealed that whereas the government has a role to play in changing the subordinate status of women in government and decision-making, many actions have to be taken by women in order to break loose from political backwardness and social subordination. Issues such as contending factors to the political progress of women were examined, and thereafter the way forward proposed. The main purpose of the study is to encourage maximum support and participation of women in decision-making and the development of the nation. This article may be useful to educators, policy makers and women groups who are developing strategies for the advancement of women in developing countries.

## Introduction

Globally, there has been transformation about the role of women in the society.

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More awareness is being created with regard to incorporating gender perspectives in policy-making and the adoption of gender-inclusive approaches in the implementation of development-related goals in order to empower women(although it is arguable if the remote and often neglected parts of developing countries receive these sensitizations). The achievement of this goal is seen as the attainment of peace, justice and sustainable development.

Although controversial, gender has come to be a very crucial instrument for shaping the society; and based on this, the world's governments adopted gender equality and women's empowerment as the third Millennium Development Goal in 2000. The previous United Nation's conferences such as the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), the World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, (1993), the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo (1994), the World Conference on Women, Beijing (1995), and the Security Council Resolution (2000), all focus on gender equality and women's empowerment.

In Africa, women are politically underrepresented, with little or no decision-making power accorded them. Nigeria stands as one of the countries in the continent lagging behind on this issue. Nothing seems to have changed for women as a result of male-dominance. Most Nigerian women still have little influence and control over economic resources in the somewhat questionable democratic republic; a situation that has wasted the potential in them and thus brought about a decline in economic development

Just like women in other patriarchal societies, the subordinate position which Nigerian women are subjected to, predisposes them to various acts of gender-based discrimination. Being a patriarchal society, male dominance is reflected in the marriage institution, political and governing institutions, religious institutions, and other public and private institutions existing in the country. Very few women in the country occupy leadership positions and participate equitably with their male counterparts in decision-making. This in part is caused by the nonchalant attitude of women, inadequate credible women's groups, discriminatory cultures, the society, and the governing institutions.

This article focuses on the empowerment of Nigerian women, using both empirical and analytical methods.

It examines the achievements and challenges in the implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment; measures the gender gap using criteria such as: (a) Educational attainment, (b) Economic participation, (c) Political empowerment, and (d) Health and well-being. The factors which contribute to the disparities will be highlighted and strategies for advancement recommended, with a final conclusion.

## Conceptual Clarity

Gender Equality

Gender equality has been defined by several gender experts and advocates of gender equality. However, I shall select three comprehensive ones. Gender equality is being referred to as a stage of human social development at which the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born male or female, but a stage when both of them realize their full potential, (World Economic Forum, 2005:1). This does not signify that men and women are created with similar body features, but that they ought to enjoy equitable benefits.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (1999:11), defines gender equality as "the overall strategic objective for promoting the role of women and therefore, sustainable people-centered development," and the Fourth World Conference on Women, (1995), stipulates that, "equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice, and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace." A gender-equal society is a society in which both women and men, as equal members of the society, deserve to have equitable opportunities to participate in all kinds of social activities at will, enjoy equitably, political, economical and cultural benefits, and share responsibilities.

Women's Empowerment

Empowering women is an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty. There is no doubt that empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families, communities and the nation.

A critical aspect of gender equality is the equal participation of women and men in decision-making about societal priorities and development directions. Investment in women's empowerment is rather, vital for securing sustainable economic growth and other development objectives.

Women and Development

Successful development depends on the involvement and commitment of members of the society, especially women, men, and youths. Every group, regardless of creed, class or sex, ought to have a role to play in the development of the nation. The degree of cooperation and the extent of participation of members depend upon the general level of the people's awareness of their needs. For any society to survive, both men and women alike, have roles to play as members of the society. Men and women are created to live and work together for their betterment, and for the progress of the society. Usually, the development of any society demands the effort and commitment of every member. Put differently, every member of the society, including women and girls, have to be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and habits to be able to make their contribution towards the development of the society.

Different approaches and theoretical frameworks have been used to analyse the place and conditions of women in development over the past few decades. Approaches such as 'Women in Development' (WID), 'Women and Development' (WAD), and 'Gender and Development' (GAD) have been repeatedly used to illustrate the role of women in development. Whereas WID approach calls for greater attention to women in development policy and practice, and emphasizes the need to integrate them into development (Hazel, Reeves and Sally Baden, 2000: 3), Gouws, Amanda (2005: 25) argues that this approach places women just as an 'add on' to development projects. She notes that women were only excluded from development projects, and therefore, had to be included on equal terms with men.

