



P-ISSN: 2394-1685  
E-ISSN: 2394-1693  
Impact Factor (ISRA): 5.38  
IJPESH 2018; 5(2): 255-266  
© 2018 IJPESH  
www.kheljournal.com  
Received: 12-01-2018  
Accepted: 13-02-2018

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## Functional strides to sustainable development goals (SDGs): The critical role of mobilizing Nigerian women for active participation in sport leadership

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### Abstract

Nigerian women are in recent times improving their participation level in competitive sport. They even take part in sporting areas hitherto designated "male oriented sports" like boxing, wrestling, soccer, motor racing, etc. in addition to more feminine physical activities like aerobic exercises, dancing, gymnastics, hand ball, volley ball etc. It is on record that Nigerian women have made more success in international sport competitions than their men counterparts. This notwithstanding, the number of Nigerian women in sport leadership at various sport establishments is nothing to write home about. Discriminatory socio-cultural practices often meted out to the Nigerian sport women, negatively affect their participation in sport leadership. Each gender is endowed with special talents, skills and abilities to enable them contribute meaningfully to national development through leadership role. Unfortunately, the life of a woman in Nigeria is still shaped and reinforced by socio-cultural, psychological, religious and political factors that hinder their inclusion in sport leadership. The MDGs which is a developmental blue print of eight goals targeted (for 2015) are transforming to 17 Sustainable Development Goals (From 2016) geared to meeting the needs of the present time without compromising the needs of the future generations. The emphasis is on "17 goals to transform the world". This paper has traced the historical trend of women participation in sport in Nigeria and examined the socio-cultural, psychological, religious and other factors that hinder their participation in sport leadership. Scanty representation of women in sport leadership in Nigeria is counter-productive to achieving the MDGs and by extension may affect the progress envisaged in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Strategies towards empowering the Nigerian women for greater involvement in sport leadership are recommended for achieving the SDGs.

**Keywords:** Functional strides, sustainable development goals, critical role of mobilizing Nigerian women, active participation in sport leadership

### Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals, otherwise known as the Global Goals, build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight anti-poverty targets which the world vowed to achieve by 2015. The MDGs, adopted in 2000, aimed at an array of issues that included slashing poverty, hunger, disease, gender inequality, and access to water and sanitation. Enormous progress has been made on the MDGs, showing the value of a unifying agenda underpinned by goals and targets. Despite this success, the scourge of poverty has not ended. The new SDGs, and the broader sustainability agenda, go much further than the MDGs, addressing the root causes of poverty and the universal need for development envisaged to work for all people. UNDP Administrator, Helen Clark, noted: "This agreement marks an important milestone in putting our world on an inclusive and sustainable course. If we all work together, we have a chance of meeting citizens' aspirations for peace, prosperity, and wellbeing, and to preserve our planet. "The Sustainable Development Goals will now finish the job of the MDGs, and ensure that no one is left behind,

The SDGs build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty. The new Goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection,

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and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection. While the SDGs are not legally binding, governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks for the achievement of the 17 Goals. Countries have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review of the progress made in implementing the Goals, which will require quality, accessible and timely data collection. Regional follow-up and review will be based on national-level analyses and contribute to follow-up and review at the global level.

In the past, women participation in sports was hampered by societal perception of women's traditional roles and expectations. Mystical beliefs instilled fear in the minds of girls aspiring to participate in sport and physical recreation. Discrimination and general negative attitude towards women perceived to be venturing in area known to be male domain were discouraging. Discriminatory socio-cultural practices often meted out to Nigerian women particularly Igbo women at community level affect negatively their participation in sports and sports leadership. Each gender is endowed with special talent, skills and abilities to enable them promote in community development. Unfortunately, in Nigeria (especially among Igbos), the life of a female child is shaped and reinforced by socio-cultural, psychological, religious and other factors that have different expectations with that of their male counterparts. In fact the Igbo culture can be said to accommodate differential expectation for men and women.

Recently, due to development, education, globalization, technological advancement, women liberation and other factors have enlightened the society and encouraged the women to embrace active participation in sport and sport leadership especially in developing worlds like some African countries. The International Sport Movements for women have been increased steadily and the Women Sport International has been working with other International Associations like ICHPER, SD, AAHPERD, ICSSPE, ISSP etc. to include sub-commission on women and gender. In addition, so many conferences have been held on women participation in sport, leisure and recreation to help mobilize more women for active participation in sports and physical activities like recreation. In realization of the objective, important international conferences have been organized in the past few decades. The Brighton International Conference on women sports held in October, 1994; the Egypt International Conference on women sports held in October 1995, the Cuban 17<sup>th</sup> International World Congress held in April 2013 to mention but a few.

There is still large scale discrimination from male folk both in voting for candidates and in allocating political offices in all social institutions. For instance in sports, when one walks into a sports council or a sports establishment and glance down the staff roster, in most cases, one finds that the number of men holding leadership positions far outnumber the number of females. Even where some sports bodies prescribe quota of women to be appointed into offices of leadership position, the problem of implementing this idea raises a fresh case. This implies that the traditional belief that women should not be where men are has continued to hunt women in taking their rightful place in politics and leadership positions in sport and as such mar sport women's chances of greater contribution to National Development and by extension the realization of MDGs/SDGs.

