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EMPLOYMENT POLICY IN THE PARAMILITARY SERVICE AND GENDER EQUITY IN NIGERIA: AN ASSESSMENT OF NIGERIAN CUSTOMS SERVICE

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Abstract

This study investigates the issue of employment policy and gender equity in Nigeria's paramilitary services, with a specific focus on the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS). Existing literature sheds light on the pervasive marginalization of women in security institutions, however, there remains a significant gap in empirical analysis of how institutional policies and informal structures reproduce gender disparities within paramilitary organizations like the Nigerian Customs. This study, guided by the Social Role Theory aims to identify structural barriers to women's participation in financial and enforcement roles, evaluate gender sensitivity in policy-making, and explore how recruitment, training, and promotion practices affect women's career progression. Employing a qualitative research design, the study relied primarily on semi-structured interviews, complemented by focus group discussions and secondary sources to ensure triangulation and cross-validation. Thematic analysis was conducted through three iterative rounds of coding using NVivo software, with data drawn from a purposive sample of 40 participants. The findings reveal that institutionalized patriarchal norms, policy inconsistency, informal gate-keeping, and lack of gender-responsive training structures collectively hinder gender equity in the Nigerian Custom Service. The recommendations include integrating gender-sensitive metrics into leadership evaluations and restructuring TRADOC's training curriculum to reflect equity goals among others.

Keywords: Gender Equity, Employment, Nigerian Customs Services, Social Role Theory, Paramilitary Service

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Introduction

Paramilitary organizations such as the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), the Nigeria Immigration Service, and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps play a critical role in national security, border control, and public order. Despite their importance, these institutions remain overwhelmingly male-dominated, reflecting enduring colonial legacies and entrenched patriarchal norms that continue to shape Nigeria's public institutions (Akinola, 2020; Nwosu, 2021). Employment policies within these organizations have historically privileged masculine ideals of physical strength, aggression, and risk taking, systematically marginalizing women and limiting their participation in operational and leadership roles (Adebayo, 2021; Okoro, 2022).

Within the Nigerian Customs Service, gender disparities persist in recruitment, deployment, promotion, and access to decision-making positions. Although Nigeria has adopted national and international gender equality frameworks, including the National Gender Policy and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), their implementation within paramilitary institutions remains inconsistent and largely symbolic (UN Women, 2021; Nnamdi, 2023). Socio-cultural expectations that position women primarily as caregivers further constrain their career progression, particularly in institutions characterized by rigid work schedules, long postings, and limited family-support mechanisms (Akinola, 2020; Eze, 2022).

Over the decades, political and economic developments have further reinforced these disparities. The implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the 1980s, for instance, reshaped employment dynamics in the public sector by prioritizing cost-cutting and privatization. These policies disproportionately affected women, who already faced systemic exclusion, and entrenched male dominance in recruitment and promotion processes. Importantly, during periods of military rule between 1966 and 1999, the increasing militarization of paramilitary institutions fostered high masculine cultures that valued aggression and physical dominance traits traditionally associated with men while undervaluing the skills and leadership potential of women. These historical and structural factors demonstrate that gender inequality in Nigeria's paramilitary services is not only a colonial inheritance but a condition continually reproduced through political, economic, and institutional practices.

Socio-cultural factors also play a pivotal role in sustaining women's under-representation in the paramilitary services. Deeply ingrained beliefs about femininity, domesticity, and the perceived appropriateness of women in leadership or security roles continue to shape recruitment and career progression. Women often face societal pressure to prioritize marriage, childbearing, and care-giving, making it difficult to sustain long-term careers in demanding security institutions. Within the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), such cultural

expectations manifest in barriers to recruitment, slower promotion rates, and limited access to leadership roles. The absence of gender-sensitive institutional mechanisms, such as maternity support, flexible work arrangements, and mentorship programs, further promotes these inequalities (Eze, 2022). As a result, the organizational culture of the NCS and similar institutions remains one that privileges masculinity while marginalizing women's contributions.

To add, Nigeria has ratified several international and national frameworks promoting gender equality, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the National Gender Policy, their implementation within paramilitary organizations has been inconsistent and largely superficial (UN Women, 2017; Nwosu, 2021). Consequently, women still remain under-represented in operational and leadership positions, and employment policies often fail to address the structural barriers that limit their advancement. This situation highlights a persistent disconnect between policy commitments and institutional realities.

