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THE PROBLEMS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Gyuse, Terdoo Sandra	Department of Political Science and International Relations, College of Leadership Development Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.
Sheriff F. Folarin	Department of Political Science and International Relations, College of Leadership Development Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.
Ibok, Samuel Bassey	Department of Political Science and International Relations, College of Leadership Development Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.
Faith Olarenwaju	Department of Political Science and International Relations, College of Leadership Development Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.
Okwoche, Eneyi Victory	Department of Political Science and International Relations, College of Leadership Development Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.
Ilemobola Peter Olarenwaju	Department of Political Science and International Relations, College of Leadership Development Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Abstract

In the contemporary society, sovereign States are particularly concerned with initiating and sustaining development. In this light, States are more than ever-evolving strategies to expedite development. Nigeria gained independence on 1st October, 1960, and since then it has been plagued with issues inhibiting its development, including the undue marginalization and relegation of women. It is for this reason that this study seeks to critically analyze the importance and implication of women empowerment on development in Nigeria. Based on textual analysis and review, this study reveals that Nigeria is currently lagging in development because majority of its women are unemployed, underemployed, and relegated in the society. Thus, it is imperative for the Government to introduce an "inclusive plan" for development. This implies a plan that will incorporate women different culture and age grades. Critical to the findings of this article is the fact that human development is a precursor for economic development and negligence of the human factor will greatly impact on national development. The study concludes that Nigeria must pay attention to empowering its women uproot the various stereotypes which inhibit the progress of women. The study recommended that cultural practices and stereotyping women should be eliminated; the Government and Non-Governmental Organizations should create programs such as vocational training and free education for vulnerable women in society. The government should also enlighten its citizens on the adverse effect of discrimination against women.

Keywords: Development, Education, Employment, Nigeria, Women Empowerment

Introduction

It is pertinent to note that although women constitute more than half of the world's population they are still marginalized and hindered from utilizing their talents

for the benefit of society. Women in Nigeria like other developing countries of the world suffer from undue marginalization, discrimination, and exploitation by people through the implementation of their religious

and cultural beliefs, traditional prejudices which placed men as superior beings and 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.

Women empowerment is a process of enabling women to develop the capacity to actualize their potentials. Women should be conceived as individuals that possess hidden potentials. It is pertinent to note that the perception that democracy would automatically boost gender equality in political participation has not been validated in Nigeria. Ojobo (2008) puts forward that women in Nigeria still suffer constraints which militates against their personal and national development. Many women are often considered second-class citizens and their contribution to the Nigerian economy is usually hidden. In traditional Nigerian 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 childbearing and then see themselves even in their marital homes as a figure 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 opinions of women (Uzodike & Onapajo, 2013). Nigerian women have a subordinate role to their male counterparts. There are twice as many women below the poverty line than men and up to nineteen times as many men in executive positions than women. The United Nations have developed and organized programs that aim to ameliorate gender inequalities. Women's empowerment is a means of mainstreaming women's development. This in turn emphasizes the importance of the impact women participation can make to national development. Patriarchy is engrained in the Nigerian society, and these results in gender-based discrimination, which emphasizes preference on sex instead of competence.

The majority of women in Africa live in rural areas (Obalyelu & Chime, 2020). The future of economic development in Nigeria lies in the dynamic and growth of small-scale enterprises that are directly or indirectly owned and managed by women especially in rural communities (Agu, 2007).

Given this background, this study is divided into five sections. Following the introduction, crucial concepts are discussed. The third section examines the challenges constraining the empowerment of women in Nigeria. In the fourth section, the means of empowering women are examined. The fifth section interrogates the nexus between women's empowerment and development in Nigeria. The last section concludes the work and offers recommendations.

Conceptual Clarification

Women Empowerment

According to Enemuo (1999), empowerment is a multidimensional process involving the transformation of the economic social legal, political, and psychological circumstances of the powerless. Sako (1999) maintains that empowerment is the process of strengthening the existing capacities of disadvantaged groups in society to enable them to perform towards improving themselves and their families. Empowerment means to give strength and confidence (Asogwa, 2012). Women empowerment is an economic process that involves empowering Nigerian women as a poverty reduction measure. Correspondingly, Empowerment is the development of women in terms of politics, social and economic strength in nation development. It can be noted that the aggregate of educational, political, health, and legal empowerment are key to women's empowerment in Nigeria. Weidman (1989) suggests that empowerment reduces vulnerability, decreases dependency, and implies action, not passivity. Simply put, it is a way of reducing women's vulnerability and dependency in all spheres of life. Correspondingly, it broadens the opportunities and alternatives available to women in determining their choices (Weidemann,

1989). Women's empowerment results in the human development of women.