## **Gender Issues in Sport Participation and Development in Nigeria**

Many issues surround the achievement of national development through sportswomen. National development is all about pushing all the development indices of a country upwards whether in structural, social, political, cultural or occupational areas without compromising the future growth of any sector. Despite this concept of National development and in spite of the central role sports women play in national development, it is regrettable how cultural and social beliefs limit women from contributing their full quota to National development effort. The worst issues arise in the areas of job security and leadership opportunities for women in sport. For instance, it is still loosely feared that full involvement of women in the modern labour force may run counter to their traditional roles and may destabilize the family and the society at large. Perhaps this has offered explanations for Nigerian women who are currently known to dominate peasant Agricultural sector as well as jobs characterized by low status and pay like teaching, nursing and petty trading. Adeyanju (1986)<sup>[3, 24]</sup> laments a situation where even though females have been exposed to the general achievement orientation of Nigerian society. They have not been encouraged to succeed in those areas traditionally perceived as a laboratory for socializing male for appropriate masculine behavior in Nigerian society whereas females are rewarded for practicing future marital role (Adeyanju, 1986)<sup>[3, 24]</sup>. It is generally believed by most Nigerians that no matter how highly qualified a female cannot be as good as a man holding the same kind of job position. The worst often happens when at times a female finds herself on a high job position. This is because she is not accorded executive power simply for being a female and to assert her authority, she either exhibits "male" characteristics or she faces criticism or even overt hostility from the males who perceive her role as out of order for a female. It is doubtful how a woman who faces all these prejudices on a job could make meaningful contributions to national development and political leadership position in Nigeria sport.

Despite these constraints, women in sports have continued and will continue to advance for the course of National development in Nigeria. For instance, it is on record that some Nigerian women directly involved in sports have made their impact on National development by working as high caliber personnel in Nigerian National Sports Council and in the Federal Ministry of Sports, PE teachers and sport related researchers; Prof. Philomena Ikulayo, a Physical Education specialist once served in the Board of the National Sports Council, Prof. Veronica Igbunugo, Prof. Florence Adeyanju, Prof. Oby Okonkwar are some of the few women who have made their impact felt. Other women who are worthy of notes in sports leadership in Nigeria are Mrs. Bolayi Kuforiji (an accountant) and a former member of the Sports Federation, Mrs. Wharmate (a business woman) who worked as a member of the 15-Member Caretaker Committee of the NSC that spanned from 1985-1989; Mrs. Olayinka Idowu who was the only woman in the Board of NSC inaugurated in 1990. In the year 2003, Mrs. Adenkuie and Mrs. Jegede worked in the Federal Ministry of sports as the director of personnel and assistant director of sports development respectively. Mrs. Uche Eucharia was the one time interim Head Coach of the Super Falcons that was once ranked 24<sup>th</sup> in the World FIFA. Prof. Oby Okonkwar has equally served as the Chairman Nnamdi Azikiwe Sports Council for 14 years 1999-2014 and at NUGA level was appointed chairman of NUGA Volleyball,

chairman of NUGA Academic Sub-Committee and a representative of International Federation of Student University Games (FISU REP). Uche Nnebedum was a national basketball player and a one time member of National Basketball Federation, Prof oby okonkwor, alongside Prof P.B Ikulayo and Mary Onyali-Omagbem were three women that were in sport Thematic group in 2009 that were in sport Thematic group in 2009 when the latest National Development Plan vision 20:20:20 was produced. Mrs. Emilia Okpalaoka and late Mrs. Regina Okafor were gold medalists in the Common Wealth Games.

Bestowing honour on a Nation is a laudable index of National development at least at the psychological and social levels. In sports; there are numerous females in sports that have caused such honour to be bestowed on Nigeria. In 1963 Common wealth Games in Dakar, Nigerian women participated in its first friendship games where Mrs. Okpalaoka won the first Nigerian International Medal in High Jump. For this, she became a National Award Winner as a member of the order of Niger (MON). In the first All Africa Games in Congo Brazzaville, Nigerian women, Mrs. Adebowale Junake won Gold medals for Nigeria which was a show of prominence for Nigeria. For the first time in history, there was a women's soccer tournament in the All Africa Games won by Nigeria in the final against South Africa in October, 16, 2003 at Abuja. All these and more are testimonies of how women in sports should not be written-off as contributors to National development in Nigeria.

### **Historical Overview of Women Participation in Sport**

Women participation in sport has for long *been* a study of continuous struggle which, from all available evidence, remain somehow unsettled (Amuchia, 1978) <sup>[25]</sup>. The history of women participation in sport depicts socio-cultural segregation against women. The trend of women participation in sport has all along been punctuated by a lot of misconceptions, prejudices and even myth (Anyanwu, 1980) <sup>[26]</sup>. Women's lot has been that of child bearing, home-keeping and toil. Until in recent times, the exhibition of physical prowess was considered the domain of men. Only in the beginning of the century have African women (especially) been viewed as capable of holding their own head in physical competitions including sport. Although there is no legal apparatus to prevent women from participating in sport, there are societal and cultural barriers, norms and expectations which are even more restrictive than laws. In 776 BC, the women of Greece were denied entrance to Olympiad (Okonkwor, 1995) <sup>[9]</sup>. In most African countries women to date, are not allowed to even be spectators of masquerades and some cultural dance displays let alone participate. Most Islamic countries both in African and elsewhere abhor any sport which brings male or female competitors together. Compliance by female victim to age long discrimination in sport is generally expected because of up-bringing and environmental factors. Right from infancy daughters are brought up with strict adherence to societal expectations which can only pave way for her subjugation and dehumanization. As long as the female children are brought up with a sense of inferiority to men, they cannot profitably avail themselves of many sporting opportunities in life.

### **The Perception of Sex Role**

Stereotype plays a major part in determining participation of individuals in sporting events. Some are tagged as male or female events. And hence, dominance in participation is

directed towards such events. It can be viewed with dismay that there are no much immutable anatomical differences, that exists between males and females, few differences exists in the bones such as the weight, particular surface, texture and the pelvis. But this may not necessarily account for the low socialization of the females into some of the sport events. It is simply a theoretical framework of patriarchy.

