

Impact Assessment of The Role of Nigerian Women in National Development

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ABSTRACT

This paper espouses the salient contributions of Nigerian women in national development. It is manifested that the roles of Nigerian women in rural development have gone without notice. Using the dominant theory as propounded by Andre Gunder Frank which has guided many development politics in the Developing States, this paper seeks to highlight the critical areas of Nigerian women's positive contributions towards National development. From the findings, salient recommendations were made based on the fact that at this point that the general socio-cultural practices against women constitute the major impediments to women's access to education, employment and participation in polio institutions and implementations of affirmative policies.

Keywords: *Women, Nigerian Women, National Development, Assessment.*

INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that the 21st century will even witness a greater prominence of women. Culture and tradition that have kept women in bondage are gradually giving ways. In recent years, women have received unprecedented attention from researchers and academic institutions reviewing their roles and status. To Chaslton (1984) this avid intellectual interest has been outpaced only by the profusion of voluntary non- governmental organizations that ostensibly seek to defend women's rights and clarify their positions on socio- economic, legal, culture and political issues. Government agencies and department have been co-opted into campaigns to protect the basic right of women. Thus empowering women is increasingly being recognized as a condition for and as an indicator of the level of success in the attainment of sustainable human development.

Women issue has therefore become an important and integral part of contemporary discourse on development and democratization To Udegbe (1998) he argued that despite the fact that women have been placed according to the societal norms, stereotypes and traditional ideology that relegate women to housewife role while their counterparts are providers and final authority, the contributions of women are still noticeable in major strata of the society. In fact, it would be discovered that women have indeed contributed to the political, social, economic and professional growth of both developed and developing nations of the world. According to Boserup and Bryson, (1985) agreed that women in Africa have been systematically excluded from the benefits of planned development in both the colonial and past- colonial eras. This is in spite of their importance to major sectors of their economics especially agriculture food supply, the informal sector and the

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service and farm labor force. Women are the major food producers of the third world and by denying them their right the economics of whole communities are undermined. In Nigeria, Women form a sizable proportion of the country's population. They are an important segment in the development process. For this, Whitehead (1991) observed that women should be given every opportunity to develop their potentials so that they can take a rightful place in nation- building. The purpose of this paper therefore is to critically assess the impact of Nigerian women in national development.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

It would be most appropriate to begin this theoretical exploration by explaining about the meaning of development. The Gross national product Approach (GNP) is purely economic model, which asserts which the primacy economic factors, most especially capital formation and high per capital income as initiator and index of development respectively. This approach assumes that balanced economic growth is the most appropriate strategy for realizing the objectives of national development. Rodney (1976) in this own's argument claimed that at the level of the individual persons. Development implies increase skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self- discipline, responsibility and well- being. But for Rodney (1976) the achievement of any of these aspects described of personal development is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole. In search of a more acceptable approach to the concept of development .Seers (1972) directed attention to the conditions of human beings rather than building nations. This group of scholars propounded the Development Model Approach, which contends that man should be the central focus of development and so, any development at that is anti-human is no development at all.

Again, development connotes increase in the capacity of political agencies, political unification and political participation. Myrdal (1968) on the other hand is of the opinion that development involves total and full mobilization of the whole societal system and that it has to be comprehensive and should invoke total political commitment. Taking a holistic approach, Fadeiye (2005) fees that development could be described as those change or progress, which enhance better quality of life for the generality of the people in the society. Such desirable and positive change are observable in all human endeavors with particular reference to social, economic, political and culture aspects of life, which usher in progress for the overall benefit of the entire population in the society .Such development should be genuinely geared towards the reeducation of poverty, reduction of inequalities, checking unemployment and facilitating easy access to basic needs of life, such as food, health care, education, shelter, electricity, transportation and communication.

Thus, development should involve the active participation of all and sundry so as to bring about concrete and meaningful transformation in the lives of people in the community, state and even in the nation or the country at large. At this juncture, it is necessary to operationalise the concept of national development. Different scholars have described the concept of national development from various perspectives. The National Educational Research council perceives development as "the plan, usually initiated by the government, for economic social and political development of the nation." As Aderito and Abdullai

(1988), national development encompasses social and political development. Other scholars also see development as rapid mechanization and massive production of material goods and services as some of the notable yardstick for measuring national development. One of the vital issues that is connected to, and has profound effects on national development is women empowerment. Women empowerment according to Fadeyiye (2005) is a notable pre-requisite for national development. The contributions of women in all spheres of human endeavors to the overall development of the home, the community, the state, the nation and the world at large could no longer be dismissed with a wave of the hand from time immemorial, women had played an immense role in bringing outstanding changes and rapid transformation to their different states and countries.” It is important to stress that women now constitute important partners in progress in any serious movement towards national development in all its ramifications.

