Citizens' Perception on Gender Equity and Inclusion in Nigeria: Evidence from the 2024 National Social Cohesion Survey

K.A. Sunmola[1]

Abstract

Gender and social inclusion are key components of Nigeria's pursuit of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, especially SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). This study examined citizens' perception on gender equity in education, politics, and family inheritance. Federal Government efforts in promoting gender equality in Nigeria were rated, and gender equity in education across Southern and Northern Nigeria was equally examined. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design. The study population include all Nigerians aged 15 years and above. A sample size of 5,465 citizens was pooled from 36 States, including FCT. Descriptive and inferential analyses were

1. Department of Gender and Development Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria; Department of Demography and Social Statistics, Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria; adebayo.sunmola@eksu.edu.ng; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4314-6619

performed in line with study objectives using SPSS version 27. A substantial proportion, 87% of males and 88% of female Nigerian citizens, agreed and strongly agreed that boys and girls should have equal access to education. There is a significant difference (p < 0.001) between Northern and Southern Nigeria regarding the accessibility of boys and girls to education. Region-specific intervention is needed to achieve uniform progress towards gender and social inclusion. There is a need for increased policy enforcement and monitoring to ensure that the principle of educational equality is well established in all parts of Nigeria.

Keywords: Citizens' Perception, Gender Equity and Inclusion, National Social Cohesion Survey

Background

Gender equity and inclusion have emerged as central themes in Nigeria's developmental discourse, reflecting both domestic imperatives and international commitments to justice and equality. Despite progressive frameworks such as the National Gender Policy (2006) and Nigeria's endorsement of Sustainable Development Goal 5, gender disparities remain deeply entrenched in political representation, labour participation, and access to education and healthcare (Ajah et al., 2025; Oki, 2025). Scholars argue that gender equity is not only a human-rights objective but also a structural condition for achieving social cohesion and sustainable governance (Orole, McKenna, & Härtel, 2025).

Across sub-Saharan Africa, the pursuit of inclusion has become integral to democratic consolidation and conflict reduction. Research indicates that societies with higher gender parity demonstrate stronger community trust and reduced social fragmentation (Gloria, 2025; Igbashangev, 2025). Within Nigeria, however, cultural hierarchies and patriarchal norms continue to restrict women's agency and civic engagement (Ogonegbu, 2025). Studies show that political and economic exclusion reinforces horizontal inequalities, undermining citizens' perceptions of fairness and belonging (Besong & Matthew, 2025).

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Empirical findings suggest that education and institutional inclusion policies can moderate these inequalities. Bibot and Ibrahim (2025) observed that gender-sensitive educational reforms foster civic tolerance and improve social relations among the youths. Similarly, Ajah, Morojele, and Phokojoe (2025) contend that gender-inclusive health and crime policies strengthen national unity by addressing structural inequities in service delivery. Nonetheless, as John Elijah and Ekong (2025) highlight, effective mainstreaming of gender in governance remains inconsistent and largely symbolic, revealing a persistent implementation gap.

The theoretical foundation for this study is grounded in Social Identity Theory and Gender Role Theory, which posit that perceptions of equity shape intergroup relations and national cohesion. When citizens perceive fairness and representation across gender lines, they are more likely to trust institutions and participate constructively in collective life (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Conversely, perceived exclusion can erode civic trust and fuel social fragmentation (Ajah et al., 2025).

Given these dynamics, examining how Nigerians perceive gender equity and inclusion provides timely insight into the broader structure of national cohesion. The 2024 National Social Cohesion Survey, with its large and representative sample, offers an empirical basis to assess these perceptions across demographics and regions. This study examined citizens' perception of gender equity in education, politics, and family inheritance. The Federal Government efforts in promoting gender equality in Nigeria were rated and gender equity in education across Southern and Northern Nigeria was equally examined.