The discourse of WID shifted from equity to anti-poverty and efficiency in the mid- 1980s to support the WAD approach. Meanwhile, Bhavnani, Kurian and Others (2003: 5) note that integrating women into development is not the only important action to take; but to ensure that mainstreamed projects are transformed to include women's needs and issues right from the beginning of any development project. On the other hand, the GAD approach focuses on the socially constructed basis of differences between men and women, and emphasizes the need to challenge existing gender roles and relations (Hazel and Baden, 2000: 3).

This approach has become the most prominent one adopted since the late 1980s by policy planners, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, because it not only focuses on the inclusion of women in development, but also focuses on the relationships of power which generate women's inequalitysince unequal social and gender relations need to be transformed to empower women. Apparently, there is a shift from mainly focusing on women's role, to a focus on the role of men, thereby making gender relations the prime target of investigation and transformation (although this approach has been criticized). Arguing from a standpoint of the notion of women's empowerment, Parpart, Jane and Others (2002: 4) assert that empowerment projects focus on grassroots, participatory methods and their empowerment potential for the poorest of the poorequating empowerment with inclusion and voice at the expense of the complexities of empowerment as a process and as a goal.

To clarify some doubts which may have risen as a result of Parpart and others' argument, it is important to note that 'empowerment' in the context of gender inequality is not meant to contribute to inequality itself by giving preference to the poorest group in the society. Rather, it seeks to challenge gender inequality in all spheres of life, including development, by transforming gender-power relations through individuals or groups, and to create awareness of women's subordination and to build capacity in order to challenge it. Women's empowerment is the basis of development and a channel to ensure that every trace of unfreedom in the life of women and girls are dealt with, so that they will be seen as equal partners with men and boys in all decisions related to development and peace.

Broadly clarified is the fact that empowerment needs to include an understanding of broad political and economic structures, cultural assumptions and the impact of discourses of human rights and law (Parpart and Others, 2002: 5-12). Empowering women is an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty. According to the OECD (1999: 15), "women's empowerment generally refers to the recognition that women legitimately have the ability and should individually and collectively, participate effectively in decision-making processes that shape their societies and their own lives." In other words, investment in women's empowerment is rather, vital for securing sustainable economic growth and other development objectives and peace.

The United Nations specifically proposed a human rights-based approach to development to further emphasize the importance of human rights to development in general. Basically, the UN's human rights-based approach is a conceptual framework for the process of human development. It is based on international human rights standards directed toward the promotion and protection of human rights, with goals to promote sustainable development work, to empower people (especially, the marginalized group), to promote participatory policy formulation and accountability (UN, 2006: 15). This framework is very essential in this article because it gives an entry point into the recognition of women in the development process.

The importance of incorporating gender perspectives in any development process is well acknowledged. Hari, Srinivas (2008: 9) puts forward that taking gender into consideration in the overall context of development has to be prioritized. This, if taken into account, may lead to the actualization of women's aspirations of having their voice heard in any decision-making relating to development and its implementation.

Women's Empowerment in Nigeria: Measuring the Gap

Development derives from participatory process and the incorporation of gender perspectives in the whole framework. At the root of violence against women, lay unequal power relations, which ultimately lead to domination over and discrimination against women by men, thereby impeding the full advancement of women and their equal participation in the development of the nation. This derives from cultural patterns that perpetuate the lower status accorded to women. These factors make the role played by women to appear invisible to the general public. Nigeria has made efforts to promote gender equity by accepting several policy commitments at the global, regional and national levels. The government of Nigeria formed a national policy on women in the year 2000, which was further revised in 2006 as a result of continued imbalance in the roles of women and men. Other policies include Gender Policy and Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria, 2003; National Guidelines and Strategies for Malaria Prevention and Control During Pregnancy, 2005, and National Strategic Framework and Plan for Vesico-vaginal Fistula (VVF) Eradication in Nigeria. It is important to note that most of the policies exist on paper, but are not implemented.

