The United Nations Women and Gender Equality in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Over the years, the United Nations made several attempts to prioritise gender equality through the establishment of international treaties, conventions, and creation of entities dedicated to address the needs of women. The UN Women is one of such laudable initiatives. It is in this connection that this paper examined the challenges of promoting gender equality in Nigeria, focusing on the agenda set by UN Women. Specifically, the paper looks at Nigeria's progress so far in attaining the four target areas of the UN Women in Nigeria. The target areas include: Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action, Economic Empowerment and Resilience, Leadership and Political Participation, and Ending Violence against Women. The paper leveraged the critical and liberal feminist theories to analyse gender equality issues and the challenges posed to the UN women efforts in promoting gender equality in Nigeria. The paper argues that Nigeria has made some progress in the target areas of the UN Women through the ratification of international treaties, policy formulation, and creation of agencies. The UN women has also demonstrated commitment to its aim of promoting gender equality in Nigeria

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in its four thematic areas of engagement through campaigns and advocacy, capacity-building, partnerships and strategic alliances; service delivery and improving access to services. However, there are challenges that hinder the promotion of gender equality in the country. These challenges include: the Nigerian law, insecurity, the political terrain, cultural and religious practices, human rights record, funding, poverty; and COVID-19 Pandemic. The findings of this paper reveals that UN Women plays an important role in advancing gender equality in Nigeria. The paper concludes that institutional structures that hinders the progress of gender equality in Nigeria should be addressed so as to solve the socio-economic problems that has posed a major threat to the UN women programmes and works. This, the paper recommends that a lot can be achieved by creating institutions and implementing policies that encourage and drive economic growth among women in the country. Domesticating international conventions and eliminating discriminatory laws against women in the Nigerian constitution will also help address the challenges of the UN Women in Nigeria.

Keywords: United Nations, UN Women, Women, Gender Equality, International Treaties and Non- Governmental Organisations.

Introduction

Women's movements have been among the most enduring and consequential movements in modern history. Advocacy for women's rights arises out of gendered structures of oppression and denial of opportunity. Women's movements are broadly deûned as "all organising of women explicitly as women to make any sort of social change" (Ferree, 2007). Activists in women's movements frequently use gender to form a collective identity on the basis of their social position as women. Despite the geographical differences in women's movements, scholars identify certain basic structural conditions that have contributed to the emergence of

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women's activism in most parts of the Western world. The structural preconditions underlying the emergence and endurance of women's collective mobilisation are perpetually evolving. Demographic, economic, and cultural processes that spur women's movements vary by national and regional contexts. Even within countries, political and cultural variations in women's movements are reûected in differences in the ways women deûne their collective interests, whether by cultural, racial or ethnic, religious, age, caste, or community identities, or a combination of these intersecting identities (Crossley, 2013).

In the 1990s, the progressive global women's movement emerged as one of the visible players in the UN fora. The lobbying for women's rights during UN conferences of the 1990s, established women empowerment, gender mainstreaming and women's rights as key features of UN intergovernmental negotiations and agreements. The global women's rights movement took up each UN conference, highlighting different regional specific needs. These represented major shifts in UN approaches and, as the lobbying and advocacy continued, there was an overall agreement that women and gender issues could no longer be ignored in the UN development plans. Women's rights and gender equality were absorbed conceptually into international development debates. Thus, women were invited to take up higher positions in the bureaucracy, and the push to have a "gender perspective" in all areas of development was established (Harcourt, 2006).

According to William (1995), the recognition of equal rights for women along with men, and the determination to combat discrimination on the basis of gender, are achievements reaffirmed by the Vienna declaration, adopted by 171 states at the World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993. In addition, in 1979, the United Nations approved the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), a path breaking charter of the legal and human rights of women.

Gula (2020) argues that gender equality is a fundamental human right. Yet despite progress of the women's movement globally, women and girls around the world do not fully experience equal rights and their potential as economic, social and sustainable development change-agents remains untapped. Women are underrepresented in power and decision-making roles. They receive unequal pay for equal work and they continue to be targets of

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physical and sexual abuse. Additionally, women-owned enterprises are economically disadvantaged and lack equal opportunity to compete for business opportunities. Women also face legal and other barriers that affect their opportunities at work and as entrepreneurs.

In Nigeria, women constitute about half of the population and are known to play vital roles as mothers, producers, managers, community developers/ organisers and so on. Their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is also more than half when compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet their participation in formal and informal structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant (Olabisi, 1998). The patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society sets the parameters for women's structurally unequal position in families and markets by condoning gender-differential terms in inheritance rights and legal adulthood, by tacitly condoning domestic and sexual violence and sanctioning differential wages for equal or comparable work. Patriarchy justifies the marginalisation of women in education, economy, labour market, politics, business, family, domestic matters and inheritance (Salaam, 2003).

Despite the pronounced commitment of the international community to gender equality and to bridging the gender gap in the formal political arena, reinforced by the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action, women are highly marginalised and are poorly represented in political and other activities (UNDP, 2015). This challenge has led to the establishment of many international organisations working with women to ensure and foster their effective participation in development. In Nigeria, international organisations have moved beyond mere designing of policies to developing strategic grassroots' techniques in helping the nation's women fight discrimination, inequality and poverty (Dibie, 2013).

