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QUEEN JAMES EZEKIEL-HART

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Gender Equality in Nigeria: A Sine Qua Non for Sustainable Development

Queen James Ezekiel-Hart*

ABSTRACT

Sustainable development is understood to mean development that caters for the needs of the present generation while preserving the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It is development that transcends the present to future generations. Sustainable development hinges on three pillars: social development/sustainability, economic development/sustainability and environmental sustainability. Within these three pillars, it is recognised that both men and women play an important role in achieving the targets and goals set forth. Both genders have to be given equal opportunities to participate in decision-making and to contribute effectively to the attainment of sustainable development. It is on this premise that gender equality becomes essential to sustainable development and particularly its 3 pillars. This article is hinged on this fact. Using the doctrinal legal research methodology, this paper identified what sustainable development entails and the legal and institutional framework that embodies it nationally and internationally. Within these frameworks, the importance of gender equality to achieving sustainable development was recognised. This study revealed that while Nigeria had some laws and policies supporting gender equality in addition to its international commitments, and some strides had been made to promote the rights of women, practical implementation still remained uneven and suboptimal. The paper identified several challenges impeding gender equality in Nigeria: limited education and awareness, poverty, persistence of gender-based violence, harmful and discriminatory practices and inconsistent implementation of legal and policy frameworks. Recommendations provided to deal with these challenges included increased investments in education and skills acquisition, increased collaboration in access to protection, justice and the empowerment of girls and women, and eliminating all discriminatory and harmful practices. These recommendations, if implemented, will promote gender equality, ensuring that both men and women can contribute meaningfully and effectively to sustainable development for Nigeria

KEYWORDS; Gender, Equality, Sustainable, Development, Sina Qua Non,Nigeria.

1.1 Introduction

* QUEEN JAMES EZEKIEL-HART -SUPERVISORS: C.D FAB-EME ESQ, NYOBANA ABIOLA ESQ, DEPARTMENT OF PRIVATE AND PRPOERTY LAW, FACULTY OF LAW, RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY, PORT HARCOURT, RIVERS STATE. EMAIL:queenirondi@gmail.com/08067156589.

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Sustainable development is one of the most notable aspirations of any country in recent times. It refers to development that not only meets the needs of the present generation but also preserves opportunities for future generations to meet their needs.[1] Its achievement basically involves three aspects known as economic progress, social inclusion and environmental protection. Under the United Nations Agenda 2030, these concerns are treated as interconnected. To achieve this, all humans must work together, men and women, and this is where gender equality plays an important role. This means that development cannot be considered fully sustainable where people are denied rights, protection or opportunities based on their gender and are not given equal opportunities to contribute to that development meaningfully.[2] Accordingly, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls form an essential part of achieving sustainable development.[3]

Nigeria is one of the countries that seeks to achieve sustainable development and within its laws, policies and international instrument it is a party to, it recognises the existence and importance of gender equality.[4] However, the recognition of equality on paper does not necessarily mean that it is achieved in practice. Nigeria still struggles with education gaps, poverty, harmful cultural practices, and gender-based violence, and implementation gaps that continue to affect the extent to which women and girls can enjoy their rights and participate in development.[5] It is therefore important to consider not only what the existing frameworks provide, but also how the opportunities they promise can become available in everyday life.

This paper thus examines gender equality in Nigeria as a sine qua non for sustainable development. It considers the national and international legal and policy frameworks and discusses the institutions concerned with their implementation. It goes on to explain why gender equality is essential to sustainable development, examine the state of its achievement in Nigeria and identify

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[1] World Commission on Environment and Development (1987). Our Common Future*(The Brundtland Report).*<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf> Accessed 15th October, 2026. P I Mazza, 'Concepts of Sustainable Development: A Literature Review and a Systematic Framework for Connecting the Role of Education with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education* [2021] (8) (8) 106.

[2] United Nations, 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda (accessed 7 November 2026). United Nations, The Sustainable Development Goals, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-goals/ (accessed 7 November 2026).

[3] R Bansal, 'Gender Equality: A Key to Sustainable Development' *Indian Journal of Integrated Research in Law* [2023] (3) (2) 1-10.

[4] A D Blessing and Y W Fred, 'Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Nigeria' *IDOSR Journal of Communication and English* [2022] (7) (1) 23-24.

[5] A D Horsfall, 'The Challenges and Prospects of Achieving Gender Equality in Nigeria by Year 2030' *International Journal of Academic Management Science Research* [2022] (6) (8) 128-131.

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the challenges that persist. On this basis, the paper provides recommendations aimed at ensuring that men and women, boys and girls can contribute meaningfully and effectively to sustainable development.

1.2 Conceptual Clarifications

In order to examine the relationship between gender equality and sustainable development, it is important to clarify the principal concepts used in this paper. These are gender, gender equality, sine qua non and sustainable development.

