

ROLE OF THE FEMALE GENDER IN RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

Women represent half of the population of Nigeria. Although they are seemingly generally considered as one of the main pillars of economic development particularly in the rural areas, they have also suffered some unjust social heritage in addition to discriminatory practices in virtually all areas; they have made tremendous progress in contributing to the development of the rural communities in Nigeria. To this end therefore, the paper examined the role and contributions of Nigeria women in rural economic development. It equally considered some of the detrimental effects which the colonialism has had on the status of Nigerian women and the political dynamics involving the women. The challenges faced with women in the course of contributing to the economic development of the Nigerian nation at large were also highlighted.

Furthermore, the study considered some ways of ameliorating these challenges and upon which some far reaching recommendations which include: more women participations in governance, proper education of women, formation of more women empowerment, business cooperatives, recognition of women's contributions by government as well as assist them through soft loans and other incentives, enlightened campaigns in secondary and tertiary institutions as well as granting women their constitutional rights to effective participation in the affairs of the country were made amongst others.

Keywords: *Rural development, Development, Economic development.*

Introduction

Women constitute an indispensable element in the quest for rural and national development of any nation. Women are the fundamental human reservoir of every society as they control most of the non-monetary economy (subsistence, agriculture, bearing children, domestic labour etc, and play an important role in the monetary (training wage labour, employment etc Yawa, (1995). Women in most societies, whether developed or developing are regarded as currency with which political and economic alliances are cemented. Thus in social anthropology, the transfer of women between lineages and clans is regarded as a medium of communication more potent and clearest than language itself. The woman as a person is an agent of reproduction of life itself. This places her in the position of the life itself. This places her in the position of the life blood of

the entire humanity. The industrial revolution in England and other parts of the western world in the 18th century drastically altered the primary role of women in the society. Women henceforth could be seen playing roles hitherto regarded as the exclusive reserves of men in the economic, political and social lives of the society in the African setting women have played the role of peace maker, the symbol of beauty and major moulder of the character of the children she is the first teacher, the sustainer and maintainer of the home. Fasugba (2000) asserted that many women today are engaged in activities and jobs hitherto regarded as the exclusive reserve of men. He further states that since women have become conscious of their right, they have continued to slug it out with men in all areas of human endeavour. By their sheer psychological, physiological and intellectual make up they do perform more than mere complementary roles in the production process.

Consequently, matters of human capital improvements, social justice and environmental concerns are hardly at the core of the neoliberal development agenda at the rural areas. Such development trajectory rarely promotes inclusivity and participation for the rural people. Rural development approach that fails to incorporate conventional economy to includes paid work, the activities of businesses and the making of profit, whereas women's voluntary contributions towards the well-being of rural communities has not been considered part of the conventional economy. In Nigeria, the role of women in rural development is mostly located in the informal agricultural sector. However, most government at the centre of policy and programmes hardly place women at the centre of policy and programmes development agenda. Statistics vary, but the general impression is that women involvements in public rural development programmes are at minimal level. The importance of this study is to evaluate the level of participation of women in rural development by assessing some aspects of public rural development policies and programmes in Nigeria. Rural development is a dynamic process which is mainly concerned with the rural areas. These include agricultural growth, putting up of economic and social infrastructure, fair wages as also housing and house sites for the landless, village planning, public health, education and functional literacy, communication etc.

Rural development and the involvement of women is a national necessity has considerable importance in Nigeria because of the following reasons.

- Majority of Nigeria population live in rural areas,

- Nearly half of the country's national income is derived from agriculture,
- Around seventy percent of the Nigeria population get employment through agriculture and other rural activities,
- Bulk of raw materials for industries come from agriculture and rural sector,
- Increase in industrial population can be justified only in rural populations' motivation and increasing the purchasing power to buy industrial goods, and
- Growing disparity between the urban elite and the rural poor can lead to political instability.

Objectively, the paper mainly focuses on the role of women in rural economic development. It equally addressed the challenges and opportunities of engaging women in rural development by highlighting some barriers and critical areas and developmental programmes.