The Victorian ideas were vividly expressed in the views of Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympics that the ancient Greek Olympics forbade women from participation, not even to watch the men run. History has it that sporting activity in Nigeria were influenced and improved upon by our colonial masters, hence it was ruled by the Britons who were in turn influenced by the Victorian ideas and their common laws. Therefore those biases and societal expectations which govern the British also affected their colonies. And consequently, women sport in Nigeria has been affected by the traditional expectations that women were (and still are) expected to perform certain roles and duties in the society which are distinctively different from that of men. Emphasized that sports participation was seen (is still seen) in many spheres of life as an exclusive right of men that should never be extended to women. Even where it is extended, female are still denied participation in some sports such as American football, Rugby, Cricket, Pole Vault, Triple Jump, Limited Marathon Races.

Hence these sports have been stereotyped to male orientation for quite some time; it is only re-orientation and socialization that can salvage these sports from male dominance. Views that socialization evolves among individuals; where there are two or more people, a form of interaction are bound to occur. Socialization in essence means the interaction between and among individuals and their physical environment that will yield positive result.

Interaction is so important in sport but females are denied it. It is through continual observation and education that the female can acquire the right attitude and value, behaviors, habits and skills transmitted in sports, school, family, neighborhood, ethnic group, religious group, nation and the world at large. Socialization and interaction is the process by which society moulds its offspring's into the pattern prescribed by its culture. According to in socialization is more than the transmission of a particular culture of a society to an individual at birth, it is the process of becoming human and acquiring uniquely human attributes from interactions with others and preparing their minds towards a particular goal primarily at childhood and secondarily at adulthood.

### **Challenges Faced By Nigerian Women in Sport Participation/Leadership**

#### **Preamble**

Even though the Greeks excluded women from the Ancient Olympic Games (and the founder of the modern Olympic Games viewed their role as cheering spectators) later, the women were fully accepted as sport participants. Traditionally, physical, psychological, religious and societal factors contributed to the discriminating treatment many girls and women experienced in their effort to compete in sport or take up physical education as a course of study

#### **Psychological Limitations**

Psychologically, many women refuse to get involved in sport as a result of certain misconceptions. It is generally believed that a woman is the weaker sex and her participation in sport would result to serious damage to her system, Also it is

believed that women participation in sport would result in tension, anxiety, stress and undue excitement more than men. Okonkwor (2012) <sup>[15, 16, 35]</sup> states that there is still a considerable group who believe that women participation in sport is physically harmful and in some instances morally wrong as sports women are generally believed to be loose morally and should not be exposed.

There is also this notion that sport participation will make female participants develop unattractive, masculine features which make them more aggressive and stubborn than non-participants. In the same vain, the traits of successful athletes, such as aggressiveness, striving for achievements, high physical and emotional endurance, and risk-taking, are usually associated with male rather than female. In the light of the above, most women have phobia for winning in sports. They face derogatory attitude and remarks if they performed well in sport competition. Such a situation creates in women a low desire to win and a conscious effort to avoid inherent psychological problems.

Okonkwor (2014) <sup>[17]</sup> states that psychological barriers to a woman's participation in sport and other physical activities include; role conflict, low self-esteem, in the absence of role models. Some of the perceived barriers to women participation in physical activity as reported by Okonkwor (2014b) <sup>[18]</sup> include lack of time, due to work, health reasons, lack of energy, motivation, self-defeat, anxiety and attitude of the society.

Sex role 'stereotypification' strongly influences women's fear of injury as a psychological constraint has implications on what task a woman can take, how she will carry out the task, when she will carry out the task, where she will carry out the task, and wifely whom to carry out the task in her chosen career or occupation. A woman who is easily scared of taking risk and sustaining injury may not take productive steps even if the work will contribute positively to national productivity and development.

### **Cultural Limitations**

The cultural belief that a woman's place is in the kitchen is still a problem for most women aspiring or actually involved in sport related career. Most societies frown at female participation in sports and do everything possible to prevent it from birth. It is perhaps some physical activities like feminine dance, other restricted recreation that women are allowed to participate in, in traditional Nigerian society. Submissiveness and restriction by domestic norms are the desired characteristics of a good woman. Even where women manage to reach leadership position in sport, they meet great difficulties which arise as a result of obvious conflict with their traditional rote in their families. Again in most parts of Nigerian society, women are not allowed to even be spectators during masquerading and traditional wrestling. It is also a taboo for a woman to climb certain trees especially palm tree, kola nut tree etc; and are not free to eat all types/parts of meat. Women who choose to participate and even get involved in sporting careers are stigmatized by the society (Okonkwor 2014) <sup>[17]</sup>. The demands placed on women from paid employment, housework, child-rearing and lower socioeconomic level, hinder their involvement in leadership. All women face pervasive and invasive messages about how women's bodies should look move and develop and they face rigid social definitions of attractiveness.

### **Social Limitations**

In most Nigerian Cultures, a woman is still tied down by

several taboos that impede her emancipation, let alone the practice of sport. Modern labour force that takes woman outside her home (like camping and travelling involved in sports life) clashes with traditional expectations. Even where few women manage to get into high positions. They meet great difficulties/resistance at home and even in their offices in their attempt to discharge their official duties creditably. Social factors such as social support are significant correlates of exercise behavior; social limitations to women's involvement in physical activity include lack of social support, role conflict, lack of equal opportunities and limited role models. Sexual harassment is one of the limitations to their initiating and maintaining physical exercise programme. Lack of support from parents, husbands, siblings, friends, peers and social institutions constitute serious limitations to female-exercise behavior. Women are more likely to participate in exercise when they enjoy support from significant others and loved ones. Most adolescent females often look forward to seeing a woman who is either standing as a mother, sister, friend or peer that participates in physical activities to imitate (as their male counterparts) and the absence of such role model discourage-them from involvement in any physical activities.

