# GENDER EQUALITY LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND THE ATTAINMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA, 2015-2024

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***Abstract***

*Gender equality remains a cornerstone of inclusive and sustainable development, with particular relevance to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth). Despite Nigeria's ratification of key international treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol, these instruments remain largely undomesticated. This study examines how Nigeria's gender equality legal frameworks have influenced the attainment of SDGs 5 and 8 between 2015 and 2024. It is guided by two core research questions; does the government's failure to domesticate ratified international instruments toward gender equality undermine the attainment of SDG 8 in Nigeria? Secondly, have legislative efforts aimed at promoting gender equality impeded or advanced the attainment of SDG 5 within the same period. Drawing on the propositions of the structural functional theory, the study adopts a qualitative methodology, combining documentary and observational methods. Data were collected from secondary sources including national policies, legislative documents, government documents, and scholarly literature. Findings indicate that the non-domestication of international instruments has undermined equal legal and economic rights between gender, restricting their access to decent work and economic empowerment. Similarly, domestic legislative efforts, including the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill and the National Gender Policy, have faced persistent socio-political resistance, hampering advancement toward SDG 5. The study recommends an effective Domestication and Implementation of International Treaties and adoption of a Legally Binding Gender Quota System for Political and Economic Inclusion.*

***Keywords:*** *Gender Equality, SDGs, Legal Frameworks, Policy Implementation, Domestication*

## Introduction

The discourse on gender equality remains a pivotal issue in both scholarly and policy debates owing to its profound implications for social justice and sustainable development. Gender equality is not merely an aspirational goal; it is a fundamental prerequisite for national development, economic growth, and social progress (Okorie, 2016). Sustainable development,

whether in developing nations or on a global scale, is significantly impeded if gender disparities persist. The realization of gender equality is particularly vital in Nigeria, where systemic barriers continue to restrict women's full participation in political, economic, and social spheres (Agbo, 2016).

Although gender inequality is a global concern, its expressions vary across societies. Agbegunde (2014) notes that women, despite constituting nearly half the global population, remain severely underrepresented in leadership roles, occupying as little as 5–10% of formal political positions. In Nigeria, such underrepresentation is reinforced by entrenched patriarchal values and institutional structures, further exacerbating women's marginalization in governance and economic life. These challenges highlight the importance of legal frameworks and international instruments designed to address gender inequality.

The 1995 United Nations International Conference on Women elevated gender discourse to the global stage, prompting various definitions of "Gender" to suit different policy and academic contexts (Akiyode, 2010). Egbo et al. (2010) define gender as "being male or female or masculine or feminine" These roles and relationships are fluid, yet often marked by systemic inequalities in power, resources, and opportunities. In Nigeria, gender mainstreaming introduced globally at the 1985 Nairobi Conference has been embraced as a strategic policy approach (Omotoso & Enweremadu, 2022). Nonetheless, practical implementation has been weak, despite the formulation of key instruments such as the National Gender Policy and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act. More critically, Nigeria has failed to domesticate key international frameworks, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol, limiting their impact on national legal systems (Nwogu & Okonkwo, 2023).

The period between 2015 and 2024 has been marked by significant shifts in Nigeria's gender policies, largely driven by the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Among the 17 goals, SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) are particularly interlinked, with empirical evidence demonstrating that gender inequality significantly constrains economic productivity, weakens social institutions, and undermines long-term development (UNDP, 2020; World Bank, 2022). In this context, gender equality is not only a normative concern of rights and representation but a structural requirement for inclusive and sustainable development.

In Nigeria, the pursuit of sustainable development continues to be undermined by systemic gender disparities embedded in legal, institutional, and socio-cultural frameworks. Despite having ratified major international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol, Nigeria has failed to domesticate several of these instruments, weakening their legal force and limiting their developmental impact. National efforts such as the National Gender Policy (2006, revised in 2021), the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (2015), and the proposed Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill have demonstrated intent but remain constrained by political resistance, religious sensitivities, and institutional inertia (Makinde et al., 2017; Nwogu & Okonkwo, 2023).

As of 2018, Nigeria ranks ninth from the bottom among the ten lowest-performing nations on the World Economic Forum's (WEF) gender equality index) (Archibong et al., 2018). Again, as of 2023, Nigeria ranks 130th out of 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index compiled by the World Economic Forum (WEF). This index calculates the disparities between men and women in categories including political empowerment, health and survival, educational achievement, and economic engagement (Global Gender Gap Report, 2023)

Odemenam (2010) observes that while many international conventions and domestic laws exist to combat gender inequality, countries like Nigeria struggle with a lack of political and judicial commitment to implement these frameworks. This gap between ratification and enforcement remains one of the most significant barriers to progress, as it allows deeply entrenched patriarchal norms to persist unchecked. Orisaremi (2022) identifies multiple obstacles, including patriarchal dominance, androcentric values, unequal socialization processes, and gender biases in family and marital structures. These barriers inhibit equal participation by men and women in societal development. In the workplace, gender equity faces additional challenges.

The central problem addressed in this study, therefore, lies in the apparent disjuncture between Nigeria's gender equality legal frameworks and its developmental outcomes between 2015 and 2024. Specifically, while gender equality is widely recognized as a driver of sustainable development, the weak domestication of international instruments and the ineffectiveness of domestic legislative efforts may be actively impeding progress toward key SDGs. This study fills this gap by interrogating the extent to which legal and institutional efforts to promote gender equality have advanced or constrained the attainment of SDG 5 and SDG 8 in Nigeria.

Accordingly, this study is guided by two key research questions: Does the government's failure to domesticate ratified international instruments toward gender equality undermine the attainment of SDG 8 in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024, and have legislative efforts aimed at promoting gender equality impeded the attainment of SDG 5 in Nigeria during the same period?