It is against this background that this study seeks to examine employment policies and gender equity within Nigeria's paramilitary services with particular focus on the Nigerian Customs Service.

Statement of the Problem

Despite formal commitments to gender equality, the Nigerian Customs Service continues to exhibit significant gender inequities in recruitment, promotion, training, and leadership representation. Employment policies within the Service emphasize physical endurance, field command experience, and informal networking structures that disproportionately favor male officers while disadvantaging women (Adebayo, 2021; Okoro, 2022). These practices reinforce patriarchal institutional cultures and restrict women's access to operational roles and career advancement opportunities.

Existing empirical studies on gender and paramilitary institutions in Nigeria have largely concentrated on the Nigerian Police Force and a limited number of related agencies, leaving the Nigerian Customs Service underexplored (Chukwuma, 2021; Eze, 2022).

Furthermore, most studies focus on gender equality—numerical representation—rather than gender equity, which emphasizes structural and policy-based adjustments needed to correct historical disadvantages (Nnamdi, 2023). The absence of gender-responsive training curricula, mentorship structures, and work–life balance policies within the NCS further exacerbates women's marginalization.

As a result, there is insufficient scholarly understanding of how employment policies and organizational practices within the Nigerian Customs Service reproduce systemic gender inequities and constrain institutional effectiveness. This gap limits evidence-based policy

reforms aimed at promoting inclusive leadership, improving staff morale, and enhancing organizational performance. Addressing this problem is therefore critical to advancing gender equity within Nigeria's paramilitary services.

The Objectives are to:

1. Examine the structural and institutional barriers affecting women's recruitment and participation in the Nigerian Customs Service (Adebayo, 2021; Nnamdi, 2023).
2. Assess the extent to which employment and promotion policies within the NCS are gender-sensitive and equity-oriented (Okoro, 2022; Nwosu, 2021).
3. Analyze how recruitment, training, and promotion practices influence women's career progression in the Nigerian Customs Service (Eze, 2022; Akinyemi & Musa, 2021).
4. Explore the role of organizational culture and informal institutional practices in sustaining gender inequity within the NCS (Chukwuma, 2021; Ridgeway, 2011).
5. Propose policy and institutional reforms that can promote gender equity, inclusive leadership, and organizational effectiveness within the Nigerian Customs Service (UN Women, 2021; Nnamdi, 2023).

Empirical Review

Empirical studies conducted after 2020 consistently demonstrate that formal gender equality policies in Nigerian paramilitary institutions are frequently undermined by patriarchal organizational cultures and weak policy implementation. For example, Chukwuma (2021) found that although gender policies exist within the Nigerian Police Force, informal male-dominated networks and workplace harassment continue to limit women's advancement. Similarly, Eze's (2022) intersectional analysis revealed that gender, rank, and institutional culture interact to restrict women's access to leadership roles despite affirmative policy frameworks.

Comparative evidence across paramilitary agencies further indicates uneven progress in gender inclusion. Nnamdi (2023) showed that variations in institutional leadership commitment significantly influence gender outcomes, with agencies demonstrating stronger reform efforts recording better inclusion of women. However, the Nigerian Customs Service remains largely absent from these analyses, underscoring a critical empirical gap. These findings suggest that achieving gender equity requires not only policy reform but also cultural and structural transformation within paramilitary institutions (Adebayo, 2021; Okoro, 2022).

Oluwaseun (2017) conducted a comprehensive study on employment policies within the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and their implications for gender equality, focusing on recruitment, retention, and promotion. Guided by the Liberal Feminist Theory, which

advocates for equal opportunities through legal and policy reform, the study adopted a quantitative design by analyzing employment data from 2007 to 2017 and surveying 500 police officers across various ranks. The findings revealed persistent gender imbalances, with women constituting only 12% of the force and predominantly confined to administrative and clerical roles. Physical fitness requirements and promotion criteria were shown to disadvantage women, while male officers had greater access to field experience and training opportunities. Oluwaseun concluded that these disparities stemmed from both institutional bias and cultural stereotypes portraying policing as a masculine profession. However, the study was limited by its reliance on quantitative methods, which failed to capture the real experiences of female officers and the informal networks that sustain gender inequality within the NPF.

