

FEMINIZED POVERTY IN NIGERIA: THE AKWA IBOM STATE EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The frequent changes in governments or perhaps the corrupt practices of Administrators and their political allies have often led to sharp and devastating changes in economic and social policies which often tend to be controversial than yield consensus. The effects of these policies have fallen more on women than any other group. The mismanagement of the country's oil resources over the past decades does affect the country significantly in terms of declining economy. Poverty, particularly the one affecting women in Africa *vis-a-vis* Nigeria, can be said to be constructively gender based. Females have no inheritance rights, no sufficient capital for investment, cannot progress in line with other politicians, and are not privileged to manage government corporations and others. Women in Uyo Eket and Etinan Senatorial districts constitute half the population. The 70-80 percent of sample in all the population was taken by cluster sampling. The data instruments were questionnaire and personal interview. Data were analyzed by simple percentages. Given the scenario, this paper attempts to look at the circumstances that perpetually dump women on the poverty side. It also proffered solutions in response to the critical situation.

INTRODUCTION

The continent of Africa has often referred Nigeria to as the giant of Africa. She is rich with gold as it is equally found in Ghana in addition to other minerals. Nigeria is also rich in vegetation as it is for Ghana, Sierra Leone and others. Not excluded is Nigeria's wealth in human resources that places her shoulder high in comparison with other African countries. In spite of the resources both in human and mineral, Nigeria in

particular, and Africa in general is inundated with discomfoting poverty. This work does not discuss poverty in its complete sense. Discussion shall be based on poverty that strikes women in all their endeavours – in economics, religious, political and cultural. Poverty embodies a deprivation. The deprivation of rights in all areas does normally lead to dissatisfaction and crisis. Illiteracy rate is higher among the womenfolk than their male counterpart. It can be argued that, education wise, women are poorer than the men. Poverty has also sectoral dimension which is detected along professional or trade lines. The womenfolk are few on professional lines like architects, surveyors, and engineers and similar professions that can be set up without scrambling for government work. Skill jobs and trades like mechanic, carpentry, welding and others are common areas women seem to be seen or absorbed in the struggle for a living.

Although poverty is a general phenomenon underlined by incapacity to act strongly and deal with one's challenges. It is experienced the world over, especially in the third world countries. And the most vulnerable group to the monster called poverty is the women. The sub-Sahara Africa has the highest poverty rate in the year 2000, and Nigeria is the largest country in the continent as we have said earlier.

Although Nigerians are predominantly farmers, the sustainable food production is barely enough for the family. In Akwa Ibom state of Nigeria, women also embark on petty trading, moving from Akwa Ibom state to such states like Edo, Kaduna, Borno, Adamawa and other Northern states for purchase of food items. In spite of their struggle to make ends meet, their meagre capital, high rate of accidents and high transportation costs still leave the women less capable and, in deed, impoverished. This impoverished condition leads to excessive dependence on "good relationship" between the long distance travellers and owners of the food items or sellers who function as their last resort to trading work and personal existence. Some women are forced to accept sexual relationship when they become desperate in exchange for goods. This relationship between the buyers and sellers develops into a business networking 'mistresses' and 'masters' relationships. It is such that helps in the spread of HIV/AIDS, one can say. The popular conception is that college and university students and high-class women in Nigeria go into prostitution for money. The situation now has changed to include a broader concern of the modern woman in society. In a place like Nigeria, it is believed that single girls or women thrown out of marriage because they are sterile engage in prostitution, but the Nigeria sex industry has far more young and single women. In other countries of the world such as Poland, some married women embarked on sex work as a legitimized economic ventures. None of the African countries has taken such a step to legitimize sex work, though prostitution is as old as human cultures and relationships between men and women.

Women have not been viewed well in terms of having the capacity to manage social order. Ellen Sirleaf, when she was the interim president of Liberia was deprived of the position of a president merely because she was a woman; African countries tended to favour Taylor who had in various circumstances threatened peace in Liberia. The most annoying part of it is that when eventually the country was handed over to Taylor, there was no peace in Liberia until Sirleaf eventually won as president. Nelson Mandela's wife, who was the head of ANC party in South Africa during her husband's imprisonment, was an object of victimization which led to her divorce. We can see that male politicians have done worse things but have been able to maintain their positions as party head and other important positioning. As long as one is a male, it does not

