

# Strategies For The Empowerment Of Women In Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *This paper has shown that Nigerian women are marginalized. They are humiliated and overpowered. The paper has especially shown that the status of the Nigerian woman is pathetic. The women are generally illiterate, discriminated against in the work place and are physically, emotionally, and psychologically abused. The paper has however observed that Nigerian contribute the most to the daily activities that that keep Nigerian society going and wonders why they should be so humiliated and overpowered. It has thus recommended the existential factors that hamper the empowerment of women be sincerely addressed. Especially women should be empowered educationally, economically and politically including their health status.*

**Keywords:** *Strategies, women, empowerment, Nigeria.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In all parts of the world, women make tremendous contributions to the development of their communities. In fact, women exert considerable impact on the productivity of male workers. The women, because of their multiple roles have significant control over the subsistence lives of their communities. They perform reproductive roles of child bearing and rearing. They are also engaged in productive activities like trading, weaving, farming, etc for the production of income and other day-to-day maintenance of homes (Amucheazi, 1991). Although, women have always participated in development, their efforts have not been taken into account or recognized.

But women, as mothers have and will continue to be procreators of human. There is no society that is complete without a woman. Even God did not stop creation until woman manifested (Nkiruka and Akabue, 2012). This means development in any society will never make any meaning or progress if women's roles are not acknowledged and appreciated (Akubue, 2001). This shows that women are important resource for development. Thus, in the words of Singh (2016), man and woman are like two wings of a bird, which only in unison can take a lofty flight.

Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the woman's creation-man has continued to humiliate and overpower his procreator- the woman. Women are denied their rights and are often subjected

to callous and inhuman practices. It is generally believed that in Nigeria, men and women play complimentary roles. However, if the activity profile of men and women are assessed, it will show that more than 80% of the work is done by women. It is therefore sad to say that in Nigeria, one of these wings is wounded and weak. The question then is how can the people that contribute the most to the daily activities that keep the society going be so humiliated and overpowered? It is on this basis that this paper suggests strategies for the empowerment of women in Nigeria.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The central concept in the discussion of empowerment is power. Power, according to the International Encyclopaedia (1995), refers to having the capacity and the means to direct one's life towards desired social, political and economic goals. Empowerment therefore is a process of acquiring power in order to understand one's rights. According to Rapparpot (1982), empowerment is a process or mechanism by which people, organizations and communities gain mastery over their lives. It is the capacity of individuals, groups to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their goals (Adams, 2008).

The international Women's Conference (1985) defined empowerment as a redistribution of social power and control

of resources. It is the measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self determination in people and in communities in order to enable them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way. Empowerment enables people to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of influence. It makes people powerful or equips them with the power to face the challenges of life to overcome disabilities, handicaps and inequalities (Singh, 2016)

Women empowerment therefore is a process by which those who have been denied power gain power, especially the ability to make strategic choices. It is a process that allows women to make self-determined choices. That is, it allows women to gain control over their lives by participating in decisions that affect them in the home, community, government, and international policies (Rahman, 2013). Women play important role in socio-economic development of all societies. Since women are crucial to the survival of all societies, their empowerment becomes essential.

### III. STATUS OF WOMEN IN NIGERIA

To appreciate the plight of the Nigerian women, it is pertinent to understand their status in specific contexts such as poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, etc.

**WOMEN AND POVERTY:** In Nigeria, like elsewhere in the world, the poor form the majority. Studies conducted by UNFPA (1982) and Morelli (1992) have also established that among the poor, women are poorer than men because of their unequal status in the society. Most of the poor women in Nigeria reside in the rural areas and are getting poorer because they do not have equal access to the available resources and development processes.

In Nigeria, agriculture is the main occupation of the rural women (UNDP, 1980). Women represent about 70% of food producers in Nigeria yet agriculture has the largest number of the poor because they are denied access to social services and title to the land they work on (Jekayinfa, 2007). Most Nigerian women do not have voice in the power structures that control resources allocation. It can thus be said that the main cause of female poverty in Nigeria lies in the inequalities in the control of assets and discrimination in the labour market.

**WOMEN AND ILLITERACY:** The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for access to education for all. In pursuit of this, there have been campaigns to encourage people to enrol their school-age children. There are also programmes for adult and non-formal education. However, the Women's Consortium of Nigeria (2004) quoted UNESCO as positing that Nigeria was one of the 9 countries with the highest rate of illiteracy and that women constituted the largest percentage. Scholars and analysts such as Umar, (1996) Sambo (1996) have lamented the educational imbalances against females and have maintained that it is detrimental to national development. Osuala (1984) posited that the disparities in education have been affecting women in the labour market as some firms discriminate against women in their employment policy.

**DISCRIMINATION AND INJUSTICE:** In Nigeria, injustices and discriminatory attitudes exist. Women are

treated differently. They are seen as second-rated citizens only to be seen but not heard. Women's rights are often denied them simply because they are women. For example, they are not entitled to inheritance nor ownership rights. They have no say in the decisions affecting the family, community and nation.

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:** Thousands of Nigerian women are often subjected to sexual, physical or psychological suffering. The violence against women has no regard for income, class and culture boundaries as all women/girls are affected. Examples abound on the pages of Nigerian newspapers of such violence against women. The violence against women is a direct consequence of the unequal power relations between men and women.