Efforts from the UN and international development organisations over the years have made some progress on the issues of gender equality globally. Yet, the journey towards gender equality is still far as there are prevailing factors that seem to work against the goal of gender equality, especially in Nigeria. Against this background, this paper is examined under the following

sections: first is introduction, second is conceptual framework, third engages the theory, fourth looks at the contribution of UN Women in promoting gender equality in Nigeria, fifth examines the challenges of UN Women in promoting gender equality in Nigeria; the sixth section is the conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Clarification
Gender
According to Blackstone (2003), the term "Gender" is a social term that is often confused with the term "sex". Sex and gender are different concepts. Sex is a biological concept, determined on the basis of individuals' primary sex characteristics. Gender, on the other hand, refers to roles, values, and characteristics that people ascribe to different sexes. Gender is constructed in individual, interactional, and structural ways to create environmental constraints and opportunities that usually benefit men more than women. Gender is referred to as a social construct because humans create the concept of gender socially. The social construct of gender is demonstrated by the rationale that individuals, groups, and societies ascribe particular traits, statuses, or values to individuals purely because of their sex. Yet, these ascriptions differ across societies and cultures, and over time within the same society.

Kimmel (2009) differentiates gender from sex in four crucial ways. The first one is "gender varies from culture to culture", what it means to be man or woman varies from one culture to another. In some cultures, women are taught to be passive and dependent; while in some others they are taught to be decisive and competitive. In some cultures, men are aggressive and stoic while in other cultures, men are taught to be caring and emotionally responsive. The second point is that "definitions of gender changes over time." What it meant to be a man or woman in the United States in 1776 is different from today. The third way gender varies from sex is that definitions of gender vary within a society. Within a society, the definition of gender differs depending on the religion, race, social class, age and the likes. For instance, the idea of what it means to be a woman between the blacks and the whites in America today differs because black women are faced with issues such as representation, racism and colourism, while these do not

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apply to white women. Finally, gender varies over the life course of humans. There is a correlation between age and life experiences of both the male and female sexes. The concept of masculinity and femininity mean different things to different age groups. For instance, what it means to be a man at age 20 is quite different from what it means to be a man at age 70.

Gender patterns develop through socialisation, the process by which individuals internalise elements of social structures, making those elements part of their individuality. The common conception is that gender socialisation is taught. For example, teaching boys to be boys and girls to be girls. However, Cohen (2015) argues that the reality is more complex because it is something people do to themselves through learning the norms, rules, beliefs and behaviours of cultures around them as well as adapt their behaviours to align with the environment. The socialisation process includes learning to adapt to the ways gender is organised because gender is an important part of self-identity and behaviour. In gender, there are other concepts such as gender identity, gender stereotypes, gender expression, and gender spectrum.

Gender Inequality
Gender inequality refers to unequal treatments on the basis of gender roles. Magaret (1999) explains that women have been traditionally designated to occupy roles which require domestication which are not economically valued. Men, on the other hand, have been historically and economically valued and paid higher wages. Women development has suffered in the world especially in the developing world due to the wide gap spread in economic and resource control opportunities in power and political voice. Across the globe, men outpace women in most workplace and economic indicators although women now make up more than 50 percent of the world's paid workforce in all regions except Northern Africa, South Asia and Parts of the Middle East. The issue of balancing child care, family and career has posed as a setback for women as the responsibility of child care is more of a mother's problem rather than a parental one. Most women are posed with the dilemma of choosing family or advancing their careers. Thus, putting women at a disadvantage compared to men in regarding career opportunities. Also, women play an increasing role in politics around the world.

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Discrimination against women is a global problem. However, the case is significantly worse in developing countries as the problems appear more fundamental and pervasive. Significant gender gaps are found in all sectors from literacy to education to employment to income, to health. Kimmel (2009) posits women are disproportionately represented among the world's poor. They are denied access to critical resources such as land, inheritance and credit. Their participation in decision making at home and in the community can be minimal but routinely lower than men. As a result, gender inequality can be said to hurt women more in developing nations than it does in developed ones. Collins (2002) establishes that abilities acquired by women are often classified "unskilled" and they are unrewarded and this continues to assert the dominance of men. Also, the global economy generally attributes less value and negative returns on "nurturing skills" generally attributed to women when compared to men. Studies argue that when a job or skill is predominantly occupied by women, even outside paid labour, it gets devalued or stigmatised so its contribution to development is not recognised. Hence, contributing to the growing division and inequality between men and women in the world.

Gender Equality

Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not restricted to women's issue but also concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people centreed development. Gender equality refers to a relational status between women and men with the aim of removing barriers to ensuring that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female (Guzura, 2017).

According to Sansonetti (2015), the diversity of inequalities experienced by women in diûerent countries and cultures often led to arguments for equality among women, eliminating discrimination by categories of race, class, ethnicity and sexuality. Studies from Inglehart (2003) explain that during the late twentieth century, the issue of gender equality became a

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major issue on the global agenda. The UN Decade for Women which ended in 1985, initiated the integration of women into development, triggering the formation of thousands of women organisations and networking them across the world. In 1993, the Vienna World Conference proclaimed that women's right are human rights; in 1994, the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development placed women empowerment at the centre of sustainable development programs. Two years later, the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women adopted a platform seeking to promote and protect the rights and freedom of women.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1979, is one of 10 core UN human rights instruments. Often described as a bill of rights for women, CEDAW's 30 articles enshrined a series of rights for women. The Convention recognises the full equality of women and men under the law and proscribes discrimination against women in education, employment, political participation, healthcare, and economic life. The foundations of CEDAW traces to 1946, when the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council with a mandate to promote women's rights. Over the next 15 years, the CSW adopted several conventions on women's rights, including the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1953), and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (1962). In 1963, the General Assembly directed CSW to consolidate these disparate standards into a single document, the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The Declaration, CEDAW was adopted in 1979 by a vote of 130 to 0, with 10 abstentions. It entered into force in 1981 (Wade, 2016). For women's international struggle to achieve equality, development, and peace, September 1995 was the culmination of decades of a global movement and over a year of intensive preparations and meetings.