## Literature review

It would be worthwhile to commence this review with the definition of the concept: ***Gender equality and sustainable development/sustainable development goals.*** However, considerable efforts were made to review literature related to the following themes:

a.) Government's failure to domesticate ratified international instruments and attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

b.) Legislative efforts aimed at promoting Gender Equality and attainment of SDG 5 (Gender equality)

- ***Gender equality:***

When men and women in a society are viewed as having equal value, gender equality is achieved. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (n.d) broadly defines gender equality as the state in which individuals of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities, and

opportunities, emphasizing equal pay and equal access to responsibilities as top dimensions in the workplace. Gender equality is the existence of equality, whereas gender inequality can be defined as the unequal treatment or perception of an individual based on their gender. According to this viewpoint, people of a specific sex are given equal chances to increase their innate ability to make decisions and develop their inherent assets, free from stereotypes and established gender norms (Archibong et al., 2020). In the majority of Nigeria, women are viewed as culturally inferior to men.

- ***Sustainable Development/ SDGs:***

The United Nations defines sustainable development as a process of development that aims to raise everyone's standard of living while preserving our natural resources at a level that does not exceed the earth's carrying capacity. According to Ugwueje (2014), development allows both men and women to reach their full creative potential and fulfill their goals, allowing them to use the resources at their disposal to enhance their living situations. It must be underlined that development initiatives may have distinct effects on men and women, and that proper "gender planning" must be used to guarantee that the conditions and outcomes are fair to both sexes.

Unlike the earlier Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopt a more holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental challenges. The SDGs constitute a universal call to action aimed at protecting the environment, addressing climate change, eradicating poverty, and ensuring inclusive access to well-being and prosperity. Structurally, the agenda is composed of 17 interlinked goals, 169 specific targets, and more than 230 measurable indicators, collectively serving as a unified roadmap for achieving peace and sustainable development for both humanity and the planet. This study places particular emphasis on SDG 5, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and SDG 8, which promotes sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth. Notably, SDG 8 underscores the importance of ensuring full and productive employment and decent work for all, regardless of gender, age, or disability status with a commitment to equal pay for work of equal value (Our World in Data Team, 2023).

- ***Government's failure to domesticate ratified international instruments and attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).***

A growing body of literature has emphasized the developmental implications of gender inequality, particularly in relation to economic growth, labor participation, and poverty reduction, which are central pillars of Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8). Eze-Anaba (2007) acknowledges that although international and national efforts, including CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, have laid important legal foundations for promoting gender equity, their implementation in Nigeria remains superficial due to the lack of domestication and institutional commitment.

Abegunde (2019) and Abolade (2021) argue that Nigeria's failure to domesticate key gender-related treaties has left significant gaps in the legal system, undermining not only women's rights but also national development. Without binding domestic legislation, such international frameworks cannot be enforced in Nigerian courts, thereby limiting women's access to economic resources, formal employment, and protections against workplace discrimination, barriers that directly obstruct progress toward SDG 8. Okongwu (2020) identifies this legal vacuum as a driver of economic exclusion, noting that women's limited access to formal work, land, credit, and capital is rooted in discriminatory legal structures. These barriers, while often viewed as issues of human rights, also translate into diminished labor productivity, restricted market innovation, and weakened national economic performance. Enemo (2018) and Eruteya (2024) support this view, linking the ineffective legal protection of women to stagnant progress in employment and economic participation metrics that define SDG 8.

According to Orisaremi (2022), Nigeria's commitment to international treaties is undermined by a lack of enforcement mechanisms. Although the Nigerian Constitution (Section 42) provides for non-discrimination, its impact is diluted by conflicting customary and religious laws (Etinagbedia, 2024; Abimbola et al., 2023). These competing legal orders not only perpetuate inequality but also inhibit women's full integration into the formal economy, where they could contribute more significantly to national output and human capital development. Akpambang (2020) further contends that legislative gaps and poor enforcement mechanisms weaken existing gender policies, limiting their developmental impact. While progress has been made in enacting gender-sensitive laws such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, their reach remains limited without the domestication of binding international obligations.

Research by Durojaye and Lawal (2022) on the Niamey Guidelines reveals a broader pattern of institutional failure to integrate regional human rights standards into domestic frameworks. Specifically, Nigeria's lack of a comprehensive legal framework on workplace harassment undermines safe labor conditions, a core objective of SDG 8. The absence of legal deterrents against gender-based workplace abuse has led to underreporting, reduced female workforce participation, and unproductive work environments. Achakpa (2019) and Doepke et al. (2011) underscore the economic implications of gender inequality, demonstrating that women's economic empowerment is not only a matter of justice but a prerequisite for macroeconomic development. When women are denied access to property, finance, and equitable labor protections, household welfare suffers, and national productivity is stifled. Yet, these authors note that progress is often hindered by legal environments that fail to institutionalize equality.

From a socio-economic perspective, Said (2024) observes that the lack of legal protection against gender-based violence exacerbates workplace absenteeism and reduces women's capacity to engage productively in the economy. Arowolo (2020) adds that deeply patriarchal structures and a weak judicial response to gender-based violations reinforce a cycle of exclusion that erodes women's economic autonomy. This, in turn, limits Nigeria's ability to achieve broad-based, inclusive economic growth. Roden et al. (2021) stress the need to reframe gender equality as a shared societal objective. While women's activism has historically driven progress, engaging men in legal and policy advocacy could catalyze more inclusive structural reforms.

However, this insight has yet to be applied directly to legal reforms targeting labor equality or the formal economy.

In summary, the literature strongly affirms that Nigeria's failure to domesticate international gender equality instruments has had tangible developmental consequences. These legal and policy gaps obstruct women's economic inclusion, limit workforce participation, suppress labor rights, and undermine the attainment of SDG 8.

