

Gender Differential and Poverty amongst Women in Nigeria

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Abstract

Poverty is no respecter of gender; it cuts across both male and female. However, it is on record that the scourge of poverty is more pronounced on the female gender than male in Nigeria. That fewer women apply for entry to universities is a result of their being fewer girls completing secondary education and this problem has its roots in primary school. Men have greater access to high-paying, secure employment than women. This study, therefore attempts to examine the relationship between gender differential and poverty amongst women in Nigeria. It relies heavily on secondary data for its analysis. The study reveals that only a very tiny proportion of women do get into the commanding heights of national life for which higher education is a prerequisite. Education for women and girls at all levels, therefore, should aim at reversing the trend of gender discrimination by ensuring full empowerment of women in the true sense of raising their status.

Keywords: Education, Entrepreneur, Poverty, Women, Girl-child, Gender differential

1.0 Introduction

After the First World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975 and that of Beijing in 1995, vibrant agitations for gender balance and equality in all aspects of human activities arose. These vibrant agitationseventually began to witness some improvement in the reduction of the gap of gender imbalance. In spite of these modest achievements, the role of the state in policies and development issues as well as the dearth of data in traditional setting on the role of women in most human endeavours, still pose serious challenges to equitable gender equation.

Gender inequality particularly in the traditional communities is still prevalent. This relates to inequality in education and employment as well as ownership of the means of production. The structural roles of men and women in the economies and politics of the traditional societies are ubiquitous (Abbass, 2014). This brings about the structural linkages between markets and households as well as the inseparable intersections of gender, poverty and social policy of the state that drastically affects the women gender. This indicates that in most of the developing countries, designs of development policies tend to be gender insensitive, characterized by genderblindness and gender deafness.

An estimated 50% of the population of Nigeria is made up of female gender. UNDP's Human Development Report (2002) estimates the earned income of women to be \$532, while the comparable figure for men is \$1,254. This indicates that on the average, a woman's income is barely 42% of a man's income. The same report shows female economic activities as representing only 56% of those of men. Thus, for every woman engaged in economic activities, there are at least two men (Anyebe, 2015).

This study therefore, attempts to examine the relationship between gender differential and poverty amongst women in Nigeria.

2.0 An Overview of Gender Differential and Women Poverty

The identification of the socio-cultural dichotomy and relationships between men and women in the society with distinct and complementary role which men and women play in the process of production have evolved since human creation. These differentiated gender roles and relations, due to patriachalism in the society, over time, have strategically made women impoverished with least access to resources and education. Over 90% of women, especially in the underdeveloped region of the world, absolutely depend on the land they till for their basic needs and survival (Abbass, 2014). Women's role is diverse and multifarious: they till the land and grow crops, they go to streams for water, they gather firewood, they tend animals, they clean the household, they take care of the children, they cook, they wash clothes, and they engage in some commercial activities for income, they help sustain the environment and many other unnoticed and unrecognized activities.

These arduous, neglected and ignored vital role women play in taking care of the environment cannot be measured or quantified. Rocheleau expressed that most rural women are directly dependent on their immediate environment and their own skills in using it, for the daily necessities of life (Rocheleau, 1985:8). Thus, women in rural areas play a major role in managing natural resources. Tasks women play centre on agricultural activities, management of small animals and the entire household activities. With their knowledge, skills and information of the environment around them they are in a position to handle all issues relating to the ecology within the community. As they process farm products into raw materials they engage in a number of small scale marketing of by-products of the farming and other activities they engage.

Women constitute the buck of most underprivileged group of people. They invariably become the majority of the victims that suffer from environmental degradation. Development policies that affect the environment, especially in agriculture, affect women adversely. The challenges of the environment are directly related to the problems women face which profoundly marginalize and subordinate them. Hence, the women's condition of poverty, due to inappropriate environmental degradation has compelled them into miserable life as they have no option other than to continue to live in such harsh environment albeit with fierce struggles to overcome it.

Women are therefore constrained in participating effectively in the development process because their subordinate position in society is ignored in development

planning and policy making, while their concrete needs are equally ignored. This is reflected in the manner in which resources are allocated and utilized (Abbass,2014).

Women share their poverty in their outlook and what they do, what bother them and what they aspire. Hence, wherever they live, they are naturally bound together by the traffic of work burden they shoulder at home and on the farm. Women not only perform physically heavy work but they work even longer hours than men with much of the household chores completely ignored. They wake up as early as 4:00am to clear the house, wash plates and clothes, prepare meals and quickly set out for the farm and work till about sun set. While returning home, women naturally collect firewood and sometimes drinking water. Immediately after reaching home, they begin to prepare evening meals. The exhausted women usually go to sleep late. Hence, women have traditionally been the invisible and indeed invincible workforce in the household, the unnoticed and unacknowledged backbone of the rural economy (Abbass, 2014).

