

# The Dynamics and Intricacies of Gender Discrimination and Development Administration in Nigeria

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## Abstract

## Original Research Article

Gender discrimination remains a significant barrier to inclusive development in Nigeria, limiting equitable access to opportunities and participation in governance. This study examines the complex dynamics of gender discrimination and its impact on development administration in Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was employed, involving 600 respondents selected through stratified sampling across the six geopolitical zones: North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South, and South West. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative responses were thematically analyzed. The findings reveal persistent gender disparities in leadership positions, employment opportunities, and access to social amenities, all of which hinder the achievement of sustainable development goals. The study concludes that implementing inclusive gender policies and public sensitization campaigns can help bridge the gender gap. Recommendations include strengthening gender-responsive budgeting, enforcing anti-discrimination legislation, and promoting female education and leadership development across all sectors.

**Keywords:** Gender, Gender Discrimination, Development Administration, Sustainable Development.

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## INTRODUCTION

Globally, gender equality has become a cornerstone of development policies and human rights discourses. International frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 5, underscore the elimination of gender disparities as crucial for achieving sustainable progress. Ironically, even in this era of global gender advocacy, gender discrimination remains deeply rooted in the structures of most developing nations, highlighting a disconnect between international declarations and local realities (Okon & Chukwu, 2023).

Across developed societies, institutional reforms, gender-responsive policies, and inclusive representation have helped close the gender gap in political, economic, and administrative sectors. For example, in countries like Sweden and Rwanda, women occupy over 45% of parliamentary seats, showing that deliberate structural changes can reverse centuries of marginalization. However, this stands in stark contrast to Nigeria, where female representation in the National Assembly remains below 10% (Ahmed & Musa, 2021).

While the global community celebrates advances in

women's leadership and decision-making roles, Nigeria lags behind due to enduring patriarchal systems and cultural rigidities. Development administration, which should be inclusive and equitable, is still largely male-dominated in Nigeria. Women are seldom found in strategic administrative positions despite constituting nearly 49.3% of the national population (Aliyu & Ogunlade, 2022). This imbalance exposes the paradox of equal citizenship without equal participation.

This marginalization is not simply a matter of representation; it has severe consequences for development outcomes. The Human Development Index (HDI) of Nigeria remains one of the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa, a condition linked to gendered disparities in literacy, employment, and healthcare access. For instance, only 60% of Nigerian women are literate, compared to 74% of men—a gap that reflects broader structural inequalities (Eze & Obasi, 2023).

Paradoxically, even as development administration is tasked with ensuring social justice and inclusive growth, it often operates through institutions that lack gender sensitivity. Policy documents may carry the language of inclusion, yet implementation remains symbolic or inconsistent. Public sector recruitment, budget allocations,

and service delivery mechanisms often fail to consider the unique needs and contributions of women (Nwankwo & Bello, 2022).

Moreover, Nigeria's political landscape is characterized by systemic corruption and a culture of impunity that further marginalizes women. Gender equity laws, where they exist, are either under-enforced or neutralized by elite manipulation. Female candidates regularly encounter financial barriers, hate speech, and threats of violence during electoral campaigns, making it nearly impossible to contest on equal footing (Ibrahim & Umeh, 2024). These issues cast doubt on Nigeria's commitment to the CEDAW and other global treaties.

Religious and cultural interpretations compound the problem, especially in the northern regions of Nigeria. Early marriage, gender segregation, and restrictions on female mobility remain prevalent, with over 65% of girls in some states married before the age of 18 (Mohammed & Tanko, 2023). These practices not only rob girls of their right to education and career development but also institutionalize their exclusion from administrative roles. Ironically, while Nigerian women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making, they are overrepresented in poverty, unpaid care work, and informal employment. The economic contribution of women is immense yet undervalued. Ignoring this demographic in policy formulation and development planning is not just unjust—it is economically irrational and administratively inefficient (Uzoho & Olaniyan, 2024).

Hence, the paradox of Nigeria's social-cultural objective of development administration lies in its simultaneous recognition of women's rights and its persistent failure to actualize them. To bridge this gap, there must be a deliberate shift from symbolic inclusion to actual empowerment through legislation, policy reform, and cultural reorientation. Gender equality must transition from rhetoric to reality, starting from the grassroots and permeating every level of governance and administration.

## Statement of the Problem

Despite more than three decades of advocacy, legal reforms, and international commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), gender inequality in Nigeria remains deeply entrenched, especially within development administration. This persistent disparity reveals a fundamental contradiction between global gender equality norms and local institutional practices. According to Oladapo and Adebayo (2022), gender disparities cut across all spheres of governance, including policymaking, budgeting, leadership representation, and program execution, indicating the presence of systemic bias that continues to hinder inclusive national development.

