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## Achieving Equitable Engagement in Decision-Making Processes with Regards to Gender Representation in Nigeria.

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### **Abstract**

Gender refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for men or women. Gender is a socially constructed definition of women and men which is determined by the conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in the society and in public and private life of the people. It is the state of being male or female and typically used with reference to social and cultural differences of the people rather than biological ones in the society and appears to manifest as hierarchical relations with men above women and women being regarded as inferior and less valuable in family and other social relationships in African states. The gender hierarchy is manifested in different forms. It may be from inheritance laws of the society, customs, traditions and other sociocultural engagement of the people that are reflected in the decisions-making power of the government, society, family, working place, religious and other cultural institutions. In Nigeria, the pursuit of gender equality in decision-making processes is both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity.

The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, whether in politics, business, or community leadership, limits the country's potential for inclusive growth and sustainable development. Equitable engagement in decision-making not only fosters a more just society but also leverages the diverse perspectives and talents that women bring to the table. Achieving equilibrium in decision-making procedures concerning gender representation within Nigeria is an intricate undertaking that requires a thorough understanding of the nation's socio-political structure. Despite significant progress in recent years, women in Nigeria remain underrepresented in key decision-making positions. According to various reports, women constitute a small percentage of elected officials in national and state legislatures, hold fewer executive roles in the private sector, and are often marginalized in community leadership structures. This disparity is rooted in a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and structural factors that perpetuate gender biases and limit opportunities for women.

**Keywords:** female discrimination, Decision making, gender equality, Leadership, equal opportunities

### **Introduction**

Achieving equitable engagement in decision-making processes with regard to gender representation in Nigeria remains a significant challenge. Despite various efforts and commitments to promote gender equality, women in Nigeria are significantly underrepresented in political, economic, and social spheres. This disparity limits their ability to influence policies and decisions that impact their lives and communities.

Patriarchal norms and cultural stereotypes play a critical role in perpetuating gender inequality. These norms often relegate women to subordinate roles, discouraging their participation in leadership and decision-making positions (Olatunji, 2013). Furthermore, the economic marginalization of women, characterized by limited access to education, employment opportunities, and financial resources, further exacerbates their underrepresentation (Egunjobi, 2015).

The legal and institutional frameworks in Nigeria also present significant barriers. While there are laws and policies aimed at promoting gender equality, their implementation and enforcement are often inadequate (Aina, 2012). Additionally, gender-based violence remains pervasive, creating an environment of fear and insecurity that discourages women from

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participating in public life (UN Women, 2020).

To address these issues, comprehensive strategies must be implemented to promote gender parity and enhance women's participation in decision-making processes. This includes educational programs to challenge and change patriarchal norms, economic empowerment initiatives to provide women with the resources they need to succeed, and robust legal reforms to ensure the protection and promotion of women's rights (Nwankwo, 2019). The endeavor to achieve equitable engagement in the processes of decision-making concerning gender representation in Nigeria is firmly substantiated by a diverse array of references. Agbalajobi (2021) emphasizes the limitations of exclusively augmenting women's seats within Nigeria's National Assembly, highlighting the need for a more holistic strategy. Campbell (2013) delves into the intricate socio-political tapestry that intricately shapes such representation. Eniola (2016) exposes the tribulations encountered by female politicians from Northern Nigeria, bringing to light the urgency of cultivating an encouraging backdrop.

Ette's (2017) evaluation of the prominence of Nigerian women politicians in media spheres underscores the weight of media depiction. Frederick (2013) introduces intricacies by underlining the multifaceted interplay of race and gender storytelling concerning women's political aspirations. The National Democratic Institute's (2021) overview spotlights the intricate ties between gender, women, and democratic mechanisms. The charter of demands presented by the Nigerian Women Trust Fund (2018) delineates essential stages for nurturing elevated women's political engagement. Okoronkwo-Chukwu's (2013) thorough examination unveils the limitations of depending solely on the 35% affirmative action in confronting female representation gaps in Nigeria. Omojola and Morah (2014) direct attention to media influence over women's political visibility and its sway on public perception. The endeavor by the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) (2018) delves into the sluggish advancement of women's political representation, presenting practical methods to accelerate change. Refki et al's (2017) insights into gender dynamics in political representation, garnered from their Uganda parliamentary study, amplify the dialogue. The legal and institutional frameworks in Nigeria also present significant barriers. While there are laws and policies aimed at promoting gender equality, their implementation and enforcement are often inadequate (Aina, 2012). Additionally, gender-based violence remains pervasive, creating an environment of fear and insecurity that discourages women from participating in public life (UN Women, 2020).