318 matter what bag of misdeeds one may carry. Zuma, in spite of his accusation for raping an HIV positive girl has still been elected the president of South Africa. If he were to be a woman, it would have been a done deal to sack her long before the next opportunity to climb the ladder of political position and activity. The issue here is that poverty of political survival is more critical for the female than it is for the male.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The fundamental assumption of modernization theory for women and men is that all countries can potentially follow a single path (or parallel and to "modernity"). In his classic work, *The Stage of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1960), W. W. Rostow, who, more than any one else, represents the modernization or the developmentalist perspective, perceived the process of change as a series of stages through which each nation-state had to pass through. Rostow stated confidently 'it is possible to identify all societies, in their economic dimensions, as lying within one of five categories: the traditional society, the precondition for take-off, the off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass consumption' (Rostow, 1960:4). This work deals with feminized poverty, that is, deprivations directed at women.

WOMEN'S VULNERABILITY TO POVERTY

Women are most vulnerable to poverty. As seen by Hense, (1993), women have been found to be generally disadvantaged. Although women are very industrious, they continue to earn less while men continue to earn more. Even in the construction industry, it is the men who are the contractors, the consulting engineers, while women are employed in block carrying and concrete conveyance to the building site. Limited access to resources and weaker ability to generate income, constrain women's power influence on resource allocation. As a result of this gender inequalities, the toll on human lives and quality of lives, are breeding more poverty, malnutrition, illness and other desperations (World Bank, 2000, "Engendering Development through gender Equality", World Bank Policy and Research Bulletin, vol.11, No.3, July/Sept., 2000).

POVERTY AFFECTING WOMEN IN DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Women's poverty surfaces in different dimensions as already indicated. We will now discuss the following five dimensions or perspectives of feminized poverty in Africa.

ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

In Africa, the dominant culture of most countries leaves the intuited poverty for the female child. The female child is married out and has nothing to do with the property of the parent. This culture is so prevailing that any female who is married and has no footing in the husband's family has to count on a life to be lived in perpetual poverty. In a distress economy as can be found in African countries, women suffer most

because they are unable to acquire loans for lack of capacity or ability to offer collaterals. 319

Most Governmental Enterprises/Corporations favour male managers. Money is scarcely

"minted" in civil service jobs except where political officers are. Women in developing countries do 70% of all the work in food production, 50% in animal husbandry; 100% in food processing and almost 100% of all domestic or household jobs (FAO, 1975). Nigerian women are striving to expand their businesses but at a very insignificant level. The deprivation of women from inheriting property from parents drives some female children into prostitution thus endangering them in HIV/AIDS (Umoh, 2005).

RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

The word religion usually has to do with man's relationship with unseen world and super realities. Anyanwu (1999) citing Idowu said that religion is a means by which God as spirit communicates with man. In the old Testament of the Holy Bible, females are described as being an help mate to the male because Eve was created from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:21-25). Arguing in the same vein, Omoregbe (1999) wrote of Judaism, a religion of the Jews as having placed their premium on men's superior role and stressed clearly women's subordinate level. Strengthening this assertion, a portion of the Holy Bible quotes an instance where men of 20-60 years of age had equivalent of 50 shekels of silver by sanitary weight while a woman had only 30 shekels (Leviticus27:3-4). Further examples are seen where in the Holy Bible; the history of the Jews listed the genealogy of male descendents without that of the women. Fixated kinship ideologies always make women less visible in patriarchy.

A woman who was not a virgin was stoned to death while men's sex life was unquestionable (*African Journal of Biblical Studies*). The Buddhist faith puts women as sinful whose only function is to tempt men (Simone de. B, 1974). Confucianism which was founded by Confucius in China gave grounds for the founder to say of women that such is the stupidity of her character that it is incumbent upon her, in every particulars to distrust herself and obey her husband" (Elbert, 1978). Hinduism is no exception in downgrading women. Being born a woman, in their opinion, is a punishment for the sins committed in past life. For the Hindus, the Psyche of women directed by the men leads to placing them in perpetual degradation (Omoregbe, 1999).

The Islamic religion has more serious implications for the women. The recent events in Afghanistan and Iran have shown that Moslem women suffer more than men in other religions. For Islam, women should be veiled, and be put in the Purdah because they are not expected to be seen outside. They are "women under the veil" up till date.

CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

The issue of gender is man-made; and socio-culturally cooked with taboos aimed at frustrating and belittling the "other sex". There is a global concern for gender discrimination which in 1948, led to the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights

320 which placed all human beings born free to be equal in dignity and rights with freedom set forth therein without distinction based on (Ekpo, 1999). A sociologist, Spencer (1982) is of the opinion that women suffer an ecological cultural prejudice because of their sex. According to Fred (1980), men have highly preferential access to those activities which the society accords the greatest value (Udokang 2004).