Women are crucial in keeping the family intact and the economy vibrant and alive by the tremendous work they do. In the first place, household routine activities consume hours of women's time and at the same time consume a lot of their energies. The routine works are almost exclusively their responsibilities which are repeated daily with new challenges always emerging. Since women contribute substantially to the family budget, they engage in numerous income generating activities to keep the families going. These include food processing, trading of agricultural products and production of handicrafts. Sometimes there are female headed households where the men might have died, migrated or incapacitated and thus women become sole providers. They perform other tasks but their labour is unpaid or unrewarded. Although women represent half of the world's population and one-third of the official labour force, they receive only 1% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property, (UN, Conference, 1980, Copenhagen).

A study of countries by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in1985 shows that women account for 80% of agricultural production in the third world, especially African countries, with steady increase in the women's inducement in food production. This includes responsibility for sowing, weeding, crop maintenance and harvesting. It also involves the cultivation of both subsistence and cash crops. Management of small domestic animals and supply of water for the survival and health of the family are equally the responsibility of the women. In addition, energy supplies on which families depend, like firewood, crop residues and manures are collected mainly by women usually assisted by children.

It should be noted and emphasized that notwithstanding these tasks performed by women for the survival of the families and sustaining the economy, they have gross limitations in access and control over income, credit, land, education, training and information. In addition, certain trends and development have continued to affect women's condition by further worsening their position.

3.0 Research Method

The data were obtained from the following sources; Universal Basic Education (UBE) Office, Abuja, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, bulletins of National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), UNDP's Human Development Report (2002), Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), and National Assembly Statistical Information (2009).

4.0 Results and Discussion

Poverty is no respecter of gender; it cuts across both male and female and ages. It is on record that the scourge of poverty is more pronounced on the female gender than male in Nigeria. The gender statistics collated by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs in 2006 and 2008 reveal that out of 70% of the Nigeria's population living below poverty line, 65% are women. Income and purchasing power was estimated to be US\$1,495 for men as compared to US\$614 for women. Men had greater access to high-paying, secure employment. For example, about 76% of federal civil service employees were men. Women occupied less than 24% of the workforce at the federal level and less than 14% of the overall management positions in the federal civil service. Also, about 17.5% of Nigerian medical doctors are women and 82.5% were men (National Assembly Statistical Information, 2009). These disparities have a significant effect on the capacity of women to contribute to the economic growth of the country and to play active role in politics. Only a very tiny proportion of women do get into the commanding heights of national life for which higher education is a prerequisite (Anyebe, 2015).

Education which is known worldwide as an instrument of development has not been fully accessed by Nigerian women (Obanya, 2004). Even though there are a few female trained scholars and technocrats in the country, there is a wide disparity in educational attainment and literacy rate which varies from 65.7% for male and 47.8% for female. There is low female enrolment in schools. In 2005, the enrolment in the primary schools showed that 56% of pupils in primary schools were male, while female represented 44%. The education statistics on gender published in 2007 by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Development show that on the average 70% of women in Nigeria are not literate (National Assembly Statistical Information, 2009). Fewer women apply for entry to universities is a consequence of fewer girls completing secondary education. This will definitely affect the number of women applicants for available jobs.

The discrimination against female gender in the country is contrary to section 17 (3) of the 1999 Constitution which states that:

Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that all citizens without discrimination on any group whatsoever have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment. There shall equal pay for equal work without discrimination on account of sex, or no other ground whatsoever.

While there are well-known political and economic determinants of the prevalence of poverty, the case of women is usually attributed to the following factors:

- Inappropriateness of education and training, a situation in which knowledge and skills are not at the level that can awaken human potentials.
- A disabling socio-cultural environment which denies women a good number of basic human rights: rights to property, inhuman treatment of widows, succession and inheritance rights, even the rights to be seen and be heard.
- Inadequate access to credits, even when women manage to make concerted efforts in spite of all odds.
- The low social value placed on the girl-child.
- Lack of social recognition for the socio-economic and human welfare roles that women play in all societies.
- The generally low status of women in society.
- The prevalence of women in no-income, low-income, unattractive, low-status and back breaking jobs and occupations.

These factors should be reversed.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the paper submits that the poor handling of girl-child education has adversely affected the development of entrepreneurship and by extension promoted poverty amongst women in Nigeria. Education for the girl-child therefore, should aim at reversing the trend of gender discrimination by ensuring full empowerment of girl-child and by extension women in the true sense of raising their status in the following essential dimensions:

- Psychologically: building and enhancing their self-awareness and self-esteem.
- Intellectually: awakening and sustaining reasoning and knowledge-acquisition skills.
- Technically: inculcating in them a variety of socially useable and marketable life-skills.
- Socially: ensuring that they use their newly acquired knowledge, skills, self-esteem and technical skills to serve society better and to push for social equity and social recognition.
- Economically: enhancing their productivity in the economic sense, as well as enhancing their income earning capacity.
- Politically: ensuring that the girl-child and by extension women can be seen and heard, that their civic rights are recognized as essential human rights, that they also become fully involved in decision-making at all levels.

Promoting girl-child education will enhance the production of female entrepreneurs with the capacity to generate ideas and to turn such ideas to profitable and emotionally satisfying ventures through perseverance and hard work.

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