- ***Legislative efforts aimed at promoting gender equality and attainment of SDG 5 (Gender equality)***

Scholarly debates consistently highlight the centrality of legislative frameworks in advancing gender equality. SDG 5 seeks to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," a goal that requires institutionalizing equality through enforceable legal mechanisms. In Nigeria, legislative initiatives have been pursued to align with this global agenda, but their effectiveness remains contested. Several studies acknowledge that Nigeria has taken steps toward promoting gender equality through domestic legislation. The ***National Gender Policy (2006, revised 2021),*** *the* ***Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act (2015),*** *and repeated attempts to pass the* ***Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill*** exemplify these efforts (Makinde et al., 2017; Nwogu & Okonkwo, 2023). However, these interventions are frequently undermined by socio-cultural resistance, weak political will, and inadequate enforcement mechanisms.

According to Abimbola et al. (2023), inconsistencies between statutory laws and entrenched customary and religious norms perpetuate structural inequalities, thereby limiting the transformative potential of legislative reforms. Nwogu and Okonkwo (2023) argue that these legal measures promoting gender equality are vital in reducing disparities and fostering inclusive societies. However, Arowolo (2020) observes that without strong institutional backing, laws designed to empower women often remain symbolic, with minimal effect on societal norms or state practice. This is consistent with Etinagbedia (2024), who notes that cultural norms frequently override constitutional guarantees, leaving many women unable to claim rights that are legally recognized.

The United Nations (2015) asserts that legal reforms in the global world such as criminalizing domestic violence, enhancing women's political participation, and ensuring equal access to education, have been central to advancing gender equality. However, scholars emphasize that the effectiveness of legislative reforms is closely tied to institutional enforcement and public acceptance. Aloamaka and Adaezeibekwe (2021) argue that while progressive laws may exist on paper, the absence of implementation strategies hinders their capacity to reduce gender disparities. Similarly, Eruteya (2024) stresses that the mere passage of legislation without adequate monitoring and sanctions mechanisms undermines the credibility of gender laws, rendering SDG 5 targets elusive.

In Nigeria, the 1999 Constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex (Section 42), providing a legal foundation for equality (Bonkat-Jonathan & Ejalonibu, 2021). Yet, systemic

discrimination persists due to cultural practices and legal contradictions. Okongwu (2020) highlights that constitutional guarantees are often subordinated to customary and religious traditions, a concern echoed by Udu et al. (2023), who note Nigeria's difficulty in implementing ratified conventions such as CEDAW. Akpambang (2020) acknowledges progress in gender-equality legislation but emphasizes gaps in enforcement, which are compounded by a lack of political will and institutional commitment. Consequently, women continue to face barriers in healthcare, education, and political representation (Udu et al., 2023).

The repeated rejection of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill (2010–2016) by the Nigerian Senate exemplifies this challenge. Makinde et al. (2017) attribute the opposition to religious and cultural resistance, despite the bill's potential to strengthen protections in areas such as inheritance, workplace discrimination, and political representation. Amnesty International (2022) similarly reports that in 2022, Nigerian lawmakers rejected five bills aimed at promoting gender equality. Legal pluralism exacerbates this problem. Ibecheozor and Okoroafor (2020) and Adebayo (2022) note that Nigeria's plural legal system allows customary and religious laws to supersede statutory provisions, particularly regarding marriage, property rights, and inheritance.

The enactment of the Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act in 2015 represented a milestone in combating gender-based violence. Its provisions addressed domestic violence, harmful practices, and other forms of abuse (Makinde et al., 2017). Yet, as Amnesty International (2021) highlights, by 2020 only 21 states had domesticated the Act, revealing the uneven adoption of national reforms in a federal system. Variations in state-level enforcement are most pronounced in Northern Nigeria, where religious laws often override statutory protections (Agbo, 2016). Institutional limitations further undermine implementation. Archibong et al. (2018), Orisaremi (2022), and Eruteya (2024) identify insufficient funding, poor monitoring mechanisms, and inadequate law enforcement training as major obstacles. As a result, existing laws fail to deliver justice for vulnerable groups, weakening public confidence in Nigeria's gender framework.

Legislative efforts to enhance women's political representation have also yielded limited progress. Okorie (2016) notes that women occupied just 25 out of 360 House of Representatives seats in 2015, with only 17 women elected in 2023 (4.7%). Similarly, Olatakun (2021) observes that although legislative frameworks have opened some pathways for women's economic empowerment, structural barriers persist. Women remain concentrated in informal, low-paying sectors, while infrastructure deficits and domestic responsibilities restrict their advancement.

Beyond legal structures, socio-cultural resistance remains pervasive. Izugbara (2008) observes that patriarchal narratives sustain male dominance in decision-making, while Ashe (2007) points to male resistance to women's empowerment as a driver of social backlash. Nevertheless, engagement with men and boys has shown promise. Ajayi (2018) finds that men involved in gender equality initiatives often report improved relationships and reduced stress. Similarly, UN Women's HeForShe campaign highlights shifts in male perceptions toward shared responsibility (UN Women, 2020). Urban centres such as Lagos demonstrate greater openness to reform due to

globalization and rising levels of education (Aina & Olayode, 2011), though rural areas remain resistant.

Ultimately, while Nigeria has introduced progressive legislation such as the VAPP Act and constitutional provisions against discrimination, the gap between law and practice remains wide. Repeated failures to pass critical gender bills, combined with cultural resistance, legal pluralism, and weak enforcement, hinder the attainment of SDG 5. Legislative efforts, though necessary, will remain insufficient without stronger political will, institutional reform, and cultural transformation.

