

## Communicating Women Empowerment for Socio-Ecological Challenges in a Multi-Lingual Society: Nigeria's Example

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### Abstract

Ecological problems result from deep-seated social ills of the society, vividly illustrated by economic slump, malnutrition, deforestation, air, urban and oil pollutions, urban violence, water borne diseases, housing problem and insecurity all of which breathe more life into poverty. In most cases, women, a significant segment of the society are the most vulnerable in time of ecological crises. Using secondary data, this study traced women's vulnerability to the age-long gender discriminatory culture and lopsided political structure which oftentimes place women at a disadvantaged position. With theoretical hindsight, the study discovered that given appropriate motivation and empowerment inform of access to quality education, paid employment, capital assets and land, women could break the web of poverty and record significant victory over socio-ecological adversity. The study observed that to achieve maximum success in women's capacity building against socio-ecological problems, there must be strategic communication efforts through the various mass media organs to persuade the government to incorporate women empowerment into its policies and programs and also to influence positive belief and discourage negative attitudinal disposition to women among the various ethnic components. This evidently will enthrone a just society where everybody can compete and contribute to the socio-economic development and environmental sustainability.

**Key Words:** Communication, Women Empowerment, Socio-ecology, Multilingualism

**1.0 Introduction:** The world population which presently stands at 6.9 billion has continued to grow at an alarming rate with its attendant pressure on the natural environment and considerable extinction of the ecosystem thus leading to significant environmental change and systematic depletion of natural resources. Given this background therefore, there have been growing universal concern among environmental and development experts over issues such as environmental degradation, accelerated loss of arctic sea ice, extinctions of plant and animal species as well as the impacts of the climatic change on the state of ecological conservation and environmental sustainability.

There is a symbiotic relationship between ecology and sustainable development which according to Bookchin (1993) has constituted serious socio-economic challenges to the present world. This means, if the ecological problems confronting the world today will be resolved, there has to be multi-disciplinary approach to it. This is because the society in which we live today is facing threats from different directions such as socio-economic, culture, religion and ethnic conflicts all which have combined to battle for the soul of the society. Recently, the issue of gender conflict has been introduced as a new dimension. For instance, the advocates against gender discriminations have observed that women form a significant segment of the society and as such when there are ecological problems; women are usually the most vulnerable. This perhaps explains why the issue of gender discrimination and women empowerment have become a global chorus singing especially among developing nations including Nigeria.

Nigeria's difficult socio-ecological and development challenges have become more complex to tackle obviously because of its population coupled with her multi-ethnic and multi-lingual make-up. According to Orobosa (2008), Nigeria accounts for one fifth of sub-Saharan Africa's population with a population estimate of about 170 million people and divided among about 400 ethnic groups and 510 languages (Omu, 2008; National

Population Commission, 2013). With a land area of 923, 768km<sup>2</sup> extending from the Guinea Coast to the border of Sahara, Nigeria cut across different climatic vegetation and climatic zones ( Idachaba, (1985) cited in Orobosa, 2008). According to Adeleke (2009:1), Nigeria is greatly blessed with excellent climatic condition with sunshine the year round, vast tracts of unspoiled nature ranging from tropical forests, magnificent parks, waterfalls, unique wildlife, beautiful rivers, beaches and isolated rocky hills

The Nigeria's rapidly growing population within the last two decades has thrown up socio-ecological and development challenges. This explains why despite being endowed with abundantly rich land, human and natural resources, yet about 75percent of her people including women, youths and children residing in the rural communities still live below poverty line (Oshewolo, 2010). An oil rich state, with her 2.5million barrel per day, Nigeria ranks as Africa's largest oil producing nation and the sixth position in the world. Apart from oil and large deposit of gas which is adjudged to be greater than oil, Nigeria still have 17 other solid mineral resources distributed in commercial quantity across the states.

Development experts have observed new dimensions to poverty expansion in Nigeria. These include geographic spread and gender inequality and its attendant implications. With her current population of about 162.5 million, 80.2 million or 49% are females. Of this aggregate, 60% or 52.6 million live in the rural communities where they are subjected to hard labour with little or nothing to show for it (Ngeri-Nwagha, 1996; Aigbokhan, 2000; British Council, 2012).