To address these issues, comprehensive strategies must be implemented to promote gender parity and enhance women's participation in decision-making processes. This includes educational programs to challenge and change patriarchal norms, economic empowerment initiatives to provide women with the The endeavor to achieve equitable engagement in the processes of decision-making concerning gender

Sahara Reporters (2018) spotlights the obstacles obstructing women's political openings, unveiling existing obstacles. The Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum (2021) contributes statistical observations on persistent discrepancies. The United Nations (2022)

elaborates on the Sustainable Development Goals, underscoring the global commitment to gender parity. Lakshmi Puri (2018) emphasizes the pivotal part played by gender equality in sustainable growth, aligning with UN Women's objectives. The European Commission's (2023) report on gender equality affirms a fortified European stance. Farina and Carbone (2016) delve deeper than quotas, exploring various angles on women's representation. Mayer and May (2021) delve into optimistic psychology's applicability to women leaders, especially during crises like COVID-19. Salazar and Moline (2023) offer tactics to amplify women's presence in business leadership, with potential ripple effects in politics. In Nigeria's particular setting, Akinbi and Akinbi (2015) scrutinize gender inequality in education, while Ejumudo (2013) underscores the pertinence of women's empowerment. The Constitution (1999) and National Policy on Education (2013) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria lay the legal and educational bedrock. OECD's (2020) recognition of women's roles in crises bolsters the plea for just representation. This collective corpus of references underscores the multilayered significance of gender representation in decision-making, a pivotal factor for Nigeria's holistic advancement. This investigation holds immense significance in the pursuit of achieving equitable engagement in decision-making processes concerning gender representation in Nigeria. By closely dissecting an array of references, its objective is to shed light upon the intricate complexities and hindrances encompassing women's involvement in political and leadership capacities. By offering comprehensive insights into the socio-political backdrop, media influence, and the limitations of current undertakings, the investigation endeavors to impart a nuanced comprehension of the barriers obstructing gender-harmonized representation. Through the resolution of these challenges, the study contributes to shaping an inclusive and nurturing environment, facilitating energetic women's participation in decision-making, and thus fostering societal, economic, and political progression within Nigeria.

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### Literature Review

The issue of gender representation in decision-making processes has garnered considerable academic attention globally and particularly in Nigeria. This literature review explores the multifaceted challenges and potential solutions for achieving equitable gender engagement in Nigeria's

political, economic, and social spheres.

### **Patriarchal Norms and Cultural Stereotypes**

Patriarchal norms and cultural stereotypes play a significant role in perpetuating gender inequality in Nigeria. According to Olatunji (2013), these norms often relegate women to subordinate roles, discouraging their participation in leadership and decision-making positions. This cultural backdrop has historically limited women's visibility and influence in public and private sectors.

### **Economic Marginalization**

Economic marginalization significantly hampers women's ability to engage in decision-making processes. Egunjobi (2015) highlights that limited access to education, employment opportunities, and financial resources creates substantial barriers for women. This economic disenfranchisement not only restricts women's personal and professional growth but also their capacity to contribute to and influence broader societal decisions.

### **Legal and Institutional Barriers**

The legal and institutional frameworks in Nigeria, while containing provisions for gender equality, often fall short in implementation and enforcement. Aina (2012) points out that the existing laws aimed at promoting gender equality are inadequately enforced, creating a gap between policy and practice. This lack of enforcement undermines efforts to achieve gender parity in decision-making processes.

### **Gender-Based Violence**

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pervasive issue that deters women from participating in public life. UN Women (2020) reports that GBV creates an environment of fear and insecurity, further marginalizing women and inhibiting their engagement in decision-making roles. Addressing GBV is critical to creating a safe and supportive environment for women's participation.

### **Educational Initiatives**

Education is a pivotal tool in challenging and changing patriarchal norms. Programs aimed at educating both men and women about gender equality can shift societal perceptions and empower women to take on leadership roles. Nwankwo (2019) emphasizes the importance of educational initiatives in fostering a culture of equality and respect.

### **Economic Empowerment**

Economic empowerment initiatives are crucial for enhancing women's participation in decision-making processes. Providing women with access to education, vocational training, and financial resources can significantly improve their economic status and, consequently, their ability to engage in decision-making. These initiatives help break the cycle of economic disenfranchisement that limits women's societal roles (Egunjobi, 2015).