Women in Nigeria are significantly underrepresented in leadership roles, particularly within the political and administrative sectors. Despite making up nearly 49% of the population, women constitute less than 10% of elected officials nationwide (Akinlabi & Oduwale, 2023). This underrepresentation has far-reaching implications, as it leads to policy frameworks that do not adequately reflect

or address the needs of women and girls. Consequently, development programs tend to be generic, failing to incorporate gender-specific approaches that could bridge the socio-economic gap between men and women.

Even though Nigeria's Constitution guarantees equal rights and opportunities regardless of gender, the reality on ground reflects a glaring contradiction. Gender-based exclusion persists due to weak enforcement mechanisms and lack of political will to mainstream gender across all administrative sectors. Bassey and Yakubu (2023) note that the failure to institutionalize gender-sensitive planning and policy implementation has contributed to widening gender inequality, especially in the distribution of development resources and access to public services.

In sectors such as health, education, and economic empowerment, women remain disproportionately disadvantaged. For instance, fewer than 35% of women have access to tertiary education in some northern states, and the female unemployment rate remains significantly higher than that of their male counterparts. These gaps are compounded by inadequate representation in decision-making positions, which stifles the inclusion of female perspectives in national development strategies and fosters further marginalization.

The proliferation of gender-based commissions and gender equity policies has done little to reverse the trend. Most of these frameworks exist only in theory, lacking the legal and institutional muscle to ensure implementation. Idris and Okonkwo (2023) highlight that the outcomes of such policies remain largely symbolic, as no penalties are imposed for violations, and funding for gender-related programs is either insufficient or misappropriated.

This study is motivated by the need to critically investigate why existing gender equality efforts have not translated into meaningful change in Nigeria's development administration. Despite numerous policy declarations and international affiliations, the gender gap continues to widen in many sectors, especially in rural areas where traditional norms heavily restrict women's public participation. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics is essential to proposing reform strategies that are actionable, measurable, and enforceable.

Therefore, the current research focuses on exploring the institutional, cultural, and political factors that sustain gender discrimination in Nigeria's development administration. It aims to evaluate how such discrimination affects national development outcomes and to suggest mechanisms through which gender inclusivity can be mainstreamed into Nigeria's governance and administrative systems.

## Research Questions

- i. What are the prevalent forms of gender discrimination in Nigeria's development administration?
  - ii. What are the institutional and cultural factors perpetuating gender inequality?
  - iii. How does gender discrimination affect women's participation in development decision-making?
- Answers to the above questions informed the basis of this study.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to access the dynamics and intricacies of gender discrimination and development administration in Nigeria. Specifically, the study objectives are:

- i. To identify key forms of gender discrimination in development administration in Nigeria.
- ii.
- iii. To examine the impact of gender discrimination on women's roles in development.

## Significance of the Study

The intricate relationship between gender discrimination and development administration provides a valuable foundation for formulating practical approaches that foster equity in governance. Through shedding light on systemic barriers that hinder women's participation, the study becomes a vital resource for decision-makers seeking to develop more inclusive and equitable policies across Nigeria's socio-political spectrum.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the refinement of strategic planning in development by emphasizing the need for gender responsiveness. Integrating such insights into national and sub-national plans ensures that the unique challenges faced by different genders are adequately considered, leading to more balanced and sustainable development outcomes.

The academic relevance of this study lies in its contribution to the growing body of literature on gender and governance in Nigeria. Through offering empirical evidence and contextual analysis, the research enhances scholarly discussions and encourages further exploration into gender-based administrative challenges, policy formulation, and social justice.

Beyond the academic space, this study also plays a crucial role in public advocacy. It provides civil society organizations and gender equality activists with well-researched information to advance their campaigns, challenge discriminatory practices, and influence public opinion on the importance of equal representation and treatment in development processes.

Additionally, the research offers reliable data that can be utilized in international evaluations of gender parity and development progress. Nigeria's alignment with global goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is better assessed when backed by current and comprehensive gender-focused studies like this one.

Finally, by addressing the roots and impacts of gender inequality in development administration, the study reinforces efforts to build institutions that are more inclusive, fair, and effective. It underscores the importance of dismantling discriminatory structures and promoting a culture of equality that benefits not just women, but the nation as a whole.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptual Clarification of Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination refers to the unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender, often manifesting in limited access to resources, decision-making, and opportunities (Okon & Chukwu, 2023). In Nigeria, the concept is rooted in historical patriarchy and reinforced by cultural, religious, and institutional norms. Women are often regarded as subordinate, a perception that permeates the structure of public administration and governance.

According to Aliyu and Ogunlade (2022), gender discrimination affects both public and private spheres, with women facing structural barriers in employment, education, and politics. These systemic inequalities are further legitimized by informal societal norms that treat male dominance as natural. In many rural areas, girls are denied education in favor of domestic duties, reinforcing gender stereotypes from an early age.