Methodology
The study employed a cross-sectional survey design. The study population include all individuals who were aged 15 years and above. This population group constitutes over 50 percent of Nigeria's population. A sample of 5,465 citizens was pooled from 36 states, including the Federal Capital Territory. All states and senatorial districts in Nigeria were proportionately represented in the survey.

Approval for the use of the dataset was sought for from Africa Polling Institute, which is based in the Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria. The

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research agency is one of the leading polling research agencies in Nigeria. In order to ensure data quality, data was collected using KoboCollect. Data cleaning and recoding were performed before the commencement of data analysis. Descriptive and inferential analysis were performed in line with study objectives using SPSS version 27. Descriptive analysis was done using bar charts, frequency counts and percentages. At the bivariate stage, an Independent T-test was performed to compare the mean difference of boys and girls on equitable access to education between Northern and Southern Nigeria.

Results
The socio-demographic distribution of respondents reveals the type of participants across various background factors. The total sample size consisted of 5,465 respondents, with a relatively equal gender distribution of 51% male (2,787) and 49% female (2,678). This implies that both sexes are almost equally represented within the study. In terms of marital status, 62% were married, 32% were single, 4% were widowed, and 2% divorced or separated. This indicates that the sample consisted of more people with family obligations, which would affect how they perceive gender roles and equity.

On religion, the data reveal that Christians predominated as the largest percentage (56%), and they were followed by Muslims (43%), while a mere 1% identified with traditional or other religions. This is a reflection of religious diversity in Nigeria, but also a manifestation of Christian-Muslim domination of the country. Ethnic origin was examined, which provided a heterogeneous representation. The Hausa ethnic group accounted for the largest proportion of respondents (31%), followed by Yoruba (20%), Igbo (18%), and others (31%). It indicates that all significant Nigerian ethnic groups were represented in the sample, reflecting inclusiveness and representativeness of the sample at the national level.

Age-wise, the majority of the respondents were in the 25-34 years age group (33%), followed by the 35-44 years age group (30%). Respondents from the 15-24 years age bracket made up 14%, from the 45-54 years age bracket 17%, while those above 55 years were only 6%. Such a pattern suggests that the sample population in the study was dominated by young

and middle-aged adults, who are normally regarded as economically and socially most active groups.

By level of education, nearly half of the respondents (45%) were at the secondary level, while 30% were at the tertiary level. Again, 14% were at the primary level, 6% reported informal education, and 5% reported no formal education. This implies that the majority of the respondents were educated and had attained at least secondary education, thus improving the validity of their gender equity and inclusion responses. As for the average monthly income, the majority of the respondents (42%) earned below #70,000, followed by 31%, who earned #70,001–#100,000. About 20% earned #100,001–#200,000, with proportionately lower percentages earning #200,001–#300,000 (6%), #300,001–#400,000 (1%), #400,001–#500,000 (0.1%), and above #500,000 (0.0%). This breakdown shows that the majority of the respondents belong to the lower to middle-income classes, reflecting the overall economic condition in Nigeria.

Finally, the geopolitical distribution reflects an even national representation in which all six zones had respondents. Most represented was North West with 25%, followed by South West with 20%. The North Central and South South had 15% apiece, while North East had 14% and South East 11%. This spread captures the representativeness of the research across Nigeria's different regions to facilitate a comparative study of experiences and perceptions across geopolitical zones.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Item/variable	Category	Frequency (N= 5,465)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	2,787	51.0
	Female	2,678	49.0
Marital Status	Single	1,741	32.0
	Married	3,413	62.0
	Widowed	200	4.0
	Divorced/Separated	111	2.0
Religion	Christian	3,064	56.0
	Muslim	2,322	43.0
	Traditional/Others	55	1.0