Education

Okafor (1984) defines education as a process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of his or her potentialities. Etesike and Ogugua (2005) describe education as the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, valuable skills developed, and faculties trained. It is concerned with the imparting of knowledge in People (Akubuilu & Omeje, 2012). Education is conceived as the cornerstone for sustainable development globally. Education empowers women by improving their living standards. It is apposite to note that the girl child has been dastardly affected by illiteracy. According to Odili, Omotor, and Pessu (2003), about 70% of adult females are illiterate. Female education is still low despite the efforts at increasing the supply of female education through campaigns and the building of girls-only institutions and vocational programs. Education has been identified as one of the constraints holding back the advancement of Nigerian women (Akubuilu & Omeje, 2012). Many in societies believe that a woman's education is a waste since she will eventually marry into her husband's family. This reinforces the preference for boys to be educated (Noah & Zakariya, 2011).

Development

It is pertinent to mention that there is no arrangement among scholars as to the meaning of development (Gertzl, 1995). This ensues from the dissenting opinions regarding what constitutes development (Kanbur, 2001; Chidozie, Lawal, & Ajayi, 2015). Rodney (1974) maintains that development is many-sided and not entirely an economic concern. According to Aniekan and Otoabasi (2013) development denotes a multidimensional process involving modification or transformation from a less to a more desirable state. Furthermore, it is a situation where an economically unstable country can create and sustain a yearly growth in her Gross National

product (Thirwal, 1989; Todaro & Smith, 2009). The concept of Sustainable development goals was initiated at the Rio Conference in 1992. This suggests development that addresses the needs of contemporary society without jeopardizing the resources available for the imminent generations (Aniekan & Otoabasi, 2013). Similarly, Dutt (2001) contends that development contrasts growth because the former is a wider term covering areas such as political, social, human, and objects at advancing society and human well-being.

Challenges to Women Empowerment in Nigeria

Traditional Constraints

The culture and traditional practices of many ethnic groups in Nigeria oppress women and promote gender discrimination (Achunine, 2005). Put differently, the Nigerian society is dotted with cultural practices that are inimical to women's emancipation (Madu, 2000). Yomi (2007) asserts that traditional education for girls is targeted at preparing girls for marriage. By implication, the girl-child is raised to perceive marriage as their goal. The entirety of their life is an internship for the lifelong course of marriage (Sutton, 1998; Achunine, 2004; Akubuilu & Omeje, 2012).

Unequal Employment Opportunities

It is important to mention that many Nigerian women are discriminated against by employers and fellow employees. Similarly, women are not deemed fit to take jobs in some fields and some positions are exclusively for men (Fasugba, 2000). Some women are sexually harassed at the workplace and this advances the awful narrative that women are merely sex objects. It should be noted that many hold the view that a woman cannot work and manage her home properly (Isike & Okeke, 2011; Onwubiko, 2012).

Early Marriage

The practice of early marriage is largely endorsed by many ethnic groups in Nigeria. For example, this practice is cultural in Northern Nigeria (Ede & Kalu, 2018). It involves giving the girl child to an adult

male in marriage. This is against the fundamental rights and freedom of the girl child as anyone under the age of 18 cannot contract any marriage (Onwe, 2014). Despite efforts by the government and Non-Governmental Organizations to curb this appalling practice; many are still coerced into it. Early marriage makes the girl child vulnerable to health hazards and abuses (Maniglio, 2009; Hornor, 2010). It equally eliminates the opportunities for the girl-child, and she may not finish her education. Most parents pressure their young girls into this for monetary gain and some girls are betrothed to men the age of their fathers (Ede & Kalu, 2018).

Abuse and Violence Directed At Women

Politics and public policy are particularly troubled because they are women, and also because of their rising appearance. It also risks stopping women from involvement in politics as they deem the climate to be too dangerous. A study of misogyny, abuse and violence against women in parliament in Europe by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the National Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2018 showed a warning. Psychological and sexual abuse was more prevalent for those under the age of 40 and MPs with a clear record on women's rights as well as gender equality were selected as an attack. Many (79.2%) MPs who were victims of harassment and violence have been resolved that they will remain in offices for a further time, but 33.3% state that their freedom of speech and room for action during their term of office has been compromised. There is also concern about the high level of abuse of females especially because this can be a starting point for a political career.

Socio-Economic Factors

The greater a nation's income, the more women in this society is portrayed. There are conflicting assumptions regarding the significance of the country's resources to deciding women (Moore and Shakman 1996) and (Paxton 1997) have integrated the element in their global research, but no proof of its value can be identified. In addition, (Matland, 1998) but only for rich countries, found indirect effects. He notes that growth results in decreasing conventional

norms, lower birth rates, increased urbanization and higher involvement of women in education and labor force, and shifts in the understanding of women's acceptable positions.