To arrest this downward trend, requires strong political resolve backed by good governance that is constantly open to public enquiry and is accountable to the people. Governance as an instrument of administrative order, authority and control demands efficient and beneficial discharge of authority and power in a manner that allows unhindered sharing of information between the government and the citizenries. This is where the media of communication becomes appropriate; to interpret government policies and program to the people and to mobilize them in support. The media also serve as information clearing house for both the government and the people on issues that border on environmental sustainability, socio-economic and political development of the state as it affects both parties.

## 2.0 Clarification of Key Words

**2.1 Communication:** Despite its acknowledged impacts in accelerating development programs and environmental sustainability, communication is rarely incorporated into the development planning and implementation of most government programs especially among the developing nations. According to the World Bank Report (2009), many technically sound policies and programs of the government have ended in failure just for failing to incorporate communication as strategic tools in the policy and program's life cycle. This is why communication in this context has been defined as the planned and strategic use of the communication process and media products to support effective policy making, advocate public participation and enhance project implementation geared towards national development and environmental sustainability (OECD, 1999). Going by this definition, it is obvious that for strategic communication to be effective and produce result, it must be planned and tailored to a particular program and should not be done haphazardly. Besides, communication in this regards must be interactive, giving opportunities to everybody to participate in the process in other words, it must be two ways. According to the 'social responsibility theory' by Siebert et al (1963) and the 'development media theory' by McQuail (1987), the media of communication must be obliged to be socially responsible to the society by carrying out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy. In doing this, the media must be free and accessible to all regardless of social status in their information gathering and dissemination process.

**2.2 Women Empowerment:** According to Asogwa (2012), women empowerment is always being discussed in relation to development, democracy and the entire socio-economic wellbeing of humanity. Women in most societies are regarded as currency with which the socio-economic transactions are cemented. Thus, in social anthropology, the transfer of women (by marriage) from one lineage to another is regarded as a more powerful and persuasive medium of communication than language (Coleman, 2007). As agent of reproduction and child nurture, women are acknowledged as the agency of continuity of human race through regeneration. This explains why whenever the issue of development is discussed; the role of women cannot be underestimated. All across the developing world especially in Nigeria, it has been observed that in spite of the identified potential ability of women, there are artificial and institutional barriers traceable to the age-long gender discriminatory culture and lopsided political structure which oftentimes limit their active participation in developmental activities and environmental sustainability thus placing them at a disadvantaged position and making them most vulnerable in times of socio-ecological adversity (Onwubiko, 2012). Therefore, for women to break the yoke of poverty and get insulated against ecological problems most vividly illustrated by heightened poverty and socio-economic

misfortune there must be institutional and multilateral attention paid to women empowerment. By women empowerment, it means evolving a wide range of practicable options and effective opportunities to address age-old gender discrimination against women in Nigerian (Environmental Study Team, 2011). The UNDP (2012) also views women empowerment as the type of supports made available to women so as to ensure they have credible voice like men in political, social and economic decision making process that significantly affect the future of their families and countries. From the explanations proffer above, it is evident that women's capacity to be self-reliant and overcome ecological and socio-economic challenges can be enhanced if they are empowered through exposure to qualitative education, having unrestraint access to needed resources (funds and land) and confronting all the cultural, political and institutional constraints that hold them back for long.

**2.3 Socio-ecology:** Year in year out, as the world population grows and the nations keep experiencing frequent climatic changes, there have been severe corresponding environmental and socio-economic impacts on the ecosystem, both living (plants, animals and microbes) and non-living components (air, water, mineral and the soil) (Kitula, 2004; Musah and Barkarson, 2009; NEST, 2011).