Ethnic group	Yoruba	1,095	20.0
	Hausa	1,679	31.0
	Igbo	986	18.0
	Others	1,706	31.0
Age (in years)	15-24	781	14.0
	25-34	1,784	33.0
	35-44	1,641	30.0
	45-54	934	17.0
	55 and above	325	6.0
Highest Education	No formal education	252	5.0
	Informal education	325	6.0
	Completed Primary School	746	14.0
	Completed Secondary School	2,516	45.0
	Completed Tertiary School	1,626	30.0
Average monthly income (in #)	Less than N70,000	2,008	42.0
	#70,001-#100,000	1,516	31.0
	#100,001-#200,000	979	20.0
	#200,001-#300,000	306	6.0
	#300,001-#400,000	66	1.0
	#400,001-#500,000	23	0.1
	Above #500,000	13	0.0
Geo-political zone	North Central	826	15.0
	North East	742	14.0
	North West	1,382	25.0
	South East	620	11.0
	South South	814	15.0
	South West	1,081	20.0

Source: 2024 National Social Cohesion Survey

Objective One: Examine the Perceptions of Nigerians on gender equity in education for boys and girls
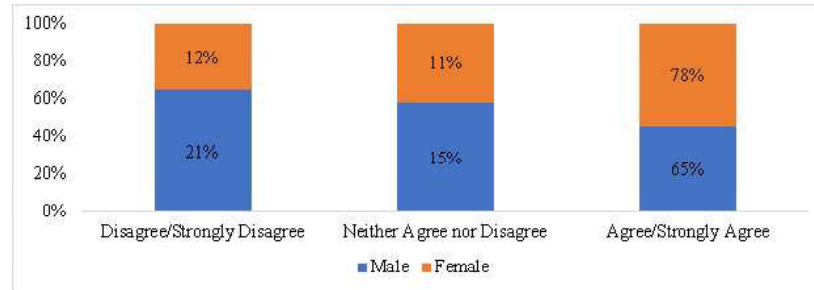
Figure 1: Perception of Nigerians on gender equity on education for boys and girls
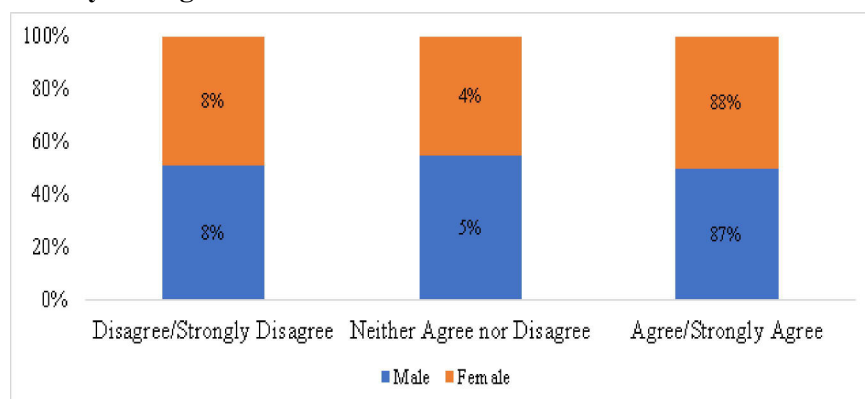
Source: 2024 National Social Cohesion Survey

Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents' perception on gender equity access to education for boys and girls. A substantial proportion, 87% of males and 88% of female Nigerian citizens, agreed and strongly agreed that boys and girls should have equal access to education.

Figure 2: Perception of Nigerians towards men and women having equal access to lead in all, especially in society, corporate entities, and politics

Source: *2024 National Social Cohesion Survey*

Figure 2 shows the distribution of Nigerians on their perception towards men and women having equal access to lead in all, especially in society, corporate entities, and politics. The analysis revealed that more respondents, 65% of males and 78% of females, agreed and strongly agreed that men and women should have equal access to lead in the society, corporate entities and politics.