## Methodology

This study employed a mixed approach to data collection, incorporating both documentary and observational methods. For the first research question, which focuses the government's failure to domesticate ratified international instruments for gender equality has undermined the attainment of SDG 8, the documentary method was primarily utilized. This involved the qualitative review of secondary data from books, journal articles, official reports, and institutional documents. Sources included materials from reputable organizations like the United Nations, the Nigerian constitution, academic journals, government reports, and publications from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Other relevant literature, such as scholarly reviewed journals and related materials, were also included to ensure a thorough examination.

To address the second research question on whether legislative efforts aimed at promoting gender equality have impeded the attainment of SDG 5 between men and women in Nigeria from 2015 to 2024; the study employed both documentary and observational methods. The documentary method analyzed legislative instruments, including the Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act and the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, introduced in 2015, and the National Gender Policy detailing their implementation and societal impacts. The researcher also observed persistent gender disparities in Nigeria from multiple perspectives. The observation approach also provided a useful understanding of the obstacles women experience in obtaining justice under legislation such as the Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, such as societal shame and institutional bottlenecks.

This study employed content analysis as its principal method for analyzing data. The researcher guarantees objectivity by carrying out the analysis according to explicit rules or procedures that enable other researchers to obtain the same results from the same messages or documents.

- ***Theoretical framework and application***

This study adopts Structural Functionalism as its guiding theoretical framework. The roots of structural functionalism can be traced to Emile Durkheim, who emphasized social cohesion, shared values, and collective consciousness as central to societal stability. Later, scholars such as Talcott Parsons (1951) and Robert Merton (1968) elaborated the theory, conceiving society as a system of interrelated parts, each of which performs specific functions necessary for the

maintenance of order and progress. Political scientists, including David Easton, Gabriel Almond, and Bingham Powell, adapted functionalist analysis to political systems, stressing the role of institutions in performing functions essential for societal survival.

Structural functionalism, as conceptualized by Parsons (1951) and later expanded by Robert K. Merton (1968), perceives society as a complex system composed of interrelated structures that work collectively to maintain stability and order. Each institution, such as law, education, the economy, and the family play a distinct role in sustaining societal equilibrium. When these institutions function effectively, they foster social cohesion and progress; however, when they fail to fulfill their roles, dysfunctions emerge, leading to social inequalities and stagnation.

From this perspective, **legal and legislative institutions** are functional structures tasked with maintaining justice, enforcing rights, and promoting equity. When they operate effectively, they help societies achieve cohesion and development. Conversely, when they fail, dysfunction emerges, producing inequalities, instability, and underdevelopment. Merton's (1968) concepts of **manifest and latent functions** are useful here: while laws and treaties may be designed to promote gender equality (manifest function), their poor implementation or rejection can produce unintended consequences (latent dysfunction), such as reinforcing patriarchal dominance and undermining sustainable development outcomes.

Applied to Nigeria, structural functionalism illuminates the role of gender equality legal frameworks in shaping national development. The Nigerian Government's failure to domesticate international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol has continued to create systemic dysfunctions. These dysfunctions manifest in women's limited access to employment, property rights, and economic resources, thereby constraining labour productivity and obstructing the attainment of SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth). Similarly, the repeated rejection of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill and the weak enforcement of domestic frameworks such as the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act illustrate institutional breakdowns that hinder progress toward SDG 5 (gender equality) (Makinde et al., 2017; Ibecheozor & Okoroafor, 2020; Nwogu & Okonkwo, 2023).

The theory also helps explain how Nigeria's plural legal system comprising statutory, customary, and religious laws, creates contradictions that weaken the functionality of constitutional guarantees of equality. When cultural and religious norms override statutory protections, the legal system fails in its integrative function, producing dysfunction that perpetuates gender inequalities and undermines development. In this sense, structural functionalism is useful not only for highlighting the functional role of institutions in promoting gender equality but also for analyzing the dysfunctions that arise from institutional failure.

## Findings and Discussion:

Nigeria has ratified several key international treaties designed to advance women's rights and equality, including the Maputo Protocol and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). However, the absence of domestication and weak enforcement mechanisms cast serious doubt on the country's progress toward achieving SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) between 2015 and 2024. This section discusses the findings of the study, which are supported by key indicators as highlighted below.

1. The number of international treaties related to gender equality that Nigeria has ratified but failed to domesticate, and their implications for economic progress.
2. The delay or non-passage of gender-focused bills and how this legislative inaction has contributed to persistent unemployment and poverty levels.
3. Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill introduced in 2015; National Gender Policy (revised in 2021) and Men vs Women in political offices/political representation
4. Enactment and Domestication of the VAPP Act of 2015 and Gender disparities in the Nigeria constitution

- **Number of international treaties related to gender equality ratified but not domesticated, and economic growth in Nigeria**

Under Nigeria's dualist legal system, a ratified treaty does not automatically acquire legal force; rather, it requires specific legislative action for domestication. As Eke (2020) asserts, merely signing or ratifying an international treaty does not render it legally binding within Nigeria's jurisdiction; it must first undergo domestication through national legislation to be enforceable.

Eke (2020) further stresses the importance of international treaties as formal agreements between state parties that create legally binding obligations. These agreements, governed by international law, are documented in one or more legal instruments and can be either bilateral or multilateral. They are often the outcome of prolonged negotiations among nations and may be referred to by various terms such as treaties, conventions, protocols, pacts, or accords, reflecting their diverse objectives and scope. Aina and Olayode (2012) argue that the attention on gender relations, especially the uneven relationship of power between men and women in cultures, has increased as a result of the inclusion of gender issues in development planning. Gender equality emphasizes the need to acknowledge and incorporate the unique needs and goals of men and women into policy frameworks, rather than negating biological distinctions, especially in reproductive responsibilities.