In the ecosystem, there are constant interactions among the living and non-living components as well as the environment thus leading to periodic disturbances which oftentimes constitute serious threat to life and environment. The study of interactions and relationships between the organisms and their environment is what Stokols (1995), referred to as ecology. Term "ecological problems" is today mostly used to describe different environmental problems. This is because ecology is believed to be a core issue in environmental science, and many people identify ecology as some sort of science that is primarily oriented on protection of our environment. According to Bookchin (1995), ecology is perceived to be "social" because all ecological problems are perceived to have their foundation in deep-seated social problems that have plagued the society for long. These include economic, ethnic, cultural and gender conflicts among others. He believes these ecological problems cannot be fully understood; much less resolved, without first tackle the social problems using interdisciplinary approach. The environmentalists however hold a contrary opinion. They see ecology basically as preservation of wildlife, degradation, deforestation, pollution among others, all of which they believe are the effects of climatic change. However, in this paper, we will be looking at ecology from the perspective of people-environment interactions and the effect such interactivities produce on human life especially of women.

**2.4 Multilingualism:** The concept of languages with their complex implications for identity, communication, social integration, education and development are of strategic importance for people and the planet. This is why most sociolinguists have observed that the more multilingual situations present in a nation is the more problem of communication associated and perhaps more grave is the complexity and diversity of identity. Multilingualism has been defined as the proficient use of more than two languages. This could happen to individual when the person possesses the ability to communicate intelligibly in more than two different languages. Such situation also occurs in a nation when different language communities co-exist in one geographic or political area. Parasher (2001) observes that in a multilingual setting, history shows that formulating language policy in such a nation is usually fraught with difficulties and complexity. Nigeria is no exemption as the founding fathers of her constitutions were confronted with the difficulty of which one to choose as the national official language among the 510 languages and dialects coexisting in the nation. According to Omu (2008:89), "a sense of ethnic affiliation, socio-cultural differences and linguistic identity have never been an inherent threat to harmonious inter-group relationships until other factors such as politics and fear of domination came into play. This is why every effort made by post independent governments to adopt one of the indigenous languages as lingua franca has been strongly resisted. While it sounds unreasonable to encourage reading and writing in multiplicity of small languages that coexist in Nigeria, there is still the necessity of an official language, hence the retention of English, the language of the colonial masters as the national language while others remain as regional or indigenous languages of communication among the various ethnic groups that constitute Nigeria.

### **3.0 Perspectives of Gender Discrimination against Nigerian Women**

All over the world, the issue of discrimination against women has engaged the attentions of academics, development experts, non- governmental organisations and gender advocacy groups at different international gatherings. Beginning from the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) held in Thailand to the popular Beijing Conference held in 1995 and the 2010 United Nations' High-Level Development Symposium in Helsinki, there have been radical approaches to issue of gender inequality. In Africa as well, the Nairobi Women conference ended with a communiqué canvassing women involvement in development (WID) strategy (Agu 2007).

Subsequent to these conferences, the issue of gender inequality in the third world and its attendant socio-economic implications has repeatedly gained the attention of both national and international media

organisations which have heightened the level of awareness and attracted the attention of the international community such as United Nations, Commonwealth of Nations and European Union. Women in every society and nation constitute a significant segment of the populations. Ochonogor (2008) also observes that women constitute a larger proportion of the world labour force. As the mother of the nations, they are responsible for child birth and nurturing, providing life-sustaining food, care for the elderly, take care of domestic chores and also form a stabilising force in the society. Despite their strategic position in the world socio-economy and sustainable development, Onwubiko (2012) observes that 70 percent of the 1.3 billion people living in abject poverty globally are women. United Nations Population Fund (2010) also observes that women work two-thirds of the world's working hours but curiously earn 10 percent of the world's total income. While the two-third of the world's estimated 876 million adults who cannot read or write are women, girls constitute 60 percent of the children who are not enrolled in primary school (Unagha, 2006).

Of Nigeria's 162.5 million populations, 80.2 million or 49% are girls and women. The poverty index rate shows that 87.7 million or 54% live in abject poverty. About 80.2 million women live and work in rural communities where they account for 60-70% of the rural work force even though men are five times more likely the land owners (British Council, 2012). To women particularly in Nigeria, poverty doesn't just mean scarcity and want, but connotes deprivation of rights, opportunities curtailed and voices silenced.

