

**GENDER DIFFERENCES, PARTICIPATION AND INEQUALITY IN LABOUR MARKETS IN
NIGERIA**

By

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ABSTRACT

The labour market is profoundly influenced by various demographic factors with Gender emerging as a pivotal element shaping employment patterns and economic outcomes. Gender differences in Labour market participation and inequality remain significant challenges in Nigeria, shaping both economic development and social inclusion. Women's Labour force participation is consistently lower than men's with recent estimates showing female rate around 52 percent compared to 65 percent for men. Even when employed, women are disproportionately represented in informal and low-paying sector, while men dominate formal wages employment. This paper highlights on persistent wages gaps that exist, exacerbated by marital status, motherhood, and culture and social norms that continue to assign women heavy domestic responsibilities, constrains their time and mobility for paid work. It will also examine educational disparities, weak enforcement of labour regulations and limited social protection further entrench inequality. The implications are wide-ranging women face higher poverty risks, households experience reduced income security and the nation loses potential productivity and inclusive growth. The paper seeks to explain recent improvements, such as rising female participation rates targeted empowerment programmes and growing policy attention to gender equity which indicate slow but positive change. In addressing these disparities requires, multidimensional strategies including expanding women's access to education and digital skill; enforcing equal pay laws. The paper adopted empirical method of contacting different texts and relevant journals. The paper concludes that formalising informal work, improving childcare support, and challenging entrenched gender norms, by bridging the gender gap in Nigeria's labour market is not on question of equity, but also a crucial driver for sustainable economic transformation and national development.

KEYWORDS: Gender inequality, Labour Market, Participation, wages gap, informal employment, women employment, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION:

Addressing the issues of Gender, race, and inequality in the Labour Market is crucial for cultivating a more inclusive and equitable economic by recognizing the complex dynamics at play and implementing effective policies, societies can strive to reduce disparities and promote equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their gender or racial background. Enduring access to quality employment and fair wages for every worker is not merely a matter of social justice. It is essential for fostering sustainable economic growth. (Armosty, 2004)

This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of how gender and race shape labour market dynamics underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions to advance equality and inclusivity. It will also discuss the complex ways gender, race, and inequality interest in the labour market, showing how these factors shape job prospects wage gaps, and career progression. While progress has been made in promoting diversity and inclusive at work, deep-rooted challenges remain, continuing to disadvantage underrepresented groups. Gender activeness in Nigeria's Labour Market is unequal. Men are more active informal, high-paying sectors, while women are highly active in informal low- income work. However, closing this gap require policies that expand women's access to education, finance, child-care support and protection in both formal and informal employment. (Ajani, 2003)

However, Gender differences in Nigeria's Labour force participation reflect structural inequalities, cultural norms, educational disparities and care burdens. Men dominate formal better paying jobs, while women are clustered in informal low-income activities.

Occupational Segregation by Gender:-

Occupational Segregation denotes the phenomenon where certain professions are predominantly occupied by one gender, leading to a labour market structure that often reflects traditional gender roles and societal expectations. This segregation of the workforce has significant implications for economic equality and the career trajectories of both men and women. (Geretti, 2022)

The current trends reveal a persistent underrepresentation of women in high- paying, male dominated professions such as engineering, information technology, and financial service conversely women are over represented in lower-paying fields, predominantly associated with care giving and administrative roles, including education, health care, and clerical support. This division of labour not only reflects societal norms regarding gender but also reinforces existing economic disparities. (Daidu, 2023)

The implications of such segregation are profound, as it often leads to a concentration of women in roles that provide limited opportunities for advancement and lower wages. As a result, women may find it challenge to achieve financial independence and long-term career growth, perpetuating the cycle of economic inequality consequences or the implications of occupational segregation are multifaceted. Women's limited access to high-paying male- dominated fields restricts their earning potential and diminishes their opportunities for upward mobility. This segregation creates a workforce in which women are frequently confined to lower- status positions resulting in a wage gap that not only affects individual earnings but also has broader economic consequences. (Ibekwe, 2020)

Furthermore, the lack of representation of women in leadership roles within those higher-paying sectors diminishes the diversity of thought and innovation ultimately impacting organisational performance and economic growth. The systemic nature of this issue necessitates targeted interventions to break down the barriers that perpetuate occupational segregation.