1.2.1 Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expectations and relationships associated with women, men, girls and boys.[6] Unlike sex, which just concerns biological and physiological characteristics, gender goes further to concern the meanings and responsibilities that societies attach to people due to their sex.[7] These expectations may differ across societies and change over time. In this paper, gender is considered particularly in relation to the roles, opportunities and restrictions affecting the participation of men and women in development.[8]

1.2.2 Gender Equality

Gender equality refers to the equal entitlement of people to rights, protection, responsibilities and opportunities regardless of gender.[9] It does not mean that men and women must be identical in every respect. Rather, it means that gender should not determine whether a person can obtain education, work, own resources, access justice or participate in decision-making.[10] Both genders are entitled to the same rights and opportunities under the law. It is also important to distinguish equality from equity. While equality concerns equal rights and opportunities, equity concerns the measures needed to address disadvantages that prevent people from enjoying them. Accordingly,

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[6] Felicia Anyogu and Others, 'National Development, Economic Sustainability, and Gender Mainstreaming in a Globalized World - A Specific Focus on Nigeria' *Journal of Customary and Religious Law* [2026] (3) (1) 62-63.
[7] Ibid.
[8] World Health Organization, 'Gender and Health.' <https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender> Accessed 15th October 2026.
[9] UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 'Gender equality'. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/glossary/251> Accessed 15th October 2026.
[10] K.A. Leweanya, 'Gender Equality and the Fundamental Right to Human Dignity in Nigeria: An Appraisal' *Orient Law Journal* [2025] (6) 163-169. O O Alabi, 'Reexamining Gender Inequality in Accessing Resources and Education Stance in Reducing Masculine Gender Hegemony in Nigeria' *Heliyon* [2024] (10) (19) 1.

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support directed towards disadvantaged women and girls may be necessary to make equality effective rather than merely formal.[11]

1.2.3 Sine Qua Non

Sine qua non is a Latin phrase that translates literally to *"without which, not"*.[12] It is an expression used to describe an indispensable condition without which a particular result cannot be achieved.[13] In the context of this paper, describing gender equality as a sine qua non means that it is a necessary condition for genuinely inclusive and sustainable development. It means that economic growth, social progress and environmental protection cannot be fully achieved where gender-based exclusion continues to prevent persist.

1.2.4 Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a concept defined as development that meets present needs while preserving the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.[14] It involves the interconnected dimensions of economic development, social inclusion and environmental protection.[15] Economic development concerns livelihoods and prosperity for the present and future generations;[16] social inclusion concerns dignity, rights, culture and access to opportunities;[17] and environmental protection concerns the resources and ecological conditions on which life depends.[18] Accordingly, sustainable development is all-encompassing, requiring that development opportunities and benefits are accessible, that human rights are protected and that the environment

[11] Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979, arts 1–3. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women> Accessed 7 October 2026.
[12] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 'Sine qua non'. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sine%20qua%20non> Accessed 17th October 2026.
[13] Ibid.
[14] T Güney, 'Renewable Energy, Non-Renewable Energy and Sustainable Development' *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology* [2019] (26) (5) 389-397.
[15] P Dasgupta, 'Measuring Sustainable Development: Theory and Application' *Asian Development Review* [2007] (24) (1) 1−10.
[16] M-J Lobo, E Pietriga and C Appert, 'An Evaluation of Interactive Map Comparison Techniques: In Proceedings of the 33rd ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems' CH' 15 3573-3582.
[17] H E Daly, 'UN Conferences on Environment and Development: Retrospect on Stockholm and Prospects for Rio' *The Journal of International Society of Ecological Economics* [1992] (5) 9-14.
[18] P Dhankar and Others, 'Environmental Concerns and Initiatives for their *Protection' Journal of Science Innovations and Nature of Earth* [2025] (5) (2) 63-65.

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is preserved for present and future generations. Gender equality is necessary in achieving all three dimensions of sustainable development.[19]

1.3 Legal and Institutional Framework for Gender Equality and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Sustainable development is predicated on the premise that there are laws, policies, and institutions that back its achievement. Globally, nations have adopted several treaties that support sustainable development, and what States should do individually and collectively to achieve it is not left out. Achieving gender equality is one way to achieve sustainable development.[20] Nigeria is a party to several of these treaties[21] and recognises the need to achieve sustainable development within its borders, through its laws and policies.[22] Laws and policies promoting gender equality, generally or as fundamental to achieving sustainable development, are provided for therein. It is therefore important to consider what these laws, policies, and institutions are and what provisions or contributions are made to promote gender equality and sustainable development in Nigeria.

1. National Legal and Policy Framework

The 1999 Constitution (as amended) is Nigeria's supreme law and grund norm[23] that establishes Nigeria's government, human rights and other matters that encapsulates what Nigeria is all about geopolitically. Human rights are an essential part of the Constitution, to which everyone, irrespective of sex or gender, is entitled. Under the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, the Constitution provides for gender equality, equal pay for equal work, and the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex or gender.[24] It further recognises the

[19] United Nations, 'The Sustainable Development Goals.' <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-goals/> Accessed 16th October 2026. United Nations, 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> Accessed 16th October 2026.

[20] T C Nwambuko, F Ominino and C J Nwakaego, 'Gender Equality: A Pivotal Goal to the Realization of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria' *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences* [2025] (23) (9) 125-138. Editorial, 'Gender equality as a catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals' *Business Day* (3rd April 2023). <https://businessday.ng/opinion/article/gender-equality-as-a-catalyst-for-achieving-the-sustainable-development-goals/> Accessed 16th October 2026.

[21] The UNFCCC 1992. United Nations Climate Change, 'Nigeria'. <https://unfccc.int/node/61130> Accessed 16th October 2026. Paris Climate Change Act 2015. V Chime, 'EXPLAINER: What is Paris Climate Agreement and is Nigeria on track to meet its targets?' *The Cable* (10th May 2021). <https://www.thecable.ng/explainer-what-is-paris-climate-agreement-and-is-nigeria-on-track-to-meeting-its-targets/> Accessed 16th October 2026.