According to Eke (2020), the primary rationale behind signing international treaties is to foster peace, unity, and cooperation among member states. Once a state commits to a treaty, it is expected to implement its provisions in line with its national legal framework. However, some countries including Nigeria, have adopted a pattern of ratifying international agreements without taking the necessary legislative steps for enforcement. This practice enables states to continue reaping benefits from multilateral arrangements while evading their responsibilities under international law. In dualist legal systems like Nigeria's, the requirement for treaty domestication

before enforceability has not only delayed the effective implementation of treaty provisions but has also provided legal loopholes for the government to sidestep its international commitments to gender equality.

The Table below shows the list of ratified and non-ratified international related instruments/treaties not domesticated in Nigeria.

**Table 1: List of International Treaties/Instruments related to gender equality Ratified but Not Domesticated in Nigeria**

| S/n | Name of treaties | Year ratified | Status | Sources |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) | June 13th, 1985 | Not domesticated | United Nations, 1979 |
| **2** | Optional Protocol to CEDAW | September 8 th, 2001 | Not domesticated | United Nations (1999) |
| **3** | Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) | December 16 th, 2004 | Not fully domesticated | African Union (2003); African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights |
| **4** | International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 183 on Maternity Protection | Not Ratified yet | Not domesticated yet, but Nigeria has expressed commitment | International Labour Organization (2000) |
| **5** | United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace, and Security | Adopted October 31, 2000 | Not domesticated as a legally binding framework. | United Nations Security Council (2000) |
| **6** | ILO Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment in the Workplace | Not ratified | Not applicable, as Nigeria has not ratified the convention. | International Labour Organization (2019) |

**Source: Compiled by researcher, 2025**

Despite having ratified several international treaties on gender equality, Nigeria has not domesticated the majority of them, as seen in the above table, making them unenforceable under Nigerian law.

According to Nwankwo (2016), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) remains the most comprehensive international human rights treaty aimed at eliminating gender-based discrimination. Widely regarded as the most significant modern legal instrument on women's rights, the United Nations General Assembly (1979) adopted CEDAW on December 18, 1979, and it entered into force as an international treaty on September 3, 1981, following its ratification by the twentieth signatory nation under Article 27 of the Convention. Nigeria ratified CEDAW in 1985 without reservations, subsequently signing its Optional Protocol in 2000 and ratifying it in 2004, thereby

affirming its commitment to gender equality at the international level. In addition to CEDAW, Nigeria ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in 1983, two years after its adoption in 1981. The ACHPR serves as a regional framework for the promotion and protection of human rights across Africa, encompassing civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and collective rights. This broad scope reflects the interdependence of human rights and the need for a holistic approach to social justice.

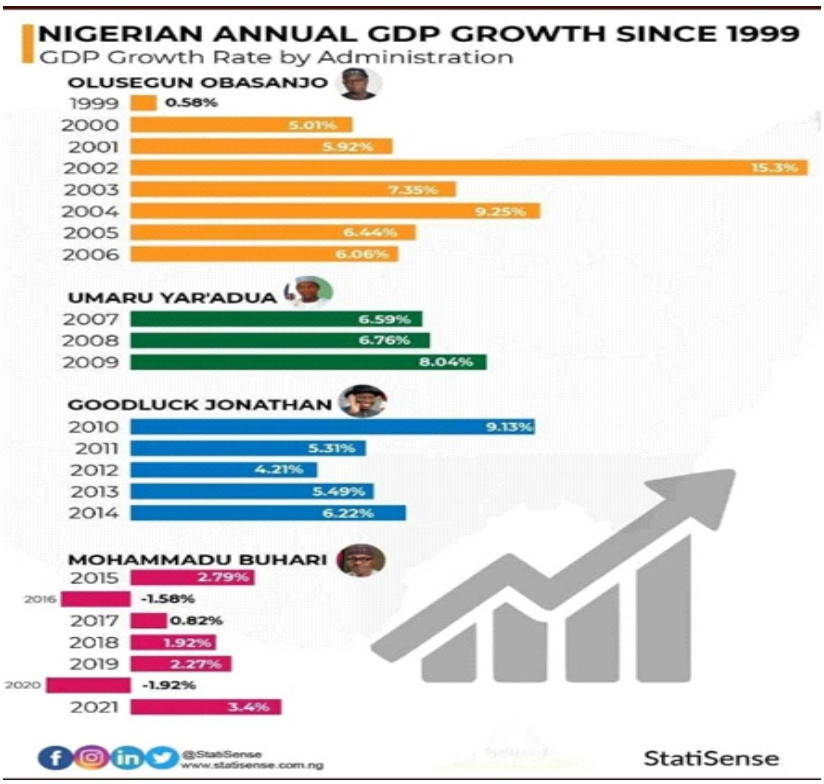
Despite these commitments, Nigeria has failed to domesticate these key gender treaties, which has far-reaching consequences for its progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) particularly SDG 5 and 8 (Gender equality and economic growth). The absence of legislative enforcement weakens the legal protections available to women, thereby limiting their participation and advancement in economic, political, and social spheres. Bhavana (2020) asserts that gender equality is often relegated to a symbolic issue, rather than being treated as a fundamental component of addressing pressing global challenges such as poverty, food insecurity, and climate change. However, true gender equality is not merely about numerical representation in leadership, governance, or workforce participation; it requires a systemic transformation that ensures equitable access to opportunities, resources, and rights.

Figures 1 and 2 below illustrate Nigeria's GDP trends in (dollars) current prices (1999–2029) and the annual GDP growth rate since 1999, respectively. However, this study focuses specifically on the period 2015–2024, assessing the relationship between gender policy implementation and economic development within this timeframe.




**Source: Statista, 2024**

Figure 1 indicates a decline in GDP in current prices from 404.65 billion dollars in 2015 to 199.72 billion dollars in 2024.