### **Environmental Limitations**

Inconvenient, inaccessible programme locations, work conflicts, lack of time, lack of facilities, and other environmental factors can hinder women's long-term participation in physical activities. Hindrances to participation in physical activities for women are lack of time and money, safety, resources such as facilities, equipment and instruction, and support (US Department of Health and Human Services Publication, 2000). Reasons for low physical activity participation rates for women include lack of transportation and lack of money due to lower socio-economic status. A woman faces problems of safety and security in traveling alone to a facility for exercising at night, Women experience of sexual abuse and harassment in the sporting environment constitute serious barrier to their involvement in physical exercise and sport programmes. Unfavorable and non-supportive sports environment affects exercise and sports adherence. The nature of sports facilities is one of the factors that determine one's exercise behavioral pattern. Unavailability, inadequacy, inaccessibility, unaffordability, proximity and insecurity of sports facilities scare their potential users especially women.

### **Religious Limitations**

Some religions like Islam forbid women from associating with grown up men or participating in any competitive physical activities involving men. Both Islamic and some Christian religious denominations preach against certain sports outfits for women and they could not participate in any activity that will involve exposure of certain parts of the body. Again sports that may involve body contact with men is frowned at.

### **Educational Limitations**

Poor educational standard is another barrier. Women must be knowledgeable enough to help sensitize and create awareness in some of the psychological, social, religious and cultural misconceptions that discourage majority of young women from actively participating in sport and other physical activities. Poverty: Most Africans are faced with poverty and underdevelopment and sport and education are not priority.

The major problem in our rural area is day-to-day survival.

**Economic Limitations:** This is one of the biggest problems facing Nigerian women and trying to overcome this is an uphill task. The women may not enjoy credit facilities that could strengthen their endeavors; they have fewer economic opportunities and less autonomy than men. Nigerian women are absent or poorly represented in economic decision-making and other economic policies in the country. Over the past decade, the number of women participating in remunerated work has increased. However, due to lack of bargaining power, women are forced to accept low or poor working conditions. The inadequate sharing of family responsibilities and insufficient services such as childcare, continue to restrict women in economic and professional opportunities. Inadequate access to land has prevented women from making efficient contribution to national growth and development. The consequences arising from this barrier is not farfetched. Inadequate economic empowerment of women pushes them (especially the young girls) to undue subordination to unscrupulous men and circumstances, resulting to early childhood marriage. Other consequences are:

- Enslavement
- Inferior positions in all aspects of life.
- Inability to enroll into physical education as a course because of ignorance and cost of facilities involved.
- Lack of poor participation in sport.
- Poor or lack of financial support for women in sports association, to mention but a few.

### **Background of women involvement in active sport leadership**

Sport development in Nigeria has over the years witnessed one sided approach in favour of the men. Generally speaking, the men are culturally free to embrace whatever profession their life's ambitions may be, unlike women who dare not venture into certain fields regarded as exclusive domain for the men. Though this discrimination based on gender is not peculiar to sport alone in Nigeria, sport rank very high as a field in which this type of segregation is sustained. Consequently, it is possible to recall the large number of Igbo men who have and are still making the list of top leadership positions in sport, while their women counterpart can simply be counted on the fingers. This situation exists in spite of the domination of women folk in the last official census figure of Nigeria and recorded achievements of women in many aspects of major international sport competitions.

### **Women and sports leadership: the case of marginal representation**

Women have really gone into leadership in virtually all fields of endeavour though that of sport leadership is still marginal due to socio-cultural factors generally facing sport women discussed above. Specifically speaking, women have not yet reached the desired critical level in sport leadership. Women in leadership position, as far as sport is concerned, is still disproportionately smaller than the number of men and women in leadership position in other fields of endeavour like trade, music, education, arts, media, banking, business etc. rather than empowering and encouraging qualified women to be full part of sport leadership in acceptable number, 'tokens' are granted to make few women feel good. These tokens come in form of settlements with some slots in federation boards, international trips without specific roles, appointment for selected few, gifts in form of foreign currency, jewelries, T-Shirts to even free lunch.

Just like in sport participation, women who aspire to leadership position are seen as deviating from societal norms for women. Ndu (2001) <sup>[28]</sup> posits that women, who try to enter into leadership position in sports organizations, meet all sorts of obstacles from family, community, offices, men and even fellow women. The oppositions is so stiff that some of the characteristics, attitudes and behavior attributed to women in leadership position on account of their gender, stigmatize them. Women are generally seen as incapable of fully performing administrative functions of decision-making, planning, organization, communication, supervising and controlling. This is not the case. Okonkwo (2011) <sup>[13, 14, 32]</sup> survey of some women in sport leadership in Igbo land reveals that sport women leaders do go out of their way to prove a point. They work two times more than their male counterparts to keep their home, perform official functions and even go extra miles to prove their capability.

Result of a random survey by Okonkwo (2010) <sup>[12, 31]</sup> shows that:

- Women in high sport administrative position are few
- Women in sport leadership are granted tokens
- The gender of the manager (leader) does not affect people's expectations and evaluation of style of management,
- There is a trend to favour men in top position by men
- There is a trend to favour men in the position by women
- Women sport administrator start with democratic style and end up autocratic to achieve result,
- Women administrators who are bent on pleasing many people do fail in their goal,
- Women sport administrators achieve more result.

The trend to favour men in top positions goes with a problem connected with women's societal roles. Administrator's position demand that the incumbent stays long hours designing and planning work schedule outside the official hours and involvement in sport tours almost on daily basis. Men can more readily afford to do this because of the supportive role of their spouses who take care of the home front and see to the personal needs and comfort of the spouse. Wife to a male chief executive is happy to be called commissioner for women affairs and in most cases from association to confirm their pride, (the one who is in charge of the home front).

