



## Are Women Prejudiced Against Themselves? Journalists' Advocacy for Gender Inclusiveness for Improved Food Security

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### ABSTRACT

In Nigeria and indeed other less developed nations, women play an invaluable role in an effort towards ensuring food security. A greater percentage of farmers especially at the subsistence levels are women. Despite the patriarchal system that places them in a disadvantaged position, they toil to feed their families and indeed, the nation. Unfortunately, hardly is this role recognized as they suffer different forms of marginalization in the society they invest so much to feed. As they struggle to emancipate themselves from the patriarchal system that derails their potentials towards food security, they face different forms of blackmail. It is common to hear comments such as "Women do not love themselves" "Women are enemies to themselves," "Women hate themselves," "Women prefer to be men," "Women do not support fellow women," etc. The findings according to views expressed through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with selected women leaders from 14 Local Government Areas in the state show that arriving at such a conclusion remains a fallacy aimed at blackmailing women. The findings presented through the explanation building techniques show that those assertions are defense mechanisms put up by men to shift the blame of the patriarchal system to women to either dwarf or derail the efforts of female gender advocates fighting for gender equality. The authors therefore recommended an intensified media campaign to counter this false narration and the recognition of the substantial efforts of women towards food security in different societies.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In different parts of the world especially in Third World nations, women are at the base of the family system, bearing most of the family burden. They engage in agricultural activities especially at the subsistence level to ensure that the basic needs of the family are adequately take care of. Despite these efforts of women, in different climes, they are subjected to different forms of discrimination by the society they toil to feed. This discrimination transcends all fields of human endeavours; be it in the homes, employment, places of work, educational institutions, religious organizations, political parties etc.

The social system promotes patriarchal societies where women play the second fiddle and the males are the “kings.” In these societies, different phrases such as the weaker sex, the helper etc are used to identify women. Right from birth, they (women) are brainwashed and made to believe that they are not and cannot be equal to men. They are made to believe that’s how both God and nature destined it. They see it as their lot and anyone who opposes that is seen as a social deviant. But, with time, events in different spheres of life have shown that despite the physical attributes, the difference between males and females are minimal as women have demonstrated excellence in different fields. Seen that if given the opportunity, women would excel, some women, in different parts of the world organized themselves and started to champion the cause of their fellow women who suffer different forms of marginalization. That formed the basis of feminism and the feminist movements.

In most societies, even where women have some legal rights, men still see themselves as superior to women. To this class of men, women are inferior beings that should always subject themselves to the authorities of men. That explains why they often ask questions such as: “Don’t you know I am a man” or “Are you not a woman” whenever they want to assert their imagined superiority or express their male chauvinism. These men, no doubt are biased and victims of their self-imposed superiority complex. Though at times, they may be Christians or adherents to other religions, they fail to realize that the Bible tells us that God created all beings (male and female) in his own image (Agbanu and Ezekwelu, 2024). Also, various international conventions and constitutions of various nations harp on gender equality. The constitution of different nations, international laws, conventions and treaties harp on this equality of mankind irrespective of sex or other differences. In view of these provisions, the 6th GMMP (2020, p.42) says that “gender equality is first and foremost a human rights issue” while Anusi (2024) states that it is “a fundamental human right and a necessary condition for building inclusive human relations.”

As the feminist movements grow in different parts of the world, men are fighting back and shifting the blame on women. In Nigeria, it is common to hear comments such as - “Women are enemies to themselves,” “women hate themselves,” “Women are the architect of their own fate,” “women do not support fellow women,” women do not love themselves” etc. These comments have to an extent gained acceptance in some places and some people, especially men have accepted them to be the truth. But the question is: Is that the truth? Do women also believe they are prejudiced against themselves? If the males are

said to be biased, what do the women think of themselves? Do they consciously or unconsciously consider their own sex inferior? And, if so, does this belief prejudice them against other women - that is, make them view women as less competent than men or wish to be men?

### **Problem Statement and the Allegations**

To justify the marginalization of women in various communities, men often allege that in most cases, women marginalize or are prejudiced against themselves. In doing this, they level different allegations against women. Some of these allegations are that women prefer to be men, that women do not vote for female candidates during elections, that women prefer to work under male bosses, that women celebrate the birth of a male child more than the birth of a female child and that women are mobilized to fight fellow women. To either buttress or refute these allegations form the general objective of this study. Some of these allegations are hereby discussed:

#### **Women Prefer to be Men**

In some traditional Igbo societies, especially in Anambra State, Nigeria where this study is situated, it is common to see women simulate male/female relationship as they call their fellow women "my wife." By this, the former is elevating herself to the position of a man (husband) and placing the other woman in the position of a wife. Normally, the joke may not end there as the "masculine women" may proceed to tease "his wife" with such statements as: "I will take care of your needs," "I hope you have prepared my meal? etc. All these women both married and unmarried love to place themselves in the position of an imaginary "superior" man while placing their fellow women in the position of an "inferior" women expected to attend to them (their simulated husbands). In doing this, they are simply passing a message – the superiority of males and the inferiority of women which they try to dramatize or simulate or better put, that they prefer to be men.

