

GENDER AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: NIGERIA AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Using some secondary data, the paper discussed the socio-cultural dichotomy, called gender, and how it affects the female input in socio-economic development. The ratio of women participation in economic pursuit is very slim, as reflected in the great disparity in employment ratio, access to facilities (bank loans, land and property). The paper recommended closing the gap between male and female; giving equal opportunities to both female and male sexes in educational pursuit and career choices; reviewing of the obnoxious laws that deny women access to bank facilities, land and property for a balanced economic development to be achieved.

Introduction

Sen (1999) stated that there is danger to confuse gender with women. He posited that the concept of gender is not limited to the male or female species, but goes further to assess the relationship between them. When we say that a certain type of behaviour or certain activities are womanly, we are basing this on our expectation as to how a real woman of our culture would behave in a given situation. Gender, therefore, is a concept that refers to system of roles and relationship between women and men determined not by biology but the social, political, and economic context. One's biological sex is naturally given, but gender is constructed. Just as women and men

have different biological sex, they have also been assigned by society roles based on idea, i.e. ways of being and interacting as women and men that are shaped by history, ideology, culture, religion and economic development. Gender roles are learned. They differ from one society to another, from place to place and over times.

The term “gender” refers to economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female (UN-Habitat, 2003). In almost all societies, women and men differ in their activities and undertakings, regarding access to and control over resources, and participating in decision making. Eweama (2009) identified gender as a social institution, cultural construct and power tool. Sexual characteristics are determined in the household frequently viewed as the primary arena for gender relations.

Gender, therefore, in a simple term is the established socio-cultural dichotomy drawn upon biological categorization of male and female. This singular biological difference has far reaching effects on these established categories: male and female in relation to status, roles, power and privilege. It has for a long time been the determinant factor for social relations and economic activities in our society (Chikwe, 2003).

Canada-Ukraine Gender Fund (2004) states that gender equality means that women and men enjoy the same status and have equal opportunities for realizing their full human rights and potentials to contribute to national, political, social, cultural development and to benefit from the result.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The historic Mexico Conference of the International Women’s Year was held in June 1975. The World Population Conference of the previous year, 1974, held at Bucharest, Romania, had earlier emphasized the need to train women to take their places as the equals of men, otherwise economic development would be held back. Taking a cue from that World Population Conference, the IWY Mexico Conference of 1975 fired the first volley and, until Beijing 1995, the

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loudest in the series that had been fired ever since. Focusing primarily on women's rights to equal employment and pay and equal educational opportunities, the Conference outlined in what it called a "World Plan of Action," the following, among others, as "minimum objectives" that the World's governments should achieve within five years from 1975. Finally, the Conference called on the United Nations to declare 1975-1985 a Development Decade for Women, a declaration which was eventually made by the United Nations (Commonwealth Youth News, 1975).

On the 4th to 15th of September, 1995, history was made in Beijing, when the United Nations held the fourth world conference on women. The theme was "Action for Equality, Development and Peace." Now known as the "Platform for Action/Beijing Declaration," this declaration took some giant strides in recognizing the contributions and enhancing the status of women in the society. According to FIDA (1996), it identified twelve critical areas of concern, as follows:

- i. The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women;
- ii. Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training;
- iii. Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal to healthcare and related services;
- iv. Violence against women;
- v. The effects of armed or any kind of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation;
- vi. Inequality in economic structures and policies in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources;
- vii. Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels;
- viii. Insufficient mechanism at all levels to promote the advancement of women;
- ix. Lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of human rights of women;

- x. Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems especially in the media;
- xi. Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment;
- xii. Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child.

The Food and Agricultural Organization (2001) listed the benefits of taking gender concerns into consideration in the design, implementation and review of development programmes as:

- a. Enhanced social and economic impact;
- b. Increasing possibilities for successful action;
- c. More efficient use of resources; and
- d. Tapping local knowledge.

Enhanced social and economic impact

Sustainable development depends on integrating environmental, technical and economic consideration with social and cultural aspects. The active participation of men and women in gathering information differentiated by gender and the analysis of this information will lead to a more positive social impact. Economic impacts will also be reinforced because the possibilities for consolidating and increasing income related to natural resources will take into account income generating activities carried out by both women and men.