Gender Equality in Nigeria
In Nigeria, there has been gross inequality especially in political representation, economic management and general leadership. The male gender dominates in government and socioeconomic spheres, thereby holding

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the reins of power relations and exerting sole authority over resource control and allocation. This is as a result of many historical and cultural factors (Ikpe, 2004). Oyekanmi (2004) highlights that gender issues in Nigeria were treated as peripheral in national planning until the Declaration of the United Nations' Development Decade for Women, between 1975 and 1978. Consequently, gender issues were not taken cognizance of by national planners, and the general exclusion of women during national prosperity intensified even during the period of national prosperity. Feminist studies have highlighted the need for a gender sensitive approach to socio-economic issues particularly in the quest to accelerate development in most countries of the world.

According to Dauda (2004) conscious efforts by the Nigerian government to reduce inequalities and create an environment which supports opportunities for women and men in Nigeria, dates back to 1976 during the United Nations Development Decade for Women when the federal government established Women Development Units with the aims of integrating women into national development processes. This pronouncement by the government was backed with several plans and initiatives such as the establishment of women ministries and women in development across various levels of governments. The federal government also came up with the Establishment Circular No. 18 of September 20, 1979 which streamlined benefits for women in line with their male counterparts. This was done to stimulate the interest of women in the civil service. In addition, Adult and Non-Formal Education section and Women's Unit in the Federal Ministry of education were established in 1975. Federal Government Girls' Colleges were also established with the aim of bridging the gender gap in education. 1987 saw the launch of the Better Life Food Programme (BLF) initiative aimed at encouraging rural women and populace towards improving their standards of living for their families and environment. Furthermore, the National Centre for Women Development (NCWD) was established in 1992 as an additional mechanism for women in Nigeria as a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs modelled after the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). In 1994, the Family Support Programme (FSP) was introduced to enlighten the public about women's issues, eliminating

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discrimination against women, embracing an institutional change in terms of culture and tradition. This led to launch of the Family Support Basic Education Programme which focused on maternal and child health as means to placing emphasis on education. By 1995, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development was created (later renamed the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development since 1999). The adoption of the national policy on women and development in the year 2000 was another expression of the government's commitment to consolidating the largely revolutionary changes by past women development programme.

The UN and Gender Equality

Over the years, the UN General Assembly has established conventions, resolutions and declarations on gender issues to reaffirm the centrality of gender equality to sustainable development worldwide. These conventions define commitments to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms. Countries that ratified these conventions become legally bound to put to practice the provisions and report on measures taken to comply with obligations. Some of these major conventions are as follows:

I.   Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974) which states women and children who are most vulnerable in wars and conflict must be protected via access to food, shelter and medical assistance during emergencies.

II. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979) which is popularly described as an international bill of rights for women. It obligates parties to take appropriate measures to ensure full development and advancement of women. The convention provides a complete definition of sex-based discrimination which intentionally or unintentionally nullifies or impairs the recognition and exercise of women's social, political, cultural and economic rights.

III. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) which sets a global agenda for women's right, gender equality and empowerment. The resolution adopted to promulgate a set of

principles with the objective of advancing the goals of equality, development and peace for all women. The declaration flagged 12 key areas where urgent actions were necessary to achieve equality.

IV. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1997 called on the United Nations Organisation to ensure that gender concerns are addressed in planning, setting priorities, allocating resources and identifying actions and activities.

V.   World Summit Outcome of the United Nations Assembly (2005) which emphasised gender mainstreaming as a strategy for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. Nations were positioned to mainstream gender perspective in implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes and policies in political, economic and social spheres.

VI. Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Right on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) which guarantees comprehensive rights to women such as rights to participate in political processes, social and economic equality, control of women's reproductive health and ending female genital mutilation.

VII. Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (2014) which creates a legal framework to combat violence against women and criminalises domestic violence.

By the beginning of the new millennium, developing nations still faced serious impediments to development, and poverty was widespread. As a result, the United Nations enacted new measures to help alleviate world poverty and to ensure equality of opportunities to developmentment of all individuals. The Millennium Declaration in the year 2000 was an evolutionary extension of the Right to Development, which was endorsed by the UN member states as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by the year 2015. When 189 UN member states adopted the Millennium Declaration in 2000, politicians and experts were clear that without incorporating a goal that brings down gender disparity, all sorts of plans, including eradicating poverty would be a futile exercise. Hence, during

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drawing up of the eight MDGs, the UN included one goal on *the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment* known as MDG3. It has one target on education and four indicators on female's empowerment and political representation. The target of the goal was to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015. Indicators include ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary educations, ratio of literate women to men 15-24 years old, share of women in wage employment in the non-agriculture sector, and proportion of seats held by women in national parliament. The target of the MDGs were both global and local, adapted to each country to meet specific needs. They provided a framework for the whole international community to work together towards a common goal (Gerbu, 2014).

The United Nations Women
UN Women is the UN entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. In doing so, UN Member States took an historic step in accelerating the organisation's goals on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The creation of UN Women came about as part of the UN reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact. It merges and builds on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system- Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), which focused exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment. The main roles of the UN Women are to:

I.   Support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.

II.   Help Member States to implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.

III.   Hold the UN system accountable for its own commitments on gender equality, including regular monitoring of system-wide progress. For many years, the UN faced serious challenges in its efforts to promote gender equality globally, including inadequate funding and no single recognised driver to direct UN activities on gender equality issues. UN Women was created to address such challenges. It will be a dynamic and strong champion for women and girls, providing them with a powerful voice at the global, regional and local levels (UN Nations, 2021).