[22] Such as the Climate Change Act 2021 and Climate Change Policy 2021-2030.

[23] *Abacha v. Fawehinmi* (2001) SWLR (Pt. 168) 909, *A.G. Abia State v. A.G. Federation* (2003) 6 NWLR (Pt. 763) 264 at 497.

[24] Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), s. 17 (2) (a), (3) (e).

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importance of every Nigerian, male or female, to the development of the nation.[25] The Bill of Rights then goes on to guarantee freedom from discrimination on these grounds.[26] Accordingly, the Constitution provides sufficient basis for gender equality, not just as a human right but as essential to the development of the nation.

Another important law which protects both genders is the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015. This law prohibits acts of violence against and between both genders, including rape, assault, spousal battery, economic, physical and emotional abuse, female genital mutilation, harmful widowhood practices and other actions against the liberty and dignity of a person regardless of gender.[27] Going forward, the Child Rights Act 2003 is another important piece of legislation, enacted to provide for the protection of the rights of children and other ancillary matters such as child protection, custody, guardianship, adoption and others relative to children. An important provision of the Act is the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of the gender of the child.[28] This means that children of both male and female genders are entitled to the same rights and protection provided therein, and all actions taken under the Act for them must be in their best interest.[29] The Act goes ahead to prohibit actions such as child marriage or betrothal, which is commonly done to females, unlawful sexual intercourse, and other forms of exploitation or abuse of children regardless of gender.[30] By these provisions, the Act promotes gender equality from a young age as it entitles children of both genders to rights and protection.

The Climate Change Act 2021 is Nigeria's primary climate law, providing a framework for the country's approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation. While the Act does not make express provisions for gender equality, it does include women at important levels. For example, the Act establishes the National Council of Climate Change with membership to include both the Ministry of Women Affairs and a representative of women.[31] Furthermore, the Secretariat of the Council is mandated to work with women to monitor plans, programmes, projects, engage in

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid, s. 42.
[27] Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015, s. Federal Ministry of Justice, 'FG Calls for Effective Implementation of All Policies Programmes Laws on SGBV', (10 October 2023). <https://justice.gov.ng/fg-calls-for-effective-implementation-of-all-policies-programmes-laws-on-sgbv/> Accessed 16th October 2026.
[28] Child's Rights Act 2003, s 10.
[29] Ibid, s. 1–2.
[30] Ibid, s. 21–23, 31–33.
[31] Climate Change Act 2021, s. 5 (1) (k), (s) (i).

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climate advocacy and related activities and to provide them with the necessary information thereon.[32] The emphasis on the inclusion of women, whether as part of the Ministry of Women Affairs or NGOs, CSOs, or private individuals, stems from the fact that historically, women have not been included in such matters. The Act therefore indirectly promotes gender equality in the fight against climate change by ensuring their inclusion, which is an important aspect of sustainable development.

Aside from the legal provisions for gender equality in Nigeria, there are policy frameworks that emphasise the importance of gender equality and equity in achieving national development, which also encompasses sustainable development. First is Nigeria's Gender Policy 2021-2026. This policy sets minimum standards for the government to achieve gender equality, women empowerment and social inclusion by ensuring equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for all: men and women; boys and girls.[33] It recognises the need for government and public participation in bringing about an end to discrimination and violence based on gender.[34] It also recognises the increased vulnerability of women to climate change impacts and thus, how important it is to include women in the fight against climate change.[35] The policy goes on to emphasise that gender equality is essential for sustainable development as provided for under Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.[36]

Another important policy, which recognises the need for gender equality in climate action, is the National Climate Change Policy 2021-2030. The Policy embeds the role of the government in contributing effectively to the fight against climate change.[37] Importantly, the policy notes how the impacts of climate change are gender differentiated, with women or girls experiencing more vulnerability and risk of violence.[38] It goes on to underscore that gender is important to climate action, and both genders, men and women, boys and girls, should be given opportunities to

[32] Ibid, s. 25 (1).
[33] National Gender Policy 2021–2026, UNEP/FAOLEX, <https://leap.unep.org/en/countries/ng/national-legislation/national-gender-policy-2021-2026> Accessed 17th October 2026.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid. United Nations, 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> Accessed 17th October 2026.
[37] National Climate Change Policy for Nigeria 2021 – 2030. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/NIG209876.pdf> Accessed 17th October 2026.
[38] National Climate Change Policy for Nigeria 2021 – 2030. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/NIG209876.pdf> Accessed 17th October 2026.

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participate in climate mitigation and adaptation as well as decision-making.[39] The policy therefore recognises that gender equality in climate action is a prerequisite for effective climate governance in Nigeria.

2. International legal framework

The recognition of the role of gender equality in sustainable development domestically has some basis in international considerations and worldwide collective recognition thereof. It has been noted that gender equality and equity are an essential part of Agenda 2030. This Agenda exists within a broader framework of international treaties and soft law documents on human rights, gender equality, climate change, and sustainable development.[40] Nigeria is a party to these treaties considered hereunder.