Increasing possibilities for successful action

Sustainable rural development should take into account gender based division of labour and gender-based access to resources. Control of resources will result in development initiatives based on more complete information. Furthermore, rural development based on the full range of social, economic, technical and environmental issues

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opens up the opportunity for greater exchange of ideas and approaches among the different sectors.

More efficient use of resources

Taking into account social, environmental, technical and economic considerations will ensure that development activities make better use of often increasingly diminishing resources available.

Tapping local knowledge

Tapping the respective knowledge of women and men regarding the management and conservation of natural resources and biological diversity increases the possibilities of successful programmes. Thanks to the collection of gender inequality data for planning and management. It is possible to guarantee that this invaluable source of local technical knowledge is fully utilized.

Economic Development

Some economists emphasize capital as the most important factor of development. It has been argued that if any scarce resource associated with underdevelopment should be singled out, it would be under capitalization. Hence, Rostow specified a rise in the rate of productive investment in excess of 10% percent of national income as a necessary requirement for a country's take-off in development. W. Arthur Lewis opined that "the central problem in the theory of economic development is to understand the process by which a community which was previously saving and investing a small proportion of its national income converts itself into an economy where voluntary saving is large. This is the central problem because the central fact of economic development is rapid capital accumulation" (Abah, 2000).

Granted that capital cannot work on its own, and as such capital accumulation is not the only factor of development, we must however note that the contribution of other factors are dependent upon the availability and increases in the stock of capital. It is not enough to

assume that once capital is accumulated there will be development. Capital accumulation can only be possible through saving and investment, for anyone who consumes everything he earns can not expect returns on those earnings. As we have noted earlier, domestic saving is the most reliable source of investment. In the less developed countries, particularly in Nigeria of the last three decades, it would therefore appear a miracle that there had been any growth at all, considering the income saving ratio in an economy where an overwhelming majority of the people barely subsist and can scarcely save anything of their income. This overwhelming majority are the women, who account for over 70% of the world's absolute poor (United Nations, 1996).

Development is human being's bases of existence. It implies increased agricultural production (food), improved healthcare, better nutrition and all the other essentials for improving the quality of life of the citizen. The situation of women all over the world has continued to change since the 21st century, especially in the developing nations of the world. More responsibilities, such as health care provider, generation of wealth, community leadership, etc., are trusted on the woman. Women are directly involved in these and other areas because they are largely responsible for the food consumed by families, for the health, nutrition and education needs of every member of the family. The woman increasingly stands as the life blood of the family.

In Nigeria, women multi-tasks, both in the traditional and all human endeavours, include subsistence food production, food processing, transportation of food water, housecraft, trade, domestic chores, childbearing and child rearing. Women are responsible, in addition to seeking livelihoods for keeping their homes and providing for their children, and so bear a disproportionate burden attempting to manage household consumption and production under conditions of increasing scarcity.

Therefore, there is urgent need for new paradigms of development that will examine women productive and community management roles. The level of civilization and development in a

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country depends largely on the status of and the respect accorded to the womanfolk.

Women Capacity

Nigerian women have recorded proven integrity, right from mythology, through history, creative literature and reality (Chikwe, 2003). Women have made great impact in the society. They have demonstrated enough capacity to contribute to economic development. The only problem is gross under utilization of women's capacity in economic development. This question of capacity utilization of womenfolk needs to be addressed for a successful economic development to take place.

A recent publication by the Federal Office of Statistics, FOS (1998/99) contains gaps between women and men in policy, investment and employment in Nigeria and what is needed to reduce the gaps and create equal opportunities for women in health, in education, in work and in decision making at all levels. Extensive changes in policy, in government, in business and in the household will be required to achieve this, with women and men reworking the conductional assumptions about politics, economics and family life. It is also going to require explicit initiative to advance women's interest, initiative informed by the analysis of numbers and grounded in the argument that advancing the interests of women benefits everyone.