It is a common knowledge that no nation, regardless of its status whether developed or developing can raise beyond the quality of its citizenry. Hence, the essential role of women in national development can no longer be underestimated. Andre Gunder Frank (1969) provided a figurative expression of the dominant theory, which has been guiding development policy in many developed nations for several decades. According to Sanda (1983) the question, which struck at the root of the problem and provided the answer, which other scholars have utilized to blindfold development in oriented political leaders for a longtime. A number of scholars such as Bauer, Hayter, Hudson and Goutlet and Meade (1972) agreed that foreign aids could not solve the problem underdevelopment of third world nations; instead, such aids could only increase the dependence of the underdeveloped nations on the developed societies.

Thus, Rodney and Ley (1976) agreed that the underdevelopment theory is in essence a theory of the history of underdevelopment nations. It is a theory of their relations of production under colonialism and imperialism. Amin (1974) in his own analysis sees, socio-economic development in term of self-centered system and a peripheral system. For Everet (1971) Hagen and other scholars, endogenous factors are responsible for third world under-development. That is if we are searching for reason why most these nations are underdeveloped we must consider the critical internal requirement for societal development. He claimed that the extent of creativity present in the population and the degree to which such creativity to be geared towards other spheres such as war, philosophy etc. Is a pre-requisite or a necessary concomitant of development? Having considered the meaning of development, it is necessary for us to take a cursory look at feminist theories of social change. This is equally relevant for analysis in this paper.

Feminists agree that there are deep-rooted social, economic and political inequalities between the sexes, which need to be changed but they fundamentally digress in their analysis of why this situation has come about and how far it could, and should be altered through government policy. The socialist feminist tradition stretches in a complex and evolving tradition from classical works by Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, August Bebel and Alexandra Kollontai to more recent theorists such as Sheila Rowbotham and Juliet Mitchell. Equality of opportunity, which is the primary demand of classical feminists, whilst

useful, is only one stage of change. Socialist argues that formal equal right might lead to access to boardroom or the medical school for a few upwardly aspiring women but this is not enough in itself. Engels (1984) did not discuss equality of sexes in detail in the main body of his work; however, Engel applied Max's theoretical frame work to women in the origins of the family, private property and the state. Engels argued that women suffer a triple burden, oppressed by domesticity, legal inequalities and capitalism. The low—pay given to women result in higher profits for companies, and the unpaid house work which women do is essential for society. Under socialism, domestic tasks would be placed on a collective basic with communal state – funded services for common needs as the care and education of children and the production of food.

Women would be free of house hold work and able to participate equally in paid work in public sphere, thus the socialist theory that the state has to intervene directly to remove in contrast, both liberal and radical feminists doubt the efficiency of the state action as a means of changing gender role at a personal level. Instead, the liberals argue that the primary change has to come in the aptitudes to gender roles acquired through our early-socialization, the family education and the media, the classical liberal perspective stretches in an unbroken line from John Stuart Mill's (1869) to Friedan's, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) a century later. They learn to be obedient slaves, with social controls reinforced by the legal institution of marriage which at that time , denied women ant right over their property and their children, and even failed to provide protection from brutal violence. Mill argued passionately that the situation should change to let women develop their potential both for the benefit of women and that of society as whole.

The solution of Mill was for the state to remove the legal restriction, which denied women equal and evil political right. Gives these opportunities, Mill felt that the position of women would change over time. Mill argued that the law should recognize that there are no inherent differences between the sexes. In the liberal tradition, the state should remove barriers to individual achievement through creating legal equality, preventing employment discrimination and to. a limited extent supporting the condition of female work, such as facilitating care. Women should be able to compete with women on an equal basic if they wanted career and conventional success. In the Opinion of the radical feminist, the problem which face is not the result of legal inequalities or the result of legal inequalities or the capitalist system, the problem is reproduction and family. Revolutions abolish social institutions like the family and school, sexism will remain.