However, occupational segregation occurs when men and women are concentrated in different types of jobs industries or sectors. In Nigeria, men are overrepresented in higher-paying, more formal and technical occupations, while women are concentrated in lower-paying, informal and care-related sectors.

Occupational Segregation by Gender plays a major role in shaping Nigeria's Labour Market Inequalities. Its manifestations in Nigeria's Labour Market is seen in horizontal segregation, where women cluster in teaching, nursing, petty trading, agriculture, and domestic series, men dominate construction, engineering transportation, mining, and managerial role.

In sectoral differences:- Women dominate informal self-employment and subsistence agriculture, while men are technology-driven sectors.

Invertical Segregation:- Even in mixed sectors men occupy senior positions while women are often restricted to junior or support roles. Therefore occupational segregation by gender in Nigeria channels women into lower-paid, less secure jobs and restricts their mobility in the labour market. This entrenches wage gaps, reinforces cultural stereotypes, and slows down inclusive economic growth. Thinking it is the key to reducing labour market inequality and achieving Gender equity. (Awaka, 2016)

Discrimination and bias in hiring practices:-

Discrimination and bias in Nigerian hiring practices disadvantages women, ethnic and religious minorities, order workers and even younger job seekers who don't fit employer stereotypes. These biases reinforce inequality, weaken productivity and perpetuate occupational segregation. Addressing them requires a mix of policy enforcement, cultural change and inclusive hiring practice.

Discrimination and bias occur when employment decisions, such as recruitment, selection, promotion, or remuneration are influenced by gender, ethnicity, religion, marital status, age or appearance rather than by merit and skills. In Nigeria, these biases are both explicit and implicit (unconscious employer stereotypes). (Onyema, 2024)

Besides Gender-Based Bias preference for male candidates: Many employers men are more reliable, committed, or physically capable, especially in technical, managerial or field-biased jobs, while mental and maternal penalties:- Married women or mothers are often viewed as less committed due to family responsibilities, leading to reduced chances of hiring or promotion.

Stereotypes of appropriate jobs:- women are clustered in teaching, clerical, secretarial, or customer service roles, while men are favoured for engineering, finance, ICT or leadership positions

Policy Interventions to Address Racial Inequalities:-

Policy interventions play preventive, corrective, and promote roles in addressing racial/ethnic inequality in Nigeria's Labour Market. Preventive roles involve enforcing anti-discrimination laws corrective roles involve affirmative action and equalization policies, while promotive roles expand education, skills and economic empowerment for disadvantaged groups. Ultimately, such policy fosters equity, social cohesion and inclusive growth by ensuring that all groups have fair access to employment opportunities. (Odishika, 2023)

Policy interventions therefore play crucial roles in addressing inequality like:

1. **Equal opportunity legislation:** This deals with enforcing anti-discrimination laws that prohibit employers from restricting jobs to specific ethnic or religious groups monitoring job adverts and recruitment processes to eliminate exclusion any language and practices
2. **Affirmative action and quotas:** Implementing affirmative action policies that promote diversity and inclusion in hiring and promoting processes can help mitigate discrimination and create more balanced workforce. These policies can foster an environment where individual from underrepresented groups have equitable access to job opportunities and career advancement. Policies such as the federal character principle aim to balance opportunities. Extending such measures to private-sector recruitment can reduce ethnic/ regional exclusion.
3. **Educational training programs access and human capital development:** Investing in education and job training initiatives tailored to the needs of underrepresented communities can enhance skill development and improve employability. By providing access to quality education and vocational training, we can empower individuals to pursue fulfilling careers and increase economic mobility.

Policies that expand quality education across regions (particularly northern Nigeria, which has historically lower access should be introduced) it will assist in reducing labour market inequality.

However, scholarships, skills acquisition and technical training targeted at disadvantaged ethnic groups enhance competitiveness.

