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# GENDER EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICY FOR UNIVERSITIES IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT
*Gender equity and social inclusion in higher education is a major concern in many countries including Nigeria due to its significance in socio-economic and political development. Nigeria has joined other countries in signing international conventions and agreements in an effort to address the negative impact of gender inequalities across all social contexts that includes higher education. These commitments include the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), among others. With regards to education, it is a fundamental human right, and an essential tool to ensure that all people realise their full potential. Thus an investment in education for boys and girls, men and women with a gender-based framework has been consistently acknowledged by the Government of Nigeria as a powerful vehicle for its citizens' advancement socially and economically. The National Gender and Social Inclusion Policy is thus proposed for domestication in Universities in Lagos State with attention given to the derivable objectives, phases in formulation, adoption, implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation. The implementation of this policy is hoped to lead to fruition of the overall goal of the Education Sector – providing equitable quality education for all citizens in Lagos State, Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Policy, Equity, Gender, Education, and Nigeria

## Introduction
Gender is an importance issue in many aspects of society. It is a socio-cultural construct that highlights the differences in the attributes of girls and boys, women and men (UNICEF, 2017). This construct has been used to demonstrate systemic bias or discrimination against girls and women in relation to boys and men in different areas of life; and serves as a basis to address such bias. One of the constructs to address systemic bias in countries and institutions today is gender equity. Gender equity refers to the process whereby terms and

conditions in relation to all outcomes in the society are fair to men and women, boys and girls (UNICEF, 2017). Accordingly, this human right concept covers the use of measures to compensate for historical or systemic bias or discrimination and accommodates differential treatment that is fair and positively addresses a bias or disadvantage that is due to gender roles or norms or differences between the sexes. It thus ensures that women and men and girls and boys have an equal chance, not only at the starting point, but also when reaching the finishing line (UNICEF, 2017). Furthermore, it also recognises the different needs of the men and women, cultural barriers and (past) discrimination of the specific group.

Gender equity has emerged as a widely accepted and unquestionable goal in the global development and human rights discourses in the last few decades (UNICEF, 2017). It poses a perspective that everyone should not be discriminated against based on their gender. Yet, relatively disadvantaged position of girls and women in virtually all societies puts women into the focus of gender equity issues. While the gender equity covers almost every aspects of life, such as social, economical, work life, the scope of this paper is limited to the higher educational context. While education is a powerful and veritable tool for the reduction of poverty and illiteracy; an undeniable instrument to stimulate sustainable economic and social growth, and a mechanism to increase the living standards for individuals; however, access to higher education for women and girls is low in many countries including Nigeria (UNESCO, 2013; 2016). Overall, 493 million or two-thirds of the global illiterate population were women in 2013 (UNESCO, 2013; 2016). The pattern is similar if not worse in African countries and reflects the degree of women's access to employment and educational opportunities (Nwajuiba, 2011; Obielumani, 2010; Alumode, 2010). Women have been challenged in achieving equitable access to education in many states in Nigeria and this is due to a range of social, economic, cultural, and geographical circumstances (Amadi, 2017; Nwajuiba, 2011; Obielumani, 2010; Alumode, 2010).

**Challenges Being Addressed**

In the higher education system, women are still under-represented in senior faculty and decision-making bodies in many universities (Nwajuiba, 2011; Obielumani, 2010; Alumode, 2010) and this includes Universities in Lagos State from a review of documents. For instance, since the creation of the Lagos State University in 1983 till the 2020, the proportion of women in top management has been almost non-existent; the percentage of women in the senate, in the leadership and management structure of faculties has been low. This stark reality can be explained only by women's history of lower access to education, but also by institutional cultures that are neither inclusive nor geared towards broader social and cultural change for greater gender equity (Vandima, 2020; Amadi, 2017). This position contrasts with the commitment of Nigerian Government in the provision of equitable and equal opportunities and quality Education for all as enshrined in the various International, Regional and National legal and policy documents such as: Universal Declaration

on Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW] (1979), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) [1989], the Jomtien World Conference (1990), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), the Dakar Framework of Action on Education For All (Dakar 2000), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000) and The Constitution of Nigeria in 1999 with amendments through 2011 (Amadi, 2017). It should be noted that a review of the Nigeria Constitution showed male-as-norm ideology and the relegation of female gender almost to anonymity (Ezeifeka & Osakwe, 2013).

The World Education Forum in 2000 presented six Education for All (EFA) goals which are achievable and still relevant today. The Goals 2 and 5 pertain to equality (and quality) of education. Goal 2 states "ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to…education of good quality" and Goal 5 "eliminating gender disparities in…education by 2015, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls" full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality".