Generally, Nigerian women have not really enjoyed equal economic participation with their male counterparts. Yet, they form more than 70 percent of food producers in the country. The study carried out by Idisi, P. I. (1996:263) in Delta State shows that over 90 percent of the Urhobo women are directly involved in agricultural production and petty trading, whereas the men who own the majority of the land are not fully engaged in economic activities. Only less than 20 percent of the men are engaged in diverse non-rural economic and socio-political activities. According to Ikeoji, (2000), over 70 percent of farmers in parts of Delta and Edo States are rural women and girls who engage in a variety of farming activities ranging from clearing, to marketing and storage of food produce. In Afugiri of Abia State, women are the major food producers. They currently built more than three oil mills and cassava processing centres, through their monthly financial contributions. However, they receive little economic reward from their labour, which has left most of them who have no one to care for them in penury.

In a study to estimate the gross income accruing to some Imo State women from palm oil and palm kernel processing, Onweagba, A.E. and Nwaihu, E.C. (2004:91-95) observe that the gross income realized was reasonable for meaningful rural development projects. However, their full participation in rural development infrastructure was hindered by certain socioeconomic constraints posed mainly by societal gender inequality. Gender issues providing constraints include land ownership rights, of which women are often denied the right; lack of right to economic trees, and cultural taboos associated with women harvesting palm fruits. The participation of women in economic development is necessary for development. Economic participation referred to here concerns not only the actual number of women participating in the labour force, but also, their remuneration on an equal basis. Bessie, A. Ukpore (2009:269) writes that, "to promote sustainable development, there is the need for citizens (males and females) to participate in the economy, policy and social development of the society." I agree with her because it is very important for women and men, alike to contribute to the development of the nation through active participation in the socio-economic and political development of the nation. The economic empowerment of women is very crucial for poverty reduction. When women are financially empowered, then, the tendency to support their families, create ideas and initiatives on how to develop their communities, states and nation become very high. The employment opportunity for women in the late 1990s was a bit impressive.

For example, the wage employment of women in the non-agricultural sector was 46 percent in 1996 and 62 percent in 1997 as a result of some ad hoc women-focused programmes such as the Better Life for Rural Women, Family Support Programme (FSP), and Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), initiated and implemented during that period. But, the decline in the wage employment of women recently, is quite alarming.

Recently, there are many qualified, but unemployed women and girls in the country. The reason being that there is an increase in female education without corresponding job opportunities for them. Women are not empowered to be self-employed and when it comes to the recruitment of staff, women are likely to be the least to be recruited with poor remuneration. Some women and girls are employed to generate income for some companies through enticing manners, and to recruit more clients for the companies' benefit.

Lack of access to land and capital remain a major obstacle to women's economic empowerment and advancement in some regions. For example, in Southeastern Nigeria, women have limited access to land. Food crop production in the home base is usually for domestic and commercial consumption. But, female farmers and their household members rarely provide sufficient labour for land preparation and other farming activities, because hiring labour is quite expensive. Obviously, agricultural credit is often inaccessible to women. They rarely receive any agricultural credit for farming from any organization. In some cases, men receive without the women receiving any. For example, Nkoli, Ezumah and Catherine Domenico (1995:1739-1742) observed in their investigation that out of 95 per cent of farmers in Umuleri and Mgbakwu in Anambra State, only 5 per cent (men) received agricultural credit. None of the women received any. Also, findings on gender and research outputs of 219 academics in three Universities of Agriculture, including University of Agriculture, Umudike, show that research attainment is slightly higher for male academics than for female (Abayomi, Oloruntoba and Michael, Ajayi 2006: 88). They argue that academic qualifications and rank in the universities are significantly associated with gender. Although there was significant association between promotion time and gender, Oloruntoba and Ajayi assert that male academics have higher publishing rates in journals and proceedings of repute. Also, more male faculty members are employed at the top management positions, while majority of female faculty members occupy middle management and entry levels. Empirical evidence shows that gender bias and discrimination in higher institutions of learning in Southeastern Nigeria is not a new phenomenon.