1. **Strengthening Anti-Discrimination Legislation:** Robust enforcement of anti-discrimination laws is critical for ensuring that employers are held accountable for discriminatory practices. By creating a legal framework that protects the rights of all workers, we can promote a more equitable labour market.
2. **Intersectionality, Labour Market, Empowerment and inclusion programmes:-** Intersectionality explores the interconnected nature of social categories such as races, gender, and class, which can result in overlapping systems of discrimination and disadvantage. Understanding how these intersections shape labour market outcome is essential for addressing inequality effectively. (Anyankua, 2021)

Government initiatives that support entrepreneurship, especially in marginalized communities, to reduce dependence on discriminating wage labour. Also microfinance and

credit access policies targeted at underrepresented groups that help break entry barriers should put in places.

Gender and Labour Market Intervention:-

Women in Nigeria face significant barriers to entering the workforce, ranging from cultural norms to limited access to education and financial resources, policies that focus on empowering women by providing access to skills training education, and entrepreneurship opportunities can drastically improve their labour market participation. Women economic empowerment is a powerful tool for reducing poverty and driving development, as it unlocks untapped economic potential To achieve Gender parity in the workforce, governments and employers must strengthen anti-discrimination legislation and actively promote gender-sensitive hiring practices. By addressing biases, in recruitment, promotions, and pay, Gender disparities in the workplace can be reduced. Encouraging companies to adopt inclusive practices that embrace diversity will not only improve fairness but also foster innovation and growth (Nwosu, 2025)

Women's participation in the work place can be greatly enhanced through policies that promote or supporting work-life balance.

Implementing family:-Friendly policies, such as paid parental leave and flexible working hours, ensures that both men and women can effectively balance their professional and personal responsibilities. This fosters a more inclusive work place culture and can improve overall labour market participation.

Labour markets in developing countries (Nigeria) are characterized by a complex set of challenges, including high levels of informal employment, migration and persistent issues such as child labour and widespread poverty. Addressing these problems require a holistic approach that encompasses improving education and skills, enforcing labour standards, and promoting Gender equality. By focusing on human capital development, enhancing social protection systems, and creating inclusive policies, developing nations can build more equitable, sustainable labour markets that offer opportunities to all workers. (Fapohunda, 2013).

Besides, gender and labour market intervention in Nigeria's Labour Market in a clear structured ways are:-

1. Promote Equal Access to Employment:- It provide intervention aim to remove barriers that prevent women from entering and remaining in the workforce. This includes policies against discriminatory job adverts, maternity protection, and encouraging women's entry into male-dominated fields like STEM, construction and leadership.
2. Reduce Wage, Income Inequality: support skill development and training:- In income inequality, Gender focus labour interventions seek to close wage gaps between men and women by enforcing equal pay for equal work and improving women's access to formal, better-paying jobs while in skills support development and training, a major

duty is to enhance human capital development by giving women and marginalized groups access to vocational, digital and entrepreneurs training, which help in reducing occupational segregation and equips women to compete in high-growth sectors.

The major duty of gender and labour market interventions in Nigeria is to ensure fairness, inclusivity, and productivity in the economic via expanding opportunities for women and disadvantaged groups. Protecting workers from exploitation, closing wage gaps and promoting structural reforms that allow both men and women to contribute fully to national development. (Fadayomi, 2014)

Though these effects, labour markets can evolve into engines of economic growth, social cohesion and shares prosperity.

Labour markets in Nigeria are characterized by several unique features, including high levels of informal employment, wage disparities and labour market segmentation. Informal employment, which includes street vendors, domestic workers and other uncontracted role, accounts for up to 60% of the workforce in low-income regions. While this sector provides livelihoods for many, workers face significant challenges such as low wages, job, insecurity, lack of social protection, and limited opportunities for upward mobility. These conditions contribute to economic inefficiencies, low productivity and persistent poverty (Idowu, 2024)

Rural-Urban migration is a significant trend in Nigeria, driven by the search for better job opportunities in cities. While migration can stimulate economic growth, it also places pressure on urban infrastructure, contributes to higher unemployment rates and exacerbates under employment. This highlights the need for balanced labour development policies that promote both rural and urban opportunities. Additional labour market challenges in Nigeria include child labour, migration, remittances, and the pervasive effects of poverty. Child labour, especially in agriculture, deprives children of education and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. The lack of education and weak enforcement of labour laws contribute to this issue. Migration, particularly international migration can offer economic opportunities, but it also exposes migrant workers to exploitation, unsafe working conditions and family separation.