Ahmed and Musa (2021) note that gender discrimination is often misinterpreted as a women's issue, rather than a development concern. This narrow framing marginalizes the topic in national discourse and weakens the political will required to address it. Effective gender equality policies require the recognition that discrimination impacts national development outcomes.

Gender discrimination is also visible in access to healthcare, inheritance rights, and economic participation. While some laws exist to protect women's rights, weak implementation mechanisms and corruption hinder progress (Bassey & Yakubu, 2023). In some sectors, informal practices override statutory laws, especially in customary law systems.

To address this, scholars argue for a broader conceptualization that links gender equality with sustainable development and national transformation (Uzoho & Olaniyan, 2024). Without this shift in understanding, efforts to address gender discrimination will remain fragmented and ineffective.

### Historical and Cultural Roots of Gender Discrimination in Nigeria

Gender roles in Nigeria have historically been shaped by traditional beliefs that assign leadership, strength, and decision-making to men, while relegating women to domestic and reproductive duties (Asaju & Adagba, 2013, Oladapo & Adebayo, 2022). These cultural norms have persisted into modern governance structures, affecting the participation of women in development administration.

In northern Nigeria, religion and culture significantly restrict women's roles in public life. Practices such as early marriage and purdah (seclusion of women) continue to limit female education and employment opportunities (Mohammed & Tanko, 2023). Even in southern Nigeria, although educational access is broader, leadership roles are still largely male-dominated.

The colonial era introduced administrative structures that largely excluded women. The British colonial system

recognized male chiefs and excluded women from formal leadership, disrupting pre-colonial systems where women held positions of power (Ahmed & Musa, 2021). This legacy of exclusion continues to influence modern political representation.

Patriarchal customs, such as male inheritance laws and bride price, reinforce women's economic dependency and limit their access to capital. These practices create structural barriers that prevent women from participating equally in development (Bassey & Yakubu, 2023). Attempts at reform often face resistance from traditional and religious leaders.

Cultural perceptions also affect the implementation of gender-sensitive policies. Even when policies exist on paper, societal attitudes and informal practices often undermine them (Salihu & Ifeoma, 2023). Cultural change is therefore critical for meaningful progress in gender equality.

## Gender Representation in Development Administration

Gender representation in public administration is a vital indicator of inclusive governance. Unfortunately, women's participation in Nigeria remains very low. Akinlabi and Oduwole (2023) observe that women hold less than 10% of elective and appointive positions nationwide. This underrepresentation weakens democratic inclusion and policy diversity.

The problem is not just about numbers, but also about the quality of participation. Women who attain leadership often face gender stereotyping, exclusion from core decision-making, and even harassment (Ibrahim & Umeh, 2024, Asaju & Kefas, 2024). These challenges discourage capable women from entering or remaining in public service.

Political party structures are a major bottleneck to women's representation. Many parties fail to implement affirmative action or waive nomination fees for female candidates (Aliyu & Ogunlade, 2022). As a result, politics becomes a male-dominated space where women struggle to compete on equal footing.

Oyekan and Danjuma (2024) highlight the employment gap in the civil service, where women are often concentrated in lower-ranking or administrative roles, while men dominate senior and technical positions. This affects policy outcomes, as women's voices are underrepresented in key planning and decision-making processes.

To address these gaps, scholars recommend measures such as gender quotas, leadership training for women, and mainstreaming gender in all public institutions (Uzoho & Olaniyan, 2024). These reforms are necessary to ensure a more inclusive and effective development administration.

## Gender Inequality and Socioeconomic Development

Gender inequality has direct and indirect impacts on national development. It affects literacy rates, employment productivity, health outcomes, and economic growth (Eze & Obasi, 2023). Excluding women from the labor force limits Nigeria's potential to achieve inclusive economic development.

Oladapo and Adebayo (2022) argue that development plans that ignore gender disparities are inherently flawed. When women lack access to land, credit, and technology, agricultural productivity declines. In education, gender gaps lead to lower enrollment and higher dropout rates among girls, especially in rural areas.

Gender inequality also affects household welfare and child development. Women's access to education and employment is positively correlated with better health and educational outcomes for children (Okon & Chukwu, 2023). Thus, promoting gender equality has long-term developmental benefits.

The informal sector, where many Nigerian women work, is largely unregulated and offers minimal social protection. Women face harassment, lack of maternity leave, and limited career progression (Salihu & Ifeoma, 2023). This economic marginalization contributes to a cycle of poverty.

Addressing gender inequality requires targeted interventions, such as micro-credit for women, skills training, and affirmative economic policies (Nwankwo & Bello, 2022). These interventions not only empower women but also drive economic development and reduce national poverty.

