

PHILOSOPHY OF GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN PRODUCTIVITY: IMPERATIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The entire concept, object and practice of gender equality are positioned as philosophical in this article. From the intellectual perception to the disputed utopian end of gender equality embodies wisdom, truth and realism (ethos of philosophy) for balanced and optimal human productivity in particularly developing economies with poor implementation of the instruments of gender equality; this lapse hampers concerted drive towards equilibrium of rights, opportunities and socio-economic development in Nigeria. This paper advances the need for the propagation of philosophy of gender equality, which is in theoretical and practical concord with the features of human rights, and holds essential tools for inclusive and all genders enhanced productivity and growth. This paper, therefore, attempts to critically link the philosophical perspectives of gender parity to the imperatives of improved women empowerment and enhanced human productivity most necessary for Nigeria's dire need for national economic growth in this era of competitive global march towards sustainable development. The paper calls for national consciousness and practice of the philosophy of gender equality and social justice devoid of discriminations and primordial interests through its incorporation into school curricula; effective institutional implementation of comatose instruments of gender equality and wide advocacy of human rights in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Philosophy, Gender, Equality, Human, Productivity.

INTRODUCTION

The place of philosophy in various disciplines, human endeavours and experiences can never be underestimated or mistaken. Philosophy in its unique perspectives touches and influences almost all aspects of human activities and affairs. This can be quite noticeable in the existence of philosophy of many disciplines, such as philosophy of science, philosophy of education, social philosophy, political philosophy, and even the divisions of philosophy that include rational philosophy, natural philosophy and moral philosophy. Perhaps, the following definition of philosophy attempts to explain its all-important nature as a versatile body of knowledge that has very wide academic outreach; and the definition states that philosophy is the knowledge of all things through their ultimate causes, acquired through the use of reason. This definition reveals the material object of philosophy, that is, the realities it studies: Philosophy studies all things. All aspects of reality can be the objects of philosophical study since one can seek their ultimate or most profound causes (Ogbonna, 2005). The above narrative implies that there can be philosophy of any aspect of human nature, activities or experiences including the issues of gender equality and human productivity.

This paper is a discourse on the philosophy of gender equality in relation to human productivity with focus on the Nigerian perspective. It attempts to establish the contemporary reality of philosophy of gender equality and its possible sustainable impacts on human productivity for economies such as Nigeria. Gender equality is a situation or condition in society whereby men and women (males and females) have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potentials, political, economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the results. It entails that the underlying causes of discrimination are systematically identified and removed in order to give men and women equal opportunities (Okoroafor and Iheriohanma, 2018). In relation to gender equality in this paper is the phenomenon of human productivity – the capacity of mankind to create and recreate things and services of value and industry for the sustainability of human life and societal advancement. Human productivity defines all creative activities of man (all genders) that produce things of value for use by man; the level of human productivity therefore matters in the course of societal existence and growth of economies (Brigitte et al, 2006).

Both gender equality and human productivity are two important and current issues that a field of knowledge such as philosophy delves into not only for the purpose of clarity of context but also to seek the deepest explanations regarding their prevalence and antecedents in society such as the Nigerian society. Heidegger (1959) opines that “the formal object of philosophy, which is that aspect under which it studies its material objects, is the study of reality through its ultimate causes; that is, by seeking the deepest explanations regarding the existence and nature of beings. This approach is what characterizes philosophy”.

Based on this premise, the paper argues that there is philosophy of gender equality that can be understood and exploited to fully enhance human productivity and human development in the overall interest of the growth of the national economy of Nigeria; and also by extension, attain laudable strides in the pursuit of sustainable development goals. A philosophy of gender equality is seen and represented here-in as instrumental for the maximum exploitation of Nigeria’s huge underutilized human resources in this era of highly competitive global economy of the 21st century. This paper logically explores the following in the course of its library research:

- ✓ Conceptualization of Philosophy, Gender Equality and Productivity
- ✓ The Philosophy of Gender Equality
- ✓ Gender Equality and Human Productivity: The Theoretical/Practical Interface
- ✓ Imperative of Philosophy of Gender Equality for Enhanced Human Productivity: The Nigerian Perspective