Building on this, Chukwuma (2021) examined how policy implementation interacts with workplace culture in shaping gender outcomes within the NPF. Using Critical Feminist Theory, the study highlighted how institutionalized sexism and informal male-dominated networks undermine formal gender equality policies. Employing a qualitative case study approach across police stations in Lagos, Abuja, and Enugu, Chukwuma combined ethnographic observation, in-depth interviews with 50 officers, and document analysis. The findings revealed that while gender equality policies exist on paper, their effectiveness is hindered by entrenched masculine cultures, exclusionary practices, and harassment that female officers encounter. Although the study provided rich contextual insights, its limited geographic scope and exclusive reliance on qualitative data reduced the general utility of its conclusions.

Eze (2022) offered a broader analytical perspective through a mixed-methods study guided by Intersectionality Theory, exploring how gender, ethnicity, and rank interact to shape women's experiences in the NPF. By combining survey data from 600 officers with interviews and focus group discussions, Eze revealed that formal equality policies, such as recruitment quotas and affirmative action, have not translated into substantive inclusion. Deep-seated gender biases and patriarchal attitudes continue to restrict women's progression, particularly in leadership and operational roles. The study also identified male resistance and the absence of mentorship or gender-sensitive career development as barriers to progress. Eze concluded that without strong institutional enforcement and cultural change, gender equality policies risk remaining symbolic. Nonetheless, the study's reliance on self-reported data and limited attention to regional variations may have introduced bias and constrained its representativeness.

Similarly, Adebayo (2020) examined gender equality within the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), adopting the Organizational Culture Theory to analyze how workplace norms and informal practices shape gender relations. Using a qualitative design involving interviews

and participant observation, Adebayo found that despite the FRSC's formal commitment to gender inclusion, a masculine organizational culture persists, relegating women to support roles and limiting access to leadership opportunities. Informal networks and gendered stereotypes were identified as key mechanisms that maintain male dominance. However, the study's qualitative focus and single-institution scope limited the application of its findings.

Olujimi (2021), employed Feminism Theory to analyze gender equality policies within the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). Using a mixed-methods design with surveys and interviews, Olujimi found that while the NSCDC demonstrates rhetorical support for gender equality, women remain underrepresented in leadership and operational roles due to patriarchal institutional cultures. Despite progress in recruitment, systemic barriers persist in promotion and task allocation. The study's reliance on self-reported data and focus on a single institution were noted as methodological limitations.

Expanding the scope of this discussion, Nnamdi (2023) conducted a comparative study across the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), NSCDC, and FRSC using Comparative Institutional Analysis. Surveying 1,200 officers and supplementing this with interviews and focus group discussions, the study found that although all three institutions had formal gender policies, their effectiveness varied. The NIS displayed the greatest progress in gender inclusion, while the NSCDC lagged behind due to weak implementation and stronger patriarchal norms. Nnamdi attributed these variations to differences in institutional commitment and organizational culture. However, the breadth of the study limited the depth of analysis for each institution.

Aina (2019) and Nwachukwu (2020) explored how employment policies in paramilitary institutions reinforce male dominance by emphasizing physical endurance and aggression, traits traditionally associated with masculinity. Their studies revealed that recruitment and promotion criteria, which prioritize combat readiness and physical strength, systematically favor men and marginalize women. In a similar study, Adebayo (2021) and Okoro (2022) highlighted that even when women are recruited through gender quotas, they are often assigned to less prestigious roles, excluding them from decision-making and leadership. Okoro further noted the absence of mentorship and gender-sensitive training programs as major impediments to women's advancement, arguing that the persistence of male-centered evaluation standards perpetuates inequality.

Put together, a consistent pattern emerges: formal gender equality policies in Nigerian paramilitary institutions are often undermined by deep-rooted patriarchal cultures and institutional practices that privilege masculinity. While researchers such as Oluwaseun (2017) and Eze (2022) provide quantitative evidence of gender disparities, scholars like Chukwuma (2021) and Olujimi (2021) emphasize the qualitative dimensions of