### IV. OVERVIEW OF NIGERIAN WOMEN IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The contributions of Nigerian women to national development have been widely acknowledged by both international organizations and scholars. For example, the Food and Agricultural Organization (1975), more than four decades ago, reported that 70% of the work in food processing and almost 100% of domestic and household chores are performed by women. Even today, this trend has not changed. This position, by the FAO, was later re-emphasized by Agboola (1990). He asserted that Nigerian women are the operators of the economy and constitute a major arm of the labour force.

However, beyond agriculture and household chores, Nigerian women have been decimated. This is quite unlike the pre-colonial period when Nigerian women were equipped with social, economic and political skills. Women contributed significantly in shaping the mental and attitudinal infrastructures of pre-colonial Nigeria (Ojeh, 2007). For example, women like queen Amina of Zaria, madam Tinubu, and madam Moremi of Ife held outstanding positions in the society like their male counterparts. Women inculcated into the younger ones the skills of economic and political development. The skills helped women to carry out certain political functions which helped to shape pre-colonial political structures (Ikejiani, 2001). It should be borne in mind that though society stereotyped women's role to mere household keeping, pre-colonial Nigerian women did not limit themselves to such role. Rather, they competed with their male counterparts in social, economic and political spheres (Nkiruka and Akubue, 2012).

Regrettably, during the colonial era, the gender ideology began to change to that of domestication of women. Women began to cease to function in the public domain like the men. Thus, men were uplifted in the social ladder while women were relegated. It is important to emphasize that Nigerian women still have potentials that are necessary for development. The only thing is that these potentials are never allowed to fully manifest because women are often denied certain rights due to sociological, cultural and traditional factors. Even the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) of which Nigeria is a signatory has not been fully implemented. It is true that the

involvement of women in some sectors has improved but the change cannot be said to be significant considering the population of women in the country. Women therefore need to be empowered.

## V. STRATEGIES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment is a multidimensional process as such the strategies being suggested are meant to address the existential factors hampering the full development of the potentials of the Nigerian women.

The key to achieving high standards in women's empowerment lies in women education. Education will help women/girls to develop skills and self confidence. It will also enable them to participate effectively in society. In Nigeria, women have low education which retards them from participating actively in every aspect of social life. In fact, the low level of women's education is often interpreted as low wisdom. Women therefore need to have education because they have the right to it, they have knowledge to share, they have dreams and with education they can improve life for everyone. After all, we are all humans and should therefore have equal right to live happily and have fulfilment. This means that women/girls should have much education just as the men.

In Nigeria, women are more economically disadvantaged than men. Women generally lack real freedom to make rational choices because of lack of reasonable income security. Women cannot exercise their rights because they lack economic strength. Women have less access to agricultural assets, inputs and services. Women hardly have access to the resources that generate stable incomes. For example, they have less access to credit, inheritance and ownership rights. This underinvestment in women is limiting development, slowing down poverty reduction and economic growth. With the crumbling economy in Nigeria today, women are becoming more increasingly disadvantaged. Therefore, women should be economically empowered because an economically self reliant woman acts as a self-generating dynamo by fostering the goals of family planning and self development (Singh, 2016). Sound economic policies are therefore needed to achieve women's economic empowerment. Strategies should be designed to focus on building credit worthiness and financial independence among women. For instance, all the skills and entrepreneurial development programmes should be redesigned to favour women and implemented sincerely.

Also women need to have access to innovations and agricultural extension services as this can enhance their productivity and economic decision-making power. In other words, access to agricultural assets, inputs and services will increase agricultural productivity and by implication enhance women's economic decision-making power.

Another strategy relates to the health status of women. Women's health issues deserve as much attention as men since health care matters impact women differently than men. It should be noted that the health of women has an overarching influence on the health of the entire family (Kerela Women, 2012). Improving women's health strengthens their economic

empowerment, enhances access to sexual and reproductive information and services (Kerela Women, 2012). It also increases their chances of finishing education and breaking out of poverty. Due to the multiple roles women play in society, they are more prone to wear and tear. Therefore, policies and programmes should be put in place to enable women live healthier lives. Gender-equitable approaches to health should be put in place to enable women have easy access to health care services.

In Nigeria, from the local to national levels, women are underrepresented in leadership positions. They have no voice in decision-making. They lack social and political support and capacity building opportunities. This exclusion is because of entrenched traditional views, lack of confidence, gender discrimination and intimidation. But involvement of women in politics can enhance bigger economic benefits and more sustainable conflict resolution. Therefore, there should be policy reforms in support of gender equality. It is important to raise women's engagement in politics by raising their awareness of opportunities available and by building confidence and skills. Women themselves should come together to assert themselves. Cross-sector women caucuses should synergize to provide structured support through training programmes. The synergy, it is hoped, would provide an opportunity for them to raise funds for campaigns.

The suggestion therefore is that women should be involved in the governance of the communities they belong to. This is because decision-making can only be beneficial to the entire country if it reflects the collaborative inputs from all members without discrimination.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In Nigeria and indeed Africa in general, women play multiple roles and have significant control over the subsistence lives of Nigerians (and Africans). They perform reproductive roles of child bearing and rearing. They are also engaged in productive activities like trading, farming, weaving, etc. for the production of income and other day-to-day maintenance of homes. In spite of these tremendous contributions women make in the society, they still occupy second-rated position in society. Women therefore need to be empowered. They need to have access to the mechanisms and processes of decision-making.

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