Theoretical Framework
Critical Theory
Critical Theory has a narrow and a broad meaning in philosophy and in the history of the social sciences. "Critical Theory" in the narrow sense designates several generations of German philosophers and social theorists in the Western European Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt School. A "critical" theory may be distinguished from a "traditional" theory according to a specific practical purpose: a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human "emancipation from slavery", acts as a "liberating … influence", and works "to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers" of human beings. The critical theory aims to explain and transform all the circumstances that enslave human beings, many "critical theories" in the broader sense have been developed. They have emerged in connection with the many social movements that identify varied dimensions of the domination of human beings in modern societies. In both the broad and the narrow senses, however, a critical theory provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms (Bohman, 2019).

Critical theory also denotes a school of academic thought which challenges dominant ways of exploring and explaining organisational phenomenon. While having a long legacy and being far from being a single

body of thought, critical theory is typically associated with the Institute of Social Research at Frankfurt University. The 'Frankfurt School' emerged in the 1930s and included such scholars as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and somewhat later, Jürgen Habermas. A key theme of critical theory is to destabilise dominant modes of understanding by surfacing underlying assumptions and rendering power relations explicit. Critical theory not only reinterprets existing orders but offers alternative modes of understanding and being which liberate those silenced and shackled by conventional theory. Critical theory provides a solid foundation from which to question intent and explore the dehumanising effects of managerial control. The legacy of critical theory suggests inclusivity through the democratisation of control and decision making (Harney, 2014).

Critical theory opened space for an expansion of methodological variety within the International Relations (IR) discipline. This variety of new approaches emphasizes just how signiûcant the critical theory has been in bringing the discipline of International Relations into closer contact with the broader social sciences. Critical theory in its broadest and most fundamental sense, is necessary and indeed unavoidable. A diversity of theories helps to understand, argue over, and, for the more optimistic, even accommodate a far wider range of political positions. Critical theory has moved the IR discipline a long way in the right direction because the theory has provided a new perspective to understanding of international relations. For instance, many issues of contemporary importance, particularly the continuing salience of identity politics, non-state violence and global economic processes, simply could not be addressed with the theoretical resources available within the discipline in the 1970s (Rengger and Thirkell-White, 2007).

The evolution of ideas throughout the tradition of critical theory should not be seen as a linear one. Indeed, the persistence of critical theory and its expansion within intellectual circles in recent years can be explained by its own explanatory efficacy. Critical theory sets out to critique repressive social practices and institutions in today's world and advance emancipation by supporting ideas and practices that meet the Universalist principles of justice. This kind of critique has a transformative dimension in the sense that it aims at changing national societies, international relations and the emerging global society, starting from alternative ideas and practices lingering

in the background of the historical process. They both use emancipation as a principle to critique, or assess, society and the global political order. Second, they both detect the potential for emancipation developing within the historical process, but consider that it may not be inevitable. The paradigms of redistribution and recognition relate to the two main axes of contemporary political struggle. While redistribution struggles refer directly to the themes of class struggles and social emancipation, recognition struggles have to do with aspirations to freedom and justice connected to gender, sexuality, race and national recognition. Critical theory assumes an active role in the betterment of human affairs according to the potential for freedom inherent in modernity and the identification of political alternatives at hand in the globalising society and the historical process bringing it into being (Marcos, 2018).

Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal feminist theory is grounded in classic liberal thinking that individuals should be free to develop their own talents and pursue their own interests. Liberal feminists accept the basic organisation of society, but seek to expand the rights and opportunities of women. They support the Equal Rights Amendment and oppose prejudice and discrimination against the aspirations of women. With their strong belief in the rights of individuals, liberal feminists agree that both men and women working individually, would be able to improve their lives if society simply ended legal and cultural barriers rooted in gender (Macionis, 1997).

     Liberal feminist theory emerged from a long tradition that began among British liberals in the nineteenth century. Liberal feminist theory argues that inequality for women originates in traditions of the past that posed barriers to women advancement. It emphasises individual rights and equal opportunities as the basis for social justice and reform. The theory contend that gender socialisations contribute to women's inequality because inequalities are perpetuated through learned customs. The framework of the theory has been used to support many of the legal changes required to bring about greater equality for women in the United States. In the interests of social change, liberal feminists advocate the removal of barriers to women

advancement and policy development that promote equal rights for women (Anderson, 2007).

Historically, the first element in the liberal feminist theory is the claim for gender equality. This claim was first politically articulated in the Declaration of Sentiments drafted at Sceneca Falls, New York in 1848 with the express purpose of paralleling and expanding the declaration of independence to include women. The theory rests on the following beliefs; all human beings have certain essential features– capacities for reason, moral agency and self-actualisation. The exercise of these capacities can be secured through legal recognition of universal rights. The inequalities between men and women assigned by sex are social constructions having no basis in" nature". Finally, social change for equality can be produced by an organised appeal to a reasonable public and the use of the state. Liberal feminisms' agenda for change is consistent with their analyses of the basis for claiming equality. They wish to eliminate gender as an organsing principle in the distribution of social "goods", and they are willing to invoke universal principles in their pursuit of equality. The ideal gender arrangement in liberal feminist theory would be one where individuals acting as a free and responsible moral agent chooses the lifestyle most suitable to her or him and has the choice to be accepted and respected.