#### **Women Prefer to Work Under Male Bosses**

It is alleged that women hardly have cordial relationship with fellow women or respect fellow women therefore prefer to work under a male boss. This is because they do not want to be "bossed" by their fellow women. Hardly do they appreciate or respect themselves.

#### **Women Mocking Fellow Women without Male Child**

In some traditional African societies, people still talk of male child preference. Unfortunately, it is alleged that it is the women that celebrate the birth of a male child more and mock fellow women without a male child. In any family where there is a woman without a male child, it is often her fellow woman that reminds her of her condition; that her stay in the family is not yet rooted.

### **Women do Not Vote for Female Candidates**

Because of the low presence of women in elective positions and considering that many women vote during elections, it is alleged that women do not vote for female candidates since only very few of them are elected. Before every election, the clamor will reach the rooftop but the reverse is always the case on election days despite the numerical strength of women. If the women that are always on the queue support female aspirants, the story would have changed long ago. The sad commentary is that they have always failed to do so. For reasons best known to them, they have always supported male political aspirants against their fellow women.

### **Women are Mobilized to Fight Fellow Women**

In many communities, women are mobilized to work against their fellow women. For instance, when a woman is seen to have gone against the culture of her people, the men usually instigate and mobilize the women who then “punish” and humiliate their fellow woman. They are often used as tools against themselves. So, while women complain of prejudice and marginalization, they should look inwards and cooperate among themselves. It is only when they work in unity and unison that result will be achieved.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to ascertain whether women are actually prejudiced against themselves while the specific objectives are to ascertain the validity of the allegations against women. These are to ascertain if women too believe that women do not love themselves, if they do not like to vote fellow women during elections, if women prefer male children, if women prefer to work under male bosses and, if women are mobilized to fight fellow women. Research questions were raised based on these objectives. The research questions are: Do Women Ignore Female Candidates? Do Women Prefer to Work Under Male Bosses? Do Women Prefer Male Children? Do Women Prefer to Be Men? and, Are Women Mobilized Against Fellow Women?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Conceptual Clarification**

The word “Gender” refers to the socially and culturally constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a particular society or culture consider appropriate for men and women. It is different from sex which is a biological attribute of being either male or female. “Woman,” singular form of women denoted a female human being, a grown-up girl often married and with children. In this work, it is connotatively used to mean all females irrespective of age, social or marital status. The word “prejudice” means to form an unfavourable opinion or feeling about a person or a group of people. While prejudice has to do with attitude, discrimination refers to actions toward someone or a group. People still have different forms of prejudice and/or discrimination against the opposite sex. Food security on the other hand refers to a situation where people have access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs for an active and healthy life. In Nigeria, for

instance food security has become a mirage despite efforts made by different governments to ensure that the people have enough to eat. It is believed that more will be achieved towards the attainment of food security if there is gender inclusiveness. A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report published in 2023 indicates that there is no country in the world where there is gender equality. The survey, conducted in 80 countries shows that about 90 percent of people (males and females) still hold some sort of biases against women (Ahmed 2023). This has detailed development and the attainment of food security in different parts of the world. It is unfortunate that in this 21st Century, bias against women is still as entrenched as it was decades ago. Despite this general feelings and attitude against women, the question then is: What do women think of themselves? Are they also prejudiced against themselves?

### **Women in Development**

The term development in the context of this discourse connotes quantitative and qualitative improvement in the life of an individual or the nation. At the individual level, it focuses on bringing about improved life and wellbeing in the living standard of members of the society (Duru, 2014) while at the national level, it is the progress made by a country in every aspect of life. There is no form of development that can take place in the absence of food security. It is only when the people feed well and are healthy that they can contribute to the development process. Development brings in positive change and cannot take place without human efforts. That is why the people are at the centre of every development effort or process because they initiate the process and are the beneficiary of the end product of every development effort.