Hence, we find association like POWA, Army Officers Wife's Association, Vice Chancellors Wife's Association, Medical Officers Wife's Association and in recent time, Political appointees Wife's Association in Lagos State, for women, the story is not often the same. Most Nigeria men would not like to be addressed like "the Sport Director's husband, MD's husband" etc. so, he may be reluctant to take on some of the home roles when the woman cannot be around. The organizational norms and expectations usually conflict with norms and expectations of women's family role and at times, given wrong impression that women are not capable.

This may be one of the major propaganda that fuels tokenism in sport leadership

for women. In 2005, a year-long study conducted by Caliper, New Jersey-based management consultant firm and Aurora, a London-based organization that advocates right of women concluded that

- Women leaders are more persuasive than their male counterparts,
- When feeling the sting of rejecting, women leaders learn from adversity and carry on with an "I" show you

attitude,

- Women leaders demonstrate an inclusive team-building leadership style of problem-solving and decision-making,
- Women leaders are more likely to ignore rules and take on risks.

Over the years, I have observed women administrators and one thing I find very constant is their multi-tasking abilities. It is also true that some of them also have to work extra hard despite their capabilities and abilities to prove their onions as females and the dogged and determined ones have often succeeded in doing so.

Researchers have long found that people think "male" when they think "Leader" and that this result transcends many cultural differences. Because of perceived incompatibility between the requirements of feminine and those of leadership, women are often required to "soften" their leadership styles to gain the approval of their constituents. Women who do not temper their agency and competence with warmth and friendliness risk being disliked and less influential. Interestingly, men face no such necessity to be agreeable while exercising power.

Women who lead with an autocratic style are the targets of more disapproval than those who enact a more democratic style; men may choose the autocratic style with relative impunity, if they are effective leaders. When women demonstrate competent leadership within an explicitly masculine arena-something that often requires the application of a "harder" leadership style they are disliked and disparaged. Can this be one of the reasons why there are few women in leadership positions?

### **How far have Nigerian women fared in sport and sport leadership?**

Nigerian women are constantly breaking the fetters with which they had historically tied; and their skills, speed and endurance are continually improving though the biases are not completely forgotten. Names like Mary Tombiri, Fatima Yusuf, Mary Onyali-Omagbemi, Chioma Ajunwa, Bose Kafo and Falilat Ogunkoya Ochaku, are household names due to the fact that they are accomplished world class athletes. Their gender is no longer the issue.

Nigerian women have continued to boost the country's international image by their achievements at continental and global competitions where they have won medals for the country. At the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, Nigeria's female athletes won one gold, one silver and two bronze medals. The first individual gold medal won by Nigeria after 38 years of Olympic participation was by the female long jumper, Chioma Ajunwa. The memories of soccer display with skill and class by Nigerian female remain long after the games. As analysis of gold medal won by Nigeria in the All African Games since inception show, while Nigerian men have won 28 gold medals, their female counterparts have won 57 medals. In football, the female team, the Falcons have become a major force not only in Africa where they are perennial champions, but also globally. The falcons participated in the three Female World Cup Finals in 1991, 1995 and 1999. The Falcons based on their performance at the 1999 World Cup Finals, qualified for the finals of the female football competition at the Sydney 2000 Olympics in Australia. Despite the major impediments that hinder the involvement of women in sports, the future of women in sports in the country is bright despite the persistent male dominance.

### **Women Involvement Sustainable Development in Sport Leadership and Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development can only be achieved if every citizen (man or woman) is given the opportunity to have his or her potentials developed and utilized for the development of the society, every individual has innate potentials in form of cognitive, psychomotor and effective talent traits. These potentials can only be identified if one is given the opportunity. But with discrimination, obstacles are created which inhibits the equitable access and participation in developmental process by every member of the society; both the individual and the society are in chain. As World Bank (2008) rightly noted, no society can survive sustainably and allow the members to live in dignity if there is prejudices and discrimination. Partnership and equality between men and women are the basis of strong families and viable societies in a rapidly changing world. If development is accepted as adequate mobilization of the human and material resources, therefore it aptly follows that women must be fully mobilized and empowered.

Women empowerment in sport, politics, economic, education and other fields of human endeavour is a catalyst for the maintenance and sustenance of development. Even the leadership crisis which our country is now experiencing can only be solved if a greater number of women are involved in decision making. The political scenario can boast of capable women like, Ngozi Okonjo-iweala, Dora Akunyili (of blessed memory), Oby Ezekwesili, Farida Waziri; the education sector can boast of women like Grace Alele Williams, Dr. Lami Amodu, Prof Uche B. Gbenedio, prof. Alice Ndu, while in sport leadership, we have Prof Vero Igbanugo, Prof F.B. Ikulayo, Prof Adeyanju FB, Prof Oby Okonkwo and a host of others. Their number is significant compared to their male counterparts, but their actions are very visible in their various sectors.

Sport has been playing a very dynamic role in socialization, education, welfare of man and societal development. This is why it is gaining grounds in institutions, organizations, establishments and various sectors in the society. Sport, which is a human endeavor, demands the involvement of every man or woman. By their sheer numerical strength, the participation of Nigerian women in all development effort (including sport) is indispensable for a meaningful impact in recognition and role of women in national development. The development of our country should be carried on in partnership between the men and the woman; one gender should not be regarded as complete at the expense of the other. What is obtained now at various levels of sport leadership, as far as women involvement is concerned, is unhealthy-and counter-productive. The women are not yet taken serious for what they can offer. For about 4 decades of establishing the National Sports Commission (the apex policy-making body in sports), no woman has ever smelt leadership positions like: Minister and Chairman of NSC; DG, NSC, Chairman of Nigerian Olympic Committee, Chairman Nigeria Football Federation, Chairman Athletic Federation and other viable Federations. The list is endless. What is obtained is that whenever appointments are made, someone somewhere may observe that there is no woman in the list usually a woman may be dropped into represent the women. Men are appointed for whom they are and what they can offer but women are appointed to represent a group-the female folk or better still appointed just as a token. The talent, commitment and professionalism that women can contribute to the

development of Nigeria through sports are enormous. Bringing women into the mainstream of sports is an important end in itself and a key to improving the quality of life of every one. Sustainable human development is not possible without the full and equal participation of women. The empowerment of women is an imperative for national development. We in Nigeria must, now more than ever before, adopt a culture and structure that provide equal access and opportunity to all Nigerians, female or male.