discrimination embedded in workplace culture and informal networks. Nnamdi's (2023) comparative analysis further shows that institutional variations in gender outcomes depend largely on leadership commitment and organizational reform. The diverse theoretical lenses ranging from Liberal and Critical Feminism to Organizational Culture collectively reveal that achieving genuine gender inclusion requires more than policy reform; it necessitates a structural and cultural transformation of paramilitary institutions. Despite these contributions, a significant gap remains. Existing research has largely focused on gender equality in the Nigerian Police Force and a few related paramilitary agencies, with limited attention to the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS). Moreover, most studies emphasize gender equality rather than gender equity, the latter recognizing the need for structural adjustments to correct historical and systemic imbalances. None have examined how equitable employment policies might influence institutional performance, particularly the NCS's revenue-generating capacity or operational efficiency. Furthermore, the role of training curricula in shaping women's career progression within the NCS remains unexplored. The relationship between gender equity, organizational performance, and professional development within the NCS thus represents an important research gap. This study seeks to fill that void by examining how gender-equitable policies and practices can enhance inclusion, leadership development, and institutional effectiveness within the Nigerian Customs Service.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore gender equity within the employment policies of the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS). Using an interpretivist approach, it relied on in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis to capture the real experiences of NCS personnel, policymakers, and gender advocates. Abuja, the NCS headquarters, served as the study area because it houses key departments responsible for recruitment, training, and policy formulation. The target population comprised 1,568 staff, from which 40 participants were purposively selected to ensure diverse representation across departments and roles. Data were collected through semi-structured interview and focus group discussion. Thematic analysis was adopted to identify and interpret patterns and themes within the qualitative data, ensuring that findings reflected participants' perspectives and institutional realities. To enhance validity and reliability, the study employed triangulation, expert review of instruments, transparent coding procedures, and inter-coder verification. Ethical standards were rigorously observed through informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and organizational approval, ensuring that the research-maintained integrity and credibility throughout.

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Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the **Social Role Theory (SRT)** developed by Eagly and Wood (1987) which provides a foundational framework for understanding how societal expectations surrounding gender roles influence behavior, opportunities, and institutional structures. The theory posits that the division of labor within society, historically based on physical, cultural, and economic factors, has assigned distinct roles to men and women, shaping perceptions of their suitability for specific responsibilities both at home and in professional contexts. Over time, these divisions have evolved into cultural norms that associate men with agentic traits such as assertiveness, leadership, and competitiveness, while women are linked to communal traits like nurturing, empathy, and cooperation. These socially constructed expectations have become deeply embedded in organizational systems and policies, leading to unequal access to opportunities and reinforcing systemic gender disparities in institutions such as the paramilitary services (Eagly, 1987; Wood & Eagly, 2012).

According to the theory, societal norms and cultural expectations do not merely reflect differences between men and women but actively shape institutional practices and behaviors. Organizations, consciously or unconsciously, design recruitment policies, promotion criteria, and performance evaluations in ways that privilege traits culturally associated with masculinity, such as physical endurance, decisiveness, and dominance (Eagly & Heilman, 2016). In male-dominated environments like the Nigerian Customs Service and other paramilitary organizations, these biases are particularly evident. Roles requiring physical strength, aggression, or command are typically reserved for men, while women are confined to administrative or supportive tasks that align with traditional gender expectations. Such institutionalized practices reflect how societal perceptions of gender appropriateness become embedded within employment policies and career advancement structures, perpetuating inequality even in the presence of formal gender inclusion frameworks.

The Social Role Theory has some key postulations. First, **the division of labor shapes gender roles**, as men and women are historically assigned different responsibilities based on perceived physical or social suitability (Eagly & Wood, 1987). Second, **cultural norms reinforce gender stereotypes**, associating men with assertiveness and leadership while positioning women as caregivers and supporters, thus influencing how both genders are evaluated and treated in institutional settings (Eagly, 1987). Third, **institutional practices reflect and perpetuate these roles**, embedding gendered expectations into organizational systems such as recruitment and promotion processes (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Fourth, **gender roles are self-reinforcing over time**, as individuals internalize and perform behaviors that align with societal expectations, thereby strengthening

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stereotypes (Eagly & Heilman, 2016). Fifth, the theory acknowledges the **dynamic nature of roles**, suggesting that societal changes such as increasing access to education and evolving economic conditions can transform gender norms, though such transformation requires intentional structural and cultural interventions (Eagly & Wood, 2011). Finally, the theory emphasizes that **gender inequity is systemic rather than individual**, arising from entrenched institutional and cultural frameworks that reproduce inequality across generations.

In relation to this study, Social Role Theory helps us in analyzing how employment policies within the Nigerian Customs Service have been historically shaped by gendered expectations that privilege men while constraining women's participation and advancement. It helps explain why organizational structures and policies often align with traditional gender norms, thereby sustaining disparities in recruitment, promotion, and leadership representation. The theory also shows the importance of addressing not only policy-level inequities but also the underlying socio-cultural beliefs and institutional practices that reinforce them.