Figure 3: Perception of Nigerians on equitable access for men and women on entitlement to family inheritances

Source: *2024 National Social Cohesion Survey*

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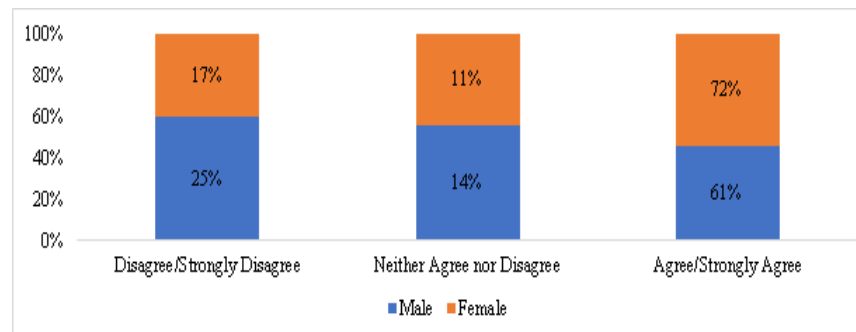
The figure above showed that 36% of males and 42% of female Nigerians rated the effort of the Federal Government very poor and poor at promoting gender equity in the country. This was followed by 37% of males and 29% of females who rated the Federal Government fair.

Objective Three: Comparing the difference of means between Northern and Southern Nigeria on equitable access to education of boys and girls

Table 2.1: T-test Analysis Comparing the difference of means between Northern and Southern Nigeria on equitable access to education of boys and girls

Item/Variable	Geo-political zones	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Boys and girls have equal access to education	Northern Nigeria	2950	4.12	1.071	0.020
	Southern Nigeria	2515	4.46	0.859	0.017

Source: *2024 National Social Cohesion Survey*

For Northern Nigeria, the standard deviation is 1.071 and the standard error is 0.020 with a mean of 4.12. The mean value corroborates that, on average, the respondents in the North believe that both girls and boys are given access to education. But the relatively higher standard deviation (1.071) indicates that there is more variation in the opinion of the respondents in this region, while some strongly agree, there are others who still disagree. This would suggest that although the impression of gender equality in education is favourable in the North, not all respondents see it to the same extent, perhaps due to regional, cultural, or religious diversity that still affects gender norms. On the other hand, the mean score is higher at 4.46 for the Southerners, with a standard deviation of 0.859 and a standard error of 0.017. The result indicates stronger and more consensus agreement among the Southerners that girls and boys enjoy equal access to education. The lower standard deviation implies the Southerners' views are more

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homogenous, meaning, a majority of the respondents strongly agree with the statement.

Comparing the two regions, the Southern region is more positively inclined towards gender equity in education than the Northern region. The fact that the mean is greater (4.46 > 4.12) shows that the individuals of Southern Nigeria more strongly feel that boys and girls are given equal opportunities in education. This regional difference aligns with the literature demonstrating that the South tends to have higher female enrolment rates, less gendered cultural restrictions, and greater development of education infrastructures compared to the North (UNESCO, 2022; Olanrewaju et al., 2023).

Briefly stated, while both regions exhibit general agreement that boys and girls should have equal access to education, the Southern respondents believe more intensely and more consistently in this equality. Differences in socio-cultural practice, religious orientation, and policy effectiveness between Nigeria's North and South may be responsible for the variation in perception.

Table 2.2: T-test Analysis Comparing Difference of means between Northern and Southern Nigeria on equitable access to education of boys and girls

		Equality of variance							95% Confidence Interval	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Boys and girls should have access to education	Equal variances assumed	29.017	0.000	-12.885	5463	0.000	-0.342	0.027	-0.394	-0.290
	Equal variances not assumed			-13.110	5443.068	0.000	-0.342	0.026	-0.393	-0.291

Source: 2024 National Social Cohesion Survey

The Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, which tests whether the spread of responses across the two groups is homogeneous, resulted in an F-statistic of 29.017 and a significance value (Sig.) of 0.000. Since the p-value is not greater than 0.05, it indicates that the assumption of equal

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variances holds not. That is, the scope of opinions among respondents across the two areas is significantly different. Hence, the interpretation relies on the second row of the table with the heading "Equal variances not assumed."