Women in development on the other hand is an approach to development that focuses on the role women play in both the economic and social developments. It emphasizes the need to address gender inequality to enhance the participation of women in all aspects of development (Agbanu and Ezekwelu, 2023). Women in development gained global attention in view of the concern that development efforts were not adequately addressing the needs and contributions of women despite the fact that they are the nucleus of all development efforts starting from the family where they cater for the needs of virtually everyone. Any social development without the integration and utilization of women is flawed from the start and bound to fail (Ndolo, 2011). To avoid this, there is the need for the inclusion of women in development planning and decision making as well as designing policies and programmes that address the specific needs and rights of women. This is because they are the hub on which the family and hence the nation revolves (Ndolo, 2011).

Population indices from different countries have shown that women constitute more than half of the human population. Also, they are at the base of the development activities in the families even at subsistence level. These activities contribute immensely to the development of not only their homes but the society in general. Part of these is the unpaid and sometimes unappreciated work they do at homes and in the farms for the society to develop and grow.

Unfortunately, some of these works done by women are most often not recognized or documented by the society as contributing to national development. At a higher level, they are often times denied an opportunity to be part of the development process by either being marginalized or not given the due attention. For the society to grow, there is the needs for women to be part of the decision-making process and the allocation of resources (Okafor, 2010). Unfortunately, this has not been the case or given the attention it rightly deserves.

In every society, women are at the root of national development from the sometimes-unrecognized domestic chores they do in the family, the subsistence farming activities to the blue- and white-collar jobs where their inputs in national development are documented. According to Mojumder (2020); it is the support of a mother who lives at home that the society works. Her various unpaid and unknown works are the cause of the development of any society. According to the author, it is through the work of a woman that the society works and the country develops as her various unpaid and unknown works contribute to the development of every society. The author adds that: A woman is like a society atom without which nothing would be there. She maintains culture and customs and brings them out. She's the one who cares about her husband and his family. In other words, she creates everything in society. A woman is her child's first teacher. She is the first doctor to treat her child lovingly. She is the first partner to play games with her children. Her function is enormous in the development of her child. A woman cannot be thanked enough for her indefinite position and constant responsibility towards the children, family, community and society. Women are no doubt the cornerstone for the sustainable growth of the family, the community and indeed the society. "Study after study has confirmed that there is no development strategy more beneficial to society as a whole, than one which involves women as central players", (Okafor, 2010). Addressing participants at the 2022 Korea Gender Equality Forum held September 27-28, Gita Gopinath, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) First Deputy Managing Director, highlighted the contribution of women to economic development. The IMF boss argues that the elimination of gender disparity which holds women back was the right thing to do since their participation in the economy remains a catalyst for economic growth. According to the IMF Director: Gender equality goes hand-in-hand with macroeconomic and financial stability, can stimulate economic growth, boost private and public sector performance, and reduce income inequality. The involvement of women in every aspect of development is imperative. Any nation that wants to enhance the contribution of women in national development should not only document both their covert and overt contributions but also erase gender disparity or gap in all spheres to exploit the potentials of women and girls in different areas of life.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This work is anchored on Nego-feminism model also known as "Negotiated Feminism" or "No-Ego Feminism." It is a form of African

feminism that emphasizes negotiation and compromise or give and take in achieving gender equality. It gained prominence in 2004 through the work of an African feminist – Obioma Nnaemeka who critiques western feminism which the author says, is judged more by its sophistication than the contributions it makes towards social change especially in other cultures different from the west. The author states that feminists' engagements in Africa focuses on collaboration, negotiation and compromise; which are at odds with western feminism which seek to challenge, disrupt and deconstruct. This is evident in Allen's book on feminist theory in which the author states that feminists are interested in criticizing, challenging, subverting, and ultimately overturning the multiple axes of stratification affecting women in the society. Making a case for African approach to feminism and feminist movements, Nnaemeka argues that theory making should not permanently be a unidirectional enterprise - always emanating from a specific location and applicable to all other locations or making a localized construct to assume a universal validity and application. Nego-Feminism harps on the interested parties (males and females), within the African context, to bury their ego and make sacrifices in the spirit of give and take for the sole purpose of reducing the gender gap in the society. This is opposed to the western models that seek to challenge male domination through radical approaches.