### **Issues on Women Participation in Sport: Implication for Achievement of Millenium Development Goals (Mdg's)**

Many issues surround the achievement of national development through sports women. National development is all about pushing all! The development indices of a country upwards whether in structural, social, political, cultural or occupational sectors without compromising the future of growth generally. Despite this concept of National development and in spite of the central role sports women play in national development, it is regrettable that cultural and social beliefs limit women from contributing their full quota to National development efforts. The worst issues arise in the areas of job security and leadership opportunities for women in sport. For instance, it is still loosely feared that full involvement of women in the modern labour force may run counter to their traditional roles and may destabilize the family and the society at large. Perhaps this has offered explanations for Nigerian women who are currently known to dominate peasant Agricultural sector as well as jobs characterized by low status and pay like teaching, nursing and petty trading. Adeyanju (1986)<sup>[3, 24]</sup> laments a situation where even though females have been exposed to the general achievement orientation of Nigerian society. They have not been as encouraged to succeed in those areas traditionally perceived as a laboratory for socializing male for appropriate masculine behavior in Nigerian society whereas females are rewarded for promoting future marital role. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is a United Nations recent development programme geared towards achieving the following eradication of extreme sport as source of income, Universal Basic Education, gender equality and empowerment, reduced child mortality, improved maternal health, combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases; environmental sustainability, and development of global partnership for development. Reasoning from the foregoing objectives of the MDGs and in recognition of the axiom that "to train a woman is to empower the entire nation", it implies that women participation in sports is a strategy at the fore front of the realization of the goals of the Millennium Development Goals because the physical fitness of a woman gained through participation in sports would mean off-springs that may have the same attribute. Regrettably, this may not be a "Simultaneous equation" since the realization of these through women in sports may be appreciated more in words than in deed because of some misconceptions in some quarters against women and girls who participate in active sports. This is buttressed by the fact that even in some "modern" societies, people still feel that child bearing function of a woman is impaired through physical activities, that unwanted physical exertion during menstruation was considered damaging to the reproductive organs, and that women's nurturing and reproductive organs like the breast and uterus are at risk during sporting activities. In spite of these misleading fallacies about the women reproductive organ while in sports, it is to be noted that woman participation in

sports serves as not only a liberating motion for women in sports from such absurdities but a fulfilling obligation for the realization of Millennium Development Goals.

The Millennium Development Goals of improved maternal health, reduced child mortality, eradication of extreme hunger and poverty, gender equality and empowerment are all implicit in women who are involved in active sports. It is only recently that Africa began to realize that participation in sports has more winning than benefit. Women who participate in sports are empowered through gaining of both organic and physical fitness. According to Okonkwo (1995)<sup>[9]</sup> physical fitness is a state of well-being believed to be consistent with muscle strength, endurance, flexibility, body composition and cardio-respiratory endurance all of which are apparatus for the achievement of MDGs. Foremost experts on the effect of sports participation on women state that properly designed sport programme improve, rather than hinder femininity. After all, various researchers are reported to have concluded that there is ample evidence to unlimited physiological, psychological and sociological values derived by all participants in sports. For instance Rosent, report that women in sport feel better, sleep better, have more energy than non-participants with greater record of higher productivity in other aspects of life. It has equally been established that sport women are better time "manisers" with good energy to supply emotional need of their spouse.

The Millennium Development Goal of reduced child mortality, as studies have shown, gains the support of women participation in sports. For instance studies reveals that female athletes were known to have quick and easy deliveries and fewer caesarian sections more than non-female athletes while in labour and duration of labour is shorter too. Accordingly it is on record that some of the female athletes won medals during pregnancy and few days after delivery and have less menstrual disturbances and respond more readily to treatment than the non-athletes.

The potential of sports to effectively convey messages and influence behavior necessary for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals has been increasingly recognized in recent years. In November 2013, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted resolution 58/5 entitled "Sport as a means to promote Education, Health, Development and Peace" where it recognized the power of sport to contribute to human development. It is for this reason that the UN proudly worked with the Government of Samoa and the 'South pacific games authority to ensure socially responsible games at the xiii South Pacific games 2007 that promoted development messages on anti-doping, smoke free, clean and safe games based on the spirit of volunteerism.

The participation of some Somoa women in the games reflects how the MDGs have been achieved for the female-athletes such as Ele Opeloge, Sharon Pickering-Fiji and Pareina Mokorea Tangata. Ele Opeloge was to be just another Samoan girl but it is sport that made her the difference. After only 18 months of hard training and dedication, Ele had already broken the common wealth weight lighting record and is a hot favorite to be the first pacific Island female athlete and weight lighter to win a gold medal in 2010 common wealth games in India. Apart from huge financial rewards given to her under the Samoan Government's bonus scheme that rewards and recognizes local athletes' premium sporting achievements in international competitions, the National University of Samoa awarded her a scholarship to study and use her high profile to promote the University's course in sports medicine. As for Sharon Pickering-Fiji, her

achievements as a swimmer for Fiji include 2 gold medals, 4 silver medals and 2 bronze medals in a career that spans over 15 years competing in the south pacific games, the common wealth games, and the Olympic and coaching the Fiji team. She was twice voted the Fiji sports person of the years in 1987 and 1991.