The age-long gender discrimination against women is deeply rooted in cultural prejudice and political lopsidedness that limit women participation in the economy and sustainable development as well as making women to be educationally disadvantaged (Osunyikanmi, 2008). Gender discrimination manifests in various ways. Nigeria's political system is structured in a way that makes it difficult for women to actively participate at the forefront. Although more women than men registered to vote during the last voters registration exercise, only 9% of those who stood for elective positions in April 2011 elections were women. While the upper chamber of the national assembly has 109 members and 8 or 7.3% are females, the lower chamber has 360 members only 22 or 6.1% are females. Out of 24 Ministers, 6 or 25% are women, Permanent Secretaries 6.4% and Directors 9.2% respectively (NBS, 2011). The reason for this lopsidedness can be explained within the context of women being educationally disadvantaged and those who are educated have no financial muscle with which to compete favourably with men hence, despite women numerical strength, most elective and appointive positions are men-dominated.

The gender discriminatory culture that denied women their right to education survives on the wrong family assumption that if women are educated, not only will they break the yoke of poverty but will also have independent mind to plan her own future without submitting to the whim and caprices of husbands and parents. Most parents also believe that money invested in a girl's education is investments down the drain which will not bring any returns to them ones the girl gets married. Perhaps this explains why the birth of girl child is usually greeted with apathy and in some instances such child may be denied post-natal attention and her "unlucky" mother sometimes sent packing from home. Nigerian culture forbids a girl child from partaking in sharing inheritance from her parents. This is why most women don't have landed property. According to NBS (2011), one in every 5 businesses is run by women in Nigeria yet, they are less likely to secure business credit from financial market due to lack of landed property with which to secure the loan. The two dominant religions in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam also command women's absolute submission to their husbands which serves to reinforce the subservient position of women in the family and in the larger society. The summary of these is that most women are usually born in poverty, live in and die there. In most cases, the child of a poor woman is most likely to inherit the misfortunes of her illiterate mother thus, fuelling and recycling poverty.

#### **4.0 Impacts of Socio-Ecological Problems on Nigerian Women**

This subsection tries to broaden our understanding on socio-ecological problem detailing it as a serious global environmental problem that constitutes universal threat to living and unliving things particularly humanity of which women are more vulnerable. As mentioned earlier in the conceptual clarification of socio-ecology, the foundational bases of ecological problem are social and economic in nature (Bookchin, 1993; Kitula, 2005). As the world population grows, so also are human activities increases thus bringing intense pressure on the available natural resources and the ecosystem in general. Statistics shows that more than 54% of Nigeria's 162.5 million people are poor and live in the rural areas (British Council, 2012). Repetto (1987) and Sadik (1989) agree that these poor segment of the population mostly women, are believed to devastate their environment to survive economic hardship. They do this by cutting down trees, overworking the soil, overgrazing the rangelands and overfishing beyond sustainable level (Orobosa, 2008).

In Nigeria today, there are large number of commercial activities going on in every part of the country. These include massive oil exploration in the Niger delta region, mining activities in the middle belt and northern region, activities of the multinational industrial complexes of the south west region, sawmilling activities and

cash crops exploitation of the south east region and many other development sites among others. These commercial activities in most cases result in serious environmental pollution of water, air and land, exposure of land to gully erosion, land degradation and general depletion of natural resources.

Socio-ecological issues have in recent time posed serious challenge to human and animal existence in various parts of the world today. Nigeria in particular is presently facing the challenge of climatic change or global warming which FNC (2003) defines as a shift in the average weather condition experienced in a particular region over a period of time. This development has oftentimes resulted in temperature increase and irregular rainfall patterns which frequently produce destructive storm, flooding, droughts and heat waves, ocean surge, desertification, inconsistent seasons, oceanic acidification and glacial melting (Abiodun, et al., 2011). These global occurrences have been well illustrated and constitute serious socio-economic and ecological challenges to Nigerians. For example, in September 18 and 19, 2012 thirty people were killed and 120,000 displaced while about 36, 000 hectares of farmland were washed away during a flood disaster that swept across ten states around rivers Niger and Benue (National Mirror, September 19,2012). During the same period, many urban centres across Nigeria also experienced serious flooding with properties worth billions of Naira washed away.