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF PHILOSOPHY, GENDER EQUALITY AND PRODUCTIVITY

Philosophy : It has been stated severally that there are as many definitions of philosophy as there are philosophers, resulting to the extreme lack of one generally acceptable and comprehensive definition. However, the most pronounced technical word in the meaning/definition of philosophy is “wisdom”, which means the ability to make sensible decisions and give good judgements because of experience and knowledge that somebody has stands out as probably the import of philosophical knowledge and enterprise. Aristotle (412-352 B.C), understands wisdom as the highest intellectual and especially philosophical excellence which can be achieved or reached by human mind. Philosophy for Plato, (427 – 347 B.C), “is a kind of vision”, the vision of truth. It is purely intellectual; it is not merely wisdom, but love for wisdom (Morris, 1960).

The following definitions of philosophy depicts its unique, all-round and academic capacities: that philosophy is a way of simplifying complex ideas and statements about our experiences in life in order to make sense out of (make us understand) them; a rational attempt in finding solutions to fundamental problems of man; what an individual or group accepts as guiding principles which prompts action in different ways at different times, places and circumstances; a rational investigation which examines nature and the reasons behind event happening in the world; and more profoundly philosophy is a constant and endless quest by man in trying to find out many riddles of the universe, so that he can find out a meaningful

framework for the expression of all thoughts, actions and observable phenomena (definitions of philosophy by various authorities cited in Enoh, 2001).

Gender Equality is a phrase as instrumental as its challenges and prospects, and therefore, often controversial whenever and wherever it is mentioned or used, more especially in the context of gender relations. Gender equality as a concept implies that women, men, girls and boys enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections (UNICEF, 2016). This does not mean that women and men or girls and boys are the same, by virtue of their sex, they are not and will never be. But as human beings they are supposed to be treated exactly the same way without any form of discrimination.

Gender equality is the reality of a situation or experience in society in which men and women have equal conditions for realizing and actualizing their full human rights and potentials as well as political, economic, social and cultural development, and are able to benefit equally from the results. It eschews all forms of discrimination and maltreatment and therefore entails that the underlying causes of discrimination and oppression are systematically identified and removed in order to give women and men equal rights and opportunities. What is more intriguing about gender equality is its component of gender equity which basically emphasizes that men and women should not only be given equal access to resources and opportunities; but they should also be given the means of benefitting from the equality. It stresses the need for fairness in the way women and men are treated in society (Acha, 2009). In all, gender equality is a factor of balance in the affairs concerning the two genders of the human race.

Productivity: Productivity basically relates to the activities and rate at which goods and services are produced. It includes the volume or amount of goods and services produced in relation to the factors of production used and time expended. The concept of productivity has always been tied to the relationship that exists between the process of production and the effective utilization of those resources at human disposal. Productivity refers primarily to the quality, state, or fact of being able to generate, create, enhance, or bring forth goods and services for human usage and consumption. A classic and yet simple definition of productivity is that it is “a way to measure efficiency”. In an economic context, productivity is how to measure the output that comes from units of inputs (Robbin, 2018). In tandem with the above definition, productivity is therefore a result of output that exceeds or surpasses a given resource/s input at a point in time. Productivity is a measure of the efficiency of a person, machine, factory, system, etc., or all of them put together at a time in converting inputs into useful or valuable outputs. Productivity is a critical determinant of cost efficiency (Business Dictionary, 2020).

IS THERE PHILOSOPHY OF GENDER EQUALITY?

Having put into perspectives the definitions of philosophy and gender equality, it is partly clear how they could be correlated with far reaching meanings and logically effects on human affairs; and particularly with regards to the issue of eradicating gender inequality for a more gender-balanced world. The question here is: is there or could there be a philosophy of gender equality in society, and in particular, the Nigerian society? The answer to this question is perceived in this paper as affirmative considering the following logical arguments that attempt to buttress the existentiality of a philosophy of gender equality.