In liberal feminist theory, gender equality is equated with "equality of opportunity". The roots of women oppression lie in women's lack of equal civil rights and educational opportunities. Only when these constraints on women's participation are removed, will women have the same chance for success as men. This approach notes the importance of gender-role socialisation and suggests that changes need to be made in what children learn from their families, teachers and the media about appropriate masculine and feminine attitudes. Liberal feminists fight for better child-care options, a woman's right to choose an abortion and the elimination of sex discrimination in the workplace (Kendall, 2006).

The paper adopts the critical theory as a framework because the basic ideology has a transformative dimension which critiques repressive social practices and institutions. This goes in line with the basic ideology of gender equality which focuses on eliminating discrimination on the basis of gender. However, for the purpose of this research, critical theory is insufficient

because it fails to cover the gendered perspective. Consequently, this study adopts the liberal feminist theory because it aligns with the critical theory's view of critiquing repressive social practices.

Contribution of UN Women in Promoting Gender Equality in Nigeria
The UN Women has been working to promote gender equality in Nigeria in line with its mandate. Through campaigns and advocacy, capacity buildings, partnerships and strategic alliances, service delivery and improving access to services, the UN agency has been able to show commitment to its aim of promoting gender equality in Nigeria in the four key thematic areas of focus. Subsequent paragraphs assess the efforts of the UN Women in promoting gender equality in Nigeria.

Capacity Building
One dimension of women's empowerment is the removal of obstacles militating against complete women's participation and involvement in sustainable development, while the other dimension is to focus on women directly to enable them get more involved. The tools that can be deployed to meet the needs of women towards appropriate capacity building are training programmes that guarantee access to relevant knowledge and information (Lawal, 2016). The UN Women has implemented some capacity building workshops on gender related issues. Some examples of these capacity building initiatives done by the UN Women includes the four-day capacity building workshop in November 2016, for female journalists on gender-sensitive reporting in Nigeria. It was conducted in Plateau and Adamawa States to train female journalists from Abuja, Plateau, Bauchi, Gombe, Adamawa, Yobe and Borno States on the UNSCR 1325. It covered the Nigeria Action Plan, gender sensitive reporting, safety during reporting, and other gender related issues (UN Women, 2016).

Advocacy and Campaigns
The UN Women launched campaigns and advocacy strategies to create awareness and drive conversations about gender equality. In 2018, the UN Women collaborated with the European Union to advocate for the inclusion of more women in politics ahead of 2019 elections. The aim was to strategise

on how to enhance support for women in politics, prior to the political party primaries and General Elections in 2019. During the 2017 International Women's Day with the theme "Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030". UN Women also collaborated with development partners such as OXFAM and the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development to advocate for equality in the workplace. This involved governments' targeted efforts to promote women's participation in economic life, and the support of important collectives like trade unions, and the voices of women themselves in framing solutions to overcome current barriers to women's participation in economic activities. In addition, the UN Women in 2016, supported the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill's passage in five States calling for the adoption of Temporary Special Measures to eliminate discrimination in political and public life (Anambra, Ekiti, Imo, Kogi and Plateau). Also, the UN Women organised campaigns that prioritided gender goals and agendas in the country. A typical example was the recent 2020 launch of the "Generational Equality" Campaign on the "International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women" event and in line with the Agenda of the Beijing Platform for Action. The campaign focused on equal pay, equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, an end to sexual harassment and all forms of violence against women and girls. It includes health-care services that respond to their needs, and their equal participation in political life and decision-making in all areas of life. Other scopes of the campaign include fostering inter-generational exchange and dialogue to empower a new generation of women's rights activists (UN Women, 2020).

Partnerships and Strategic Alliances

The UN Women works in partnerships with the federal government, regional bodies and international governments to promote gender equality in Nigeria. In 2019, the four-day visit of the Assistant Secretary General and UN Women Deputy Executive Director, Asa Regner to Nigeria was focused on deliberations and working partnerships with the Nigerian Government. It involved other development partners on various gender related issues such as the discussion held with the senior special assistant to the president on Sustainable Development Goals (OSSAP-SDGs) on the roadmap to achieving gender inclusion and the importance to embedding gender

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perspectives into all aspects of SDGs implementation in Nigeria. The visit also included interactive meeting on gender-based violence in Nigeria with the Spotlight Initiative partners and European Union delegation to discuss existing opportunities to work together with UN Women in addressing gender-based violence, harmful and discriminatory cultural practices. In addition, the UN Women collaborated with the Federal Government of Nigeria, and the Government of Japan in 2017 to launch the project, "Protection through Empowerment of Women and Girls of North East Nigeria". It was a project which sought to protect, empower and build resilience of women and girls in Borno and Yobe States of Nigeria. The aim of the project is to facilitate protection through empowerment of women and girls who have been affected by the Boko Haram insurgency (UN Women, 2019).

Service Delivery and Improving Access to Services
The UN Women has implemented some projects to improve women's access to basic services, especially women in vulnerable areas. For instance, UN Women established multi-sectorial Peace Architecture Dialogue (PAD) and Community Security Architecture Dialogue Observatory Platforms (CSAD-Obs) in collaboration with Search for Common Ground and the Government of Japan, to improve women's access to formal and informal judicial systems in 2019. The project has supported training for legal service providers on how to improve women and girls' safety through community-based actions to mitigate risks, prevent and respond to incidents of gender-based violence. Also, the UN Women in partnership with Search for Common Ground in 2019 carried out a capacity building training of conflict affected women in the Internally Displaced Person's (IDP) camps. It hosted communities in Borno and Yobe States to enhance the quality of the locally milled rice, thereby improving the market value of the milled rice. After the training, the women were divided into groups that have been registered into cooperatives to facilitate team work and ownership in producing and selling their high-quality parboiled rice in the local market. Beneficiaries were also provided with starter kits to support them in starting up businesses, and help them obtain a means of livelihood while addressing the problem of food security for their immediate household (UN Women, 2019).