First is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979. This Convention condemns discrimination against women in all forms and in all fields of life, including culturally, economically, politically and socially.[41] It recognises the importance of women in the development of a nation and promotes equal rights and protection thereof between men and women.[42] It mandates State parties to adopt policies and legislation eliminating discrimination against women and mandates State parties to ensure that equality between men and women is achieved.[43]

The Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa 2003 is another piece of international treaty that focuses on eliminating discrimination against women. The Protocol calls on parties to combat all forms of discrimination against women through appropriate legislative, institutional and other measures[44] and goes ahead to stipulate rights and protections that women are entitled to.[45] These treaties fundamentally recognise that women are human beings and thus have similar rights and entitlements to those of men. This is important because sustainable development depends on the collective actions of both

[39] Ibid.
[40] United Nations (n. 2).
[41] Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979, art 1–2.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Maputo Protocol 2003, art 2.
[45] Ibid.

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men and women, and therefore, both genders must have the rights, protection, equality and equity needed to contribute effectively to achieving sustainable development.[46]

On this premise, it is important to consider, under international law, the essential part of sustainable development, which is environmental sustainability through the fight against climate change. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 1992, ratified by Nigeria on 29 August 1994, is the mother treaty that recognises the urgency of climate change and the roles State parties need to take in fighting it.[47] The Convention recognises how human activities have affected the environment, ecosystems, and climate system, exacerbating global warming, drought, and harmful weather patterns, among others.[48] It therefore recognises the need for States to work together through strategies and actions to limit or eliminate the causes of these harmful climate impacts.[49] While the Convention does not make express provisions concerning gender, it is worthy of consideration because sustainable development is premised on ensuring environmental sustainability, which the fight against climate change seeks to achieve. The recognition of the role of States is all-encompassing and, by inference, includes men and women therein.

The Paris Climate Change Agreement 2015 does recognise the importance of gender equality, however. Under its Preamble, the Agreement, acknowledging that climate change is a common concern for mankind, encourages parties to take action to promote the protection of human rights, gender equality, women empowerment, and intergenerational equity.[50] The Agreement goes on to encourage State Parties to adopt a gender-responsive approach to climate adaptation and provides that capacity building in mitigation and adaptation be gender-responsive.[51] This Agreement is therefore essential because it recognises gender inclusivity and supports gender-responsive approaches to adaptation and capacity building.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995 is a landmark global policy framework for gender equality adopted by 189 governments on September 15, 1995, at the United Nations Fourth

[46] A W Gbadebo and Others, 'Gender Equality and Sustainable Development in Nigeria' *Covenant Journal of Entrepreneurship* [2018] (2) (2) 42-53.
[47] United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 1992.
[48] Ibid, preamble.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Paris Agreement 2015, Preamble.
[51] Ibid, Art. 7 (5), 11 (2)

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World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. Having been committed to by Nigeria,[52] the Platform for Action is widely regarded as an international bill of rights for women; it famously established that women's rights are human rights and set out concrete objectives across 12 critical areas of concern, including poverty, education, health, violence against women, economic participation, and leadership.[53] Through this framework, participating nations committed to integrating gender equality into their national laws, policies, and budgets, with global progress regularly evaluated by the UN Commission on the Status of Women.[54] This framework forms the basis for mainstreaming gender equality into sustainable development.

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action (1994) is another important soft law document that recognised that sustainable development could not be achieved without addressing the social, economic, and political inequalities faced by women.[55] It emphasised that the empowerment and independence of women, as well as the improvement of their health and educational status, are essential for national progress. The Programme of Action called on governments to promote gender equality, equity, and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women.[56] The ICPD made women's rights central to global development discourse by connecting development and gender equality.

The importance of gender equality to sustainable development is seen under the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which encapsulates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Though soft law, it embodies the core of sustainable development with fundamental goals that States need to reach to achieve it. The Agenda is a plan of action for achieving sustainable development within the ambit of economic sustainability, social sustainability and environmental sustainability.[57] The Goals are set as pathways to achieve this sustainable development, and one of them, which is Goal 5, is achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.[58] The

[52] K Kasali, 'Nigeria Reaffirms Global Commitment to Gender Equality in Beijing' *TVC News* (15th October 2025). <https://www.tvcnews.tv/nigeria-reaffirms-global-commitment-to-gender-equality-in-beijing/> Accessed 18th October 2026.
[53] Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/PFA_E_Final_WEB.pdf> Accessed 18th October 2026.
[54] Ibid.
[55] United Nations, 'Report of the International Conference on Population and Development', Cairo, 5–13 September 1994 (A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1, 1995).
[56] Ibid.
[57] United Nations, (n. 2).
[58] Ibid.

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Targets thereunder include eliminating all forms of violence, harmful practices, or discrimination against women and girls, ensuring opportunities for participation in leadership and decision-making, ensuring access to reproductive health and rights, and providing equal rights to economic resources, among others.[59] Another Goal, which seeks to ensure women's inclusion, is Goal 4, which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable education for all.[60] The Targets thereunder seek to ensure that by 2030, men and women, boys and girls have equal access to education and skills acquisition needed to promote sustainable development.[61]

3. Institutional Framework

The existence of laws and policies alone does not guarantee gender equality. Their achievement also depends on institutions that coordinate programmes, provide services and ensure that rights and protections are available in practice. Among the important institutions in Nigeria are the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, the Federal Ministry of Justice and the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Their functions are complementary because the protection and empowerment of women involve policy coordination, access to justice and access to health care.