Table 1: *Summary of employment by year and gender (2001-2005)*

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total	Average
Women	19.28	20.05	20.78	20.95	21.06	19.95	20.42
Men	80.72	79.75	79.22	79.05	78.94	80.05	78.58
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: NBS, 2006

Table 2: Percentage of women and men in Federal civil service

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2006	Total	Average
Women	28.5	28.7	30.7	29.5	39	61	31.28
Men	71.5	71.3	69.3	70.5	78.94	80.05	68.72

Source: NBS, 2006

Tables 3: Summary of seats held by Women and Men in National Assembly by Year and Gender

LEGISLATORS	1999		2003		2007	
Senate	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Male	106	97.25	105	96.33	100	91.74
Female	3	2.75	4	3.67	9	8.26
Total	109	100.0	109	100.0	109	100.0
House of Reps.						
Male	348	96.67	339	94.17	334	92.78
Female	12	3.33	21	5.83	26	7.22
Both Houses						
Male	454	96.8	444	94.7	434	92.5
Female	15	3.2	25	5.3	35	7.5
Total	469	100.0	469	100.0	469	100.0

Source: NBS, 2006

Employment comprises 20.42% women and 78.58% men. In the Federal Civil Service, it is 31.28% and 68.72% respectively. Table 3 shows in clear terms the gaps between men and women in policy making. Men held overwhelming 96.8% seats in the National Assembly in 1999, 94.7% in 2003 and 92.5% in 2007. Women play a very minor role in high political and economic decision-making in Nigeria, yet they have the right to vote and make up more than half of the electorate. Many more women work in the private sector, where they take up low-paid jobs, while their male counterparts work in the public sector.

Recommendations

Men and women need to work in partnership for a better future. Every person must, therefore, be given equal opportunity for development, irrespective of sex, in order to achieve a sustainable economic development. Government and other agencies should encourage and assist women to develop economic power and assert their social, political and legal rights, since this will be for the good of everyone.

Women should be united in their pursuit for political participation, since politics is an art of power management and allocation. Women should be encouraged to participate at policy – making levels because they are seen to represent the interest of the women and children that form a greater percentage of our population.

Economic empowerment of our women is a *sine qua none* to sustainable development. Therefore, government and non-governmental organizations should encourage and assist women to achieve economic stability. Obnoxious laws that prevent women from getting their rights and asserting them must be reviewed.

Conclusion

Gender gap cannot be ignored, but deliberate efforts must be to bridge it. For development to take place holistically, women must have access to education and health care. Law impinging on women i.e. land, loan and technology, must be reviewed urgently. Women must have the wherewithal to participate in politics.

Improvement in these areas, which in turn, will improve family income and quality of living are indicators of development and nation building. Improvement of women situation will enable them perform their multiple tasks more effectively and efficiently. Women hold a key position in the family and they greatly influence decisions related to family and the rearing of their children. They take care of the health, hygiene, physical and moral development of their children who will be the future leaders of tomorrow their influence on their children can never be over emphasized. Women are, therefore, a force to be

reckoned with in development. Without the women, no meaningful development will take place considering, the role they play in the entire population and their number. Studies have shown that the reason why many of the rural development efforts failed was because of non-involvement of the women institutions. These institutions can be harnessed for a successful and effective socio-economic development, if women are not excluded from the scheme of things.

Granted that the family is the basic, social institution from which other institutions have grown, but women still remain an indispensable tool for national development. Unfortunately tradition and culture have relegated the women to an inferior status and to a subordinate position in society. Hence their contributions are generally neglected, disregarded and unrecognized in development plan. This has been the bane of many developing countries.

Nigeria should not lose sight of the fact that it has been acknowledged in many studies and in developed countries that there is a close relationship between the status of women and the state of economic development in any given country. It is the level of development of women that serves as an indicator of the rate of the entire national development. It is common knowledge that Nigeria is endowed with mineral and human resources, agricultural potentials and more. In the area of human resources, the potentials of women are not adequately exploited. This willful ignoring of the contribution of the womenfolk is a great catastrophe to economic development, more so as women constitute about 50% of the entire nation.

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