Countries with strong Islamic faith allow females little or no representation in political life. Likewise, the cultures of most African countries disallow women having equal opportunities in public life. For example, in Republic of Cameroun, men own land and women own crops, the irony of it all is that whatever women can do, they are at the mercy of the men. The implication is that men control the source of power and production at the disfavour of women.

EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Education is all embracing-skills acquisition and formal education. Education is the necessary awareness in the various areas of endeavour to enable one to change his/her ideology and a pattern of life. It entails the acceptance on the part of the individual to be educated. The opportunity that exists for the individual, the environmental factors that favour such action and above all the funding of the programme tie up a system that protects men than women. According to Dubey (Petetomode, 1992), education is a way through which a society answers its stability by making people in that society learn expected behaviour and rules of polity (Udokang 2004).

Education is the transmission of cultural heritage of the past in a refined manner that smite the current and next generations. In summary, education, be it formal or informal transmits values, norms, customs and traditions from one generation to another.

How are women's poverty reflected in the educational sector then? Girls, all over the world are disadvantaged education wise. Where girls in developed countries have almost equal opportunities in terms of education, there still exist some discrimination in the subjects-studied.

DISCRIMINATION IN WAGE AND TRAINING: A SOURCE OF WOMEN'S POVERTY

When rural women do participate in wage labour economy, they face discrimination which results in lower wage rates. In the developing economies, such as Africa states, trying to meet local needs through cottage industries especially agro-based forms is confronted with discrimination in terms of who heads the organization. Managing institutions as such goes with who is the assistant to the helmsperson. And other important positions including job classifications and wages and salaries are especially important in considering the level women can get.

In Nigeria, women are the major participants in the production of sustainable food items while the men engage in industrial ventures and other forms of business. Since rural women are particularly confined to the areas of sustainable food items, they remain perpetually less empowered and therefore engaged in poor quality of life. In

most countries of Africa, the lowest paid jobs are reserved for women. For example, in Nigeria, women are seen carrying block and cement mud during building construction while men remain as contractors, that is, the people overseeing those jobs. Strawberry processing plants in Zanora employ 10,000 young rural women to stem strawberries select and pack them at wages well below the gnarl minimum (Arizioe and Aranda, 1986).

In the Philippines, women who work in sugar haciendas earn 2-3 pesos to men's 4-5. More than half of the working women in Java-Indonesia earn less than 3,000 rupiahs per year (Dankelman and Davidson, 1996). Only 14 percent of men earn so little.

In Nigeria, the ratio of male/female trained in the various agricultural extension programmes remain a mirage. In a study conducted by FAO, out of 46 African countries less than 4 percent of extension workers who advise women are themselves women. (FAO 1984). Women have not been privileged to have the opportunity educating themselves as the men.

A STUDY CARRIED OUT IN AKWA IBOM STATE ON FEMINIZED POVERTY

Data Presentation and Analysis

Demographic Data Table 1

Uyo Senatorial District (20-30)	30	30
Eket Senatorial District (31-50)	40	40
Etinan Senatorial District (5T and above)	30	30
Total	100	100

Qualifications Table 2

F.S.L.C	30	30
SSCE	50	50
OND AND HND	20	20
1 st Degree and above	10	10
Total	100	100

Table 3

Variable	Respondents
No, I do not	95
I do only on the curtsey of my brothers	5
Total	100

Question 6 states thus: I have difficulty in expanding my trade because of lack of capital.

Table 4

Variable	Responds	Percentage
Yes, I do	50	50
No, I do not	30	30
I am a civil servant	30	30
Total	100	100

Question 7: States thus: Women are allowed to preach in my church.

Table 5

Variable	Responds	Percentage
No, they are not	50	50
Yes, they do	30	30
It does not matter who preaches	20	20
Total	100	100

Carried out by men in our village council

Table 6

Variable	Responds	Percentage
No, they are not	95	95
Women also do have their activities	5	5
Total	100	100

Question 7: The Akwa Ibom State society gives equal preference to both male and female children

Table 7

Variable	Responds	Percentages
Yes, I do	50	50
No, I do not	20	20
I am a civil servant	30	30
Total	100	100

DISCUSSION

Information from respondents reveals that 50 percent of respondents said they had difficulty in expanding their economic venture for lack of capital. They said they are not privileged to inherit property from their paternal family (see table 3). Table 4 shows that 50 percent said yes, they have problems, 20 percent of the respondents indicated they had no problem expanding their business, while 30 percent indicated they are civil servants.