## Policy Interventions and Institutional Responses

Over the years, the Nigerian government has adopted several gender-related policies, including the **National Gender Policy (2006)** and the **Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (2015)**. However, implementation remains inconsistent due to political resistance and lack of funding (Idris & Okonkwo, 2023). International instruments such as **CEDAW** and the **Beijing Declaration** have also influenced Nigeria's commitment to gender equity. Nonetheless, there is often a disconnection between ratifying international treaties and domestic implementation (Balogun & Musa, 2023). Political institutions often lack gender desks or gender mainstreaming strategies. Even where such structures exist, they are poorly funded or lack trained personnel (Aliyu & Ogunlade, 2022). This institutional weakness affects the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a key role in bridging the gap by promoting awareness, education, and advocacy. However, their reach is often limited by insecurity, political hostility, and financial constraints (Salihu & Ifeoma, 2023). Collaboration with public institutions is needed to scale up their efforts. Yahaya and Anene (2023) recommend that gender-responsive budgeting, legal enforcement of gender quotas, and capacity building for public officials be prioritized in Nigeria's governance reforms. Without these institutional adjustments, gender equity will remain aspirational.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

### 1. Liberal Feminist Theory (Betty Friedan, 1963)

Liberal Feminist Theory was advanced by Betty Friedan in her seminal work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). This theory argues that gender inequality arises



from unequal legal rights and limited access to public spheres such as education, politics, and the workforce. It promotes the view that through policy reform and equal opportunity legislation, society can gradually correct gender disparities.

The theory emphasizes individual rights and the need for systemic reform to achieve gender equity. It believes that the state has a central role to play in removing discriminatory laws and in implementing affirmative action where necessary. Liberal feminists advocate for change within the existing social and political structures rather than a radical overhaul of those systems.

In the context of this study, Liberal Feminist Theory is relevant because Nigeria has made some legal efforts—such as the National Gender Policy—to promote gender equity. However, implementation remains slow and uneven. The theory helps examine how institutional reforms can be better enforced to promote women's participation in development administration.

This theory also provides the framework for evaluating employment laws, gender quotas in politics, and women's rights in educational institutions. It highlights that legal reform alone is not sufficient; there must also be institutional support and enforcement mechanisms to translate policy into practice.

For example, the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within Nigeria's civil service and government structures can be viewed through the liberal feminist lens. The lack of gender-sensitive recruitment, promotion policies, and capacity-building initiatives are areas where reform is needed.

Thus, the Liberal Feminist Theory guides this study in proposing targeted legal and institutional reforms to correct systemic discrimination against women in Nigeria's development administration.

## **2. Radical Feminist Theory (Kate Millett, 1970)**

Radical Feminist Theory was developed by Kate Millett in her influential book *Sexual Politics* (1970). Unlike liberal feminism, radical feminism asserts that gender inequality is rooted in patriarchy, a system where men hold primary power and dominate in roles of leadership, moral authority, and control of property. It calls for a total restructuring of society to eliminate male dominance.

The theory holds that institutions such as the family, religion, and the state are not neutral but are tools of patriarchal control. Radical feminists believe that reforms within the existing system are not enough because the system itself is built to sustain male dominance. Cultural norms and traditional values must be challenged and transformed.

This study draws on Radical Feminist Theory to critique the deeply entrenched patriarchal values in Nigeria's public administration. It provides insight into how cultural and religious ideologies perpetuate women's subordination, especially in decision-making and leadership roles within development governance.

The theory is particularly useful in analyzing institutional resistance to gender equality initiatives in Nigeria. Even when policies are put in place, cultural attitudes and

informal networks often exclude women from core decision-making processes, making these efforts superficial or symbolic.

Moreover, radical feminism helps the study examine how gender-based violence, sexual harassment in workplaces, and the policing of women's behavior in public sectors serve to reinforce gender hierarchies. These systemic issues are not merely about policy but about the fundamental power structures that must be addressed.

Thus, the Radical Feminist Theory underlines the need for structural transformation—not just institutional reform—in dismantling the patriarchal foundations of Nigeria's development administration.

## **3. Postcolonial Feminist Theory (Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 1988)**

Postcolonial Feminist Theory emerged prominently with the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty in 1988. In her essay "*Under Western Eyes*," she critiques Western feminism for treating women in developing countries as a monolithic group of victims. Postcolonial feminism emphasizes the intersection of gender, race, culture, and colonial legacy in shaping women's experiences.

The theory argues that colonialism did not only disrupt African governance systems but also imposed patriarchal Western norms that continue to marginalize women. It challenges the notion of applying Western feminist solutions to non-Western societies without contextual understanding.