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Challenges Confronting the UN Women in Promoting Gender Equality in Nigeria.
Findings reveal that the UN Women alongside a range of partners implemented projects on key areas in Nigeria. These include: Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action, Economic Empowerment and Resilience, Leadership and Political Participation, and Ending Violence Against Women. In line with their mandate to provide support to the Nigerian government at federal and state levels to champion policies, and systems that advance women's rights, findings reveal that the UN Women has successfully implemented projects and collaborated with the Nigerian government in their areas of focus. In addition, aside project implementations, the UN Women also supports policy and gender bills. However, the achievements and implementations of these feats are not achieved without challenges. A number of challenges were highlighted and they are as follows:

The Nigerian Law
In the face of gender discrimination against women, the law should serve as a legal instrument to ensure that every citizen is treated equally, irrespective of gender. The question then arises as to whether women in Nigeria are adequately protected by the law. Respondents agreed that the Nigerian laws do not adequately protect the rights of women in the country. It poses as a challenge in advancing gender equality in the country. This goes in line with the findings of Olanrewaju (2018) which shows that women are not adequately protected by the law as existing laws are not all encompassing to cover all forms of discrimination against women. For example, according to Iman (2010), Nigeria ratified the CEDAW in 1985 which was established to bring into focus and promote women's rights. The Convention affirms that discrimination against women still exist and violates the principles of equality of rights. It covers the protection for civil and legal status of women and addresses the impact of cultural factors on gender relations. However, the CEDAW is inadequate to protect women's rights in Nigeria because it has not been domesticated. By virtue of Section 12 of the Constitution, treaties which have been signed and ratified will not have any effect until a corresponding law is made by the National Assembly. An attempt was made in 2007 to pass a CEDAW Bill in Nigeria

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but failed after going through the National Assembly. The Bill failed because there was a strong opposition to it by some law makers who believed it was anti-God and anti-family and a foreign imposition. It was believed it would encourage abortion and sexual indulgence.

Section 42 of the Nigerian Constitution prohibits discrimination against a Nigerian citizen based on sex and other characteristics listed. It provides protection for any citizen of Nigeria from being subjected to restrictions by any law in force or by any government action. It goes further to prohibit privileges or advantages from being given to a Nigerian citizen by any law in force or executive or administrative action by reason of the person's sex. Abara (2012) explains that Nigeria operates a tripartite legal system with its sources of law from common law, customary law and the Islamic Law. However, the application of the three legal systems is flawed with contradictions and inconsistencies which make it difficult to harmonise legislations and eliminate discrimination. The 637th and 638th Reports of the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women states that progress achieved by International Conventions and legislation has been weakened by the application of customary and religious laws, which are discriminatory against women.

Ekhator (2015) further supports this view by stating that evidence of inadequacy of Section 42 of the Constitution can be seen in other national laws which are subject to the Constitution but are discriminatory against women. Ekhator posits that Section 26(2)(a) of the Constitution discriminates against Nigerian women who wish to marry non-Nigerian men. The section confers citizenship rights to 'any woman who is or has been married to a citizen of Nigeria' without a corresponding provision for men who marry Nigerian women. Section 55 of the Labour Act Chapter 198 of the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990 prohibits women except nurses from undertaking night work in a public or private industrial undertaking or in any agricultural undertaking. Section 56 of the same Act prohibits women from being employed in an underground mine except for those employed in management, health and services or training. From the perspective of criminal laws, the study of Tertsakian (2004) posits that the criminal code encourages violence towards women by making it a felony to assault a man (maximum sentence being imprisonment for 3 years) while it makes it a misdemeanor

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to assault a woman or girl (maximum sentence being imprisonment for 2 years). The Penal Code is disproportionate in the way it applies to women in adultery cases. Charges for adultery carries a death sentence for someone who is married or divorced. For a man to be convicted of adultery, he would have been caught in the act by four independent witnesses whereas a woman needs only be convicted on the evidence of pregnancy alone. Also, Section 55 of the Penal Code Act does not make it an offence if a husband inflicts harm on his wife for the purpose of correcting her.

In order to check inequalities and reduce discriminations against women in Nigeria, certain bills have been presented but they have been rejected by the National Assembly. The Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill (GEO) was proposed in 2010. The Bill's focus was on eliminating discrimination and prejudices influenced by stereotypes and cultural expectations. It proposed to increase the participation of women in politics, eliminate practices based on the idea of inferiority and superiority of the sexes, prohibit domestic and sexual violence, end degrading socio-cultural practices associated with widowhood and the denial of inheritance rights. Unfortunately, the GEO Bill met a similar fate as the CEDAW Bill and was voted against by law makers during the second reading because they believed it was against their culture and religious beliefs (Okongwu, 2020). Furthermore, the Sexual Offences Act Bill 2013 was introduced to make provisions on sexual offences, prevention and protection of all persons from harm and unlawful sexual acts. The bill creates new offences not contained in previous laws, but a significant change introduced by the bill is that sexual crimes are no longer gender specific where men were viewed as the main perpetrators of sexual crimes and women as victims. The bill introduced new offences such as child pornography, incest, indecent exposure, deliberate transmission of HIV or other life threatening sexually transmitted diseases, gang rape and so on. It also contains provisions on stalking, cultural and religious practices that are discriminatory against women, sexual harassment and sexual and domestic violence against women, children and vulnerable people. Although, the bill has been passed by the National Assembly, but has not been signed into law (Ekhator, 2015). According to respondents, constitutional laws and the attitude of the Nigerian shows that Nigeria does not prioritize

gender equality and this restricts the work of the UN Women and other activists working to promote gender equality in Nigeria.