Gender equality is a key component of conceptual framework of educational access and quality according to Barrett and colleagues (2006) and has been found helpful in the analyses of educational access and quality. Thus quality education and access to this require gender-sensitive use of human resources, and consideration of gender in the allocation of finances. Quality education in higher education entails a concern to include the views of all members of a community – boys and girls, men and women, taking context into account. And as such, a quality education rejects gender discrimination and social injustice; and a quality education cannot be achieved without gender equality and equity (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005).

Furthermore, the UNESCO (2003)'s framework of gender equality conceptualises the achievement of full gender equality in education in four dimensions. First is the equality of opportunities and this is measurable with gender parity index and teachers' attitudes towards equality in schools. Second is equality in the learning process which is measured using students' participation in learning activities, group work and club leadership, curricula, decision making, and use of school resources. The third dimension comprises of equality of outcomes and this is reflected in academic achievement, length of school careers, academic qualifications and diplomas that do not differ by gender. The fourth perspective is equality of external results. This is understood and measured in terms of earnings of men and women with similar qualifications and experience.

However, there are emerging studies that show gaps in the dimensions mentioned above (Moges, 2019) and thus call for a broader and contextual view of equality which is termed substantive equality: equality in life outcomes. And in order to achieve equality of life outcomes,

institutional arrangements, strategies, and policies should be designed. These are collectively referred as equity strategies (Moges, 2019). According to Moges (2019), they range from affirmative action, through the development of gender sensitive policies, strategies and administrative units to deliver implementation outcomes, to organisational arrangements that allow positive discrimination.

The development and implementation of equity policy together with strategies, however, require an analysis of social and cultural relations and the opportunity for dialogue, debate, and the exploration of differences, particularly with regard to the public–private interface. This only in-depth analysis paves the way for the development equity strategies instrumental for the removal of deeply embedded obstacles and structures of power and exclusion, such as discriminatory laws, customs, practices, and institutional processes, all of which undermine opportunities and outcomes in education (Moges, 2019).

In many African countries, the enrolment rate of women in higher education is poor and there is a huge under-representation in higher education from people with marginalised backgrounds (Moges, 2019; Hurtado, 2021). In Nigeria for instance, there is no data on the quotas in tertiary education for students who are females, those who belonging to vulnerable groups; there is no data on the expansion of scholarships to achieve equity and access to higher education (Nwajuiba, 2011; Obielumani, 2010; Alumode, 2010). Policies that promote the appointment of women in senior positions and promote their careers are lacking. In LASU and some other universities in Lagos for instance, such data above are non-existent, and there are no policies that encourage women's full professional participation in higher education. It could be observed that some universities are yet to be an institution that embraces an equal opportunity employer with implication for the encouragement of the academic development of women. There is a gap in some of these universities thus where there is a need to provide the platform where women are encouraged to become leaders and where increased female leadership is highly valued.

UNESCO-IESALC report according to Hurtado in 2021 proposes that universities have programmes to help students make informed choices, free of gender bias, about their future fields of study and career, and to develop strategies to enhance female participation in traditionally male-dominated careers, including career orientation "to deconstruct misconstrued images of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics and their biased connection to gender stereotypes, documents that reflect that in universities policies are lacking. While there is a growing acceptance of women in higher education in LASU for instance, further progress requires the availability of scholarships and cultural reforms such as the recognition of women in higher education in society and academia and to change the perception that entering higher education is not feminine. This can only be achieved through evidence-based policy on gender equity and social inclusion.

In addition, most African countries have national and institutional policies that favour female enrolment in higher education, but such policies are implemented when there is sufficient budget (Hurtado, 2021). And budget has never been sufficient in higher education in most African countries including Nigeria educational institution. This thus implies that women in universities in Lagos might suffer comparatively to men in having educational opportunities due to cultural and socio-economic factors.

From the foregoing, it is still arguable that in Africa, including higher institutions in Nigeria, women are still seen as second-class citizens and it is logical to explore why this inequity and what can be done to correct the situation such as policy formulation, adoption and implementation. Gender policy and social inclusion in higher education will notably promote women to lead in higher education by increasing their numbers of women in leadership positions.

**Targets and Beneficiaries of the Policy**

The targets and beneficiaries of this policy include policy makers (i.e. Lagos State Ministries of Education, Health, Youth and Sports Development, the Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, and the Vice Chancellor as well as top management of universities in Lagos State); women groups in universities in Lagos State (rural and elite groups); young people in universities (Youth groups – females and males); persons with any level of disability (females and males); NGOs/Civil Society Organisations in Lagos State that work with women, youths, elderly, and persons with disabilities; gate keepers at the grassroots level in Lagos State (traditional leaders; religious leaders and leaders of grassroots development associations etc.); academic staff in universities; Police Commands in Lagos State; Health /Social Workers in Lagos State; Representatives of Political Parties with offices in Lagos State; Development Partners who work on issues of women, youths, elderly and persons with disabilities in Lagos State.