While remittances sent by migrant workers play a crucial role in supporting households, they can also make families vulnerable to external economic shocks. These interconnected issues require comprehensive and multi-faceted policy interventions to create inclusive and sustainable labour market development.(Hossini, 2025)

- Social Protection and Labour Standard in Nigeria:- comprehensive social protection systems and the enforcement of robust labour standards are vital in state guarding

workers' rights and well-being; particularly in economic dominated by informal employment.

The presence of strong social safety nets through building effective social safety, such as unemployment, insurance, health care benefits, and income support programmes can offer critical relief to individuals facing job loss or economic hardship. These measures are essential for reducing vulnerability informal sectors where job security is minimal. Social protection system help workers recover from economic shocks and contribute to a more stable workforce. (Diaz, 2025)

The protection of workers' rights is essential for fostering fair and safe working conditions. Governments must enforce labour laws that establish minimum wage standards, ensure workplace safety, and uphold the right to unionize and collectively bargain. Addressing violations of labour standards is crucial to reducing exploitation and ensuring that all workers, regardless of their status enjoy fair treatment.

In Nigeria, social protection provides safety nets like pensions, health insurance, and cash transfers, but remains narrow in coverage, especially for informal workers. Labour standards legally guarantee rights such as minimum wage safe working conditions, and freedom of association, but enforcement is weak. Strengthening both is essential for reducing poverty, protecting vulnerable workers and ensuring fair and productive employment in line with global labour rights. Social protection refers to policies and programs designed to reduce poverty, vulnerability, and social risks by providing income security and access to essential services. In Nigeria, social protection is still developing and fragmented, but it plays an increasing important role in the labour market. (Van, 2023)

Component of Social Programmes are:- Cash transfer programme like, National Social Safety Nets Programmes NASSCO, conditional cash transfers for poor households: Health protection through national health insurance. Authority through coverage is limited pension via the contributory pension scheme under the Pension Reform Act, 2014. Social insurance schemes for formal workers, covering workplace injuries. Youth and women empowerment, schemes such as N-Power and Government Enterprise and Empowering Programmes.

Through these efforts, labour market can evolve into engines of economic growth that not only reduce poverty but also foster social cohesion and shared prosperity (Anyanwu, 2021)

Poverty remains one of the most significant barriers to improving labour market outcomes in Nigeria. It limits access to education, job opportunities and overall economic resilience. The poverty trap keeps individuals in low-wage or informal jobs, especially in marginalized communities. Economic vulnerability compounds this as those living in poverty are more susceptible to economic shocks, such as job losses, health crises and natural disasters.

Labour market development, strategies must focus on improving education, skill training and social protection. Access to quality education is essential for upward mobility and economic growth. Vocational training programs aligned with local economic needs can help address skills mismatches and ensure that workers are prepared for available job opportunities.

Additional, promoting lifelong learning and re-skilling initiatives is crucial to help workers adapt to evolving industries and new technologies strengthening social safety nets, such as unemployment insurance, health care benefits and income support programmes, is vital for protecting workers, particularly in the informal sector, turn economic hardship. (Raimi, 2025)

Gender differences in labour force participation:- Labour force participation is defined as the proportion of the working-age population that is either employed or actively seeking employment. These differences in labour force participation rates between genders carry significant implications for economic productivity, social equality, and the overall economic landscape.

Traditionally, women's engagement in the workplace has been lower than that of men, primarily due to deeply rooted Gender roles that prioritize families and domestic responsibilities. These roles have often relegated women to care giving positions, limiting their access to formal employment opportunities. However, over the past few decades, a remarkable transformation has occurred. Women's labour force participation has increased significantly, driven by changing societal norms that advocate for gender equality, improved access to education, and the pressing need for dual-income households in an evolving economic environment.