**Source: StatiSense, 2021**

Again, Figure 2 indicates that from 1999 to 2015, the lowest GDP growth rate for Nigeria was 4.21%. From 2015 to date, the highest GDP growth rate for Nigeria has not hit 4%.

A significant consequence of Nigeria's failure to domesticate international treaties, particularly focused on women's rights is the restriction of women's full participation in the labor market, which directly affects economic growth. Research by the International Monetary Fund (2018) indicates that gender inequality can reduce a country's GDP by up to 15%, primarily due to the exclusion of women from economic opportunities. A weakened female workforce results in lower national income levels, higher dependency ratios, and diminished economic productivity. Similarly, studies by the United Nations (2022) estimate that eliminating gender disparities in employment could boost Nigeria's GDP by over 20%.

A study by Yi et al. (2022) found that increased female labor force participation has a positive impact on economic growth. However, the persistence of gender-based discrimination at both systemic and individual levels prevents women from fully contributing to national economic progress. The study also recommended that to mitigate the negative effects of gender inequality within the civil service, the Nigerian government must implement a comprehensive policy framework that actively promotes female education and employment security.

Nigeria's poor ranking on global gender indices, such as the Global Gender Gap Index (130th out of 146 in 2023), discourages economic partnerships and foreign investment. According to Nnoje (2024), the failure to implement gender treaties has led to reduced gender-focused aid programs from international institutions. Development partners and foreign investors prioritize gender-responsive policies when allocating FDI and financial assistance. As a result, multinational corporations and donors often hesitate to invest in countries with poor gender rights records, with entities like the EU and UN tying financial aid to gender equality benchmarks.

In essence, the non-domestication of gender treaties directly hinders economic growth by limiting women's access to employment, education, financial resources, and legal protections. Without enforceable gender-equality laws, Nigeria loses billions in GDP growth potential and investment opportunities. Moreover, Durojaye (2013) highlights that Nigeria's treaty obligations necessitate eliminating harmful cultural practices, yet deep-rooted societal norms continue to reinforce gender inequality. The lack of legal alignment with international standards creates a gap that sustains discriminatory practices, undermining women's rights and broader economic progress.

- **Delay or non-passage of Gender-focused bills and the employment rate/poverty rate between 2015 and 2024**

The failure to pass key gender-related bills has significant economic repercussions, particularly in employment rates and poverty levels among Nigerian women. A notable example is the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill (GEOB), which has repeatedly failed to pass in the National Assembly. Originally introduced in 2010, the bill sought to incorporate CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol into Nigerian law, ensuring: Legally enforceable rights for women, Equal access to employment, fair wages, and non-discriminatory workplace policies, Greater representation of women in political and economic leadership (Nnoje,2024).

The bill was first presented to the Nigerian Senate in March, 2016 but encountered strong opposition, with lawmakers arguing that the Nigerian Constitution already guarantees women's rights. Despite multiple reintroductions (2016, 2019, 2021, and 2022), it has consistently been blocked due to socio-political resistance, particularly from legislators citing religious and cultural concerns. The failure to pass this legislation has perpetuated systemic barriers to women's economic participation, resulting in lower employment rates and heightened poverty levels (Fakomogbon, 2021).

Beyond the GEOB, several other gender-related bills have faced similar delays or outright rejection, exacerbating employment disparities and poverty. We present such examples in a table below:

**Table 2: List of Gender focused Bills that have faced delays or rejection in Nigeria National Assembly**

| Bill Name | Purpose | Status | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| Affirmative Action Bill (2022) (often debated as part of constitutional amendment bills on gender quotas) | Sought to allocate 35% of government positions to women | Rejected by the National Assembly | Amnesty International (2022); National Assembly (2022) |
| Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill (2016) | Proposed legal backing for gender equality in economic and political spaces | Not passed | Makinde et al. (2017); Amnesty International (2022); Nwogu & Okonkwo (2023) |
| Harmful Widowhood Practices Bill | Aimed at protecting widows from cultural - economic disinheritance | Stalled/Mot enacted as a standalone federal law in the legislative process | Okorie (2016); Orisaremi (2022); UN Human Rights Council (Nigeria Reports) |
| Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (2015) | Criminalizes ge nder-based violence, but implementation remains weak | Passed but with limited and uneven domestication | Amnesty International (2021); Makinde et al. (2017) |

**Source: Compiled by the researcher, 2025**

This table above supports our arguments on delayed efforts to pass gender-focused bills. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023) reports that women in Nigeria face significantly higher unemployment rates than men, largely due to discriminatory hiring practices and restricted access to skills training. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) further highlights that women's labor force participation in Nigeria remains below 50%, compared to over 65% for men. Additionally, Nigeria's poverty rate stood at 60% in 2023, with women disproportionately affected (NBS, 2023).

Research by Agboje (2025) asserts that lower female employment rates contribute to higher dependency ratios, as women are more likely to rely on informal income sources and financial support from male household members. This, in turn, reduces household incomes, lowers consumer spending, and slows overall economic growth. According to the World Bank's Nigeria Development Report (2023), poverty rates among women are 15% higher than those of men, primarily due to Lower employment rates, Limited access to credit and land ownership, and Absence of gender-sensitive social safety nets.

Between 2015 and 2024, employment and poverty rates in Nigeria have fluctuated, shaped by economic shifts, oil price volatility, global economic conditions, and internal challenges. The table below illustrates these trends in employment and poverty rates over the period.