For example, P.C. Onokala and F.O. Onah (1998:23-26) study on the gender distribution of academic staff at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka for the period 1980 to 1997, shows that the number and percentage of female academic staff of the total number was lower than that of the male academic staff in all the faculties. This implies that there is little or no awareness of the various legislations enacted to tackle inequality and raise the status of women. Furthermore, there is no evident commitment, enforcement and implementation of the laws. The numerous trainings conducted by government, civil society and other development partners do not appear to have had much effect in challenging gender inequality. The Virtual Poverty Fund, skills acquisition, and all other poverty alleviation programmes have not been able to raise the status of women to parity with that of men. As a matter of fact, many development projects of women in Southeastern Nigeria have been abandoned, due to lack of financial support from any organization or the State government. Skills acquisition programmes have in fact, ensured in reinforcing the inequality between men and women; given that major training skills offered follow the traditional gender-defined occupational stereotypes. For example, hairdressing, fashion design and catering are but an extension of women domestic responsibilities. Majority of women in the country are not aware of the Virtual Poverty Fund, and as such, unable to take advantage of the fund.

Another crucial empowerment of women is in the area of governance, especially, in political participation. The political participation of women in Nigeria from the 1970s to 1990s was very low. For instance, in 1991, only 27 out of 172 legislators in the House of Assembly were women. In 1999, there were 106 male Senators with only 3 female Senators. Out of the 360 members of the House of Representatives in 2003, 345 were males and only 15 were females, (National Assembly, Independent National Electoral Commission, 1999 and 2003). But, there is little improvement in the political empowerment of women recently, though men still account for 90 percent of the country's legislature despite the promises made in 2004 to increase the legislative posts of women to 30 percent.

Under the support of the Gender Electoral and Constitution Memoranda Committee, the Nigerian women called for 35 per cent of all elected government posts to be filled by women, and for the first time, Nigerian women held the posts of Speaker of the House of Representatives, Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, as well as Ministers, Deputy Governors, heads of parastatals, and other key offices after the 2007 general elections.

As a measure to increase women's political participation in the 2007 general elections, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs at several levels engaged Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to achieve this. This led to the establishment of six Zonal Women Political Empowerment Offices to support political focused women NGOs in mobilizing women towards popular political participation in the 2007. Despite this effort, the ratio of women to men in political appointments is still insignificant. Women are still regarded as subordinate, non-active, and inferior members of the society, and are treated unequally in their families, communities, political institutions, academic institutions, and other institutions in the society. In his findings on female political participation in the 2011 Nigeria's general elections, Deji, Oladoye (2011) writes that only 909 out of over ten thousand candidates that contested for the 2011 elections were women. He confirms that whereas 9.1 percent of the total number of candidates constitutes female, 90.9 percent out of the overall candidates was male. Education is very important for women's empowerment. It is one of the tools for achieving sustainable development. While empirical evidence shows that progress is being made in female literacy in the country, there is still a marginal gap in the enrolment of the girl-child in schools. The Education For All goal is constrained by the high rate of attrition in primary schools, especially, government schools, which is due to many factors including, engagement in income-generating activities by some children during school hours; inability of parents to meet expenses for books, school uniforms and other learning materials; location of schools; ill-health, religious and cultural factors; early marriage of girls, and teenage pregnancies

The national literacy levels remain low and there exists considerable regional variation in female literacy rate. The analysis made by the National Population Commission and UNICEF concerning the literacy situation in Nigeria in 2001 shows that the literacy rate declined from 58 percent in 1990 to 49 percent in 1999. Also, the literacy among women and girls declined from 44 percent to 41 percent during the same period.

Regionally, in the South East and South West zones, the female literacy rates were 60 per cent and 55 per cent respectively, compared with male literacy rates of 74.2 per-cent and 74.4 per cent. The North West and North East zones had female literacy rates of 22 per cent and 21 per cent respectively, compared to 40.3 percent and 42.1 per cent for their male counterparts. Also, recent study has shown that the gross enrolment ratio for boys remains higher than that of girls by over 10 percent with a male-female ratio of 55 percent: 44.1 percent. At the secondary level, results show that girls' dropout rate is higher, and only 39.70 percent of female students graduate from universities, and 37.54 percent from polytechnics respectively, (see Akosile, 2008). Health and well-being of every woman is a matter of right, and not a privilege. Ensuring that women have equal access to health care facilities with their male counterparts is capable of prolonging their life span to enable them contribute effectively and efficiently toward the development of the nation. The National Health Policy and Health Reform Strategy, which seeks to achieve health for all Nigerians was promulgated in 1988 and revised in 2004. It was established by the government with the primary objective to bring about a comprehensive health care system through the primary health care to every citizen of the country. The National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), 2003 is under the National Health Policy and Health Reform Strategy, meant to spread health benefits across the primary, secondary and tertiary spectra. Other key health policy framework adopted to achieve quality reproductive health for all Nigerians, especially women and girls, are the National Policy on Sexuality Education, National Policy on HIV/AIDS 2003, and the National Policy on Population for Development Unity, Progress and Self-Reliance, 1998, and 2004, designed to decelerate the rate of population growth and improve living standard (BAOBAB,2008:46).