If the problem has biological roots, firestone claimed that to change situation, women need to control the means of reproduction, which includes the use of technological development to revolutionize the process of childbirth. Firestone criticized the socialist advocacy of daycare centers, arguing that this still puts medical and technological developments, which will revolutionized the process of childbirth and abolish the family, the source of all psychological economic and political oppression. In their own contribution to the feminist debate, conservative theorist expressed strong doubt how far traditional gender role could and should be transformed. For the purpose of the discussion, the essential point of this theory is the assertion that sexual/ physiological differentiation leads

inevitably and universally to differences between male and females. Attempts to make traditional sex role more egalitarian will therefore fail, as patriarchy, male dominance and male status in supra familial role are inevitable. Despite their contribution to the development of the various communities, it is disheartening to know that they receive only- tenth of the world's income and own less than one – hundredth of its property. Beside, their large number and critical functions notwithstanding, the division of role between the male and female sexes, as prescribed by most cultures, assign the subordinate position to women. Women, as are submerged in extreme poverty, are still victims of all kinds of abuse, discrimination and exploitation are illiterate and are still victims of ill health. Thus, a concerted policy must be formulated for the participation of women in the overall national development. Currently, things are changing. Women's role in national development is being acknowledged.

Nigerian Women and Socio-political Life:

In Nigeria politics is an area in which women have always been involved but rather in a passive way long before the colonial master, women like Amina of ZauZua. Moremi of Ife was among women of repute, who sacrificed themselves in their communities. Adullia asserted that in the Nigeria oral traditional, women were concerned about the life of their community's behinds curtains. She proved too hot community that women could achieve perhaps where men have failed other legendary women who contributed to the development of her community was Daurama, the daughter of the King of Daura who married Bayajidda, a stranger who killed the dangerous snake of kusugu well .The snake was a menace to the people. Daurama offered herself as an object of settlement between the warrior villager and the Duara people so that the community could prosper. She was a unique personality in the history women politicians in Nigeria.

In addition Halldwell (1967) observed that women's access to politics is exemplified by the Queen Amina's resounding military and political successes. Queen Amina who came to power in Zaria between 1588 and 1598 (AD), was a formidable woman with special character. She is believed to have fought wars and won them all through these conquests; she expanded her area of jurisdiction as far as River Kwarafar Empire and up to Kano into the north. She is remembered for putting up walls around Zaria. Unlike two other earlier in Yoruba land, for instance, tradition speaks of female obas (Kings) in Ile- Ife. Oyo kingdom, Ilesha and undo. Example of female obas ruled in the Oyo Kingdom was Iyayun and Orompto.

Women also held public offices; such were Iya kekere who in charge of the king's treasury and paraphernalia of state Ayaba controlled both men and women in the palace. Members of Oyomesi could gain access to the Allafin through Ayaba. In the Delta region of Nigeria we had Queen kambasa of Bonny, who in her lifetime was seen as remarkable liberated women, who did not allow any body to dictate to her what she should do or not do. She equally believed that women had equal right with men in everything without inhibition whatsoever. She is remembered not only as a female leader of great stature, but also as of the most colorful and dynamic political leaders of modern Nigeria. Also, she played a

dominant role during the 1945 general strike in Nigeria. The pre-independence days were a lucrative period for women actives in Nigeria. In 1946, the market women Abeokuta felt alienated from the Alake and his administration as they were not consulted over the issue of tax. This finally led to the dethronement of Alake in 1946. So also Mrs. Soley, Mrs. Osimosu and Mrs. Soyinka were leading activists of their time. In Igbo speaking areas, the Aba market women who were organized by Mrs. Ekpo became very vocal. Her experience during her stay in Ireland taught her a lot about the passion of women in the realm of things. The period covering the struggle for independence is the least eventful in terms of involvement and participation of women. The Nigerian political scene was virtually monopolized by men. During the struggle for independence, political parties were formed without much female presence, except a few women like Mrs. Fumilayo, Rensome Kuti of National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) and Hajia Gambo of Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU). Infact, Hajia Gambo Sawaba was the first woman in modern time to call for women Solidarity. Her audience was basically women of low social status. This group were later recognized and absorbed into NEPU.

All these women country was hardly appreciated despite the significant contributions they have made. Even so, our culture norms and traditions marginalize women's a subordinates mentality. With the rapid pace of urbanization in the country fuelled by the drift of able-bodied men to the urban centers, a greater role for women in rural agro-based industries is anticipated in the years ahead developing programmes that would particularly in the rural areas. It is therefore necessary to appreciate, compensate and evaluate the work of female farmer in order to assess their contribution to the agricultural economic and national development. If the food crisis gets worse, it is likely that more attention and aid be directed at female farmers; new evidence of their importance in cultivation is motivating few development experts to ignore.