Firstly, philosophy focuses on the application of wisdom in understanding and interpreting human affairs to the benefit of mankind. For Aristotle, the desire for knowledge is something natural to man, and his happiness is closely linked to wisdom. Wisdom enables him to discover the meaning of his life and to act in an upright way. Wisdom empowers the comprehension of the basic truths that govern human conducts. One needs a systematic study of these truths to attain wisdom in all its extension and depth. The term wise man is usually applied to a person who has a certain and well-founded knowledge of the deepest truths, which enables him to guide and influence other people. Ogbonna (2005) states that in the natural level, the most perfect wisdom is attained through metaphysics. This is so because metaphysics studies the deepest causes of reality, in so far as they can be known by natural reason. Metaphysics provides the foundation for a proper perspective in particular sciences and for the adequate interpretation of their findings; it is also the basis of natural ethics. It passes judgment on the ultimate value and meaning of the specific knowledge they attain.

Thus, it makes the ordering of different types of knowledge and acts toward their true end possible. In a general way, wisdom studies all things in the light of their ultimate causes. Above all, it considers them in relation to God, who is the origin and end of all creatures. In this way, it allows us to carry out the task of passing judgment on them and of ordering them with regard to their ultimate end, which is God (Wetheimer, 1991).

The above narratives explain the role of philosophy via metaphysics in the existence and growing wave of the system of gender equality around the world and to some extent in Nigeria. Wisdom that is obtained through metaphysics studies the deepest causes of reality as long as they can be known by natural reason. Gender inequality and gender equality are both issues in human affairs in which the former is an age long practice in most patriarchal societies of the world even upto date while the latter is a growing possible reality in the future. The two concepts are therefore aspects of human affairs in which the application of wisdom (philosophy) can be quite instrumental for their proper understanding particularly in the areas of the causes of their reality in society. The philosophy of gender equality, reveals the deepest causes of gender inequality for human understanding and appreciation, and also explains with wisdom the wisdom in the attainment of gender equality as individual and societal value that does not only help towards the dismantle of the shackles of gender inequality but also gives the highest freedoms to the genders to be optimal in human affairs including human productivity. Philosophy through the use of wisdom exposes gender inequality as the opposite in concept, knowledge and practice of gender equality.

While gender inequality, in essence, implies the unequal treatment and perception of individuals based on gender, gender equality emphasizes the prevalence of condition in society in which men and women have equal rights, equal opportunities and no discriminations or biases. The nature and object of gender equality is such that it is embedded in philosophical knowledge and insights given its embodiment as wisdom being applied in a distinct human phenomenon. Philosophy is about man's search for truth and the voice of the people has long been interpreted and believed to be the voice of God, that is the voice of truth. From the United Nations Conventions Declarations on human rights to the sustainable development goals are all laced with several mentions of the need and critical importance of equality between the genders. This global mention and pursuit of inclusiveness and gender equality are clear signs of their global awareness, and the emerging popularity of the wisdom behind the concept of gender equality, particularly in the present world order of increasing global insecurity and competitive economic atmosphere. Okoroafor and Iheriohanma (2018) observe that "the attainment of gender equality is not only important as an end to gender disequilibrium, particularly in terms of human rights issues, but as prerequisite for the attainment of sustainable development". In concord, Ugwulebo (2011) posits that "favour of one sex against the other is against the tenets of gender equity and negates the spirit of sustainable development. It dictates who benefits from allocation of available resources including economic and political benefits".

The argument here could be which of gender inequality and gender equality benefits human beings and human productivity more than the other? Which of the two exemplifies the true nature of philosophy in terms of its search for reality and truths, its application of metaphysics (wisdom) in human affairs? While gender inequality has been in existence for many centuries, the increasing knowledge (wisdom) of the need and benefits of equal human rights that are inalienable, and the growing awareness of the gains of allowing women and men to have equal access to opportunities and privileges makes the idea of gender equality not only laudable but also a necessity for a world in search of greater human productivity and development. There is the saying that when women thrives, the world thrives; this saying is on the assumption that the men are already thriving and should the women thrive as much as the men, then the world will be better in many positive ramifications. Women are more than half the population of Nigeria (Isigwe and Onuoha, 2014), and are quite industrious and energetic and therefore the practice of gender equality rather than gender inequality will give them equal opportunities with their men counterparts to excel and contribute to the overall human productivity while enjoying equal rights and no discrimination for a good life. A society of equality for everybody not minding the gender is a balanced society upholding wisdom and truth in human affairs. This