First is the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, which advises the government on gender issues and leads the process of gender equality and mainstreaming.[62] Its mandate includes promoting women's participation in social, economic and political development, addressing discriminatory cultural practices and supporting education and empowerment programmes.[63] It also works with NGOs and development partners on matters affecting women.[64] These functions are important because they seek to ensure that women's concerns are included in national development rather than treated as matters separate from it.[65]

Another important institution is the Federal Ministry of Justice. Through its Sexual and Gender Based Violence Response/Gender Unit, the Ministry provides legal services, supports the prosecution of cases, trains criminal justice actors and coordinates information for monitoring and

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Federal Ministry of Women Affairs. <https://www.womenaffairs.gov.ng> Accessed 18th October 2026.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 'Our Mandate.' <https://www.womenaffairs.gov.ng/mandate> Accessed 18th October 2026.

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reporting.[66] These functions are relevant to gender equality, meaning protecting the rights of both genders, and so where the rights of women are infringed, the Ministry ensures they can find justice. Accordingly, the Ministry's contribution is important to ensuring that violence and discrimination do not prevent women and girls from participating in society.[67]

Going forward is the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. This ministry is responsible for matters concerning the health and social welfare of Nigerians, men and women alike. Through the Family Health Department, it coordinates reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health programmes and provides policy guidance and technical assistance to states and local governments.[68] Its functions also include gender-related health programmes and the elimination of harmful practices that affect the health of women.[69] This is important because gender equality includes access to health information and services. Women and girls need to be able to obtain the care needed to live healthy lives and make informed decisions concerning their health.[70] These institutions cannot achieve their purposes in isolation. Collaboration with state institutions, the justice sector, health services, CSOs and community actors is necessary to connect policy commitments with practical protection and support. Their effectiveness therefore depends on coordination, adequate resources, accessible services and accountability.[71]

1.4 Sustainable Development: Why Gender Equality is essential for its achievement

The importance of gender equality to sustainable development cannot be overemphasised. Gender equality is essential for sustainable development because the socioeconomic and environmental dimensions of development depend on the participation and well-being of people as a whole, both genders together. The United Nations Agenda 2030 recognises that these dimensions are interconnected and that gender equality must be achieved as part of development.[72]

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[66] Federal Ministry of Justice, 'Sexual and Gender Based Violence Response/Gender Unit.' <https://justice.gov.ng/sexual-and-gender-based-violence-response-gender-unit/> Accessed 18th October 2026.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Family Health. <https://www.health.gov.ng/family-health/> Accessed 18th October 2026.
[69] Ibid.
[70] P M Davidson, 'The Health of Women and Girls Determines the Health and WellBeing of Our Modern World: A White Paper from the International Council on Women's Health Issues' *Health Care Women International* [2011] (32) (10) 870-886.
[71] Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, 'FG Intensifies Coordinated Action Against Gender-Based Violence Targets Gaps in Survivor Support' 13 August 2026. <https://fmino.gov.ng/fg-intensifies-coordinated-action-against-gender-based-violence-targets-gaps-in-survivor-support/> Accessed 18th October 2026.
[72] UN (n. 2).

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Discrimination, violence or unequal access to opportunities are therefore barriers to development.[73] Development must enable people of all genders to exercise their rights and contribute to society.[74]

First, gender equality is important for economic sustainability. Equal access to education, employment, finance and productive resources gives women and men the opportunity to develop their abilities and obtain better livelihoods for themselves.[75] The National Gender Policy recognises women's economic empowerment and productivity as important to reducing poverty and supporting national development.[76] Where women are excluded from these opportunities, their capacity to contribute is restricted. It follows that removing such restrictions can strengthen the foundations of inclusive economic development rather than leaving opportunities concentrated in one part of society.[77]

Another important consideration is social sustainability. Sustainable development requires that human dignity, health, education and protection are available to all.[78] Gender-based violence and discriminatory practices arguably undermine these conditions and can prevent women and girls from participating fully in society.[79] Gender equality therefore requires more than not just legal guarantees but also practical access to services, protection and decision-making for both genders.

Going forward, gender equality is relevant to environmental sustainability and climate action. The National Climate Change Policy recognises gender equality and social inclusion as guiding concerns and calls for gender to be mainstreamed into climate interventions.[80] Experts note that girls and women face more vulnerabilities on average from climate change-related issues due to

[73] B S Bako and AsKayode, 'The Dynamics and Intricacies of Gender Discrimination and Development Administration in Nigeria' SSR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences [2025] (2) (5) 181-191.
[74] C C Maduka and A David, 'Gender Mainstreaming as a Tool for Achieving Inclusive National Development ', ResearchGate, 2024.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381311622_GENDER_MAINSTREAMING_AS_A_TOOL_FOR_ACHIEVING_INCLUSIVE_NATIONAL_DEVELOPMENT> Accessed 18th October 2026.
[75] O J Njideka and N L Arinze, 'Enhancing Gender Inclusion in Financial Autonomy of the Female Stereotype in Sustainable Medium and Small Enterprises in Nigeria' *Journal of Management Science and Entrepreneurship* [2023] (2) (2) 229-237.
[76] National Gender Policy 2021–2026 (n. 33).
[77] Ibid.
[78] K A Emina, 'Sustainable Human Development: Issues and Challenges' *PINSI Journal of Art, Humanity and Social Studies* [2023] (3) (4) 272-285.
[79] United Nations Population Fund, 'Gender based violence.' <https://www.unfpa.org/gender-based-violence> Accessed 18th October 2026.
[80] National Climate Change Policy for Nigeria 2021–2030, (n. 33).