In Niger Delta region and the coastal area of the South West where most multinational oil corporations such as Shell, Agip, Total, and Exxonmobil carried out large scale oil drilling, exploration and transportation, oil business activities have caused severe destruction to the natural environment as a result of oil spillage, gas flaring, and other kinds of pollutant emission that contaminate the air, land and ground water resources (Saliu et al, 2007:278; Ndubuisi and Asia, 2007:20). Other intensive human activities according to Iyun (2000, p.224) include port and urban development, dredging, land reclamation and deforestation with scanty or no consideration for their detrimental effects on the people domiciled in the area. All these activities without doubt, have social and economic implications on the indigenes who might be compelled to relocate from their ancestral homes to safer environment outside and whose traditional occupations (farming, fishing and hunting) have been disrupted (Onosode, 2001; Inoni et al, 2006).

The intensive industrial and manufacturing activities in the South Western part, North West as well as South East industrial zones have become sources of industrial waste and air pollution constituting serious health hazard to most inhabitants of those regions. As if that is not bad enough, the oil exploration and exploitative activities occur only a few metres away from rural communities where basic social amenities like drinkable water, electricity, road and health centres are non-existing. Despite the serious danger these commercial activities constitute, neither the operators nor the government has acted in any way to checkmate the trend and where necessary compensate the people for the destructive act.

Studies have shown that women in these areas have low living standard when compared with women in other parts of Nigeria where such activities are not taking place. The fact that a large percentage of these women are poor, illiterate and lacking in basic knowledge of hygiene and reproductive health made them prone to life threatening sicknesses and high maternal and infant mortality rate (Iyun, 2000; Asogwa, 2012).

There is possible explanation on why government did not deem it fit to compel these corporate companies to be socially responsible to their host communities. Most of the companies are observed to have at least a highly placed government official on their board of Directors who will always shield the organisation away when government wants to wield long stick. In most cases, funds that should have gone into corporate social responsibility activities usually find its way into the personal accounts of traditional rulers and few opinion leaders the immediate communities.

The severe impact of the climatic change was also experienced in the 18 northern states of Nigeria. According to IPCC (2001) the sudden increase in temperature, prolong dryness and heat waves have caused extensive damages to farm crops, animals and human lives. FNC (2003) and Abiodun et al., (2011) also remark that climatic change has been observed to have severe negative effects on the health sector. For example, there have been reported cases of acute outbreak of cerebrospinal meningitis, yellow fever, Lassa fever, malaria, guinea worm, schistosomiasis (bilharzia), and onchocerciasis (river blindness) in the northern part of Nigeria causing the death of thousands of human beings. Similarly in the southern part where the climate is hotter and wetter, there is frequent incidence of malaria outbreak which has also claimed several lives especially children.

In view of the aforementioned circumstances, NEST (2004), UNDP (2012) and NEMA (2013) express concern and while remarking that unless sufficient attention is paid to the issue of ecology and climatic change, Nigeria's achievements in its long- term development goal and poverty reduction will be systematically reversed and this in-turn could induce food insecurity, water scarcity and epidemic outbreak.

As there are enough evidences to show that women are at the centre of sustainable consumption, production process and natural resource management, they are therefore believed to be most vulnerable. Presently, it has become a common experience in most urban centres to find women engaged in prostitution,



drug and child trafficking, advanced-fee-fraud among others, all in an attempt to break the web of poverty. There is therefore the greater need to empower the women to cope under this stressful socio-ecological challenge facing the nation. Much of the information from international environmental and climate change researchers have not been of considerable benefits to Nigerians apparently because the marginalised women groups are not empowered through qualitative education and lack access to resources such as land and capital.

Women are known to play significant roles in all spheres of life however; they can only play the role when they are conscious of their potential, realised their deficiency and are ready to break away from those well-entrenched attitude that form part of the retrogressive belief system. Attitude change results from systematic information dissemination that aims to sensitize the people on the imperative need to accept an advocate viewpoint (Ochonogor, 2008). In the view of Jeremy (1996, p.5) “information is power”, applied quality information can alter individual’s world view and make one to see things differently. Mass media are believed to be agent of information dissemination and that explains why NEST (2011) asserts that mainstreaming women empowerment issues can only be accomplished through strategic communication in the communication media.