Conceptual Clarifications

Rural Development: Rural Development (RD) is a process which aims at improving the well being and self realization of people living outside the urbanized areas through collective process. Rural Development involves efforts that are economic and social in nature intended to encourage concepts of retention, growth and expansion in areas outside cities, including improving quality of life for rural people through such deliberate activities. Development of rural communities is the ultimate outcome of the transactions between physical, technological, economic, socio-cultural and institutional factors. The strategies need to be designed to bring about improvement, primarily in the living conditions of the individuals, belonging to deprived, marginalized and social economically backward sections of the society. To promote the development of rural areas, it is necessary to represent an intersection between agriculture, social, managerial, behavioural and engineering sciences. Rural - Is an area, where the people are engaged in primary industry in the sense that they produce things directly for the first time in cooperation with nature. A society or community can be classified as rural based on the criteria of lower population density, less social differentiation, less social and spatial mobility, slow rate of social change, etc. Agriculture would be the major occupation of rural area

Development: It refers to growth, evolution, stage of inducement or progress. This progress or growth is gradual and had sequential phases. Always there is increasing differentiation. It also

refers to the overall movement towards greater efficiency and complex situations. Development is simply about local people been able to have control over the resources in their environment, used them for the development of the society for better living. In the view of Dudley (1967) in Solomon (2019), development means absence of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

Development beyond this work means different things to different people. Some people however stressed material prosperity as the ultimate objectives of development efforts Rogers (2009) describes development as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced within a social system to produce higher per-capital incomes and levels of living through more production methods and improved social organization. Mabogunje (2008) listed economic, growth, modernization, distributive justice, socio – economic transformation and spatial reorganization etc as basic rural developmental areas. Rogers believed that development should means a widely participating process of social charges in society intended to bring about social and materials advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities) for the majority of people through gaining control over their environment. He further claimed that women predominate among the poor in the world today and they are more in the rural areas their annual incomes throughout the world have declined so sharply in recent years that they had fallen below poverty line. Women work two – thirds working hours according to the united nations millennium campaigns (Unagha 2006) to have world poverty by the year 2015 the overwhelming majority of the labour that sustain life – growing food, cooking, raising children, caring for the elderly, maintaining a house hauling water in done by women and universally this work is accorded how status and no pay. The ceaseless cycle of labour rarely shows up in economic analysis of a society's production and value. Women earn only 10 percent of the world's income, where women work for money; they may be limited to a set of jobs deemed suitable for women invariably low pay, low status positions. Women own less than 1 percent of the world' property where laws and customs prevent women from owning land or other productive assets, from setting loans or to economic stability and cannot invest in their own or their children's future. Education brings benefits to the educated in the forms of access to information and more economic and political influence. Education is required for skills acquisition and consequently to increase the competitiveness of women. Low education therefore generally limits the upward mobility of Nigerian women.

Economic Development: Economic development is about positioning the economy on a higher growth trajectory. Economic development is the product of long-term investments in the generation of new ideas, knowledge transfer, and infrastructure, and it depends on functioning social and economic institutions and on cooperation between the public sector and private enterprise. Economic development requires collective action and large-scale, long-horizon investment. Economic development addresses the fundamental conditions necessary for the microeconomic functioning of the economy. It is within the purview of government

Women Participation in Rural/National Development from the Colonial Period Till Date

Various researchers Ekong (2006) had reported on the contributions of women in agriculture, community, development and physical development. For instance, Ekong asserts that women are the keys to development and therefore crucial to the goal of sustainable development. In 1975 FAQ reported that 70% of all domestic and households chores are performed by women. This trend has not changed except that women now take additional burden of extra – domestic affairs. Agboola (1990) confirmed this assertion by concluding that women are the operators of the economy constitute a major arm of the labour force, and that Nigerian women are dynamic industrial and resourceful. All these researchers had looked at contributions of women based on the cultural gender division of labour, when before the colonial era was restricted to farm and household activities. But the contributions of women in national development had over the years gone beyond agriculture and household duties. Agbola (2000) assessed their contribution beyond farm and household chores (subsistence) and noted that the narrow perception of women's duties may be attributed to the late arrival of women in the colonial system or administration. He identified the eight cardinal elements of sustainable development and how it has affected the women e.g. in the area of education, health culture, politics, economy, agriculture, enhanced environments quality and peaceful co-existence.