Data Analysis

Data for this study were obtained through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis conducted at the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) headquarters in Abuja. Forty participants were engaged, including male and female officers across different ranks, administrative staff, and gender policy advocates. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach: familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, defining, and reporting. The analysis yielded four dominant themes that reflect the institutional, cultural, and policy dimensions of gender equity within the Nigerian Custom Service (NCS).

1. **Recruitment and Entry-Level Barriers**: The findings revealed that gender disparities begin at the recruitment stage. Although the NCS recruitment policy formally promotes equal opportunity, physical fitness requirements, field-based aptitude tests, and implicit gender stereotypes create barriers for women. Several female officers reported that fitness and endurance criteria are designed with male applicants in mind, while administrative postings are unofficially reserved for women. This reinforces the perception of customs work as a "male profession," aligning with Eagly and Wood's (1987) postulation that gendered divisions of labor shape institutional roles. Document analysis confirmed that the 2018 NCS employment policy lacks gender-specific provisions to address such systemic imbalances.

2. **Promotion and Career Progression**: Promotion within the Nigerian Custom Service (NCS) was found to be influenced by both structural and cultural factors that are a disadvantage to women. Participants highlighted that leadership and operational roles

are typically assigned to men, while women are limited to support or clerical positions. Promotion criteria heavily emphasize field experience and command duties, areas where women have limited exposure due to deployment biases. Female officers also reported a lack of mentorship and professional development opportunities, making upward mobility difficult. This finding aligns with Social Role Theory's assertion that institutions reproduce societal norms by rewarding traits associated with masculinity such as assertiveness, toughness, and dominance.

3. **Institutional Culture and Gender Stereotypes**: A recurring theme was the persistence of a masculine organizational culture that discourages female participation in decision-making processes. Both male and female respondents noted that informal workplace interactions and networks are dominated by men, creating an exclusionary environment. Women who aspire to leadership roles are often perceived as aggressive or non-compliant with gender expectations. Such stereotypes reinforce the perception that women are less suited for leadership within the paramilitary. Policy documents reviewed also revealed the absence of gender-sensitivity training or initiatives aimed at changing organizational attitudes, suggesting that cultural barriers remain deeply institutionalized.

4. **Work–Life Balance and Institutional Support**: The study found that family responsibilities and inadequate institutional support systems further constrain women's advancement in the NCS. Female officers described challenges balancing professional duties with domestic responsibilities, particularly during long postings and irregular working hours. The absence of flexible work arrangements, maternity support, and childcare facilities exacerbates attrition among female staff. This theme reinforces the Social Role Theory's emphasis on how societal expectations of women as caregivers influence their participation in public service careers. Participants agreed that achieving gender equity in the NCS would require deliberate institutional reforms, including gender-responsive human resource policies and leadership development programs targeted at women.

5. In summary, this analysis demonstrates that gender inequity within the Nigerian Customs Service is rooted in a combination of structural, cultural, and policy-based barriers. While formal employment policies reference equality, they fail to challenge the deeper social roles and institutional norms that privilege men. These findings show the need for transformative policy reforms that address both the structural and cultural foundations of gender bias, consistent with the principles of Social Role Theory(SRT).

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that gender inequities within the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) are not isolated incidents of individual bias but are manifestations of deeply embedded structural and cultural norms consistent with the propositions of Social Role framework. As Eagly and Wood (1987) argue, societal divisions

of labor shape gender roles, which in turn inform institutional practices and expectations. The NCS, as a paramilitary organization, mirrors this social arrangement by reinforcing masculine traits as ideal for leadership and operational efficiency, thereby marginalizing women both symbolically and structurally.

The first major finding which is recruitment and entry-level barriers shows how gender roles are reproduced through institutional gate-keeping mechanisms. The physical and endurance-based recruitment requirements, though presented as neutral, favors traits culturally associated with masculinity. Similar patterns have been observed in other security institutions in Africa (Adeleke, 2020; Osei, 2019), where gender-neutral recruitment frameworks inadvertently reinforce male dominance. The absence of gender-sensitive adjustments in the Nigerian Custom Service (NCS) recruitment policy perpetuates the assumption that effective customs officers must embody physical strength and risk-taking attributes, thus excluding or discouraging qualified female applicants. This finding reinforces Social Role Theory's assertion that societal norms become institutionalized through the division of labor, influencing perceived role suitability.