Nego-feminism came into existence as a substitute to the western oriented feminist models and theories that see the world as a monolithic entity without taking into cognizance the social and cultural realities and diversities inherent in different parts of the world. Since no single feminist theory or movement will reflect the entire range of experiences women have, Nego feminism takes cognizance of African culture, social environments and gender relations between men and women. These social and cultural differences determine the relationship between men and women in the African context. Through Nego feminism, women in African can navigate their way through the patriarchal system without disrupting the social order.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To find answers to these objectives, the researchers conducted a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with a group of women leaders in Anambra State, Nigeria. Anambra is one of the five states that make up the South-East. It is inhabited by Igbo speaking people that practice patriarchy. The state has 21 local government areas. Fourteen LGAs were randomly selected for the study. In each of the 14 local government areas selected, two communities or wards were purposively selected based on accessibility and willingness of the woman leader to participate in the discussion. Twenty-eight women leaders were selected and FGD was held with them. Each session is made up of 14 participants. The researchers at the inception of each session told participants the essence of the exercise and assured them it was merely for academic exercise. The instrument used for data collection is the FGD guide. The guide used to elicit information from the participants constitutes of five themes drawn

from the issues raised in the objectives. The discussion with these women leaders was qualitatively analysed using the explanation building technique.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Discussion of Findings and the Rebuttals**

The major finding of this study is that comparatively, women are not prejudiced against themselves. During the FGD held with the women leaders selected from the 14 local government areas selected for the study, the views of the women were established on each of the themes that form the specific objectives of the study. These themes are hereby discussed in line with the research questions generated:

#### **Do Women Ignore Female Candidates?**

In response to this research question, the participants responded with a question which is; do all men vote for male candidates during elections? The answer, according to them is No! And no one has used that as an excuse to say that men do not support or vote for male candidates, they identified so many factors that influence voters' behaviour. Among them are party affiliations, economic interest, ethnic and religious considerations, age if the candidate, campaign promises etc. All these, they argued, decide voting pattern. According to them, it is unfair to use sex as the sole determinant when a woman fails to vote for another woman during elections. Chioma (not real name), one of the participants said:

The sex of an aspirant or a candidate is just one of the factors, not even the major one that determines voting behaviour, people mainly vote for candidate based on their ability to perform. The sex of the candidate is a secondary factor. So, it is unfair to blackmail women when they fail to vote for a female candidate during elections. The participants also said sometimes, men do not vote for male candidates and they have not been blackmailed for doing so. This finding is in conformity with Ashworth, Berry and Mesquita (2020), Newman (1996) and Piscopo (2020) who said the sex of a candidate is not the sole determinant of the outcome of an election. According to Newman: The extent of support a woman candidate receives from women voters will depend on the candidate, her campaign, her opponent, the composition and mood of the electorate, and the political climate. They make their decisions based on a wide range of factors. Also, Piscopo (2020) says that "women preferences are shaped by other identities too like race, class, educational status and age; Ashworth, Berry and Mesquita (2020) say there are compelling evidence to prove that "when women run for office, regardless of the position they seek, they are just as likely as men to win the race." Still debunking the allegation that women do not vote for female candidates, Clayton, Robinson and Muriaas (2019) add that "citizens prefer women candidates *ceteris paribus*; and women and men with the same traits are evaluated similarly" during elections.

#### **Do Women Prefer to Work Under Male Bosses?**

The participants argued that the notion that women prefer to work under male bosses is misleading. According to them, just like in voting during



elections, there are many factors that determine whether someone will prefer to work under a male or female boss. Some of these factors include previous experience and personal relationships. They argued that some men too prefer to work under a female boss. And, that should not be used to say that men prefer to work under female bosses. One of the participants, Helen (not real name), said: All these amount to the usual blackmail. People prefer who to work with based on so many factors. There are men that prefer to work under female bosses. Should we then use that to generalize and say that men prefer to work under female bosses.

This finding corresponds with the Gallup poll which shows that even in America, such perception that women prefer to work under male bosses is waning (Brenan, 2017; Khan, 2022) as most people including women now prefer to work under a female boss. Brennan (2017), states that contrary to the general perception, the preference of American workers is tilting towards a female boss. According to the author: For the first time since Gallup began measuring American's preference about the gender of their boss; a majority say their boss' gender makes no difference to them. Currently 55 percent of Americans volunteer that they would have no gender preference for a boss if they were taking a new job.

Another poll conducted in 2022 shows that: Sixty seven percent of men and 57 percent of women don't really think it should make a scintilla of a difference whether their boss is a woman or a man. It is all about their competence after all. If there is any leaning towards one gender; then based on the result of my survey, it would be towards a female boss (Khan, 2022). Gallup poll attributes the shift in preference to the increasing wave of feminism that brings with it more enlightenment and makes women to support fellow women. Also, the increasing cases of sexual harassment against women made some of them to prefer working under fellow women. Ideally, a woman who has been a victim of sexual harassment in her place of work will prefer to work under a female rather than a male boss.