Under this assumption, here the t-test value is $t = -13.110$ with degrees of freedom (df) = 5443.068 and a two-tailed significance value (Sig.) = 0.000. This p-value, being less than 0.001, confirms that there exists statistically significant difference between the respondents from the South and the North's mean perception regarding equal access to education between boys and girls. The difference in means of -0.342 indicates that Northern Nigerian respondents provided lower agreement levels compared to the Southern Nigerian respondents. The 95% interval of -0.393 to -0.291 excludes zero, confirming that the difference between the two means is not a result of random fluctuation but actual regional variance.

The significance of this conclusion is that while both groups subscribe to a general ideology about equal education, people in Southern Nigeria exhibit an increasingly consistent belief that boys and girls should be afforded equal chances of education. The lower North mean score reflects the reality that attitudes are changing, but religious, cultural, and traditional aspects still influence perceptions of gender in education. This is in line with the above-cited descriptive findings where the South recorded a higher mean (4.46) compared to the North (4.12) and earlier research that highlights regional variations in gender-linked attitudes and opportunities in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

This study draws on the 2024 National Social Cohesion Survey and examined citizens' perceptions regarding equity and inclusion in gender issues across Nigeria. The study was guided by Social Identity Theory and Gender Role Theory, hence considering three dimensions of analysis: namely, citizens' perceptions about gender equity in educational opportunities; evaluation of federal government efforts toward ensuring gender equality; and regional differences between Northern and Southern Nigeria with regard to equitable access to education for boys and girls. These findings reveal that Nigerians generally have a positive disposition towards gender equality, especially in education, while regional disparities and scepticism toward government interventions suggest structural and cultural barriers remain. These outcomes

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underscore the dynamic tension between evolving social attitudes and enduring institutional and cultural constraints.

Perceptions of Gender Equity in Education

The findings indicate that 87% and 88% of males and females, respectively, agreed or strongly agreed that boys and girls should be treated equally in terms of educational opportunities. Such a high percentage reveals a certain acceptance by society at large towards educational equality as a new normal. This finding confirms previous research where Nigerians' attitudes towards educational equality between genders have been observed to steadily change for the better because of heightened awareness and campaigns by the international community (Bibot and Ibrahim, 2025; UNESCO, 2022). Such a high acceptance towards equality in educational opportunities can be attributed to the spread of progressive ideals by media and civic education initiatives, which have managed to peg education as a universal human right rather than a matter of gender.

From a Gender Role theory point of view, what these results portray is a steady shift in role definitions, such that the historic Female Gender Role dictating that education was a male domain is being slowly replaced with these revised definitions. As the cultural stories around gender roles are refocused, it has become common knowledge for men and women to see the importance of female education not merely for its power to transform individuals but for its ability to transform the socio-economic makeup of society at large. Education has literally become a battle-ground where gender roles are being redefined (Ogonegbu, 2025). Social Identity Theory gives us a meaningful way to interpret such a shift that is occurring in societal attitudes towards education as a common identity marker, as a result of which people start to recognise greater accessibility as a tool for fostering greater societal oneness in collective progress (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The considerable acceptance of gender equity in education is also a consequence of the collective efforts of the national policies in the country. Although there have been disparities in the past, the successive governments in the country recognise the gender main-sourcing approach in the National Gender Policy (2006) and the Universal Basic Education Act (2004), thereby advancing girls' education. In most cases, however, the adaptation in gender

equity in education faces obstacles at the communal level, wherein the patriarchal tradition and socio-religious values shape the decision on educational discretion (Ajah, Morojele, & Phokojoe, 2025). In this respect, the findings in this investigation demonstrate a challenge in the adaptation and implementation of gender equity in education.