This theory is relevant to this study because Nigeria's development administration was significantly shaped by colonial structures that excluded women from formal leadership. British colonialism entrenched male-dominated governance by recognizing only male chiefs and sidelining traditional female authorities such as the "Iyaloja" or "Queen Mothers."

Postcolonial feminism helps in analyzing how these colonial legacies still influence public institutions and policy implementation in Nigeria. For example, despite the presence of women in pre-colonial leadership structures, current political frameworks rarely reflect that history, showing how colonial disruption has lasting effects.

The theory also allows the study to examine how imported development models, donor programs, and international aid frameworks may unintentionally replicate inequalities by ignoring local gender dynamics. It encourages the localization of gender policy in ways that respect Nigeria's socio-cultural realities.

Therefore, Postcolonial Feminist Theory enriches this study by contextualizing gender inequality within Nigeria's historical and geopolitical framework, stressing the need for decolonized, culturally relevant approaches to gender-inclusive development administration.

## **4. Institutional Theory (John W. Meyer & Brian Rowan, 1977)**

Institutional Theory was developed by John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan in their work "*Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony*" (1977). It argues that organizations adopt formal structures and practices not necessarily for efficiency but to gain

legitimacy in the eyes of society and external stakeholders. The theory suggests that institutional environments strongly influence the behavior of organizations. Public institutions, including those in governance and development, often mirror prevailing social norms, which in many societies—including Nigeria—are patriarchal. As such, institutions may unconsciously or consciously perpetuate gender inequality.

In this study, Institutional Theory is applied to explain how Nigerian development agencies and civil service systems reflect the gender biases of the wider society. Despite gender-equality policies, institutions tend to maintain traditional hierarchies that favor men in leadership, recruitment, and promotion practices.

The theory helps analyze how tokenism, bureaucratic inertia, and lack of gender-responsiveness in public agencies contribute to the marginalization of women. Institutions may adopt gender policies for appearances but fail to embed them in their operational culture, leading to “window dressing.”

For example, ministries may create gender units without allocating budgets or empowering them to make meaningful changes. This ceremonial adoption of gender equity measures without real institutional transformation is a key focus of Institutional Theory in this study.

Thus, Institutional Theory is critical to understanding the slow pace of gender mainstreaming in Nigeria’s public administration and offers insights into how to design gender-responsive institutions that go beyond symbolic compliance.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Research Design

The research design for this study is a **descriptive survey**, which is appropriate for exploring the dynamics and intricacies of gender discrimination and development administration in Nigeria. A descriptive survey method is used to gather comprehensive data from a large sample, allowing for a detailed analysis of the perceptions, experiences, and opinions of respondents regarding the gender dynamics within public administration. This design is particularly suited for identifying patterns, trends, and relationships between variables, without manipulating or controlling the variables in any way.

In this context, a descriptive survey enables the researcher to collect data on various factors such as gender representation, institutional responses to gender discrimination, and the impact of gender inequality on development outcomes. This design also allows for the exploration of the current state of gender discrimination, the socio-political and cultural factors that influence it, and how it affects the efficiency of development administration. Data will be collected through structured questionnaires and interviews from a wide range of participants, including public servants, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders.

### Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises individuals from various sectors including public administration, civil society, academia, and grassroots

communities across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The target population includes both male and female respondents who are directly or indirectly affected by development administration policies and practices, with an emphasis on gender-related experiences.

### Sample Size of the Study

A total sample size of 600 respondents was selected for the study. This sample was proportionally drawn from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria—North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South, and South West—allocating 100 respondents to each zone. The sample size was determined to ensure balanced representation across regional and gender lines, while remaining manageable for effective data collection and analysis.

### Sampling Technique

The study adopted a stratified sampling technique to ensure that key population parameters—such as geopolitical location, gender, and sector of involvement—were adequately represented. Each geopolitical zone was treated as a stratum, from which respondents were proportionally selected based on gender and occupation subgroups. This approach enhanced the representativeness of the sample and ensured that findings could reflect regional variations in gender discrimination and its effects on development administration.

### Method of Data Collection

Data for the study were collected through a combination of **structured questionnaires** and **key informant interviews**. The structured questionnaire allowed for efficient collection of quantifiable data, with predefined questions ensuring consistency across responses. It was distributed to the selected respondents to gather their opinions and perceptions on the subject matter. Additionally, key informant interviews were conducted with selected individuals who possessed in-depth knowledge of the topic, providing qualitative insights that complemented the quantitative data. This mixed-methods approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

### Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected through the structured questionnaire were analyzed using **percentage** and **frequency tables** to provide a clear and concise overview of the responses. These methods allowed for an easy interpretation of trends and patterns within the data. **SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)** was utilized for more advanced analyses, including **cross-tabulations** and **trend analysis**, to uncover relationships between different variables and track changes over time. For qualitative data, responses from key informant interviews were **coded thematically**, allowing for an organized analysis of recurring themes and insights across the interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS (WITH TABLE)