Nigerian women have made some appreciable progress in their contribution to the development of the Nigerian nation, particularly, the in rural development. The active participation of a large number of women in the political for a is strangely a new phenomenon. Although in the past, Nigeria has seen amazons like Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margareth Ekpo, Madam Tinubu of

Lagos and a landful of other activist, women have often been relegated to the background in national politics. This situation however seem to be changing as women are now making serious and appreciable impact in the political life of the country, especially since the 2005 Beijing conference and women affirmative position (Aweni 2006). Nigerian women played a vital role in politics during the pre-colonial era, African social system and the form of division of labour which existed. Nigerian women participated in politics and government through, the institution of women chiefs the authority of first daughters and the age grades. According to Afonja (2006), the advent of colonialism disturbed the functioning of these traditional institutions suppressing them and imposing alien system through education, religion and other socio-cultural institutions. In pre-colonial Nigeria women played prominent roles in politics and held important positions among the majority of ethnic groups particularly among the Yoruba, Hausa and the Igbo. Nigerian women have been seen to break even such that today they have become a force to reckon with in the developmental processes of nation. During the second republic (1979 – 83) Nigeria had her first female senator in the person of Mrs. France Afegbua. In the fourth republic (1999 – 2004) three women were elected into the senate while fifteen got elected into the house of representatives. The fourth republic has been a period of re-awakening for Nigerian women both in terms of elected offices and political appointments. She expressed her feelings it might not be an exaggeration to say that the fourth republic has been best outing in political participation for Nigeria women. During the civilian government of Obasanjo, women to be adequately accommodated and placed in areas of intense visibility as they held important and prominent positions. The ministries of Aviation and Transport were headed by women, the ministers of state for science and technology and the sensitive ministry of defence were also women. These women were able to prove that they possess the quality, talents and characters traits required not only for the growth of the nation but for the enhancement of the progress and well – being of the human society in general. Today many women occupy elective and appointee positions in Nigeria.

African Commitments and Economic Value of Women

The AU has adopted a ground-breaking Protocol that recognizes the economic value of women. On 11 July 2003, the African Union adopted a Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, a supplementary protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which was

adopted in 1981. The new Protocol covers a broad range of human rights issues and a broad range of economic rights for women including, inter alia, the right to equal pay for equal work; the right to adequate and paid maternity leave in both private and public sectors; the right of women's access to and control over land and other productive resources and to inherit equitable shares of property from their husbands and parents; women's rights to equitable sharing of joint property upon separation, divorce, or annulment of marriage; protection and social insurance systems for women working in the informal sector, and recognition of the economic value of women's work in the home. This ground-breaking Protocol offers women in Africa not only a bill of rights that addresses protection of their range of rights within an African context, but also obligates states to take action and allocate resources to ensure that African women enjoy these rights.

According to Onwubiko (2012), the Solemn Declaration commits African leaders to report on progress on the state of gender equality and women's empowerment on the continent. The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) is an important African instrument for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment as it strengthens African ownership of the gender equality agenda and keeps the issues alive at the highest political level in Africa. Through the Solemn Declaration, Heads of State and Government commit themselves to report annually on progress towards gender equality. In addition, the Chairperson of the AU Commission is expected to submit an annual report to the Assembly on progress made in the implementation of the Solemn Declaration as well as on the state of gender equality and gender mainstreaming at the national and regional levels. In order to guarantee the implementation of SDGEA at the regional and national level, a Comprehensive Action Plan is being developed to mobilise resources for its implementation.

The Impact of Colonialism on Women Participation in Rural Development in Nigeria.

With respect to women, Nigeria men have carefully selected and interpret from the British a pattern that neglects relegate women to the kitchen thus destroying the indigenous courage and capabilities displayed by their great grandmothers in services to their communities. The late arrival of women to urban centre for the new patterns of work and gender division of labour, Anikpo (2000) listed two factors that may have facilitated the predominance of the men in the colonial work force – firstly, the uncertainty of the new urban system which saw only the men

ventured out while women and children remained in the villages to look after the homes and farms. This earlier contact with the colonial work system put the men in an advantageous position to acquire all the relevant skills before some women. Secondly, there was the existing cultural belief that the responsibilities of the women do not extend beyond the houses, the farm and market women who ventured to project themselves beyond the sectors were suspected to have easy virtue tendencies and were despised in the communities. This fact also delayed the education of women or girl children, therefore, seeing them as not having the necessary skill to function in the colonial urban system. At that stage what became known as modern and much a might for property acquisition were completely dominated by men. From there and as the system stabilized the men who went to work first now brought in their wives and children into the urban centre when it became difficult for the men alone to sustain the family it became imperative for the women to earn some income. The port of call due to her lack of skills and education was the market for trading while their husband engaged in government work. After independence, there was a boom in education of women (Ake 1981), which was the catalyst needed for women to break into occupations that were hitherto monopolized by men. This era saw women into professional areas such as medicine, law, accountancy, engineering, power sharing and decision making, and their entrance into public service as men opted out into private sector between 1970 and 1980 during the civil war and the introduction of economic stabilization measures by Murtala Mohammed in 1975 where many workers were retrenchment.