Although the positive roles of the media in conveying vital information on women in relation to gender discrimination have been applauded, however, the manner and extent of portrayal and coverage of serious issue involving women by Nigerian media has been criticised. Questions have been asked on whether the media are truly agents of social changes or re-enforcer of discriminatory status quo. According to Amobi (2013), gender inequality appears to be supported by the media treatment of women who are mostly ignored, denied or invisible. When they do attain visibility, it is done with biases and triviality. Media coverage of gender issues in Nigeria depicts an inglorious image of women as inconsequential being as such, women’s problems are hardly treated as front page or serious editorial matters in the newspapers unless it is crime related or a case of rape. Even on women’s page edited by women, it is sad to note that newspapers and magazines rarely address critical issues bordering on violence against women, inequality and empowerment instead, what you find in most cases are news about fashion, beauty tips and all kinds of half-naked pictures that further portray women as unserious people who are only fit for advertising model. This, according to Ray (2008) depicts the media as insensitive to women and their problems. What appears as media insensitivity against women can best be explained within the context of the fact that most media houses serve as government mouthpieces or the mouthpieces of their owners who more often than not are men ( Amobi, 2013). Notwithstanding the misgiving about the role of the media, the fact remains that the gate keeping and agenda setting capability of the media can be deployed into popularising the issues of gender discrimination against women thereby checkmate the trend.

### **5.0 Communicating Women Empowerment for Socio-Ecological Challenge**

To effectively communicate a critical issue as women empowerment in Nigeria cannot be somehow difficult for some reasons. This is because of Nigeria’s multilingual setting, its political and religious diversity coupled with the complexity of the issues of women in a society that is well known for its gender discrimination. Communicating women empowerment to mitigate their vulnerability in time of ecological crises therefore requires the media to play critical role in the empowerment process. The principle of social responsibility theory of the press according to McQuail (1987) stipulates that the media as agent of social change must be sufficiently independent to fulfil certain obligations to the society which include bringing ecological problem as it affects Nigerian women into the public domain, gathering and transmitting information about areas that are prone to ecological disaster, promptly alerting the government officials, environmental management officials and the general public of specific actions to take in order to avert loss of life, damage to property as well as minimise human suffering . Samarjiva et al.,(2005) notes that communicating women empowerment in times of environmental disaster cannot be done haphazardly but must be done systematically and consistently until it provokes desired action. Given that women and children have been identified as the most vulnerable in times of disaster has therefore made them the major focus of the disaster warning message.

5.1 Message: Women empowerment through capacity building is the central message and is expected to change the attitudes and behaviours of the people that are at variance with the new socio-economic order. For women in particular to build up strong capacity like most men to survive during socio-ecological misfortune they must be empowered so as to bring them up at par with men. This means the old discriminatory cultural practice and lopsided political structure that give preference to men have to give way. The message therefore must be presented with clarity and simplicity and in the language most intelligible to the larger majority in each vulnerable community. The message must not only be convincing to the government so as to initiate policies and design empowerment framework but must be made to embrace the call for women empowerment through increase access to formal and qualitative education, easy access to capital asset and land, enhanced funding for reproductive and maternal health care and greater support for women participation in the political process. The women also must be made to understand the peculiar ecological risk they face in their community; how

vulnerable they are and why. For instance, coastal community dwellers must be educated and be prepared for the possibility of flooding while oil producing communities should be alerted on the possibilities of air and water pollution all of which poses serious social and economic danger to them. They must be convinced to accept change of attitude and disposition to the old social, cultural and economic orders that has held them down in poverty and deprivation. The mass media as change agent must be made to be part of the empowerment process from conception to execution, the women community leaders and women professional associations must be carried along in the design and implementation of strategic communication, while the general public is made to engage in constructive dialogue that will strengthen the empowerment program.

5.2. Audience Analysis: The receivers of the message here are in different categories. The governments, (Federal, state and local), the oil exploration companies and operators of other industrial giants, vulnerable women in the communities, women associations, religious group, associations of women professionals, women in Nigeria (WIN), women's wing of political parties, and NGOs. This group of people, their needs, feelings, interests and goals must be identified to know what they have at stake in times of environmental disaster. A good knowledge of the audience would help in tailoring the message with the purpose of dispelling their fears and gain their supports at every stage.