Despite the reforms in the health sector, reproductive health care delivery services in the country are yet to be realized, as most of the reforms have not impacted on the lives of a majority of women. Only few women have access to good health care delivery or benefit from the free maternal health policies in the country. Many pregnant women die during and after child birth, as a result of poor health facilities. Many die because they do not have the resources to settle hospital bills and to receive medical attention. Many of them are peasant farmers who could hardly feed their families, let alone go to the hospital. Some die out of ignorance because they are unaware of their health condition. This is because available facilities are inadequate and poorly maintained, particularly at the Primary Health Care level.

There is poor state of infrastructural and existing facilities, that is, building, material and supplies; and inequitable distribution of available facilities such that in many instances women especially, travel over 5km to access health care services. The provision of quality services is poor and mainly unaffordable. Often times, unofficial payments are demanded from patients who might not be able to afford it. Poor client satisfaction has frequently led to loss of confidence in the public health system, leading to the patronage of private health sector and alternative medical providers. Women in the rural areas are worst hit, as the services are not readily available to them at all. Women and children's Hospitals exist in few States and mostly in the urban areas; while the rural communities make use of the traditional healers and sometimes the ill-equipped Primary Health Care facilities in the Local Government Areas (LGAs).

A retrospective study carried out in two tertiary and two secondary healthcare institutions in Ebonyi State, over a 3-year period (January 2003-December 2005), shows that the ratio of maternal mortality rate increased from 756.8 in 2003 to 897.6 in 2004 and then to 1052.2 in 2005 (Uchenna, I. Nwagha, and Others, 2008:2). Major risk factors include low socio-economic status (SES), and unscheduled emergencies. They identified sepsis as the commonest cause of maternal death in the State, followed by obstetric haemorrhage, as well as Pre-eclampsia/eclampsia and anaemia. Anaemia in pregnancy continues to be a major health problem for women in Nigeria. Its pandemic in the region continues to be a source of concern to many women. It increases the rates of maternal mortality and premature delivery. In a study to determine the prevalence of anaemia among pregnant women at registration for antenatal care at a major tertiary care hospital in Enugu, Cyril, C. Dim and Others (2007:11) observed that two hundred and fourteen (40.4%) out of the 530 of the study population were anaemic. Evidence shows that Nigeria's maternal mortality rate is the second highest in the world after India, (Raphael, Alison, 2008). He states that about 1,100 maternal deaths occur per 100,000 live births in the country.

**Factors which Contribute to Gender Disparity in Nigeria**

A major challenge which impedes women's empowerment in Nigeria is the problem of developing capacity for mainstreaming gender and implementing existing policies, including the national policy on women and the domestication of CEDAW. For example, the implementation of the government's new social and educational policy of free education for women and girls at all levels, and of free and compulsory basic education for girls has been very slow.

Cultural preference of sons in Africa is another factor which contributes to disparities in gender. The African culture attaches much importance on sons leaving the female folk as a minority member in the society. This in turn has made it very difficult to achieve a satisfactory level of women empowerment, especially, in politics and in decision-making in Nigeria. Religious laws and misconceptions also contribute to gender disparity, thereby making it difficult for the man to realize the strengths, potentials and capacity embedded in the woman. For instance, the Sharia law is really a threat to the advancement of Islamic women in Nigeria. Another barrier I must not ignore in this article is what I call the 'Women Leader Problem.' Nigerian women are used to mobilize support for male candidates during elections. A select number of women are appointed by male political aspirants to mobilize women to support and vote for them. These women receive some token with luxurious future promises from the boss (male political aspirant), to carry out duties which include mobilization of other women. They mobilize and brainwash fellow women, especially the illiterates and poor ones to support and vote-in their boss. They only give these poor women a little token, which is usually not enough for one square meal. When the 'boss' in question is voted in, the poor women, including their mobilizers are no longer remembered by their boss (es).