Women's capabilities and resources at both individual and collective levels:

The capacity and strength of the women can be better enhanced according to Dadirep (2005):

- Women's capabilities and interests are shaped by their life experiences and these must be understood as embedded in wider socio-political, economic and cultural histories.
- The combination of economic capital (e.g. women's ownership of productive assets and control over income) with other types of resources associated with social and cultural capital (e.g. education, skills training, awareness raising with men, and logistical support to engage in collective action) increases the likelihood of women gaining more power at the household level, and the potential for change at the community and national level.
- Formal sector principles in the labour market, such as minimum wages or social security benefits, can enhance the transformative potential of employment for women's agency.

- Legal and technical knowledge and education more generally, can enhance women's voice and credibility and, therefore, capacity for influence. Political skills, networks and experience are also key to women's leadership and influence and women often develop these through informal activities and welfare-oriented work, rather than more conventional formal party politics or political training programmes.
- Women organizing with other women around shared interest, builds their capabilities for voice and influence. The experience of group cohesion and solidarity can contribute to self-affirmation at the individual and collective level, give support and legitimacy to gender equality agendas and enable women to exert the collective power needed to shift gender norm.

Nigerian Women Contributions to Rural Economic Development and the Challenges

In spite of the remarkable achievements of the Nigerians women, there is severe constrained in their efforts to pay a major and decisive role in socio-political and economic development of the nation. Differential gender-based power positions reflect the general patriarchal structure of the Nigerian society, which seems to concentrate enormous power, resources, privileges and prestige in men over women. The cultural perception and treatment of women manifest in their different positions in the society including 'homemaker' status, inferior partners in matrimony and limited positions in social, economic and political spaces. Some forms of social stereotypes and other forms of punishments enforce these restrictive positions and status when the boundaries are crossed. These keep women away from open and active participation in rural development initiatives. In the traditional African society for example the roles of women are revolving around child rearing and general domestic care of the family. With the duties of women so rigidly defined they assume their duties of cooking, washing and child bearing and then see themselves even in their martial homes as figures to be seen and not to be hard (Fasugba, 2000). This situation creates a culture of male supremacy, superiority and dominance with little consideration given to the thoughts and feeding of women in larger scheme of things. Another worthy to note challenges raised by Yomi (2007) is what he described as the "patrieneal system of descent" in which generation are identified through male offspring's. The responsibility for the preservation and continuity of the family tree rests on the male children and special

recognition are accorded them in the preparation for their in the preparation for their adult roles. Some of the challenges faced by women include:

- **Patriarchal Problem:** Nigeria society is permeated by patriarchy where women are expected to conform to and confirm themselves to male dominance and female subservience women as seen to belong to the home because they are incapable of making sound decisions and are not allowed to explore themselves in public for political activities. It again reflects the reason why not much have been contributed economically towards the economic development of rural areas in Nigeria.
- **Problem of discrimination and Marginalization:** Women in Nigeria like other developing countries of the world suffer from undue marginalization, discrimination and Exploitation by the men folk through the implementation of their religions and cultural beliefs, traditional prejudices which placed men as super human beings women on their part do not often see themselves as viable instruments of political participation and growth. The complacency of women in several aspects of national life not only reduces their capacity for maneuver in a male dominated society but helps in perpetuating the culture of reducing women to positions roles of second fiddle.
- **Lack of Adequate Women Empowerment:** Women's economic empowerment is central to the achievement of gender equality and the implementation of international commitments that range from the International Declaration on Human Rights to the MDGs. Increased economic power for women means greater environmental sustainability and the reduction of HIV/AIDS infection rates. Women who control their own income tend to have fewer children: fertility rates are inversely related to national income growth. Moreover, men and women tend to spend income under their control differently with important micro and macro effects. Women tend to hold less income for themselves and devote more to their children's human capital (nutrition, health and education) and thereby indirectly to their nation's income growth. Women are also generally more willing than male counterparts to send daughters as well as sons to school. The benefit of women's empowerment is therefore enormously positive and affects the whole of society.
- **Economic Gap and Low Participation of the Women:** Despite the evidence, a recent World Economic Forum (WEF) study highlighted that no country in the world has yet

managed to eliminate the gap between man and women's economic participation. Even countries that achieved high scores in the WEF's empowerment index generally performed better in women's educational attainment, health and well-being and political empowerment rather than in women's economic participation and opportunities. While the former are all essential components of women's overall empowerment, they are only pieces of a puzzle that must include economic empowerment for the picture to be complete.