**Knowledge Contribution**

In the response of Nigeria to the global clarion call for a society devoid of all forms of gender-based discriminations and gender-based impunities to achieve global development goals of the 21st Century, Nigeria developed its first national policy on the rights of women in 2000 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2007; Amadi, 2017). This was replaced with the National Gender Policy in 2006 following a methodical review and integration of lessons learnt from the implementation of the 2000 Women Policy. A key lesson was the need to harmonise gender interest across the three tiers of government such that the long-standing interest on issues of gender equity for policy and planning in higher institutions such as LASU will not be illusionary.

Notably, extant studies have emerged to show that equitable access to education for women and girls do produce positive outcomes such as reduced infant mortality, lower fertility rates and increased ability to break out of poverty; while failure to invest in girls' education can lower the gross national product (GNP) of a country

(Vandima, 2020; UNESCO, 2004, 2005, 2016). Furthermore, when there is a systematic plan that is derived from a gender perspective, such plan ensures the development of new laws, policies and programmes in different sectors including higher institutions of learning, such as Lagos State University, University of Lagos, Lagos State university of Education and others towards the emergence of a just, equitable and peaceful society. In other words, when the gender equity core values are imbibed in the fabric of an educational institution, the outcomes include progressive partnership between women and men and a significant reduction in gender based violence and conflicts.

By domesticating and adopting Nigeria policy on gender equity and social inclusion, University in Lagos State will demonstrates commitment to the principle of gender equity and social inclusion objectives in its developmental educational processes. The policy document will help various university to translate its commitment to gender equity and social inclusion into sectoral plans and programmes. This process thus demands that Universities in Lagos State has indicators that deliver results for ladies, women, and the vulnerable groups – the youths, persons living with all forms of disabilities, the elderly, and those living below the poverty line. Thus, this policy will assist universities in Lagos State and it's supervising Ministry of Education to track effective use of resources, and thereby ensures transparency and accountability in governance.

**Guiding Principles of Policy on Gender Equity and Social Inclusion**

The principles of human rights, gender equity, women's empowerment and social protection/inclusion entrenched in international, regional, and national laws and instruments provide guidance for this policy (Economic and Social Council, 1997; UNESCO, 2016). Such principles include first the respect for human rights, social justice, equity and inclusionary principles (which treat the issue of vulnerability beyond women and girls' issues, to include such other vulnerable groups as youths, persons with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable children, and the elderly). Second principle is that gender equity, women's rights and empowerment as an integral part of the educational development agenda while third principle hinges on the recognition of the specificity of women, men, girls and boys in educational development such that they are not homogeneous and their circumstances vary. The fourth principle ensures the adoption of a development model that guarantees security and peaceful co-existence amongst the citizenry in institution of higher learning. This principle eradicates gender based violence within the boundaries of a higher institution. The fifth principle is the commitment to gender mainstreaming as a development strategy/administrative tool to inform a reform of educational agenda, educational development planning, value re-orientation as well as social transformation across all sectors in the institution of learning. While the sixth principle treats gender and social protection/inclusion issues as cross-cutting and demands strong cooperative interaction of all stakeholders including the governing

body in these universities, the Lagos State Government, private sector, civil society organisations, traditional leadership structures (including religious leaders), and development partners to drive the implementation of the policy; the seventh principle addresses the building of institutional capacity in gender mainstreaming and analytical frameworks for social inclusion in public educational policy and planning for development.

**Objectives of Policy of Gender Equity and Social Inclusion in Universities in Lagos State**

From the seven principles enumerated above, it logically follows that objectives of the policy on gender equity and social inclusion in Universities in Lagos State would include among others one, to empower women and girls and other vulnerable people in Lagos State (young persons, persons with disabilities, and the elderly) to achieve their potentials and have access to educational opportunities; two, to allow women, adolescent girls, young persons and other vulnerable groups in Lagos State to participate in decision-making processes of educational development in Universities in Lagos; three, to encourage evidence-based policy and planning and give priority to the use of gender statistics and gender disaggregated data in Universities Lagos State; four, to use gender mainstreaming and social inclusion frameworks as policy and planning tools across all faculties and departments in the university; five, to create a gender responsive environment through programme interventions and advocacies, and transform structures which sustain gender inequalities in local academic and no-academic communities in Universities in Lagos State; six, to enhance the role of women in peace building in local communities, and protect women and girls from gender based violence and conflicts (create safe spaces for them in Universities); and eight, to legislate against Sexual/Gender Based Violence in Universities.