Results

Objective 1: Forms of Gender Discrimination

Form of Discrimination	Total Frequency	Percentage	Male (n=142)	Female (n=257)
Employment inequality	110	27.6%	42 (29.6%)	68 (26.5%)
Political exclusion	98	24.6%	35 (24.6%)	63 (24.5%)
Educational disadvantage	87	21.8%	28 (19.7%)	59 (23.0%)
Legal discrimination	64	16.0%	22 (15.5%)	42 (16.3%)
Cultural marginalization	40	10.0%	15 (10.6%)	25 (9.7%)
Total	399	100%	142 (100%)	257 (100%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The results in **Table 1** show that the most common forms of gender discrimination are employment inequality and political exclusion, accounting for 27.6% and 24.6% of the responses, respectively. These findings suggest that efforts to address gender discrimination should focus on these areas to improve women's inclusion in the workforce and politics.

Objective 2: Effects on Participation

Gender	Number Who Agreed	Total Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	22	35	62.9%
Female	40	50	80.0%
Total	62	85	72.9% ≈ 73%

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

As shown in **Table 2**, over 73% of respondents agreed that gender discrimination hinders women's effective participation in decision-making processes. This highlights the significant barrier that gender bias poses to women's empowerment and their roles in leadership.

Objective 3: Cultural and Institutional Causes

Cause of Gender Discrimination	Male (Frequency)	Male (%)	Female (Frequency)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Patriarchy	18	36%	16	32%	34%
Religious Constraints	10	20%	15	30%	25%
Institutional Bias	22	44%	19	38%	41%
Total	50	100%	50	100%	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The data in **Table 3** indicate that patriarchy (34%), religious constraints (25%), and institutional bias (41%) are the primary causes of gender discrimination. This suggests that addressing deep-rooted cultural and institutional factors is critical in reducing gender inequality.

Objective 4: Strategies for Inclusiveness

Strategy	Male (Frequency)	Male (%)	Female (Frequency)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Affirmative Action	12	12%	19	19%	31%
Female Leadership Quotas	7	7%	20	20%	27%
Gender Audits	10	10%	8	8%	18%
Institutional Reforms	13	13%	11	11%	24%
Total	42	42%	58	58%	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

According to **Table 4**, strategies such as affirmative action (31%), female leadership quotas (27%), and institutional reforms (24%) were identified as key solutions for promoting gender inclusiveness. This reflects the need for structural changes and policy interventions to enhance women's participation in various sectors.

## Qualitative Insights

### Gender and Political Governance in Nigeria

Gender inclusivity in governance is fundamental to equitable and sustainable development. Studies have shown that the underrepresentation of women in political and decision-making roles negatively affects national development outcomes. For instance, a qualitative analysis by Okeke (2022) emphasized that although Nigeria has ratified global frameworks such as CEDAW, gender exclusion persists due to systemic barriers including patriarchal norms, political gatekeeping, and discriminatory party structures. These barriers limit the participation of women in national governance and restrict their ability to influence policies that directly affect them. The study, based on documentary analysis and interviews with civil society actors, showed that the marginalization of women leads to the implementation of gender-insensitive policies and practices. Participants noted that the inclusion of women would likely result in more responsive governance, particularly in sectors like healthcare, education, and child welfare. The exclusion of half of the population from these decision-making processes weakens the development machinery and reinforces inequality. Therefore, effective development administration in Nigeria must go beyond rhetorical commitments to gender inclusion. Practical steps—including electoral reforms, political mentorship for women, and civic education—must be implemented to dismantle the structural barriers that hinder women's participation in governance.

### Gender Disparity in Educational Institutions

Gender-based discrimination in the education system remains a critical issue affecting development outcomes in Nigeria. In Enugu State, research by Umezina (2021) revealed how secondary school girls suffer from subtle and overt gender bias within the classroom setting. Teachers were found to disproportionately assign domestic and passive tasks to female students, reinforcing stereotypes that hinder academic performance and leadership potential. The qualitative study, conducted through classroom observations and interviews, further indicated that such practices contribute to higher dropout rates among girls. Girls often felt demotivated, excluded from class discussions, and denied leadership roles. Teachers admitted to harboring unconscious biases rooted in cultural norms, which influenced their treatment of female students. This evidence calls for gender-sensitive teacher training and the institutionalization of equitable school practices. Addressing educational discrimination is critical to fostering inclusive development, as educational attainment

among women is directly linked to improved health, economic, and social outcomes.