Citizens' Perception of Government Efforts toward Gender Equity

Findings from the perceived effectiveness of federal government interventions suggest that between 36% of males and 42% of females perceived government interventions as poor/very poor, while a total of 33% to 37% for each group perceived interventions as fair. The pattern suggests moderate to low-level government commitment to gender equity in a manner that aligns with previous assertions that government gender initiatives in a country like Nigeria are fraught with government policy fragmentation, absence of enforcement, as well as a lack of appropriation (John Elijah & Ekong, 2025; Oki, 2025). The perceived government failure could also be attributed to a lack of visibility in gender equity in political leadership as well as in corporations (Ajah et al., 2025).

Theoretically, this finding resonates with Social Identity Theory's emphasis on perceived fairness and institutional legitimacy as motors of social cohesion. Where citizens experience inequity within either governmental activity or within their representation, it serves to weaken their confidence in public institutions and subsequently weakens the bonds of integration within the societies of which they are a part. The results thus indicate a type of "perceived institutional exclusion," wherein citizens acknowledge the normative relevance of gender equality but view state practice with scepticism.

A perspective of Gender Role Theory on the matter can further illustrate the gap in trust towards government efforts. On the one hand, progressive legislation is in place, but the associated implementation systems are designed in a way influenced by a masculine-led administrative environment, thereby leading to a subtle form of exclusion on this account. For instance, women's participation in government or management continues to be challenged by patronage networks and a gender view where governance is associated with the male gender (Gloria, 2025). Therefore, the community embraces

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the aspect of gender equality in general, but a deficiency in government performance is recognised.

Regional Variations: North–South Differences in Gender Equity Perception

The comparison test between the North and the Southern regions of Nigeria has shown a statistically significant difference in mean perception scores, confirming that Southerners are more inclined to gender equity in education than people from the North. Notably, this finding is consistent with existing regional disparities, not only in Nigeria but globally, based on various surveys and data on education (Olanrewaju et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2022). The higher level of gender equity advocacy from the Southern regions may be associated with a higher female literacy level, urbanisation, and an openness to liberal socio-religious attitudes.

These social realities reflect Gender Role Theory, which argues that understandings of gender are socially constructed and perpetuated through social learning. In Northern Nigeria, the cultural practices of early marriage, economic necessity, and socially defined gender roles have meant inadequate education for girls (Bibot & Ibrahim, 2025). Conversely, the relatively more developed South, through more exposure to global cultures' definitions of womanhood, have enabled the reshaping of the social role of women.

Social Identity Theory explains these differences in more depth: people define their social identity through group memberships, and if these groups subscribe to traditional views of social hierarchy, then these social identities are internalised in the form of collective self-concept. Thus, regional identities can be both facilitators and inhibitors of gender equality depending on the dominant social narrative (Ajah et al., 2025). These North–South differences in gender perceptions are, therefore, an indicator of the role of social identity in shaping perceptions of fairness.

Theoretical Implications

The results confirm and also extend both Social Identity Theory and Gender Role Theory in the Nigerian situation. First, the results confirm that people's ideas about gender equity are part of a bigger identity matrix that shapes their levels of social trust and unity. For people to feel greater levels of

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affiliation and national identity when there is equity in access to education and leadership, it confirms Tajfel and Turner's claim that greater feelings of intergroup unity will only exist where there is a perception of equity and inclusivity in the broader social structure.

The second contribution of the paper is to the Gender Role Theory by highlighting how modernisation and education are reconfiguring gender roles in a modern Nigerian society. The mass public acceptance of education equity serves to prove that traditional gender roles are fluid, not permanent, but change with exposure to new social significance and structural predispositions. However, the enduring regional differences suggest that for a structural change in gender roles, a good deal more than policy changes is required; deep cultural re-orientation and intergenerational value changes are necessary.