**Table 3 shows the trend of employment rate and poverty rate in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024**

| Year | Employment rate (%) | Unemployment rate (%) | Poverty rate % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2015 | 76.1 | 13.9 | ~40 |
| 2016 | N/A | ~13.9 | ~40 |
| 2017 | N/A | ~16.2 | ~40 |
| 2018 | N/A | ~23.1 | ~40 |
| 2019 | 81.2 | ~23.1 | ~40 |
| 2020 | N/A | ~27.1 | ~40 |
| 2021 | N/A | ~33.3 | ~40 |
| 2022 | N/A | N/A | ~63 |
| 2023 | 76.1 | ~4.3 | ~63 |
| 2024 (Q1) | N/A | N/A | N/A |

**Source: Adapted from National Bureau of Statistics and Trading economics, 2025**

From the table above, Nigeria's employment rate in 2015 was approximately 76.1%. However, due to economic challenges, including a recession in 2016, the employment landscape deteriorated. The unemployment rate peaked at around 13.9% in 2016. The employment rate showed gradual improvement post-recession, reaching about 81.2% by 2019. The unemployment rate also began to decline, stabilizing around 23.1% in 2019 as the economy started to recover. The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted employment, leading to a spike in unemployment rates to approximately 27.1% by the end of 2020. Recovery efforts resulted in a decrease in unemployment rates to about 33.3% by early 2022. The employment rate fluctuated but remained below pre-pandemic levels. As of early 2024, the employment rate has improved to about 76.1%, while the unemployment rate has decreased to approximately 4.3%, reflecting ongoing recovery efforts and economic adjustments.

Countries that have implemented gender-equality laws have seen notable economic benefits. For instance, Rwanda, which introduced gender-inclusive policies in the early 2000s, has reduced its

gender employment gap by 80% and observed an 8% growth in GDP since 2010. In contrast, Nigeria's failure to adopt similar gender-focused legislation has left over 60% of its female population economically vulnerable (International Monetary Fund, IMF, 2018; Trading Economics, n.d). The continuous delay in passing gender-centered bills in Nigeria has widened employment disparities and worsened poverty in the nation. Without legal protections against discrimination in employment and economic participation, Nigeria faces higher rates of female unemployment, gender-based wage disparities, and increased economic vulnerability, contributing to rising poverty levels.

- **Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill introduced in 2015; National Gender Policy (revised in 2021) and Men vs Women in political offices/political representation**

The Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill (GEO Bill) was first introduced in 2015 to domesticate the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol within Nigeria's legal framework. Its objectives included promoting women's rights, ensuring equal opportunities in education, employment, and political participation, and addressing harmful cultural practices. However, the bill has faced repeated rejection in the National Assembly, primarily due to opposition from religious and traditional institutions that perceive it as a threat to cultural and religious norms (Mohammed, 2019).

One of the key reasons for its failure is the severe gender imbalance in legislative representation. When the bill was presented for a second reading in the Nigerian Senate on March 15, 2016, only seven out of 109 senators were women. This underrepresentation meant that efforts to advance gender-focused legislation relied on male lawmakers, whose commitment to these reforms may not be as urgent, given that they are not the direct beneficiaries (Eniola, 2018).

To address gender inequality, Nigeria introduced the National Gender Policy (NGP) in 2006, revised in 2021, which advocates for at least 35% affirmative action in political and public sector appointments, gender-sensitive budgeting, and enhanced legal protections for women and girls (Omotoso & Enweremadu, 2022). Despite these provisions, the absence of a legally binding enforcement mechanism has significantly hindered its implementation. In practice, political will and institutional commitment remain weak, and the 35% affirmative action target remains largely unmet. Women face systemic barriers such as financial constraints, patriarchal gatekeeping, and political violence, limiting their participation in politics. Consequently, Nigeria ranks among the lowest globally in female political representation (John & Akpan, 2024).

Since the return to democracy in 1999, no woman has been elected as president, vice president, or state governor in Nigeria, underscoring the structural barriers to women's political participation (Fadipe, 2024). While recent gender-mainstreaming efforts led to a rise in female aspirants in the 2019 general elections, their transition to actual candidacy remained low. Still, women's representation in elected positions at the federal and state levels has not exceeded 6% since 1999 (Yiaga Africa, 2020). Furthermore, the 2023 elections saw a further decline in female political representation, with only three women contesting for governors across 36 states and a continued low presence in the National Assembly. Out of 15,307 candidates contesting in the 2023

elections, only 1,552 were women, representing a mere 9.8% of total candidates (Fadipe, 2024).

Gender quotas have been enacted in countries such as South Africa and Rwanda, where female political representation has surpassed 40%. More than 61% of women are represented in Rwanda's parliament, which is the greatest percentage in the world (Lemo, 2023). However, according to the Omotoso (2023) Nigeria has a low level of women's participation in government, ranking 180th out of 193 nations in terms of parliamentary gender representation. This discrepancy highlights how gender quotas affect political engagement.

Omotoso and Enweremadu (2022) have categorized perspectives on women's political marginalization in Nigeria into three schools of thought. The first asserts that Nigerian politics is male-dominated, with women virtually absent from decision-making. The second acknowledges the presence of some women in politics but argues that they lack substantive influence over policy and governance. The third perspective disputes the claim of women's complete exclusion but emphasizes that their representation remains largely symbolic, failing to translate into tangible policy reforms that address gender disparities effectively.

Despite initiatives by the government, civil society, and development partners to enhance women's political inclusion, significant obstacles persist. The Beijing Declaration advocates 30% affirmative action, while Nigeria's National Gender Policy (NGP) proposes a 35% quota for elective and appointive roles (Lemo, 2023). Yet, systemic challenges such as deep-rooted cultural biases, political intimidation, and inadequate financial support continue to hinder progress. Again, many political parties fail to implement gender-inclusive policies, while the absence of strong legislative frameworks for affirmative action exacerbates the issue (Eniola, 2018).