The importance, which has been attached to food matters, is no doubt predicated on the critical role of adequate food in the development process. Despite their enormous contribution to food production, the women in Agriculture are responsible for the production of articles of articles like mats, pottery, weaving and dying. All these are evidence of women's contribution to nation development in Nigeria. Notwithstanding these achievements, there are still a lot of constraints to women's production efforts. These include the land tenure system that denies women land ownership titles and access to fertile agricultural lands, lack of access to credit facilities. Time constraints due to performance of domestic and reproductive duties, which in traditional societies are regarded as their primary function the by passing of women in extension programme aims at improving farm practices and hence, output and the undesirable effect of the country's economic woes.

Nigerian Women and The Development of Education Opportunities

If African countries are to achieve sustained development, the gaps must be closed, and women integrated into development. There is strong evidence that there are high private returns and even higher social returns from female are education. The most significant

factors in socio-economic progress and national unity is the planned programme of democratizing education, in order to provide equal. A review of the contributions of women to western medicine in Nigeria should include the achievement of the first woman medical graduate Dr. Elizabeth Abimbola Awoniyi. She supported the causes of the Nigeria women in her professional and religious life until death in 1970. Many women serve the health industries as nurses, midwives, radiographers, physiotherapists, dental hygienists and occupational therapists who have contributed significantly to national development in the country. In fact, the contribution of women in Nigeria especially in the last two decades has been to stimulate and encourage more women in the profession.

Nigerian Women and The Development of Commerce and Industries

Commerce and industry have been immense but it took a dramatic turn within the last three decades in Nigeria. An examination of the role of women in this area must acknowledge the importance of their activities prior to the colonial period. Before the advent of colonialism, there was some trade between localities. Women dominated the trading sector of the economy as could be seen from a visit to the market. Weaving and later sewing were traditional business areas as well as looking after the home and children. Women were engaged in simple productive processes to formation of palm fronds through the various stages necessary to fabricate it into a broomstick, or the cleaning, cutting.

Nigerian Women and Labour Management

In industrial countries, roughly two-thirds of women's total work time-but only a third of men's – is unrecognized. In developing countries like Nigeria, the proportion is similar for women, but for men it declines to less than a quarter. Women in developing countries tend to carry an even larger share of the workload than those in industrial countries – on average 13% higher than men's share and in rural areas 20% higher (than men's). Only a third of women's work enters the system of Accounts. The remainder is unrecognized. Three quarters of men's work is recorded and hence recognized. Other examples of such women who are first class professionals in their own rights are Professor Alele-Williams, Professor (Mrs.) Okpete Kanu, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Chief (Mrs.) Ndi Okereke, Chief (Mrs.) Cecilia Ibru, Professor Joy Ogwu, Chief (Mrs.) Rosaline Nkechi Godwill, Professor (Mrs) M. Mbah, Lady Chinedu Brown, Chief (Mrs) Kuforiji Olubi, Senator Ita Giwa, Senator Nkechi Nwogu, Mrs. Hilda Adeferasin to name just a few. Thus, when women are in management positions, they go all out to show good leadership qualities confirming the popular cliché that “what a man can do a woman can do better”.

Nigeria Women and Environmental Conservation

Environmental degradation is fast becoming a major concern in Africa. With rapid population growth, the need for more farmland and wood has increased significantly. Large areas of forest, wetlands and grassland savannah have been converted to farmland. But areas of arable land per head are continuously shrinking. Women are both severely affected by and

contribute to the steady deforestation and resulting water resource depletion through their extensive use of fuel wood, water and farming activities. A vicious cycle with respect to agricultural production, home management, soil fertility and land degradation has come into play; with women are those involved in the industrial and others. Traditionally, women are those most involved in the disposal of domestic waste. In the rural areas, women, assisted by their daughters, sweep and keep the surrounding environment clean.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the foregoing discussions, this paper has pointed out the critical areas where women have contributed to rural development in Nigeria and areas of gender inequality were also identified. It is important to stress at this point that the general socio-cultural practices against women constitute the major impediments to women's access to education, employment and participation in polio institutions and implementations of affirmative policies. The UN decade for women was to showcase the potential losses to society arising from any aik.npt to the process of development. It is instructive to note that political assassination which has started rearing an ugly head in many states in Nigeria today continues to deter many people from participating in politics.

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