

The Contributions Of Nigeria Women Towards National Development

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Abstract

This paper examine the contributions of Nigeria Women towards National Development. It gives the detrimental effects which the colonialism have had on the status of Nigerian women. The challenges of women contributions to the development of the Nigerian nation are highlighted. And ameliorating these challenges recommendations are made which among others include the proper education of women, formation of more women, business cooperatives, enlightenment campaigns in secondary and tertiary institutions as well as granting women their constitutional rights to effective participation in the affairs of the country.

Introduction

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 (Coleman, 2007). 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 sustained 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 endeavours. By their sheer psychological, physiological and intellectual make up they do perform more than mere complementary roles in the production process (Teminiwa, 1995).

Gender Issues in National Development

Development means different things to different people. Some people however stressed material prosperity as the ultimate objectives of development efforts Rogers (1976) describes development as a type of

social change in which new ideas are introduced within a social system to produce higher per-capita incomes and levels of living through more production methods and improved social organization. Mabogunje (1980) identifies them to be economic, growth, modernization, distributive justice, socio – economic transformation and spatial reorganization.

Rogers (1980) believed that development should mean a widely participating process of social changes in society intended to bring about social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities) for the majority of people through gaining control over their environment. Murel (1992) has 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 sustains 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 no 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's 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.

Women Participation in National Development

Various researchers (Agbola 1990, 1996, Okoro 1996, Mivaniyi 1996, Ekong 2006, Mabogunje (1991) had reported on the contributions of women in agriculture, community, development and physical development. For instance, Ekong (2006) asserts that women are the keys to development and therefore crucial to the goal of sustainable development. In 1975 FAO reported that 70% of all domestic and household 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 they 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 were beyond agriculture and household duties. Few works (Olurin 1996). Agboola (1996) Mabogunje (1991) 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 administrative works. Mabogunje (1991) identified the eight cardinal elements of sustainable development as the affect women e.g. education, health culture, politics, economy, agriculture, enhanced environments quality and peaceful co-existence.

The role of Nigeria Women in Politics

Nigerian women have made some appreciable impact in their contribution to the development of the Nigerian nation. 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 Berjin 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 (1996), 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 home of representatives Agoawike (2000) believed that 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.

Colonialism and it effects on women participation in development process in Nigeria.

As regards women, Nigeria men have carefully selected and interprets from the British a model that neglects women to the kitchen thus destroying the indigenous courage and capabilities displayed by their great fraud mothers in services to their communities (Dadirep 1995.)

The late arrival of women to urban centres 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 and 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 there 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 become 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 centres when it become difficult for the men alone to sustain the family it become 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, land, 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 retrenched.

Challenges to Nigerian women is Contributing Effectively to National Development

In spite of the remarkable achievements of the Nigerians women, there is severe constrained in their efforts to play a major and decisive role in socio-political and economic development of the nation.

In the traditional African society 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 marital homes as a figures to be seen and not to be heard (Fasugba, 2000). This situation creates a culture of male supremacy, superiority and dominance with little consideration given to the thoughts and feelings 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.

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.

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.

Conclusion and Recommendations

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.

- a. Encouragement of the formation of more women agricultural and business cooperatives. This will lead to the encouraging social network activities
- b. Professional bodies should be encouraged to carryout enlightenment campaigns in secondary schools to emphasize the involvement of the girls in choice of subjects.
- c. Education of the womenfolk especially the rural women provision of basic education to the women and especially junior staff in government employ should also be given in service training. This will provide a multiplier effect to the education of youths in the state.
- d. 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.
- e. The Nigeria nation owes the womenfolk the responsibility of removing those artificial and institutional barriers bared 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.

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