### **Legal Reforms and Policy Implementation**

Robust legal reforms and effective policy implementation are essential for promoting gender equality. Strengthening the enforcement of existing gender equality laws and introducing new ones can create a more supportive legal framework for women's participation. Aina (2012) suggests that comprehensive legal reforms are necessary to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

### **Political Participation**

Encouraging women's political participation through quotas or affirmative action policies can significantly improve gender representation in decision-making bodies. These

measures ensure that women have a voice in political processes and can influence policies that affect their lives. Political support and mentorship programs for women candidates are also vital for their success (Nwankwo, 2019).

### **Barriers and Challenges that hinder equitable gender representation in decision-making processes within Nigeria**

Assessing the existing barriers and challenges that hinder equitable gender representation in decision-making processes within Nigeria involves a comprehensive examination of cultural, political, economic, and institutional factors

### **Cultural Barriers**

**Traditional Gender Roles and Norms:** In many Nigerian communities, traditional gender roles dictate that men are the primary breadwinners and leaders, while women are expected to focus on domestic responsibilities. These norms can discourage women from pursuing leadership roles and can lead to societal resistance when they do.

**Patriarchal Society:** Nigeria's patriarchal structure places men in dominant positions of power and authority. This systemic patriarchy marginalizes women's contributions and limits their access to decision-making platforms (Aina, 2012).

**Religious Influences:** In some regions, religious beliefs and practices reinforce gender stereotypes and restrict women's participation in public life. For example, interpretations of religious texts in certain communities may prescribe specific roles for women that exclude them from leadership positions (Nwosu, 2020).

### **Political Barriers**

**Discriminatory Practices within Political Parties:** Political parties in Nigeria often have male-dominated leadership structures and practices that disadvantage women. Women may face discrimination during candidate selection processes, with party leaders favoring male candidates (Journal of Politics and International Affairs, 2020).

**Political Violence and Intimidation:** The political arena in Nigeria can be hostile and violent. Women candidates and leaders often face threats, harassment, and violence, which can deter them from participating in politics (IDEA, 2021).

**Lack of Political Will:** There is often a lack of commitment from political leaders to implement and enforce policies that promote gender equality. This can result in inadequate support for initiatives aimed at increasing women's representation in decision-making (UNDP, 2022).

### **Economic Barriers**

**Economic Dependence:** Many women in Nigeria are economically dependent on men, which can limit their ability to pursue leadership roles. Economic dependence reduces women's bargaining power and ability to finance political campaigns or leadership training (World Bank, 2022).

**Gender Wage Gap:** Women in Nigeria typically earn less than men, which affects their financial independence and ability to invest in their political careers. The gender wage gap is a significant barrier to achieving gender parity in decision-making (ActionAid Nigeria, 2022).

**Limited Access to Resources:** Women often have less access to resources such as education, training, and networks that are crucial for leadership development. This limited access hampers their ability to compete effectively for decision-making positions (NCWD, 2021).

### **Educational Barriers**

**Access to Quality Education:** Although there have been improvements, gender disparities in education persist in Nigeria. Girls in some regions have less access to quality education, which affects their future opportunities for leadership roles (World Bank, 2022).

**Curriculum and Educational Practices:** Educational curricula and practices may reinforce traditional gender roles and fail to encourage girls to aspire to leadership positions. There is a need for gender-sensitive education that promotes leadership skills among girls (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

### **Institutional Barriers**

**Inadequate Legal Frameworks:** Existing legal frameworks in Nigeria may not be sufficient to protect and promote women's rights to participate in decision-making. Weak enforcement of gender equality laws and policies exacerbates this issue (International Journal of Law and Society, 2021).

**Institutional Bias:** Institutions, including government bodies and private organizations, may have inherent biases that favor men over women. These biases can manifest in recruitment, promotion, and decision-making processes (PLAC, 2022).

**Lack of Supportive Infrastructure:** The absence of supportive infrastructure, such as childcare facilities and family-friendly workplace policies, can hinder women's ability to balance professional and domestic responsibilities, limiting their participation in leadership roles (HeForShe Nigeria, 2021).

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The study will employ a comprehensive methodological approach, drawing inspiration from the Liberal Feminist Theory (LFT) as its theoretical framework. The concept of the Liberal Feminist Theory was initially introduced by Mary Wollstonecraft. This specific theory ardently upholds the idea that women merit equal rights as men, affording them the liberty to shape their trajectory in society and unleash their complete potential without bias. Put more plainly, no contrived barriers ought to obstruct women from pursuing any lawful pursuit they deem essential. Additionally, the theory posits that gender should not serve as a foundation for unfair advantages, underscoring the significance of equitable access to opportunities and privileges.