324 On table five is found information revealing women's position in some churches. 50 percent of the respondents indicated that women are not allowed to preach in their churches, 30 percent said yes, while 20 percent said it does not matter whether it is a man or a woman that preaches to them.

On the table 6 is found information about women's position within a village while performing traditional activities. A 95 percent of the respondents indicated that where traditional activities especially (rites) are performed by the village council, women are not allowed to participate. A 5 percent of the respondents indicated that women do also have their own activities to perform.

On table 7 is found information on the female children's position in Akwa Ibom state. A 50 percent of the respondents indicated that Akwa Ibom state gives the same preference to both male and female children. A 70 percent of these respondents said it is a false statement that Akwa Ibom state gives same preference to female and male children. A 20 percent of the respondents said children are given by God. What conclusions or lessons can be drawn from this study?

CONCLUSION AND LESSON

What we gather from these tabulations and analyses is that women have been disadvantaged to the extent that feminizing poverty has become a cultural attitude towards women as a whole. But we need to know that with the changing times, women are organizing to change things and there is every tendency that in the next one or two decade/s the story of women will change.

However, information from the respondents matched with the view of some authors that help the researcher to conclude that feminized poverty for women is on the increase. Women continue to be impoverished in the Nigerian society, *vis-a-vis* the Akwa Ibom state society as the men continue to enforce the only harmful discriminatory traditional practices and women's financial bases continue to be poor.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN EFFECTIVE POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA.

- 1 Poverty Alleviation Programmes are not effectively targeting the right group. For example, when the Better Life for Rural Women was operated, the rich people and not the poor benefited. Rich women fronted the women groups and collected money which was meant for such groups.
- 2 The Funds allocated by Government to Poverty Alleviation Arms of Government are often diverted to other areas. Money meant for certain programmes are often not effectively utilized.
- 3 Female children who are mainly Hawkers are impregnated and the burden of poverty on them is increased. They have no alternative than hawk. A survey carried out by the author of this survey revealed that 8 percent of hawkers

are females. When they are taken as house helps, their poverty and the poverty of their mistresses increase. 325

4 Poor Education Police in some states

The poor policy in education in some states in the Nigeria, especially in Akwa Ibom, leaves much to be desired. The Universal free primary Education has ceased to be free. Primary school children pay school fees and buy their books. This happens also in the secondary and university education. The university education has sky rocked to about N60, 000.00 per semester and only very few parents can afford this. Females who want to try from poor homes end up as sex workers which eventually earn them deadly diseases.

Poor Implementation of Poverty Reduction Programmes

More than 10 programmes in Nigeria have been experimented towards poverty reduction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There should be well co-ordinated gender targeting. Targeting women for real sector development and effective poverty reduction in Nigeria is recommended. It is easier to identify the recipient than in any other group.
2. Women can be encouraged to increase their production in animal industry. For example, in the southern part of Nigeria, women are effective keepers and rearers of animals like goats and sheep. In some western part of Nigeria, women do rear sheep for purpose of sheep milk. The increased attention of the role of women in food production stems among other reasons, from the fact that women mostly account for the management of small livestock including sheep milk which can most abundantly be found among women in Akure.
3. Public spending should be increased with regards to women activities. For example, government should be able to subsidize the investment of women who embark on cottage industries since they lack the necessary fund to take their investment to a higher level.
4. Women should be given loans without collaterals and some structures imposed by banks and financial houses. It is noted that even some husbands refuse to sign bonds allowing their wives to get loans from either the bank or other financial houses.
5. Since women are more vulnerable to contact of venereal diseases, it is recommended that government should provide free health services to women for screening of cancers of all types. A CNN programme of 8th October, 2005, revealed that drugs have been produced for cure and prevention of cervix cancers. Globalization and interest service has made it possible for Nigeria to be aware of recent events happening abroad. Many women are dying because of attack of cancer and other related diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

6. Women are the largest producers of food items, both for sustainable and for export. As done in Burkina Faso, women in Nigeria should be encouraged in the food production by providing them with storage for vegetable products. Although this is done in Burkina Faso by an outside group, it is within the reach of the Nigeria government to encourage their women in the food production industry.
7. There should exist an effective and sufficient functional social welfare department to take care of children born out of wedlock, such children become the burden of their 'baby mother' and their grandmothers. If these children born out of wedlock are taken care of, the poverty will be reduced in most homes.

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