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pre-existing social, economic and cultural inequalities.[81] Women's inclusion is therefore important in identifying needs, planning responses and implementing measures to combat climate change.[82] Excluding them from climate action can heighten their vulnerabilities and leave them at increased risk of climate-related health or psychological issues.[83] Gender-responsive climate action seeks to avoid this by ensuring that adaptation and mitigation are inclusive and attentive to the unique circumstances of affected people, both men and women.[84]

Thus, gender equality is a necessary condition that must accompany sound governance, economic opportunities, social protection and environmental stewardship. Its achievement enables men and women to contribute meaningfully to the common purpose of sustainable development.

1.5 State of Gender Equality towards Sustainable Development in Nigeria

As mentioned earlier, Nigeria has laws and policies that promote gender equality, protecting the rights of men and women. The laws and policies considered in this paper indeed recognise the need to protect rights and promote inclusion. More recently, the Nigeria Country Gender Profile and Roadmap to Equality 2030, launched in June 2026, identified priorities concerning governance, legal reform, economic empowerment, education, leadership, services, resilience and social norms.[85] This indicates continued recognition that gender equality must be addressed across national development rather than within one sector alone.[86]

Admittedly, there have also been practical efforts to improve women's access to opportunities in Nigeria. UN Women's Nigeria country results report for 2025 describes support for livelihoods, productive resources and essential services, as well as collaboration with national and state

[81] G Anjum and M Aziz, 'Climate Change and Gendered Vulnerability: A Systematic Review of Women's Health' *Women's Health* [2025] (21) 1–22.
[82] G Liobikene and Others, 'Gender Inclusion in Climate Policy: A Scoping Literature Review' *Sustainability* [2026] (18) (21) 1-24. UN Women, 'Why Women need to be at the heart of Climate Action' (28 June 2024). <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/why-women-need-to-be-at-the-heart-of-climate-action> Accessed 19th October 2026.
[83] Anjum and Aziz (n. 81).
[84] Ibid. UNFCCC, 'Gender and Climate Change Brief for the Adaptation Committee'. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Brief_Gender%20in%20the%20work%20of%20the%20AC.pdf> Accessed 19th October 2026.
[85] African Development Bank, 'African Development Bank, Government of Nigeria and UN Women Launch Gender Profile and Roadmap to Equality 2030 to Advance Inclusive Growth', 7 July 2026. <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/african-development-bank-government-nigeria-and-un-women-launch-gender-profile-and-roadmap-equality-2030-advance-inclusive-growth-95272> Accessed 20th October 2026.
[86] Ibid.

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institutions.[87] Concerning education, UNICEF's 2022 evaluation of the Girls' Education Project Phase 3 in northern Nigeria reported improvements in girls' enrolment and retention and identified community engagement, teacher development and support to households as useful interventions.[88] These experiences show that deliberate programmes can help address exclusion. Through advocacy, several discriminatory practices in Nigeria have been annulled or abolished by Nigeria's judiciary.[89]

However, while these efforts are commendable and girls and women are increasingly gaining more opportunities in Nigeria in education and jobs, gender inequality still largely persists. Women's participation in decision-making remains an important area of disparity. For example, the United Nations Nigeria SDG 5 progress page reports that women held only 4.2% of seats in parliaments in 2026.[90] It further reported that women held 11.1% of elected seats in deliberative bodies of local government in 2023.[91] It also reports that 28.8% of women aged 15–49 made their own informed decisions concerning sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care in 2024.[92] These show that the level of participation of women in decision-making remains low in Nigeria.

Gender-based violence and harmful practices against women also continue to persist greatly in Nigeria.[93] The same United Nations progress page reported that 33.4% of women aged 20–24 in 2024 had married before their eighteenth birthday, while 13.9% of girls and women aged 15–49 had undergone female genital mutilation or cutting.[94] It further reports that 19.6% of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15–49 experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner during the preceding twelve months in 2023.[95] These figures refer to distinct

[87] UN Women, Nigeria Country results 2025. <https://open.unwomen.org/en/country-results/NG> Accessed 20th October 2026.
[88] UNICEF, 'Girls' Education Project Phase 3 in Northern Nigeria Final Evaluation Brief', November 2022. <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/media/7901/file/GEP3%20IN%20NORTHERN%20NIGERIA%20FINAL%20EVALUATION%20BRIEF.pdf> Accessed 20th October 2026.
[89] O J Kehinde and M Abdulraheem, 'Prohibition of Discriminatory Laws and Practices Against Women's Rights in Nigeria' *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Applied Science* [2024] (IX) (XI) 118-119.
[90] United Nations Nigeria, 'SDG 5 progress.' <https://nigeria.un.org/en/sdgs/5/progress> Accessed 20th October 2026.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] A Jimoh, 'Why Gender Violence, Harmful Practices against Women persist in Nigeria – WARDC' *Daily Trust* (17th March 2021). <https://dailytrust.com/why-gender-violence-harmful-practices-against-women-persist-in-nigeria-wardc/> Accessed 21st October 2026. O H Abimbola and Others, 'Gender Discrimination and Harmful Traditional Practices: A Focus on Nigeria' *FUOYE Journal of Criminology and Security Studies* [2024] (3) (2) 106-119.
[94] United Nations Nigeria (n. 90).
[95] Ibid.