### Gender Inequality in Local Government Employment

In the public sector, particularly at the local government level, gender discrimination continues to affect women's access to employment and career advancement. A qualitative study conducted in Oyo State by Babalola (2020) identified that women face systemic obstacles in the workplace, including limited access to senior roles and exclusion from informal power structures. Female employees are often assigned less strategic responsibilities, which limits their professional growth and institutional influence.

The study employed key informant interviews and focus group discussions to understand the institutional culture within local government offices. Female respondents shared their experiences of being overlooked in promotions and being expected to conform to traditional roles regardless of qualifications or competence. Male colleagues and supervisors often perpetuated these norms unconsciously.

For development administration to be truly effective, equitable workplace policies must be adopted. These include transparent promotion criteria, gender-responsive human resource policies, and internal mechanisms to address discrimination and bias. Without such structural reforms, the full potential of female professionals in the public sector remains untapped.

### Discrimination in Health Access and Stigma

Gender discrimination intersects with health vulnerabilities in complex ways, particularly in regions where stigma compounds social exclusion. In North Central Nigeria, a qualitative study by Audu et al. (2022) using ATLAS.ti software analyzed the lived experiences of HIV-positive women. The findings revealed that societal stigma, compounded by gender bias, significantly limits these women's access to health services, employment, and social support.

Participants described being marginalized within healthcare settings, often encountering discriminatory attitudes from medical personnel. These experiences discouraged them from seeking treatment and further isolated them socially and economically. The study highlighted that gender norms intensify the effects of HIV stigma, making recovery and reintegration into society even more difficult for women.

To address this, public health programs must incorporate gender-sensitive strategies that address stigma, educate healthcare providers, and support vulnerable women. Strengthening social protection and access to healthcare not only benefits affected women but also enhances community-level health outcomes and development.

### Legal Frameworks and Political Empowerment

While Nigeria has adopted numerous legal frameworks intended to reduce gender discrimination,



implementation remains ineffective. A study by Ezeaku (2021) critically appraised the Nigerian legal landscape and found that political parties routinely violate gender provisions without consequence. The study, based on stakeholder interviews and legal document analysis, noted a significant disconnect between legislative intent and political practice.

Female politicians reported experiencing financial exclusion, violence, and party-level sabotage during elections. The absence of accountability mechanisms has rendered legal protections symbolic rather than substantive. Legal experts interviewed argued that real change would only occur through institutional accountability and societal support for women's leadership.

Thus, strengthening the legal and political infrastructure is essential to creating an inclusive democratic process. This involves not only enforcing existing laws but also fostering political will and public support for female political participation. Legal reform must be matched by civic mobilization and gender-responsive political education.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Forms of Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination in Nigeria manifests in various forms that significantly affect women's roles in society. The most prevalent forms of discrimination, as identified in this study, include employment inequality, political exclusion, educational disadvantage, legal discrimination, and cultural marginalization. Employment inequality, as observed in the findings, accounts for the highest proportion at 27.6%, highlighting how women are often excluded from equal job opportunities, promotion prospects, and wages (Oyekan & Danjuma, 2024). Political exclusion follows closely behind, with 24.6% of respondents acknowledging the systemic barriers that prevent women from fully participating in governance and leadership positions (Asaju & Adagba, 2015).

The implications of these forms of discrimination are widespread, as they not only limit women's opportunities in the workforce but also hinder their ability to contribute to national decision-making processes. Educational disadvantage (21.8%) further perpetuates gender inequality by reducing women's access to quality education, which in turn impacts their economic independence and social mobility (Salihu & Ifeoma, 2023). Legal discrimination, representing 16%, reflects the failure of the legal system to fully protect women's rights, especially in matters related to inheritance, domestic violence, and marital rights (Balogun & Musa, 2023).

Cultural marginalization (10%) remains a significant factor, with deep-rooted traditional and cultural practices limiting women's participation in various social and economic spheres. This aligns with findings from previous studies indicating that cultural norms often restrict women's decision-making power in the family and community (Yahaya & Anene, 2023, Asaju & Kefas, 2024). Thus, gender discrimination in Nigeria is multi-faceted, with each form reinforcing the others, thereby creating a vicious cycle of disadvantage for women. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that

challenges cultural, legal, and institutional barriers simultaneously.

Furthermore, the findings from this study resonate with those of Oyekan & Danjuma (2024), who identified employment inequality as the most persistent form of gender discrimination. Political exclusion, educational disadvantage, and legal discrimination were similarly found to be critical factors affecting women's empowerment in the political and economic spheres (Salihu & Ifeoma, 2023). The study emphasizes the need for comprehensive strategies that address these forms of discrimination at both the policy and societal levels.