The second finding, promotion and career progression, aligns with existing literature emphasizing the "glass ceiling" effect in security and paramilitary institutions (Akinyemi & Musa, 2021; Omoniyi, 2018). The study revealed that men are disproportionately represented in command and decision-making positions, while women remain concentrated in administrative or supportive roles. Promotion criteria emphasizing field command experience systematically limit women's advancement opportunities, as they are often excluded from such deployments. This institutionalized bias exemplifies what Eagly and Heilman (2016) describe as the self-reinforcing nature of social roles when leadership is defined in masculine terms, only those who fit such stereotypes are promoted, thereby reproducing the status quo.

The persistence of a masculine institutional culture, as shown in the third theme, further validates the Social Role Theory's perspective on the relationship between social expectations and institutional behavior. Female officers' experiences of exclusion from informal power networks and decision-making spaces reflect a culture that associates leadership competence with male assertiveness. This echoes Ridgeway's (2011) argument that gender operates as a "primary frame" for organizing social relations, influencing perceptions of competence and authority. Without deliberate interventions, such as gender-sensitivity training and inclusive leadership practices, the NCS risks perpetuating a culture that subtly undermines women's confidence, visibility, and participation.

The fourth finding, challenges of work–life balance, shows how institutional policies interacts with societal expectations to reinforce women's secondary status in the

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workforce. The lack of flexible work arrangements and family support systems demonstrates an implicit assumption that employees either have no care-giving responsibilities or that such responsibilities are exclusively female concerns. This finding is consistent with the work of Akinola (2020), who found that work–family conflicts remain a critical barrier to women's advancement in Nigerian public institutions. Social Role Theory helps explain this pattern by showing how societal expectations regarding women's care-giving roles shape institutional policies that fail to accommodate their dual responsibilities.

Taken together, these findings show the cultural, structural, and policy-based dimensions of gender inequity. While the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) formally upholds gender equality in its public statements, its internal structures, practices, and culture remain shaped by traditional gender roles. The study thus affirms Eagly and Wood's (2011) observation that achieving gender equity requires both cultural transformation and institutional reform. Efforts must move beyond token inclusion toward dismantling systemic barriers embedded in recruitment, promotion, and workplace culture.

Thus, we assert that gender inequity in the Nigerian Customs Service is a systemic issue deeply rooted in historical and societal constructs of gender roles. Addressing these inequities will require deliberate policy reforms, gender-responsive leadership training, and sustained advocacy to reshape institutional norms. As Social Role Theory suggests, transformative change is only possible when organizations actively challenge the social scripts that define competence, leadership, and suitability through the prisms of gender.

Conclusion

This study examined gender equity within the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) using Social Role Theory as a framework to understand how societal expectations and institutional practices perpetuate gender disparities. The findings reveal that gender inequity in the Nigerian Custom Service (NCS) is a product of deeply rooted historical, cultural, and structural factors that continue to privilege masculine traits and marginalize women in recruitment, promotion, and leadership. Despite existing gender policies and Nigeria's commitment to international conventions, the Nigerian Custom Service (NCS) remains characterized by a male-dominated culture that limits women's participation and advancement. Social norms that define men as leaders and women as caregivers have become embedded in organizational structures, shaping employment policies and reinforcing systemic exclusion. The study concludes that achieving gender equity in the NCS requires not only reforming policies but also transforming institutional cultures and social perceptions that sustain gendered hierarchies.

Recommendations

To promote gender equity within the Nigerian Customs Service, the study recommends the adoption of gender-responsive policies that ensure fairness and inclusivity in recruitment, promotion, and leadership appointments. Institutional reforms should focus on mainstreaming gender considerations across all levels of operation, supported by continuous training on gender sensitivity and unconscious bias for all staff. Leadership development and mentorship programs targeted at female officers should be implemented to enhance their professional capacity and representation in senior positions. Furthermore, the Nigerian Custom Service (NCS) should establish mechanisms that support work–life balance, such as flexible work arrangements and improved maternity policies, to enable women to thrive in their careers. Lastly, the institution should create a monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress on gender equity initiatives, ensuring accountability, sustainability, and alignment with national and international standards.

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