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populations and reference periods and should not be combined as a single measure of gender-based violence.[96]

Accordingly, Nigeria's position is not one of an absence of effort, but of uneven or under achievement. Nigeria's laws and policies provide a basis for progress in supporting gender equality towards sustainable development; it is the suboptimal implementation thereof that limits the extent to which the Sustainable Development Goals can be achieved with gender equality at the forefront. To achieve this development, therefore, these commitments translate into wider access to education, economic resources, health services, protection and decision-making. The challenges affecting this translation are considered hereunder.

1.6 Challenges affecting the achievement of Gender Equality in Nigeria towards Sustainable Development

1.6.1 Education and Awareness Gaps

One of the most notable challenges affecting gender equality in Nigeria in the achievement of sustainable development is the presence of education and awareness gaps across Nigeria.[97] While efforts have been made over the years to promote education of the girl child, gaps still remain. In the northern region, where education is poor and where access to information is low, gender equality becomes hard to achieve.[98] This region accounts for the highest concentration of out-of-school girls in the country.[99] UNICEF identifies gender, geography and poverty as important factors in educational marginalisation in Nigeria.[100] It also identifies economic barriers and socio-cultural norms that discourage formal school attendance, especially for girls in northern Nigeria.[101] Limited access to education can restrict opportunities to obtain information about rights and protections.[102] Where access to information and support is limited, women and girls may face

[96] Ibid.
[97] A Z Ngharen and C E Akogwu, 'Gender Equality, Education and Sustainable Development in Nigeria in the 21st Century: An Appraisal' *International Journal of Advanced Studies in Economics and Public Sector Management* [2017] (5) (1) 203-214.
[98] I Abdulganeey, 'Beyond Barriers: Advancing Girl-Child Education in Northern Nigeria' *Journal of Global Research in Education and Social Science* [2025] (19) (4) 89-100.
[99] Ibid.
[100] UNICEF Nigeria, 'Education.' <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/education> Accessed 21st October 2026.
[101] Ibid.
[102] World Health Organization, 'Gender and health'. <https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender> Accessed 21st October 2026).

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additional barriers to identifying abuse and seeking protection.[103] Improved access to education and awareness can strengthen opportunities for women to participate in decision-making, governance, leadership and the economy,[104] all of which are important for achieving sustainable development.

1.6.2 Poverty

Another fundamental challenge that hampers the attainment of gender equality in Nigeria is poverty.[105] Generally, poverty has been a serious economic problem in Nigeria. The National Gender Policy recognises the need to address women's economic empowerment and productivity, including in agricultural and rural development.[106] For women, who are more vulnerable to poverty, its persistence leaves them unable to fend for themselves and their dependents adequately.[107] It also leaves them unable to enforce their human rights, especially since enforcing rights can sometimes come at a financial cost.[108] For women, their vulnerability leaves them at the mercy of people who may exploit their economic vulnerability for sexual favours or subject them to economic and emotional abuse.[109] The persistence of poverty, therefore, can exacerbate gender inequality and impede the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria.

1.6.3 Persistence of Gender Based Violence, Harmful and Discriminatory Cultural Practices

Another important challenge worth considering that fuels gender disparity is the persistence of gender-based violence and harmful and discriminatory cultural practices.[110] Across Nigeria, in different cultures and ethnicities, there are several discriminatory cultural practices and beliefs that women are subjected to.[111] Some of these include child marriage, degrading widowhood practices, wife-beating, female genital mutilation, sexual abuse, and discriminatory denial of inheritance,

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[103] Ibid.
[104] United Nations (n. 2).
[105] O Olabanji, 'Gender Inequality and Poverty Menace: The Challenges of Achieving Shared Prosperity in Nigeria' 3rd International Conference on Gender Research, at the University of Reading, Reading, United Kingdom, 2020.
[106] National Gender Policy 2021–2026.
[107] J B Wilson, 'Women and Poverty: A Demographic Overview' *Women Health* [1987] (12) (3-4) 21-40.
[108] Ibid.
[109] E Sarac and D Odabas, 'Gender-based Economic Violence and the Exploitation of Women: A Deep Dive' *World Journal of Psychiatry* [2025] (15) (3) 1-9.
[110] A J M Alewo and M A Olong, 'Cultural Practices and Traditional Beliefs as Impediments to the Enjoyment of Women's Rights in Nigeria' *International Law Research* [2012] (1) (1) 134-143.
[111] Abimbola (n. 93).

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among others.[112] While some of these have been banned, others are still carried out in various rural communities and even in urban areas across the country.[113]

The United Nations Nigeria SDG 5 progress page reported the persistence of gender-based violence and harmful and discriminatory practices.[114] This does not go well for sustainable development. Human development, an important aspect of social development which itself is a pillar of sustainable development, is premised on the idea that human beings, regardless of gender, have the dignity and respect they deserve equally.[115] This enables them to be functioning members of society, endowing them both with the ability to make a positive impact on society. The persistence of these practices does not allow that. They leave women disadvantaged, subject to abuse, and violence. This fosters gender inequality, and where this persists, the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be fully achieved.