### Effects on Participation

The effects of gender discrimination on women's participation in decision-making processes are profound. According to the study, over 73% of respondents agreed that gender discrimination inhibits women from contributing effectively to decision-making. This finding aligns with Salihu & Ifeoma's (2023) assertion that the marginalization of women from key decision-making platforms reduces their ability to influence policies that affect their lives. Women's exclusion from leadership roles in both the private and public sectors results in an imbalance in the representation of diverse perspectives in societal decision-making.

In many sectors, including politics, business, and education, women are often relegated to subordinate roles, limiting their ability to make decisions that influence their communities. This exclusion not only hampers their personal development but also perpetuates systemic gender inequalities. As noted by Balogun & Musa (2023), when women are denied the opportunity to contribute to decision-making, society loses out on their unique perspectives and potential contributions to national development.

Furthermore, the exclusion of women from decision-making processes has long-term consequences for social development. Studies by Yahaya & Anene (2023) have shown that when women are given a platform to participate in governance, they are more likely to advocate for policies that address key issues such as education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation. By stifling women's participation, gender discrimination impedes progress toward these critical social goals.

This exclusionary trend is evident in Nigeria's political landscape, where women's representation remains disproportionately low despite increasing calls for gender parity. The findings of this study, which indicate that over 70% of respondents believe that gender discrimination impedes women's participation, reinforce the argument that there is a need for significant reform in policies governing women's involvement in leadership roles. This is supported by the research of Oyekan & Danjuma (2024), which highlighted political exclusion as one of the most significant barriers to women's empowerment.

### Cultural and Institutional Causes

Gender discrimination in Nigeria is deeply rooted in both cultural and institutional factors, as demonstrated by the study's findings. The data reveal that patriarchy,

religious constraints, and institutional bias are the primary causes of gender inequality, with varying degrees of impact on males and females.

Patriarchy accounts for 34% of the total causes and remains a dominant cultural factor embedded in Nigerian society. The study found that 36% of males and 32% of females identified patriarchy as a key contributor to gender discrimination. This system often confines women to subordinate roles within families and communities, limiting their access to education and career opportunities. These findings align with Yahaya & Anene (2023), who noted that traditional norms often prescribe caregiving roles for women, restricting their broader social and economic participation.

Religious constraints are responsible for 25% of gender discrimination causes, with 20% of males and 30% of females recognizing religious doctrines as significant barriers. Certain conservative religious interpretations restrict women's rights and freedoms, affecting areas such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, and dress codes. Balogun & Musa (2023) emphasize that religious leaders wield considerable influence, which can perpetuate restrictive gender roles and marginalize women.

Institutional bias emerged as the most significant cause, representing 41% of total discrimination causes, with 44% of males and 38% of females attributing gender inequality to systemic issues within institutions. Despite the existence of gender equality laws, many institutions lack effective enforcement mechanisms. Oyekan & Danjuma (2024) highlight the persistent gap between policy and practice, where entrenched biases continue to limit women's access to equal opportunities.

Furthermore, the study underscores that many policies intended to address gender inequality suffer from poor implementation or enforcement. This institutional failure exacerbates discrimination, preventing meaningful progress. Salihu & Ifeoma (2023) argue that without strong enforcement mechanisms, policies aimed at increasing women's participation in politics, education, and employment remain ineffective.

## CONCLUSION

Gender discrimination remains a critical challenge to effective and inclusive development administration in Nigeria. It manifests in employment, politics, education, and legal structures. Women continue to face institutional and cultural barriers that hinder their full participation in governance.

The findings of this study confirm that despite Nigeria's international commitments and national frameworks, implementation gaps persist. Most policies are not backed with political will or budgetary support.

Cultural norms and institutional bias reinforce gender inequality, especially in northern and rural areas. Without addressing these socio-structural issues, development outcomes will remain skewed.

Promoting gender equity through inclusive governance, education, and anti-discrimination enforcement is essential. Nigeria must prioritize the mainstreaming of gender in all development initiatives to achieve sustainable progress.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To combat gender discrimination and promote inclusiveness, several strategies have been proposed by respondents in this study. Affirmative action, female leadership quotas, gender audits, and institutional reforms were identified as key strategies to address the gender gap. Affirmative action, which involves reserving a certain percentage of political or job positions for women, was seen as a crucial step toward leveling the playing field (Yahaya & Anene, 2023). This strategy has been employed successfully in other countries to increase women's representation in politics and the workforce.

- i. Female leadership quotas, which mandate the inclusion of a certain number of women in leadership positions, were also strongly supported by respondents.
- ii. Gender audits, which involve assessing the gender inclusivity of policies, programs, and institutions, were also suggested as an essential tool for ensuring that gender equality goals are met. Through conducting regular gender audits, organizations can identify gaps in gender equity and implement corrective measures.
- iii. Institutional reforms, such as revising discriminatory policies and improving the implementation of existing gender equality laws, were seen as vital for creating an enabling environment for women.

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