Invisibility

In Nigeria, women's socioeconomic responsibilities have been greatly underestimated, undervalued, and even ignored in the development process. Women have historically been the unsung heroes of the home and national economy, the unsung backbone of the family and economy. Invisibility is a barrier that prevents women from reaching their full potential; women are driven into invisibility as a result of socio-cultural constraints that keep them disadvantaged (Ecosoc, 1999). Nigeria's governance and government have been dominated by men since the country's independence in 1960. Women's political participation has likewise been extremely low. Gender differences in income, health, and schooling, and literacy, proportion of income from labor, economic involvement, and political voice have been shown through a scenario analysis of sexual inequalities and socio-cultural dynamics. Various attempts have been undertaken in recent years to empower women so that they may manage their own lives and be a part of their nations' socio-economic and political agendas. This will make them less reliant on their husbands' wages, which are often larger than women's.

Women Empowerment and Development in Nigeria: The Nexus

Women empowerment has become a central theme in global treaties, covenants, and declarations, owing to the recognition that it is a catalyst for clear-cut development strategies aimed at poverty reduction, improved living standards, good governance, and profitably productive investments, all of which are necessary for the creation of an enlarged economy. This leads to the political-economic and social emancipation of women. It will help them contribute their quota to national development (Knowles, Lorgelly, & Owen, 2002; Klassen, 2002; Nwaigwe, 2014).

Women's empowerment has an enormous effect on national development. (Ekong, 2006; Asogwa, 2012; Ogunjemilula & Familugba, 2015). Women represent the face of poverty and underdevelopment in Africa, Nigeria. For a long, the African Continent has been plagued characterized by a range of major economic and socio-political challenges and crises such as high infant mortality, mass poverty, high rates of unemployment, child abuse, and famine. Essentially, African nations have shown some concern for human development issues by establishing particular developmental goals and methods, as well as acknowledging the essential role of gender equality or parity in the development process (Isike 2011). The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), which was adopted in 1981, the Women's Right Protocol of 2003, the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), which was adopted in 2001, are just a few of the initiatives that are linked to the Millennium Development Goals and, at the same time, a testament to commendable response in the African continent (Offor, 2006).

It imposed male domination of women. In both public and private life, women have historically been subjected to marginalization, discrimination, and injustice (Cheryl, 1986). In Nigeria, some commendable attempts have been undertaken to put in place the essential procedures for ending gender discrimination and ensuring gender equality and human dignity. The National Gender Policy, which replaced and enhanced the preceding National Women's Policy, is aimed squarely at Nigeria's gender disparity problem. In light of the foregoing, Nigeria's development policies have exhibited skepticism about the gender variable in the past.

Education for women emancipation (health benefits/political benefits) (Ukah, Innocent, Maduagwuna, & Okafor, 2017). Enrolling women in education help to empower women in the world, Colonialism initiated women's suffering (Akubuilu & Omeje, 2012). Gender bias results in gross

underrepresentation of women in decision making, when women act in response to biases against them, they are seen as a threat to the established political order. Rowbotham (1973) warns that even when women are silent, it is not a basis for assuming consent. Consciousness-raising is a means of empowering women to act collectively to induce desired change.

Sunday oke (1996) attributes women's plight to their cowardice to the re relegation of society Shettima (1995), suberu (2000) okene (2002) patriarchal culture oppresses and marginalizes women. According to okene (2000) Nigerian women have attempted to contest their marginalization, however, it yielded little success. In other words, despite persistent activism, women have not been able to penetrate the mainstream of Nigerian power structure.

Okomo (2000), women's plight in west Africa started from the invasion of Islamic culture, the introduction of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Christianity, and colonial capitalist that reshaped gender roles and relations. Similarly, they argue that women before colonialism during the late 19th century enjoyed a significant amount of economic power.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Government should pursue universal basic education. Pro-women policies should be adopted. Women participation in politics should be encouraged. Oppressive traditional practices should be abolished. Early marriage should be discouraged through sensitization in rural and urban areas. Similarly, those who still engage in this heinous practice should be punished by the law.

Social media should be properly utilized to project the need for equality. Social media can be instrumental in educating women on their rights. These projections must be devoid of exaggerations or misleading information which could discredit efforts towards women inclusion. We live in an interconnected world (Giddens, 2001). The paper concludes that there is a

clear nexus between women empowerment and

development in Nigeria.

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