- **Enactment and domestication of the VAPP act of 2015 and Gender disparities in the Nigeria constitution**

The Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) was enacted in 2015 in response to the escalating cases of gender-based violence (GBV), including domestic violence, rape, harmful traditional practices, and psychological abuse. The Act was widely praised for its comprehensive provisions, which criminalized various forms of violence, expanded the definition of rape, and addressed issues such as spousal battery and harmful widowhood practices (Okany & Fakunmoju, 2017).

A major limitation of the VAPP Act is its domestication process. Due to Nigeria's federal system, laws enacted at the national level require state-level adoption before they become fully enforceable. Since its enactment, only about 30 out of 36 states have domesticated the law, with northern states being the slowest to adopt it due to cultural and religious resistance (Nwogu & Okonkwo, 2023). The lack of uniform implementation has resulted in unequal protections for women, leaving many vulnerable to gender-based violence without adequate legal recourse.

Contrary to reports, the Minister of Women Affairs, Pauline Tallen, stated in a 2022 Premium Times report that 34 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) had domesticated the VAPP Act to address the growing crisis of violence against women. Notable among these states are

Oyo, Ogun, Lagos, Osun, Ekiti, Edo, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Benue, Cross River, Kaduna, and Plateau (Agency report, 2022).

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 recognizes gender equality as a fundamental human right, emphasizing that women should have equal status and opportunities as men in order to fully exercise their rights and contribute to society. However, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended) presents contradictory provisions regarding gender equality. According to John & Akpan (2024), one of the most glaring gender gaps in the Nigerian Constitution lies in its linguistic framework, where the pronoun "he" appears 235 times, while the term "women" is mentioned only twice (FGN Constitution, 1999). Additionally, Section 34, which guarantees the right to dignity, fails to explicitly address gender-specific concerns, such as harmful traditional practices affecting women, including widowhood rites, female genital mutilation, and forced marriages.

On one hand, Section 42 of the Constitution guarantees freedom from discrimination based on sex, ethnicity, religion, or political opinion. However, other constitutional and customary laws continue to reinforce gender-based discrimination, effectively contradicting this guarantee. Beyond Section 42, the Constitution lacks substantive provisions specifically addressing women's rights and vulnerabilities. Despite its general commitment to equality, the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian constitution remains a major obstacle to the realization of women's rights (FGN Constitution, 1999).

In the same vein, Nigeria operates a plural legal system, combining common law, customary law, and Sharia law, which often results in conflicting interpretations of women's rights. Some of the most notable contradictions include:

- Inheritance Rights: Customary inheritance laws continue to deny women equal access to property, particularly in rural areas, despite constitutional guarantees of non-discrimination.
- Child Marriage: Certain states implementing Sharia law uphold child marriage, despite federal laws such as the Child Rights Act (2003) and international conventions that prohibit the practice.
- Section 29(4)(b) of the Constitution: This provision controversially defines a girl as an adult upon marriage, effectively legitimizing child marriage and undermining efforts to promote gender equality.

Additionally, the Constitution does not mandate gender quotas for political appointments or elections, contributing to the persistent underrepresentation of women in governance. While international best practices advocate affirmative action, Nigeria's 35% gender representation goal remains aspirational, with no legally binding provisions to enforce it (John & Akpan, 2024). This legislative gap has contributed to the political exclusion of women, limiting their access to leadership and decision-making positions.

The inefficiency of legislative attempts in addressing gender inequality is shown by the VAPP

Act's incomplete implementation and domestication, as well as constitutional issues. Although laws like the Gender and Equal Opportunities (GEO) Bill and the National Gender Policy (2021) aim to address these problems, their effectiveness is seriously harmed by inadequate legal enforcement systems, Opposition from the ruling class, and rooted patriarchal norms. Nigeria's legal system would continue to fail to protect women's rights and advance gender equality in the absence of a thorough constitutional change and the efficient implementation of gender-sensitive laws.

## Conclusion

This study on Gender Equality Legal frameworks and the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria from 2015-2024, focused on two critical questions: whether government's failure to domesticate ratified international instruments toward gender equality has undermined the attainment of SDG 8 in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024 and if legislative efforts aimed at promoting gender equality has impeded the attainment of SDG 5 in Nigeria during the same period? Our findings indicate that the non-domestication of international instruments has undermined women's legal and economic rights, restricting their access to decent work and economic empowerment. Similarly, domestic legislative efforts, including the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill (2015), the revised National Gender Policy (NGP, 2021), and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act (2015) have faced persistent socio-political resistance, hampering advancement toward SDG 5. The study thus reaffirms that between 2015 and 2024, legislative efforts alone did not significantly narrow Nigeria's gender gaps, highlighting the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms and institutional commitment to achieve sustainable development goals.

## Recommendations

Arising from the findings, the study recommends the following:

a) **Effective Domestication and Implementation of International Treaties**

The Nigerian government should take concrete steps to domesticate and enforce ratified international agreements such as CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol etc. This includes ensuring the implementation of laws that align with these treaties at all levels of governance and establishing accountability mechanisms to monitor compliance. Nigeria can foster gender-inclusive governance and accelerate sustainable development if these commitments are translated into enforceable policies.

b) **Adoption of a Legally Binding Gender Quota System for Political and Economic Inclusion**

A legally binding gender quota system should be enacted and enforced at all levels of government, including federal, state, and local government councils. This should require a minimum of 35% representation for women in elective and appointive positions, aligning with

Nigeria's National Gender Policy (NGP). Similar quotas should also be implemented in the private sector, ensuring women's inclusion in corporate leadership roles and decision-making positions. Countries like Rwanda and Senegal have successfully implemented such quotas, leading to a significant increase in female participation in governance. For this to be effective, political parties must be legally required to reserve a percentage of their tickets for female candidates, and non-compliance should attract penalties.

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