Gender differences in Nigeria's labour force participation reflect structure inequalities, cultural norms, educational disparities, and care burdens. Men dominate formal, better-paying jobs, while women are clustered in informal, low-income activities. Bridging these gaps is essential for gender equity and inclusive national development (Fadayomi, 2021)

Women often encounter numerous obstacles that impede their ability to either enter or remain in the labour force such as:-

- **Care giving Responsibilities:-** Many women are primarily responsible for care-giving tasks within their families, which can limit their availability for full time work. This expectation can lead to reluctance to seek employment, particularly in roles that require long hours or extensive travel.

However, lack of access to affordable and a reliable childcare service poses a significant barrier for working mothers. Without such support, many women are compelled to prioritize family over career, leading to reduced participation rates. As well as workplace flexibility;

insufficient support for work-life balance in many workplaces discourages them from pursuing career advancement opportunities policies that do not accommodate flexible working arrangements which can hinder women's ability to juggle multiple responsibilities, resulting in higher dropout rated from the workplace. (Adisa, 2021)

- **Cultural Norms:-** Prevailing societal attitude towards women's roles can discourage their participation in certain industries or positions. Stereotypes and biases may lead to a belief that women are less capable or suited for specific roles, further perpetuation gender disparities in employment. These multifaceted challenges contribute to the persistent discrepancies in participation rates between gender, necessitating targeted interventions to promote gender equality in the labour market. Also gender wage gap is a critical issues that quantities the disparity in earning between men and women, encapsulating a complex interplay of factors that contribute to unequal remuneration for similar roles. Understanding the nuances of this gap is essential for developing strategies to promote economic fairness
- **Occupational Segregation:-** There is a tendency for men and women to work in different sectors and roles often referred to as occupational segregation. Jobs traditionally held by women, such as teaching or nursing, tend to offer lower wages compared to male-dominated fields like engineering or fiancé. This division not only reflects societal norms but also reinforces wage inequality.

Work experience shows that women are statistically more likely to take carrier breaks.

- Support for family-friendly workplace practices: organisations that adopt family-friendly policies such as paid parental leave, flexible work hours, and childcare assistance can significantly improve women's participation and retention in the workforce. Also offering training and development programmes that focus in negotiation skills for women can empower them to advocate for themselves more effectively in salary discussions contributing to long-term improvements in earnings.

Addressing gender disparities in the labour force participation and the gender wage gap is essential for fostering an equitable and productive labour market. Through targeted policy interventions and a commitment to promoting gender equality, societies can harness the full potential of their workforce, ensuring that all individuals regardless of gender have equal access to opportunities, fair wage and the ability to contribute meaningfully to the economy (World Bank, 2017)

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS:

Gender activeness in Nigeria Labour Market reflects a persistent imbalance between men and women. While men dominate the formal, structured, and better-paying segments of the economy, women's activeness is largely confined to formal and low-income sectors, despite their significant contributions. This unequal distribution is driven by cultural norms, limited

access to education and skills development, household care responsibilities and structural barriers in the market. The result is wage inequality, occupational segregation, and underutilization of women's potential, which collectively hinder Nigeria's socio-economic growth. A more inclusive labour market, while men and women can equally participate is essential for reducing poverty, promoting equity and achieving sustainable national development.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- This paper discuss the complex ways gender, and inequality intersect in the labour market, showing how these factors shape job prospects wage gaps and career progression. The following recommendations are as follows:
- Expand Education Access and Skills training; prioritize female education and technical training, particularly in STEM, to equip women for high-demand and well-paying job.
- Promote Gender:- Sensitive policies, through enforce equal may laws, anti-discrimination policies and stronger, maternity/paternity leave framework to create fairer workplaces.
- Support informal sector workers, by providing social protection, microfinance and business development programmes targeting women entrepreneur's programmes targeting women entrepreneurs in the informal economy.
- Reduce care burdens; invest in affordable childcare, flexible work arrangements, and family support systems to enable women's fuller participation in the labour force.
- Challenges cultural barriers conduct awareness campaigns and community engagement to shift traditional norms that limits women's economic roles especially in northern Nigeria.
- Strengthen labour institutions, enhance monitory and enforcement of labour standards to protect vulnerable workers and ensure equitable treatment

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