is because there is ample wisdom in allowing women equal opportunities and rights with men that will encourage them to be at their best and to participate and contribute both individually, and collectively to societal development (Onosode, 2013). There is clear wisdom in women and men joining their potentials, talents, abilities and capacities in an atmosphere of equality in order to escalate human productivity and expand human development. Again, there is truth in the equality of men and women because the practice of gender inequality which gender equality counters has the features of male dominance, male control, male inheritance, male oppression and exploitation of women, etc, (Nwakanma et al, 2016), and these are the truths of gender inequality which are anti-gender balance and human growth, and therefore unwise in moral and economic sense. All men and women are equal before God, and the combination of the productivity of women and that of men clearly heightens the overall human productivity and therefore a wise step in the right direction. The truth about the ills of gender inequality and the apparent wisdom that accompany the concept and practice of gender equality explains the existence and reality of a sound philosophy of gender equality.

GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN PRODUCTIVITY: THE THEORETICAL/PRACTICAL INTERFACE

There is theoretical and practical relationships that exist between gender equality and human productivity. The two phenomena can have significant impacts on one another while contributing to human and societal development. Basically, gender equality can empower human productivity and facilitate the much needed human development in this rising 21st century. Theoretically, gender equality is a concept that defines the opposite of gender inequality and typifies the situation or state of affairs in society whereby all genders have equal conditions for realizing their full potentials and human rights as well as their socio-economic, political, cultural and psychological development; and also being the equal beneficiaries of the outcomes of these conditions (Storey, 2003). Gender equality refers to an equal sharing of power between women and men in their access to education, health, administration and managerial positions, equal seats in parliaments, among others (GNAT, 2014). It implies the same status, rights and responsibilities for women and men. Therefore, this theoretical perspective of gender equality portrays it to be in some sort of consonance with the phenomenon of human productivity. The idea of human productivity is all about the nature, quality and rate of human (all genders) capacity in terms of productivity and efficiency. The phenomenon of human productivity is critical because it is human resources that manages and operates natural/material resources in an economy. This is primarily the reason human productivity is crucial because its failure will amount to the failure of the efficiently utilization of other resources. The realization of the importance and relevance of the human factor in not only the production processes but also in the sustenance of productivity and growth have been evident right from the early 20th century, particularly from the point of view of Fredrick Taylor. Individuals constitute the employees in industries and every industry strive to survive, grow and develop because failure to do that ensures their collapse and extinction. Right from the early 20th century to the present 21st century, human beings (workers) remain the most essential factor of productivity; being the major drivers of the process of production (Kennedy, 2016).

Practically, gender equality is an agenda that is increasingly becoming a global movement aimed at bringing male and female genders to equity in human interactions and affairs. The pursuit of gender equality in Nigeria requires women to first seek empowerment throwing moving away from illiteracy, poverty, inactive or low participation, poor socio-political awareness, self-helplessness, low self-esteem and the role of being mere appendages to men in many of life's opportunities, challenges and endeavours. This, in critical terms, requires women to practically and earnestly seek good and functioning education, greater socio-political consciousness and participation, and mobilization to fight and eradicate certain traditional values and practices that demean, subjugate and relegate them to the backwaters of insecurity and powerlessness (Okoroafor and Iheriohanma, 2014). These are some of the practical measures expected of the women in the quest for gender equality that will in turn have tremendous tangible effects on human productivity and development. The inputs that come from women's increased participation and contributions cannot easily

be quantified given the fact that they are said to be more in population than men and equally industrious in their chosen or endowed capacities. Aina (1998) posits that “women constitute about half of the population of Nigerian state and are known to play major roles as producers, managers, community developers, organizers, etc. Their contributions to the social and economic development of society is also more than half when compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres”.