In the realm of societal norms, religious doctrines, and political ideologies, women often find themselves at a disadvantage. This perspective is emphasized by Ako-Nai (2005), who argues that feminism is fundamentally rooted in the intricate interplay between the genders. The core of the feminist ideology seeks to liberate women from restrictive structures. Nigeria, a country entrenched in a patriarchal system where male dominance prevails, showcases the misguided belief that women are innately inferior in terms of education and capability. Consequently, women encounter pervasive discrimination across different

facets of society.

The notion of women's subordination emerges from an intricate web of societal and legal barriers that relegate them to the shadows, thwarting their potential accomplishments. This study champions the active participation of women in the intense arena of electoral politics, aligning with the aforementioned theory and the principles championed by the feminist movement. This movement strives to amplify women's voices by dismantling obstacles that obstruct their fair participation alongside men in the political landscape.

### **Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory is central to understanding gender inequality in decision-making processes. It explores the ways in which gender roles and expectations are socially constructed and perpetuated through various institutions, including politics, education, and the family (Tong, 2009). Feminist theory argues that patriarchal structures systematically disadvantage women, limiting their access to power and resources. In the context of Nigeria, feminist theory helps to explain how historical and cultural norms have shaped women's participation in leadership roles (Aina, 2012).

### **Social Role Theory**

Social role theory posits that gender differences in behavior, including leadership and decision-making, are largely the result of societal expectations and norms (Eagly & Wood, 2012). According to this theory, men and women are socialized into specific roles that dictate appropriate behaviors and career choices. In Nigeria, traditional gender roles often assign men to public, decision-making positions while relegating women to private, domestic spheres (Nwosu, 2020). Social role theory provides a lens for understanding how these entrenched norms can be challenged and transformed to promote gender equality.

### **Research Methodology**

The research methodology adopted in this study utilizes a quantitative approach in conjunction with a structured questionnaire to explore the achievement of equitable engagement in decision-making processes pertaining to gender representation in Nigeria. The study will formulate a comprehensive questionnaire based on pertinent literature, encompassing domains such as political participation, organizational leadership, and societal perspective. This survey will be distributed to a diverse array of stakeholders, including political figures, corporate leaders, and civil society representatives. The collected data will undergo statistical analysis to quantify trends, viewpoints, and disparities in gender representation and decision-making. By employing a quantitative method and a carefully constructed questionnaire, this research aims to yield factual insights into the current status and challenges of gender representation in Nigerian decision-making context

### **Summary**

Achieving equitable engagement in decision-making processes in Nigeria faces multifaceted challenges that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in political, economic, and social spheres. This disparity is rooted in patriarchal norms and cultural stereotypes that relegate women to subordinate roles, discouraging their

participation in leadership positions. Additionally, economic marginalization limits women's access to education, employment opportunities, and financial resources, further exacerbating their underrepresentation. The legal and institutional frameworks in Nigeria, while containing provisions for gender equality, suffer from inadequate implementation and enforcement. Gender-based violence remains widespread, creating an environment of fear that deters women from participating in public life.

Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies, including educational programs to challenge patriarchal norms, economic empowerment initiatives, and robust legal reforms to ensure the protection and promotion of women's rights. By creating a supportive ecosystem that values and empowers women, Nigeria can move towards achieving true gender equality and ensuring women's voices are heard and valued in all aspects of society.

Achieving equitable engagement in decision-making processes with regard to gender representation in Nigeria is crucial for the nation's development and democratic integrity. Despite various efforts and commitments, women in Nigeria continue to face significant barriers that hinder their participation in political, economic, and social spheres. These barriers are rooted in cultural stereotypes, economic marginalization, and inadequate legal frameworks, all of which perpetuate gender inequality and limit women's influence on policies affecting their lives.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can create a more inclusive and equitable society where women are empowered to participate fully in decision-making processes. This will not only enhance gender equality but also contribute to the overall development and democratic integrity of the nation.

Implement educational programs that challenge and change patriarchal norms and cultural stereotypes. Provide women with access to education, vocational training, and employment opportunities. Strengthen the implementation and enforcement of existing gender equality laws and policies. Establish and strengthen institutions dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Implement quotas or affirmative action policies to ensure women's representation in political offices and decision-making bodies. Develop comprehensive strategies to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, including legal, medical, and psychological support for survivors. Collaborate with international organizations and partners to share best practices and resources for promoting gender equality.

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