Political illiteracy and inferior mentality is one of the hindrances to the political participation of an average Nigerian woman. I've come across Nigerian women who do not like politics, and who do not support that women should vie for any political position. They believe that politics is in a man's world, and a man's thing. Some see it as a taboo for a woman to be the head of government, and do not consider themselves worthy to become leaders and decision makers. There is no doubt that cultures, especially, discriminatory cultures have a way of influencing the minds of people, especially, those who grew up in a patriarchal society. Other factors include, inadequate capacity building; inadequate sensitization programmes; absence of strong credible women advocacy groups, and monetization of politics and intimidation.

**Recommendation**

Early education of children on gender-related issues will help reduce future gender-based discriminations. The family as well as the school has a role to play in achieving this goal.

In other words, parents have to promote gender equality by giving their children, both male and female, equal rights at home. Also, gender education has to be included in the school curricula, in the media, and at community level, such that at every level of education, children as well as adults would have opportunity to acquire gender-related education, and to eradicate gender-based political bias in women and men, boys and girls.

The Government should consider additional anti-discrimination legislation that will entrench the principle of equality and expand constitutional provisions to create equal opportunities for both sexes. This legislation should ensure legal action can be taken against discrimination and create institutions and procedures for claiming equal rights. Also, all laws that are discriminatory have to be amended.

While commending the government for adopting the national Gender Policy that provides for a minimum 35% of representation of women at all levels of political participation, it is imperative to back this up legislatively. Therefore, 35% representation should be integrated into the appropriate provision in the constitution or instituted via other specific legislation. Also, electoral law should be re-examined and reformed where appropriate, to take gender issues into account. Gender mainstreaming must become mandatory in all government, political party and private sector policies in the country. Since violence within the political parties scares women away from vying for any political position, political parties are hereby urged to address the problem of violence within the parties, as this constitutes a hindrance to women's participation in politics. Political parties should endeavour to waive all nomination fees payable by female candidates; and measures should be taken to ensure that these fees are not reintroduced in another guise by party officials.

Education encourages female empowerment and may improve women's knowledge of safe sex practices. In other words, the gender policy on education should be widely publicized and disseminated to all stakeholders. State and non-state actors should be involved in this process to ensure its full implementation. There should be a programme to re-integrate girls who drops out of school due to pregnancy back into the school after childbirth.

The funding of primary health care should be increased, such that quality health services at community level will be provided. Maternal mortality should be declared a crisis and a Maternal Mortality Reduction Agency should be set up and given the mandate to reduce the rate of maternal deaths within a given time period, and family planning education improved to be utilised in preventing pregnancies in adolescents and to limit number of pregnancies and to space child births. Given that anaemia has been observed to be the most frequent cause of complication during pregnancy, antenatal care should be concerned with its early detection and management. Preconception care, including iron and folic acid supplementation is advocated to reduce this problem.

Also, medical staff managing pregnant women should endeavour to investigate anaemic pregnant women further in order to identify the aetiology whenever possible, before commencing the usual treatment with iron. Above all, private sector provision of health care services should be standardized and regulated along the public sector provision. All of these efforts would help to ensure safe motherhood and achieve the relevant targets of the Millennium Development Goals. In addition, there is need to promote a transformative development co-operation with women. This means incorporating the knowledge, insights and experience of both women and men in the development agenda and recognizing that these are very essential for securing effective and sustainable development in Nigeria. It is important to fully mainstream gender in all the institutions in the country as adopted in Beijing to support the goal of gender equality. This strategy involves integrating gender equality concerns into the analyses and formulation of all policies, programmes and projects in the country. It also involves initiatives to enable women as well as men to formulate and express their views and participate in decision-making across development issues. Finally, the responsibility for pursuing gender equality and women's empowerment has to be shared by all actors, both men and women, and youths, so that together, the discrimination against women in hiring, wages, benefits and other forms of violence which impede their advancement in political participation, labour force and in decision-making would be eliminated. When the above strategies and other government policies aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment are fully implemented, then, gender equality and women's empowerment would become a reality in Nigeria.

**Conclusion**

This study was consistent with data observed in other studies in Nigeria and personal observation. The article examines the obstacles to the empowerment of the Nigerian women, and offered ways to tackle this problem. Result shows that a huge gap still exists in the empowerment of women in Nigeria. Education is seen as one of the ways to tackle the marginalized and subordinate state of women in the country. The study reveals that the responsibility for pursuing gender equality and women's empowerment has to be shared by all actors, including men and women, as well as youths.

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