5.3 Channels of Communication: There are various channels of communicating women empowerment in Nigeria these include both traditional and media. However, their effectiveness varies depending on the message, the region where the intended audiences of the message are domiciled, their social status and their political and religious affiliations. It is important to mention that one medium is not more important than others as all are means to a common goal of communicating the message of women empowerment. Therefore, it is needful to first identify the target audience and the most accessible medium to them. For example, the electronic media (radio and television) have wider coverage and can quickly reach audiences both in the rural and urban centres simultaneously. However, it has been observed that television will not be as effective at the grassroots level where about 70% of the population live without electricity. A study on media perception and effectiveness in Nigeria revealed that radio is the most efficient organ of mass dissemination of environmental and disaster warning to wide, diverse and heterogeneous audiences. This is because most of today's mobile wireless devices such as handset, Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA), Digital-AMPS and Universal Mobile Telecommunication System (UMTS) possess the in-built capability to receive cell broadcasting at no extra cost. Although it also has its drawback in that there is high possibility of the rural dwellers not able to charge their radio every time because of lack of electricity (Owolabi, 2013). Another drawback is the challenge of diversity of language thus throwing up this question. In how many languages will the media broadcast in a multilingual state like Nigeria? It has been observed that the print media may also not make much impact among the rural illiterate public that constitute about 57% of Nigerian population. Only a few that are literate enough will be able to access the messages even if published in indigenous language. The question again is in how many languages a media will publish in a nation of about 250 ethnic groups and about 510 languages. Given these backgrounds therefore, it will make sense if the communicators use a combination of channels so as to reach their target population.

It is noteworthy that in contemporary time, the internet and satellite technologies have also widened the frontiers of communication network and accelerated the speed at which information travels across borders. This satellite technology is the bedrock of social media such as Face book, My Space, You Tube, LinkedIn, Skype, Twitter, Blogs and Micro blogs among others through which information can be disseminated and feedback received in seconds.

There are informal settings where people usually gather in the morning and evening times to discuss socio-cultural, economic and political matters. These include churches and mosques, palm wine joints, club house, beer parlours, market places, garages, salon etc. Apart from print, electronic and the satellite-aided media, articulate women, charismatic opinion leaders, influential religious leaders, theatre group and mobile cinema can serve as important media of information to large rural and urban populace. When communicating women empowerment and development issues, (Wilson, 1997; kalejaye et al, 2006). In fact, Lanihin (2003) asserts that considering the multilingual and multi-ethnic make-up of Nigeria, the traditional mode of communication can be used in modern mass media production to produce mass effect.

5.4 Response: The communication process is not complete until there is feedback from the receiver. The response (positive or negative) is normally determined by a number of factors which include the quality of packaging and presentation as well as the effectiveness of the channel used. A message on women empowerment must be presented persuasively taking into consideration the cultural, religious and linguistic plurality of the affected population. The effectiveness of the message will show by the degree of responses it generates among

the various receivers. This is the reason why disaster communication is normally perceived as two way communication model where instant response is expected as quickly as possible to avert tragedy.

5.5 Evaluating communication effectiveness: The success of any communication efforts is usually measured by the actions it engenders among the governments, multinational organisations causing ecological problems and the vulnerable people in the various communities that are prone to ecological disaster. This can be obtained through research using the following benchmark.

- I. How do the government, women group, NGOs, opinion leaders and professional group perceive the issue of women empowerment?
- II. What impact has communication efforts made on the government and the people's disposition towards the empowerment program?
- III. What action has the communication efforts engendered?

According to Okunlola (1996) cited in Adenekan (2008), evidences provided by environmental researchers show gross deficiencies of the Nigerian media in their reportorial patterns of environmental and related socio-ecological issues. There are proofs that most Nigerian media especially (prints) do not have specialised beat for 'environmental issues' as this area of reporting is never considered important enough to sell the papers and encourage advertisement patronage. This explains why ecological disasters are usually reported only when it struck while media hardly covered hazard warnings and preparation towards mitigating ecological impacts on the vulnerable population.