These practical roles women play are critical for effective and sustained increase in the level of human productivity. And to play these roles more successfully, women needs to have equal rights and opportunities with their men counterparts, and combined the two genders’ capacities and competences can be harnessed adequately to heighten human productivity which is fundamentally necessary for economic growth and human development in all economies, Nigeria inclusive (Edwina, 2005).

IMPERATIVE OF PHILOSOPHY OF GENDER EQUALITY FOR ENHANCED HUMAN PRODUCTIVITY: THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

Philosophy of gender equality is imperative for economic growth and development because of its theoretical and practical effects on human affairs that can positively influence human productivity in Nigeria. A cursory look at the imperative of the philosophy of gender equality in relation to human productivity can be perceived from three main philosophical dimensions: philosophy as the application of wisdom, philosophy as the search for reality and philosophy as the search for truth. The Greeks gave philosophy its first meaning from two distinct words “Philain” meaning friend; and “Sophia” meaning wisdom. To the ancient Greeks who lived about 500 years before the birth of Christ on the Islands of Miletus and Lonia, seeking knowledge may be a common inherent quality of man, but there are few who seek wisdom (which is invariably higher than mere knowledge) not just for personal gains but because they love wisdom. Wisdom for the Greeks consist in the ability to draw meaning from experience, to judge experience wisely, to see beyond what merely meets the eyes (Oluwole, 1994)

The application of wisdom in the understanding of current global issue such as gender equality is nothing else than a philosophical experience and practice. In fact, to draw meaning and positively judge the relevance and efficacy of gender equality will require in depth analysis of the experiences associated with the system and practice of gender inequality. Social inequality that harbours gender inequality through experiences is known to provide structures that disadvantage and relegate the females while the males are more valued and respected in most societies of the world. These inequalities against girls and women come with a lot of awkward and impeding experiences that wisdom can completely discern for the world to see the need for the exigency of gender equality, particularly in developing economies such as Nigeria.

A philosophy of gender equality can further be perceived from the fact that philosophy is the search for reality – both the reality of the effects of the shackles of gender inequality in society and that of the gains of attaining gender equality. Different philosophers have identified reality as matter, while others see it as the mental idea of something. More importantly, reality is variously identified as being, existence, or “The thing in itself” and not actually, “The thing as it appears”. (Cohen and Nugel, 1978). Reality is the real phenomenon in its entirety. Gender inequality is social reality, we see and live with it every day of our lives and the experiences and issues continue to influence our daily realities and affect different aspects of human affairs, including human productivity. The reality of gender inequality is that it is a system that majorly constitutes obstacles to women equal rights and opportunities with their men counterparts and these realities are so glaring especially when considered in the light of the features of gender equality, which offers a more humane relationship and gender friendly system that can quickly erase the dichotomy between the genders in socio-economic and political arenas for more equitable and progressive human race. The realities of gender inequality and their underdevelopment generating issues makes the philosophy of gender equality imperative not only in Nigeria but in any economy seeking for improved human productivity (Evans, 2012). The search of truth is one of the ultimate aims of philosophy and this has close relationship with search for reality. While the philosophical search for reality dwells on identifying some inherent qualities i.e.

characteristics something possesses by its own nature; in the search for truth philosophers engage in the exercise of determination of the truth and falsity of empirical judgments. The truth, the philosophers seek has to do with components of truth arrived at through different processes involving both natural and social sciences. In fact, some erudite philosophers argue that the search for reality is also the search for truth because what is taken to be reality is also regarded as the truth (Gratsch, 1985). Longman Dictionary of contemporary English (2023) defines truth as “the true facts about something, as opposed to what is untrue, imagined, or guessed”. It is the direct opposite of falsehood and unreal and therefore the truth can be perceived as the reality. The realities of gender inequality brings out the truth of the need for the prevalence of gender equality. The obvious realities of the system of gender inequality in Nigeria’s patriarchal society manifest several structural and informal hitches that undermine women’s rights and opportunities with untold negative consequences on their productivity and the overall national productivity; and consequently a factor that influences human productivity in the Nigerian society. The trio of philosophy as search for reality and truth, and as basically love for wisdom put the concept of philosophy of gender equality imperative for the quest for gender parity and for enhanced women’s productivity.