Insecurity

Lately, Nigeria has been enmeshed in a firebox of insecurity leading to scores of deaths of innocent civilians, foreigners, some members of the nation's security personnel, elected officials and many government workers. The insecurity challenge has assumed formidable dimensions forcing the country's political and economic managers and, indeed the entire nation, to rue the loss of their loved ones, investments and absence of safety in most parts of the country. The number of violent crimes such as kidnappings, ritual killings, carjacking, suicide bombings, religious killings, politically-motivated killing and violence, ethnic clashes, armed banditry and others has increasingly become the regular signature that characterises life in Nigeria since 2009 (Onifade, 2013).

Findings from Agbaje (2020) reveal women and girls bear a heavy burden during violent clashes and insurgencies. Women are abused, exposed to sexual slavery, trafficked, forced into early marriages and endure female genital mutilation. A clear instance is the use of women by Boko Haram both as direct targets of attacks and in operational deployments in its insurgencies. In the same vein, The Boko Haram sect has been using female suicide bombers to terrorise Nigeria. The rationale behind their use is to beat security networks and carry out operations without suspicions. Women and girls are also being used for strategic and tactical purposes, such as luring security officers to an ambush, misleading security officers or obtaining information from one insurgents' camp to the other. In essence, women have been used to build a strong insurgents' intelligence network of gathering information that may benefit the sect. As a result of insecurity and violent attacks or clashes, majority of women who witnessed the deaths of their husbands and sons, and the abduction of their daughters, along with thousands of other women live with their children as refugees in neighbouring countries or as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in government-run camps where food is scarce, health care is dismal, and impunity for human rights violations abounds. In these camps, resorting to "survival sex" in exchange for food, money, or permission to leave the camp is widely

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reported. Most girls are kept away from school in volatile areas to reduce their exposure to abduction and sexual violence by Boko Haram and other perpetrators. Also, reasons for increased levels of child marriage among IDPs include lack of economic resources and because families mistakenly perceive marriage as a way to protect girls from other forms of violence, including sexual violence. The implication of this however is that their education suffers and these girls get exposed to sexual abuse at an early age (Center for Reproductive Rights and Legal Defence and Assistance Project (LEDAP), 2020). Respondents commented that the insecurity in the country poses a challenge to the promotion of gender equality in the country. Clearly, it is impossible to promote gender equality in insecure environments where women are constantly exposed to violence and coercion.

Culture and Religion
Traditionally, Nigeria is a patriarchal society, where women generally do not enjoy equal rights with men in many cultures. Men are the custodians of culture so they determine the faith of women in many cultures both in public and private spheres in society. Since reproductive and nurturing responsibilities are naturally ascribed as duties to women, they are limited in participating in political and economic activities. Respondents highlighted that culture and religious factors are the major barriers to advancing gender equality in Nigeria as the country is a very religious one. Most cultures and religions in Nigeria emphasise on the submission of women to men. This is evident in the study of Ibenegbu (2017), which explains that in some Nigerian cultures, a widow may not acquire the property of a spouse. In addition, some cultures encourage that the widow comes under the custody of her husband kinsmen like his brother, father or son and the widow is to perform marital obligations to her next husband. Some cultures perform cleansing rites for widows and these rites vary according to cultures. This may be in the form of fasting for days, hair shaving, having sexual intercourse with a social outcast or a sleepover with her husband's corpse. (Ibenegbu, 2017).

Religion is an accomplice in the sterotyping of women and reinforcing barriers that prevent women from full participation in political and economic activites. In the history of religions, the voice of women is rarely heard, due to the patriarchal disposition of the societies in which these religions

emerged, and which eventually stifled some of the changes in the status of women triggered by new religions. The world religions agree on the respect for women and their crucial role in family life, especially with emphasis on women as mothers and wives. They do not, however, advocate emancipation in the sense of total equality with men. In the Northern part of Nigeria, Women are held in Purdah in deference to Islam. The implication of this is that only their husbands can have access to them and they have to depend on their husbands for their needs to be fully met. In Chirstian circles, some male ministers reject taking Holy Communion from female ministers because they see them as unclean. Women, who adhere to dominant religions, might also not be inclined to take part in their society's public life, due to their up-bringing and social tradition surrounding them. Although, many religious institutions are helpful for women in economic and social distress. Higher levels of religiosity in Nigeria tend to magnify their gender inequality; and, every religious doctrine has slightly different attitude towards the public participation of women (Sibani, 2017).

Calls to have efficient and comprehensive laws that promote equality and protect women against all forms of discrimination have been an uphill task. The consequence is that inequality and gender-based discriminatory practices against women persist because of ingrained religious and cultural beliefs and practices that prevail. Akinboye (2004) establish that cultural and religious practices have constantly perpetuated bias against the female gender and subjugated them against the males. Lawmakers have also expressed that religion and culture are the primary reason they opposed gender equality laws because it is a challenge to God and the Nigerian way of life. For example, the rejection of the CEDAW and Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill was based on socio-cultural factors. The general impact of these negative cultural norms has been to entrench feelings of inferiority complex, engender low regard for females and place them at a disadvantaged position.

Abysmal Human Rights Record
Reports from Amnesty International (2012) show that Nigeria as a sovereign state has not fared any better in the protection of fundamental human rights of her citizens instead, it has been a situation of wanton abuses of their

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inalienable rights with impunity. Among the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) there is flagrant and widespread disregard for human rights and due process. People are subjected to enforced disappearances and unlawfully killed by the police before or during arrest in the street or at roadblocks, or subsequently in police detention. extrajudicial executions usually go unpunished. For instance, in February 2018, the Presidential Investigative Panel, set up to probe allegations of human rights violations carried out by the military, presented its report to the authorities. The report is yet to be made public and the government is yet to prosecute security officers suspected to have committed serious human rights violations and crimes under international law (Amnesty International, 2018).