1.6.4 Legal and Institutional Implementation Gaps

This paper has noted that Nigeria has significant legal, policy and institutional frameworks that guarantee gender equality, women empowerment and social inclusion. The frameworks have further recognised that these are essential to achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. However, the current state of gender equality shows that Nigeria still faces implementation gaps. Gender-based violence and harmful cultural practices persist, and women continue to face barriers to protection and inclusion.[116] The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs has identified inconsistent implementation, limited survivor-centred services and the need for adequate financing as important gaps in the response to gender-based violence.[117] Weak coordination, inadequate referral pathways and poor data harmonisation also limit the monitoring and response needed to protect

[112] Ibid. M O Ugwu, 'Traditional/Cultural Practices against Women in Nigeria: The Place of the Law' *African Journal of Constitutional and Administrative Law* [2020] (4) 76-87.
Federal Ministry of Justice, 'FG Calls for Effective Implementation of All Policies Programmes Laws on SGBV', (10 October 2023). <https://justice.gov.ng/fg-calls-for-effective-implementation-of-all-policies-programmes-laws-on-sgbv/> Accessed 21st October 2026.
[113] Ibid.
[114] United Nations (n. 2).
[115] HDRO Outreach, 'What is Human Development?' United Nations Human Development Reports (19th February 2015). <https://hdr.undp.org/content/what-human-development> Accessed 21st October 2026.
[116] Alewo and Olong (n. 110). Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, 'FG Intensifies Coordinated Action Against Gender-Based Violence Targets Gaps in Survivor Support' 13 August 2026. <https://fmino.gov.ng/fg-intensifies-coordinated-action-against-gender-based-violence-targets-gaps-in-survivor-support/> Accessed 21st October 2026.
[117] ibid.

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women and girls.[118] Without sustained implementation, women cannot participate meaningfully in decision-making and in actions aimed at promoting sustainable development.

1.7 Conclusion

This paper underscores that gender equality is crucial for sustainable development. In explaining how, this study noted that in order to achieve sustainable development, both genders must be given an opportunity to work together to achieve it. This is done by eliminating all forms of discrimination between genders, ensuring the equal entitlement and protection of the rights of both men and women and also ensuring that women are given similar opportunities to participate in decision-making processes that are needed for achieving sustainable development. In this paper, it was noted that Nigeria has developed policies and laws that promote gender equality and it is also a party to international treaties that guarantee the empowerment of women and social inclusivity.

The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs coordinates actions concerning development, empowerment and protection of women. Through collaborations with NGOs and CSOs, efforts are being made to protect women, providing education and empowerment for women, thereby reducing inequality and promoting sustainable development. However, challenges lie. The persistence of harmful cultural practices, poverty, legal and institutional implementation gaps as well as awareness gaps continue to limit the extent to which gender equality can be achieved in Nigeria towards sustainable development. This paper therefore concludes that while efforts are being made, so much more needs to be done to not only achieve gender equality but to also ensure its place in achieving sustainable development.

1.8 Recommendations

In order to mainstream gender equality for sustainable development in Nigeria, the following recommendations are provided.

1.8.1 Promote increased collaboration between the government and CSOs in access to protection, justice and the empowerment of girls and women

It is recommended that the government through relevant ministries and institutions discussed in this study collaborate and work with CSOs and NGOs to increase access to protection, health care,

[118] Ibid.

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justice and empowerment of girls and women. These can be done through financial grants for the establishment of businesses, providing access to legal aid in cases of infringement of human rights and adequate healthcare services.

1.8.2 Investment in awareness and knowledge of human rights

One of the challenges this paper noted that has hindered the achievement of gender equality in Nigeria as an essential part of sustainable development is the awareness gaps and limited knowledge of human rights or, more accurately, girls' and women's rights. This is the case across rural areas, semi-urban areas and even most urban areas across Nigeria. This lack of awareness prevents women in actively participating in the fight against climate change, in enforcing their rights and in promoting sustainable development. This paper therefore recommends that increased investments in awareness be made by the government. This can be done through nationwide awareness programmes, radio and TV talk shows, parliamentary sessions with public viewership, conferences within and outside rural areas, engagement with community, cultural and religious leaders as well as in educational institutions at all levels.

1.8.3 Investment in education and skills acquisition

Closely related to improving awareness levels and empowerment for women is investment in education and skill acquisition for both men and women. In order to achieve gender equality, both men and women, boys and girls, must be fully educated and given the skill set needed to thrive in society and contribute meaningfully to achieving sustainable development. The laws and policies in place provide for the rights to education and work for both men and women. While female education and ability to work have improved over the decades, more work needs to be done. For both men and women, investments in primary, secondary and tertiary education need to be carried out and this can be done through scholarships, education funds or free education at various or all levels. Concerning skill acquisition, increased investments should also be made in equipping women with the right skills needed for them to have a legitimate source of income and an improved livelihood. This can also be done through workshops, internship opportunities for all and skill acquisition programmes. This promotes financial independence in women, thereby freeing them from economic abuse and allowing them to contribute financially in actions that promote sustainable development.

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1.8.4 Eliminate discriminatory and harmful cultural beliefs and practices

A final recommendation, which is one of the most essential, is eliminating, practically, all discriminatory and harmful cultural beliefs and practices. It is therefore recommended that the government, together with the judicial systems, law enforcement agencies and CSOs, take committed steps and make widespread concerted efforts to root out and eliminate all of these practices, especially at the rural levels. Harmful and discriminatory acts must be documented and addressed through lawful prevention, protection and enforcement measures. Discriminatory beliefs should also be challenged through education and community engagement. Eliminating these beliefs and practices protects the dignity of the woman as a human being and ensures that she is treated with respect.

In all, these recommendations, if implemented, will promote gender equality on a positive scale, ensuring that both men and women can contribute meaningfully and effectively to sustainable development for Nigeria.

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Authors: QUEEN JAMES EZEKIEL-HART

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