Human productivity is considered a key source of economic growth and competitiveness and, as such, is the basic statistical information for many international comparisons and country performance assessments. For example, productivity data are used to investigate the impact of product and labour market regulations on economic performance. Human productivity growth constitutes an important element for modeling the productive capacity of economies. It also allows analysts to determine capacity utilization, which in turn allows one to gauge the position of economies in the business circle and to forecast economic growth. In addition, productive capacity is used to assess demand and inflationary pressure (OECD, 2018).

Human productivity is a critical factor for economic and social development of any economy and it is fundamental for sustainable industrial development in any nation. The growth of industries in any nation, including Nigeria, is dependent on human productivity improvement or growth. Every society or nation that aims to improve productivity level, especially in this contemporary interconnected, competitive global economic order must first of all improve her human productivity. Krugman (1994) in his work, the Age of Diminishing Expectations, as cited in (OECD, 2018), states that “human productivity is not everything, but in the long run it is almost everything. A country’s ability to improve its standard of living over time depends almost entirely on its ability to raise its output per worker”. This goes to show the critical nature of human productivity. The basic essence of productivity in industries, organizations and even up to the national and global strata, which has the capacity to drive industrial development on a sustainable basis, is enhanced human productivity. The phenomenon of human productivity growth is so fundamental and vital because providing more goods and services to consumers translates for more human health and empowerment for higher human productivity, higher profits; and more profits and investments in the industries on a steady and continuous basis guarantees industrial development. Conclusively, the enhancement of human productivity through the philosophy and practice of gender equality stands out as critical imperative for Nigeria’s effective approach and strategy towards sustainable national economic development.

CONCLUSION

The search for gender equality can gain further momentum through the propagation of philosophy of gender equality because of its features of the love for wisdom and search for reality and truth that are evidently exemplified in the exposure of the shortcomings of the system of gender inequality in Nigeria’s patriarchal society. It also reveals the exigency for the installation of gender equality whose theoretical and practical nature can help to transform Nigerians mentality, perception and actions toward the need to allow women equal rights and opportunities with their men counterparts in the Nigerian society. Women’s empowerment and enhanced productivity contributes to the overall national human productivity in Nigeria, that is necessary for her attainment of sustainable economic growth and development. The imperative of philosophy of gender equality is a reflection of its inherent positive effects on human productivity and development in Nigeria and

elsewhere.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The need for the propagation of philosophy of gender equality that can promote the necessary ingredients for the actualization of equal rights and opportunities for women and men, and engender optimal human productivity for Nigeria can be achieved through the implementation of the following measures:

- The federal government in Nigeria should incorporate into the primary school curricula the philosophy of gender equality in order to begin at that level of education to instill into pupils the knowledge and attitude of positive sense of gender relations such as tolerance, respect and equality between boys and girls (men and women). The reality, truth and wisdom behind the system and practice of gender equality should be exposed to them at that early stage in order to propagate a gender friendly and united generation ahead.
- There should be concerted efforts by institutions such as the media, family, religious organizations and the government to conscientize citizens specifically on the greater benefits of a gender balanced society through wide advocacy. These institutions should at their various strata emphasize equal rights and opportunities as the means of achieving optimal productivity of all genders and invariably the society at large.
- The governments at all levels (federal, state and local) should prioritize the strict adherence and enforcement of existing instruments of gender equality that have been in comatose for many years. The instrument of Affirmative Action, Gender Mainstreaming and others have either been partially functional or dysfunctional in many public institutions and weakening the efforts towards gender equality; and therefore measures should be aimed at their effective application and continuous monitoring.
- Girls and women should continue to form common fronts through setting up initiatives and organizations that can mobilize and sensitize more women to stand up and defend their rights when violated or denied. Rural women must be supported to get their rights protected and more opportunities for empowerment created to improve their standard of living and wellbeing.

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