Policy Implications
The policy implications of these results are multidimensional. First, it is clear that there is an imperative need for context-driven policy intervention. The North-South differential in estimation necessitates localised initiatives, including the use of religious and cultural leadership in supporting women's education in particular, as it is perceived. In addition, community participation in intervention plans would assist in aligning cultural minds with gender equity, hence lessening resistance. Moreover, taking into consideration the low level of confidence in government performance, it indicates that gender frameworks need enhanced monitoring mechanisms. There is an imperative need to shift policy performance from commitment to results by using gender-responsive budgeting practices.

In addition, public awareness and civic education promoting of non-discriminatory societal attitudes need to be incessantly pursued. The great acceptance of educational equality among the populace allows policymakers to tap into accumulated goodwill when trying to deal with other aspects of gender inequality, including leadership and economic involvement. Civil society organisations are also valuable in closing the gap between policy and practice through compliance monitoring and demands for accountability. Nigeria will move from policy rhetoric to actual gender inclusion through multi-level collaboration among its government, academia, and non-governmental actors.

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Conclusion

On the basis of the results, it can be concluded that the issue of gender equity in Nigeria has transformed from mere discussion to social acceptability but has not yet achieved full structural incorporation. Nigerians have accepted the notion of having an equal status in society, but they have reservations about the ability of their government to fully deliver it. Regional variations clearly establish the need to develop context-driven strategies to overcome social and cultural hindrances, especially within the Northern regions. Again, it can be reaffirmed that the issue of gender equity not only stands out as an emblem of social justice but also serves as a catalyst for building national unity and compounded growth.

Recommendations

From the findings that emerge above, there is evidence of both progress and outstanding challenges in Nigeria's efforts at achieving gender equity and inclusion. It is upon this background that several recommendations emerge for improved gender-responsive governance and for enhancing social cohesion in Nigeria.

First, policy primarily needs to focus on being more context-driven and culturally responsive. There is enough diversity in the way the issue has been received in the Southern and Northern parts of Nigeria to reveal that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to gender policy. Relevant government departments need to work out targeted public awareness programmes that take into consideration the specific cultural, religious, and economic imperatives that apply in the region. For the Northern regions of Nigeria, where the acceptance level of gender equality has been relatively low, community outreach programmes that involve working in consultation with regional rulers, religious imams, as well as women's associations, should be the focus.

Second, there is a need for enhancement in terms of institutional accountability and implementation. The view that the government is inefficient in pursuing gender equity highlights the need for monitoring, evaluation, and implementation frameworks. Ministries, departments, and agencies should focus on gender budgeting initiatives as well as set performance measures for advancement in educational, political, and public service participation.

Besides, enhancing collaboration among ministries will ensure that gender equity is incorporated into all spheres, including education, labour, health, and politics.

Thirdly, education remains the most potent driver of gender transformation. The study portrays overwhelming public support for equal educational opportunities for boys and girls-a fertile ground for deeper investment in girls' education. Government at all levels should pour more funds into female scholarship schemes, programmes aimed at ensuring safe learning environments, and digital inclusion initiatives to ensure that educational parity is kept going beyond mere policy declarations. Expanding access to quality education among girls, especially in rural areas, would be highly instrumental not only for the quest for gender equity but also for long-term national development and social stability.

In addition to this, the programmes associated with civic education as well as public sensitisation should be strengthened to promote social attitudes supporting gender equality. Public institutions, the media, as well as civil society organisations, can work together to promote messages countering stereotypes while encouraging the contributions of women to the country's development. Education can thereby be supplemented through endeavours to transform social attitudes.

Finally, cooperation among key stakeholders is essential for sustainable gender inclusion. The Nigerian government can collaborate with civil society, international bodies, research institutions, as well as social networks, to ensure that national gender policy is realised at a local level. It is essential that these collaborations be underpinned by tenets of transparency, participation, and feedback for themselves, so that what happens aligns with Nigerian realities.

Acknowledgement

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