- **Low Investment in Nigeria Women:** Low investment in women is not an efficient economic choice. One sure way of situating women in the growth agenda is to ensure that their contribution to economic growth and development is captured and economically rewarded. By leveraging available resources and investing in women's empowerment it is possible to change women's lives for the better. African women have always been in the forefront of empowering themselves and their efforts to improve their family welfare and participate in economic activity are well documented. If they were able to access finances to invest in business ventures, access credit and markets, expand their businesses, diversify their products, undertake value addition and stabilize their business activities during times of shock, they would be better placed to contribute effectively to sustained economic growth and development.

Other challenges faced with the women in rural development which have made the effect of government's efforts at different levels, NGOs, private initiatives and international involvement not felt by the intended beneficiaries according to Umebali (2006) and Murrel, (2014), include the followings:

- The challenge is the issue of proliferation of development programmes. Some are so superficially implemented that the average targeted population (rural dwellers) doubt the sincerity of the initiators. Such proliferation can easily be noticed from the many numbers of such that died with successive government that initiated them. The problem of implementation is another glaring challenge. This justified the claim when he writes that the development policies geared towards the improvement of the rural dwellers remained almost a house-hold word without corresponding success especially at the

implementation states. To this end, some of them are haphazardly implemented as a result of poor supervision.

- Vicious cycle of poverty
- Poor infrastructure;
- High population density,
- High level of illiteracy
- Low social interaction and local politics and
- Rural-urban migration A major challenge is that the hypothetical rural dweller who is the thermometer through.

Conclusion

The importance of women in development has been underscored through the provision of some international resolutions and agenda and their subsequent domestication at in 2012 as a social safety net, aimed to alleviate the impact of the oil subsidy removal on vulnerable populations. The programme was to engage 10,000 women and youths in public works across each State in Nigeria. The SURE-P, not only sought to mitigate the immediate impact of partial petroleum subsidy removal on the population, it was equally to serve as a medium for empowering the rural women by involving them in some occupational activities aimed to better their lives and improve on their livelihood activities. There have also been some targeted financial services to rural women across Nigeria through Micro-Finance Banks (MFB) and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). These financial services are run under the umbrella of Nigeria's Vision 20: 2020 specifically aimed to redress rural gender inequalities and subordination through some forms of financial empowerment programmes

The study has provided a reliable platform to suitably argue that women played a key role in the socio-economic development of the rural communities in Nigeria. There is overwhelming evidence from what have been discussed in this paper that women are formidable productive force and a store of incredibly human resources which are required for national development. Their contributions cannot be discountenanced in household and national economies; the current role of women in national development is remarkable towards peace and direction of the economy and society. In order to identify and tap their resources so as to ensure optimal

performance in national development efforts should be made for holistic development of women along the following lines.

Recommendations

To strengthen the contribution of the rural women in development activities, the following critical areas for policy and implementations are recommended:

- There is urgent need to focus on developing strong institutional supports for gender mainstreaming. Nigeria has not made significant progress in domesticating relevant international agenda through local legislations. This challenge also applies to virtually all aspects of gender and women development issues including property inheritance, violence and other forms of abuse against women, universal education and gender equality. Many of the programmes and actions at the moment exist as administrative pronouncements, which rarely outlive changes in regime. The critical policy priority at the moment remains the need to achieve foundational empowerment of the present generation through quality education for the girl child and economic empowerment for the women in general.
- There is the need to streamline girl education within the legislative framework to make it a compulsory enrollment with appropriate penalties for defaulting parents/guardians.
- Encouragement of the formation of more women agricultural and business cooperatives. This will lead to the encouraging social network activities.
- Recognition of women's contributions by government as well as assist them through soft loans and other incentives.
- Government should sustain and improve any programme geared towards enhancing the welfare of women in rural areas
- Professional bodies should be encouraged to carryout enlightenment campaigns in secondary schools to emphasize the involvement of the girls in choice of subjects.
- Political parties should pursue a vigorous enlightenment campaigns on the involvement of women in politics and bring out modalities on mainstreaming them for elective positions. The Nigeria nation owes the womenfolk the responsibility of removing those

artificial and institutional barriers based on religion, culture or traditional consideration which have incapacitated the ability of Nigerian women to participate effectively and freely in national affairs particularly at the political and economic levels. Women should equally be protected from obnoxious policies and culture that discriminate against women.

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