The mother, 4 years old Mokoroa is representing the Cook Islands in Touchy Rugby at the xiii South Pacific games in Samoa. She also plays soccer and has represented her country in the sports. She works as a physiotherapist at the Rarotonga Hospital and is the physiotherapist for the National Net Ball Team.

All these achievements and self-development of female-athletes through the instrumentality of sports are a pointer to the fact that female participation in sports has a lot of positive implication for the achievements of the millennium development goals.

### **Need For the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

Poverty is a root contributory cause to the world's social ills culminating in lack of peace and harmony the world over. Lack of education is in itself a sentence to a life time of poverty. When children do drop out of school before completing primary school or even leave school without acquiring basic skills, they cannot earn their living in a competitive world; neither can they contribute maximally to national development. They also have less capacity to rear healthy educated children and therefore greater capacity to propagate poverty and its diverse complications. Again there are no jobs beyond subsistence for people who are illiterate and innumerate.

Women who participate in sport are empowered through gaining of both organic and physical fitness. According to Okonkwo (1995) <sup>[9]</sup>, physical fitness is a state of well-being believed to be consistent with muscle strength, endurance, flexibility, body composition and cardio respiration endurance all of which are apparatus for the achievements of the MDGs. For most experts, (for example Ojeme 2009) <sup>[20, 33]</sup>, on the effect of sport participation by women, properly designed sport programme improve, rather than hinder femininity. After all, various researches are reported to have concluded that there is ample evidence to unlimited physiological, psychological and sociological values derived, by all participants in sport; for instance Rosent, Mechikoff and Sean report that they feel better, sleep better, have more energy than non-participants with greater record of higher productivity in other aspects of life.

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### **How are the sustainable development goals different from the mdgs?**

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 targets are broader in scope and go further than the MDGs by addressing the root causes of poverty and the universal need for development that jobs for all people. The goals cover the three dimensions of Sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

Building on the success and momentum of the MDGs, the new global goals cover more grounds, with ambitions to address inequalities, economic growth, decent jobs, cities and human settlements, industrialization, oceans, ecosystems, energy, climate change, Sustainable consumption and production, peace and justice.

The new Goals are universal and apply to all countries, whereas the MDGs were intended for action in developing countries only. A core feature of the SDGs is their strong focus on means of implementation-the mobilization of financial resources-capacity-building and technology, as well as data and institutions. The new Goals recognize that tackling climate change is essential for Sustainable development and poverty eradication. SDG 13 aims to promote urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

### **The Way Forward For Women in Sport Leadership in Nigeria**

According to Dr. Aggrey's philosophy, to educate a man is to educate an individual but to educate a woman is to educate a nation. Unfortunately, women, worldwide are still discriminated against, marginalized and are mostly illiterates as they are still denied equal access to school. However, they have not relented in fighting for their liberation. This has attracted the United Nations which has in the last two decades; been at the forefront of efforts to raise the status of women. It organized series of conferences on women e. g. 1975 in Mexico, 1980 in Copenhagen, 1985 in Nairobi and the popular Beijing Africa, e. g. the 1989 Conference in Abuja. A blueprint on the "Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women" was then produced which spelt out critical areas of concern for the emancipation of women.

As it is now, Nigerian women should continue to fight for their empowerment that is for authority and power to chart their own course. These should start from their respective homes to communities where women should fight for the abolition of some obnoxious cultural practices and traditional laws against them. Women should start by providing equal educational opportunities to all their children irrespective of sex and encourage their daughters to study hard and enter the so-called men's subjects as many are now doing. They should desist from giving their daughters early in marriage or as house helps but rather educate them to the highest levels. Women should encourage their daughters, who through early marriages dropped out of school to return to school. The illiterate women themselves should fall back on non-formal education to improve themselves. This is important for the educational empowerment; they will gain economic and political empowerment.



I wish to appeal here that you pick up a copy of the book titled the Travails of Womanhood by Nndi Chukwuemeka and take time to read the obnoxious practices against Nigerian women especially the Igbo women. I wish to end this lecture with Pope John Paul II's admonition to the Church in his post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* (2000:89) which states that God gives man and women an equal personal dignity, endowing them with inalienable rights and responsibilities proper to the human person so the church should make every effort to foster the safeguarding of these rights by coming against those African customs and practices which deprive women of their rights and respects.

Highly respected audience, may I stress here that you have important roles to play. May the issues raised in this paper be food for thought and matter of concern to you all. I therefore urge you to complement the good efforts of the government in appointing women to important posts and in establishing the Ministry of Women Affairs to fight societal discrimination against women

### **How will the Sustainable Development Goals be implemented?**

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda that came out of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development provided concrete policies and actions to support the implementation of the new agenda. Implementation and success will rely on countries' own sustainable development policies, plans and programmes, and will be led by countries. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be a compass for aligning countries' plans with their global commitments.

Nationally owned and country-led sustainable development strategies will require resource mobilization and financing strategies.

All stakeholders: governments, civil society, the private sector, and others, are expected to contribute to the realisation of the new agenda.

A revitalized global partnership at the global level is needed to support national efforts. This is recognized in the 2030 Agenda.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships have been recognized as an important component of strategies that seek to mobilize all stakeholders around the new agenda.

### **The Way Forward For Implementing Sport Leadership Chances for Nigerian Women**

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Highly respected audience, may I stress here that you have important roles to play. May the issues raised in this paper be food for thought and matter of concern to you all. I therefore urge you to complement the good efforts of the government in appointing women to important posts and in establishing the especially in sport leadership positions and in establishing the ministry of women affairs to fight societal discriminations against women.