The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction UNISDR (2006) has observed that most vulnerable people in time of ecological disasters are mostly women, children and aged and these categories of people because of their social status; poor and illiterate who depend on their environment for survival majority being engaged in farming and fishing. Their situation becomes more disheartening because the government and the media that are expected to provide them with adequate and timely information did not carry out their constitutional roles and social responsibilities as expected. According to Akinleye and Ojebode (2004) even when the media appear to report an event, it has been observed there is lopsidedness in the information flow from the cities where the government and the media are based and the communities where the vulnerable population dwell. This shows that disaster warning messages and development news concerning the poor segment of the society never gained prominent attention in the media. That also explains why a greater percentage of these people always fall victim in times of disaster. For instance, the year 2009 meningitis outbreak that claimed 60 lives in four states of Northern Nigeria (FMH, 2009) and the year 2012 flood that claimed 363 lives in ten states, displaced about 2.1million and injured 18, 282 people (NEMA, 2012) could have been averted or at least, the impacts would have been minimised if disaster information had been communicated promptly to the risk-prone population.

The simple deduction from the above is that the channels of communication have not performed creditably well partly because of organisational factors peculiar to the Nigerian operation environment and also due to government's failure to build effective working relationship with the media on ways of empowering the women before ecological challenges claim them.

## 6.0 Conclusion and Suggestions

The world in general and Nigeria in particular is presently facing serious ecological challenge of which various oil exploration sites of the southern coastline and several mining and industrial operation centres in different parts of the country have all combined to make life unsafe for animal and plant. Major climatic and environmental changes are also occurring at an accelerated rate thus, constituting grave danger beyond what Nigeria could cope with. The harmful emission and toxic wastes resulting from the operations of several multinational industrial complexes of the South-West and South-East have impacted adversely on the health condition of most people especially women and children in the affected areas. All these activities going on across the length and breadth of the nation are inherently disruptive to the environment causing constant increase in temperature, inconsistent rainfall pattern, flood, droughts, sea-level rise, un-imaginable air, water and land pollution, soil degradation, gully erosion among others all of which signposts considerable socio-economic problems. It is noteworthy that when a nation is confronted with such magnitude of ecological and socio-economic challenges women, a significant population are the most vulnerable as reflected in the statistics shown in the earlier part of this paper.

It is however very disheartening to note that both the governments at various levels and the captains of industry operating in various industrial sites across the country have been little concerned about the threat their operations constitute to humanity especially the women. Now is the time everybody must rise up to the challenge of empowering the women to conquer poverty and overcome other socio-ecological manifestations.



According to Clinton (2010), “investing in the potential of the world’s women and girls is one of the surest ways to achieve global economic progress, political stability, and greater prosperity for women and men the world over”. The (MDGs) will remain a mirage unless Nigeria makes strong determination to promote gender equality and women empowerment.

The issues of ecology, environment and climatic change, poverty, women empowerment and political stability are believed to be interconnected and as such, the government must initiate appropriate policies and sustained actions that can achieve the following goals:

- Make productive assets (capital and land) available to women.
- Empower the girl child to acquire free qualitative education through adequate funding and scholarships.
- Improve reproductive health and provide easy access to family planning.
- Increase enhancement of women’s voice and participation in political process.
- Discriminatory culture and outmoded belief that limit women potentials must be overruled.

Achieving the above goals will be impossible unless the government initiates legislation that will make primary and secondary education compulsory and also make it a punishable offence for parents who disallow their girl child from enrolling in school.

The mass media as change agent in the society has trivialised the socio-ecological issue and its grave consequences on the women and girl child for too long and it is high time they promote the issue to the front burner of press agenda setting by giving attention to it in space and time in order to register it in the sub-consciousness of every Nigerian so that negative attitude and outmoded belief that are rooted in culture can be changed and women liberated from socio-economic adversity induced by ecological hazards.

The various NGOs that specialise in women advocacy programs should be more aggressive in the business of mobilising for women education and political consciousness so that more women can be actively involved at the various level of government to defend the interests of women

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