In Nigeria, there have been several cases where women's rights have been violated. Sexual harassment, trafficking in women and girls, sex selection, early marriage, female genital mutilation are epidemics plaguing Nigeria. The truth is that violence against women is one of the most ubiquitous violations of women's rights. This menace involves physical, economic, psychological, social and sexual abuse, and affects all strata irrespective of age, race, culture or status. Despite the passage of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, violence against women still remains prevalent in Nigeria (Nnadi, 2012). Nzarga (2014) highlights various reports of unlawful arrests, torture sexual violence, verbal abuse and financial extortion which affect women. For instance, the unlawful arrest of over 100 women in Abuja by the Nigerian Police Force and agents of the FCT Joint Task Team in 2019 on the suspicion of being sex workers is another example of women rights violation. These women were denied access to legal representation and were convicted by a mobile court in unfair trials and some were sentenced to prison or fined for "wandering" – a crime which has been abolished throughout the country (Nzarga, 2014).

Violence against women is pervasive, including domestic violence, rape and other forms of sexual violence by state officials and private individuals. Authorities consistently fail to exercise due diligence in preventing and addressing sexual violence by both state and non-state actors, leading to an entrenched culture of impunity. Respondents admit that the human rights records of Nigeria are filled with disregard for human rights and women still suffer because regard for human rights are not taken seriously in the

country. Consequently, it will be difficult to promote gender equality or advocates in a country that fails to respect human rights.

Funding

According to respondents, the challenge of funding inhibits the policies and programmes of UN Women in Nigeria. Thus, most policies and programmes aimed at gender equality are not executed as planned. This also affects the capacity-building of field workers and personnel that are working in different areas of focus. Financing for development is about money. For development to reach people in all parts of the world, adequate financing is required so that commitments made by world leaders translate into action. For funds to benefit everyone equally and equitably, targeted efforts are often needed. For example, if women do not have access to safe transportation or low-cost childcare, few will be able to take advantage of important social or vocational programmes. However, inclusive development is not cheap, and project planning and financing often neglects the specific needs of women. For decades, there has been chronic underinvestment in women's empowerment, which has hampered progress of the promotion of women's rights and gender equality investments. These are insufficient and only a small proportion of aid addresses women's specific needs (UN Women , 2015).

A number of global factors have had an impact on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women. These are trade liberalisation, increasing migration, the international security agenda, rising religious fundamentalism, international private capital flows, foreign direct investment (FDI), speculative capital flows, economic growth patterns that increase inequalities between countries and in countries, the feminisation of poverty, and the privatisation of public services and enterprises. The dominant approach to economic and social management is often preoccupied with matters that work against the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. For example, the payment of external debt/debt services by low-income countries has been prioritised over the provision of essential services such as health care and access to safe water. There has also been a push towards the privatisation of services delivery to for profit

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companies, to the detriment of universal access to basic social services and social protection (The Division for the Advancement of Women, 2007).

Conclusion

The paper examined UN Women programmes in Nigeria and the progress it has made in the target areas. The UN Women has shown tremendous commitment to its aim of promoting gender equality in Nigeria in the four thematic areas of engagement through campaigns and advocacy, capacity building, partnerships and strategic alliances; service delivery and improving access to services. However, despite its efforts the UN Women has faced challenges which undermines the effectiveness of its programmes and works in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this paper, the following recommendations are proposed;

1. The Nigerian constitution should guarantee and uphold the rights of women and men by ensuring that both genders have equal legal and human rights across all sectors in the country. International conventions and treaties should be domesticated into the Nigerian laws. Also, there should be a review of all discriminatory clauses in existing laws and legislations regarding persons, organisations, and enterprises. Customary laws should be engendered through advocacy, sensitisation, and equal access to the laws irrespective of gender. The capacity of the legal and justice system should be strengthened through sensitisation and incorporating structures that hold the legislative, judiciary and other law enforcement agencies accountable and gender sensitive.

2. The Nigerian government should prioritise solving socio-economic problems by creating structures and implementing serious policies that encourage and drive economic growth among women in the country. This will help reduce the high-income inequality and the number of women below the poverty line. In addition, there is need for the government to prioritise women's access to social and

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welfare services, especially those in volatile and rural areas. The business environment should be enhanced through the provision of structures that account for the value of women's work in the National Gross Domestic Production (GDP). Implementation of policies that encourage equal access to resources such as capital and investment opportunities, discouraging gender discriminatory practices access to land properties and assets; facilitate women's access to technology.

3. The international community should prioritise investments in gender equality while focusing on ways to ensure that a significant portion of aids address women needs in developing countries, especially in current pandemic times.

4. Nigeria must adopt a gender sensitive approach in addressing the pressing insecurity issues which seem to be taking over all areas of the country. The country must ensure that women are incorporated into peace, nation building and reconciliation strategy meetings.

5. Women's participation in politics is paramount to including women in influential and decision-making positions. Increasing sensitisation of women towards political participation, and creating an enabling environment for women to participate in politics should be prioritised by relevant stakeholders such as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, and the government. Eradication of all discriminatory policies, and practices that hinder women from political participation at party levels should be encouraged through a review of these policies, the structure and operational guidelines of political parties. Financial support should be provided for women political aspirants while traditional structures that limit women from participating in politics should be reformed.

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