### **Conclusion**

Participation in sports and physical activities is a globally recognized right of everyone including women. However, this right is not totally observed in some societies as exemplified by some-cultural limitations directly or indirectly imposed on women. The female folk are disadvantaged in physical activities, hence the limitations. These socio-cultural limitations have negative implications on women's productivity and contributions to national development. Participation in sport competitions by most Nigerian women up to the present time pose a threat to implementation actions towards achievement of the MDGS. The last one hundred years or so have witnessed the emergence of revolutionary ideas that have changed the course of human civilization in Africa. One singular development that changed developmental events has been emergence, though not without bias in certain areas, of female participation in competitive sport. There is need to recognize the global trend toward gender parity in all spheres of life including Physical Education and sport. Sport has come to stay in Nigeria because it is now part of our culture. Modern trend should recognize the social expectations, that talents of both men and women should be harnessed efficiently for meaningful development of the country. It is pertinent to state that the attention of the world is turning towards women involvement in national and international development issues including sport. For example, in female soccer world, Nigeria cannot afford to lag behind because of cultural and religious beliefs and misconceptions. Just few years ago, why the Super Eagles were wobbling in their performance over the years, their female counterparts, Super Falcons, clinched the African Cup

for the 7th time. The recent increase however in the number of women participating in sport in Nigeria does not give enough signals for optimism (Adeyanju, 2011) <sup>[3, 24]</sup>. Every woman should shake off all forms of stigma that hinder her participation in sport. Meaningful participation will hopefully prepare more women for higher offices and management positions in National development. The convention on Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women of December 18th 1979 warns that the "charter of United Nations reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights in the dignity and worth of the human person and equal right of men and women". Nigeria cannot afford to continue to down play the importance of women in the area of sport development and sports leadership. There is no empirical evidence to support the belief generally upheld that the traditional role of women cannot be fully performed by women in the career of sport. Most of the fears expressed to justify the isolation of talented women from participating in competitive sports are ill conceived, divisive and retrogressive. Sport has acquired social and economic under tone the world over. Women in turn have immense role to play to maximize their opportunities from participation in "sport. Their sheer numerical strength, especially in Nigeria, is a pointer to the grave misplacement of priority when they are not involved in the scheme of things. It is in this regard that empowerment of women through sport and enrolment in physical education is considered a veritable tool for women emancipation. Nigerian women are advised to ignore all forms of stigma that hinder them from maximum participation in sport. With perseverance, the current social attitude and misdemeanor will become a thing of the past. Interestingly, the pulling of efforts together through the activities of organized groups such as Nigerian women in sport (NWIS), Gender and Economic Regulation in Africa (GERA), International Olympic Committee (BC), United Nations (UN Women) and various other Ministerial bodies is a step in the right direction. However, these bodies should match words with actions to ensure that numerous summits and declarations do not end in mere rhetoric, by so doing the vision of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)/SDGs will be a mission accomplished. Reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights in the dignity and worth of the human person and equal right of men and women". Nigeria cannot afford to continue to down play the importance of women in the area of sport development and sports leadership. There is no empirical evidence to support the belief generally upheld that the traditional role of women cannot be fully performed by women in the career of sport. Most of the fears expressed to justify the isolation of talented women from participating in competitive sports are ill conceived, divisive and retrogressive. Sport has acquired social and economic under tone the world over. Women in turn have immense role to play to maximize their opportunities from participation in "sport. Their sheer numerical strength, especially in Nigeria, is a pointer to the grave misplacement of priority when they are not involved in the scheme of things. It is in this regard that empowerment of women through sport and enrolment in physical education is considered a veritable tool for women emancipation. Nigerian women are advised to ignore all forms of stigma that hinder them from maximum participation in sport. With perseverance, the current social attitude and misdemeanor will become a thing of the past. Interestingly, the pulling of efforts together through the activities of organized groups such as Nigerian women in sport (NWIS), Gender and Economic Regulation in Africa (GERA),

International Olympic Committee (bC), United Nations (UN Women) and various other Ministerial bodies is a step in the right direction. However, these bodies should match words with actions to ensure that numerous summits and declarations do not end in mere rhetoric, by so doing the vision of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)/SDGs will be a mission accomplished.

### Recommendations

In order to ensure that women contribute to national productivity and national development through the inherent values of sports and physical exercises, the following recommendations are made.

- a. Women should be given social support from members of the society ranging from spouse, parents, peers, friends and government to enable them participate in sports and physical activities.
- b. Conducive environment such as adequate, accessible facilities/equipment and finance for transportation to sport venues should be made available to women at homes, workplaces and schools to encourage them,
- c. Sports psychologists should assist women overcome psychological problems (such as fears of injury, low self-esteem and negative self-perception) affecting their participation in sports and physical activities.
- d. Sports and exercise scientists like exercise physiologists should assist women in improving their body structures and functioning through regimented sports and physical exercise programmes to meet the physiological requirements of different conditions and status,
- e. Cultural institutions especially traditional leaders or rulers should be enlightened on the benefits of women participating in sports and physical education, as it may help correct certain societal misconceptions, wrong beliefs and negative attitude towards women's involvement in sports,
- f. Various organization like United Nation (UN Women), NAWIS, ISA and the other organization known to be fighting for women equality and empowerment should be proactive enough to sponsor researchers in the area of gender to conferences, workshop, academic congresses in other to bring to the lime light their findings and ways of implementing ideas that will bring solution to the cutting edge dilemma,
- g. Increasing scholarship and training for women athletes, coaches and other officials,
- h. Urging the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to recognize the importance of physical activity and sport to women's and girls' development at all stages of their lives.
- i. Raising awareness about the importance of quality physical education,
- j. Developing strategies and educational materials to support physical education for girls.
- k. Working with the media to ensure a more accurate projection of women's sport.
- l. Gender mainstreaming is one of the ways out of this problem.

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