### **Do Women Prefer Male Children?**

On male child preference, the participants argued that the patriarchal system, not women promote the male child preference. They said women celebrate the birth of a male child because of the ill-treatment some of them without male children are subjected to. The agonies these women pass through, they said are better imagines. So, when a woman is liberated from such ill treatment, it calls for celebration. Absolving women of any blame in the male child preference, one of the participants said:

Is it women that deny people without a male child their inheritance? People clamour for a male child because of inheritance system and it is the men, not women that promote this culture that makes anyone without a male child an outcast. The participants also made reference to a law passed by the state House of Assembly that granted female children the right of inheritance just like their male counterparts. They however lamented that despite the euphoria that greeted the passage of the law, it is yet to be implemented by men who

usually share the property of their deceased kinsman to only the male children. This, supports the view of Okoli and Agu (2010) who say that “the lineage system is structured in such a way that it favours the male in the society.” Buttressing this, they stated that despite the law enacted by the Anambra State House of Assembly that gave women the rights of inheritance, men have refused to implement the law; hence denying female children the rights; a situation that promotes the male child preference.

### **Do Women Prefer to Be Men?**

On the allegation that women prefer to be men by simulating male-female relationships; the participants said such an allegation is diversionary and holds no water. According to them, there are instances where some males called cross dressers “convert” to females by putting on fake female features. To these participants, it is rather the males that prefer to be women since no woman has ever claimed to be a man. Rather, it is only men that have publicly claimed to be women. According to them, if such claim is not enough to say that men prefer to be women, why should it be said that women want to be men just because a woman calls a fellow woman “my husband.” Jane, one of the participants said: This kind of blackmail in part of the marginalization we are talking about. Cross dressers abound in the society. Some men put on female features including clothes and tell people that they are females. Despite that, no one has said that men prefer to be women. It is unfortunate to say that women prefer to be men simply because a woman calls another woman ‘my wife’.

### **Are Women Mobilized Against Fellow Women?**

According to the participants, the allegation that women are being mobilized to work against fellow women is laughable. One of them, Kate, asked: “In politics and the various communities, who mobilizes the men to fight themselves?” “Is it also the women?” Is it women that work against men in different places? They argued that in different communities, professions, politics etc, men fight and blackmail each other. Yet no one has said that they were being mobilized to fight themselves. It is only when women disagree among themselves that it is said that they are being mobilized to fight each other.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Women, no doubt contribute to the growth of any nation. Apart from ensuring food security through their involvement in agricultural activities, they toil to compliment the efforts of men in different fields. Unfortunately, these efforts are neither recognized nor appreciated. Instead, they are being blackmailed to believe that they are the architect of any misfortune they may have found themselves in the society; a situation that derails the agitation for gender equality. The marginalization of women made the human race to stand with only one leg as opposed to the story of the creation where God, in recognition that man cannot progress alone, created a woman to compliment his efforts. Despite the actions of some women who are perceived to be

prejudiced against their fellow women and engage in the pulling-her-down syndrome, it will still be fair to recognize the contribution of women towards food security and the clamour for gender equality in the society. These categories of women abound in every profession and society and use every opportunity available to them to advance the cause of their fellow women.

Those opposed to this blackmail believe that the notion that women are prejudices against their fellow women is pure blackmail; after all, instances abound where men work against their fellow men. To them, the question is: Are men prejudiced against their fellow men? They argue that while some men oppose the candidacy of their fellow men during elections, some others also prefer to work under female bosses. So, according to this school of thought, it will be unfair and pure blackmail to conclude that women are prejudiced against themselves. Also, men through the patriarchal system and inheritance provide the platform for women to celebrate the birth of a male child in the family.

Though all these views have their strength and weaknesses, since gender inequality still exist in the society, both men and women still have a lot to do. It is only when each group plays the expected role in the spirit of give and take as the Nego-feminism model advocates that a solution will come. If not, the marginalization of women and the journey for gender equality and food security will remain a mirage. Then, the need for the adoption of Nego-feminism that advocates the spirit of give and take. Also, while they (women) try to make impact and achieve gender equity in the political and economic arena, it is imperative these campaigns are taken to the rural communities to change the cultural barriers against women and those that prevent them from the attainment of their potentials. It is only when this is done that the envisaged change will come.

Those who promote the notion that women are prejudiced against themselves only want to blackmail them or derail the activities of gender equity crusaders. They also want to continue the marginalization of women who, according to Agbanu and Ezekwelu (2023), are the cornerstone for the sustainable growth of the family, the country and indeed, the society. The agricultural produce from the subsistence farming they engage in, sustains a great percentage of the human population especially those living in the rural communities.

## **FURTHER RESEARCH**

This research still has limitations so further research on this topic is still needed “Are Women Prejudiced Against Themselves? Journalists’ Advocacy for Gender Inclusiveness for Improved Food Security”.

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