**Domestication of the Gender Policy and Social inclusion in Universities in Lagos State:**

This will go through six phases.

The first phase will cover a situation analysis of the gender profile and more importantly the status of women in Universities in Lagos State and consequently establish the interest of Universities in Lagos State for the project. Data for this stage will be sourced from a desk review of existing literature and secondary data on the Gender Profile in Universities; and Gender Equity Dialogue with identified target groups. In this phase, there will be work with all faculties and departments to collect gender data; and work with other stakeholders to document gender equity and social inclusion concerns in Universities in Lagos State. The data collection techniques will include quantitative surveys, in-depth interviews, key informant interview, panel discussion and a desk review. The deliverable in the first phase will be the production of a Situation Analysis Report – Universities Gender Profile in Lagos State.

The second phase will be the development of the contextualised Gender Policy and Social Inclusion Document for Universities in Lagos State. This will include two main

activities. The first will be the development of the Policy Document by a Technical Work Group. The technical working group will be formed after a consultative stakeholders' meeting where the situation analysis report is presented and representatives of the stakeholders are selected based on consensus criteria. The meeting will be facilitated by lead consultant and a group of technical experts in gender policy and social inclusion.

The second activity will be a validation meeting after the technical work group have developed the draft copy of the policy using the National Gender Policy and Social Inclusion and relevant items from the situation analysis report. This meeting will involve different interest groups in Universities and Lagos State to consider the draft copy of the policy. It is here that the draft policy will be corrected and a final copy submitted to Vice Chancellor of Universities in Lagos State.

The third phase involves the preparation of the Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) for the Gender and Social Inclusion Policy for Universities in Lagos State. A system of coordination, networking and monitoring of policy implementation and impacts are better established when roles and responsibilities are clear; and backed up with infrastructural support, including budgets, physical infrastructures, and human resource. It is important to allocate budgets to implement the policy and to create requisite offices/units with full responsibility for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. A University Strategic Implementation Plan for the Policy with action plans will be developed using the information above as a guide– by the Technical Work Group; and this drafted SIP will be reviewed by the different interest groups in a validation meeting. Thereafter, the draft copy of the SIP will be corrected and submitted to Vice Chancellor of Universities in Lagos State.

After the validation and adoption of this policy, the fourth phase comes and it is proposed that the following are considered as priorities: the publication and dissemination of the Gender and Social Inclusion Policy for Universities to policy makers/strategic stakeholders; the setting up the requisite for implementation of the policy; a review of curriculum for training in Universities from a gender perspective.

In the fifth phase, there will be training of key stakeholders in the implementation plan. Thereafter is the sixth phase where the implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation of the policy will be carried out.

**Conclusion**

Gender inequity in higher education entails unfair treatment of persons in higher institutions due to their attributes of gender roles or norms or differences in sexes. This undermines the productivity of any institution and nation. If gender inequity is addressed in higher education, education then becomes a powerful and veritable tool to reduce poverty and illiteracy; a viable instrument to stimulate sustainable economic and social growth, and a mechanism to increase the living standards for all individuals. This paper highlights the role of gender policy and social inclusion in higher education using Universities in Lagos State as a case and proposes six

phases on how the national gender policy and social inclusion can be domesticated and implemented with consequent advantages for Universities in Lagos State and Lagos State as a whole.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations emanate from this study.

1. Universities in Lagos State needs to have a policy on gender and social inclusion
2. Universities in Lagos State needs to develop its gender and social inclusion policy following evidence-based practice
3. University in Lagos State needs to develop the gender and social inclusion policy from the extant national gender and social inclusion policy
4. Universities in Lagos State will go through at least six phases in the development of the gender and social inclusion policy
5. The first phase should include stakeholders' analysis, forum meeting to deliberate on the approach to agenda setting such as the formation of a technical work group, situation analysis of gender profile and desk review of relevant documents and this phase concludes with the production of a draft copy of the gender and social inclusion policy for Universities in Lagos
6. The second phase involves the validation of the draft copy with different interest groups which is anchored by the technical work group
7. The third phase of the policy development should include preparation of the Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) by the technical work group with adequate consideration of all available resources and action plan policy be conducted in University
8. The fourth phase should be about the publication and dissemination of the Gender and Social Inclusion Policy for Varsities in Lagos State to policy makers/strategic stakeholders; the setting up the requisite for implementation of the policy; a review of curriculum for training in Varsities from a gender perspective. There should be an appropriate governance structure to this.
9. The fifth phase should entail the training of key stakeholders in the implementation plan.
10. The sixth phase should include the actual implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation of the policy.

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