

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACHIEVEMENTS OF WOMEN IN NIGERIA

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Abstract – Women in Nigeria constitutes a large number of the population. They are noted globally as the main support for socio-economic development in Nigeria, but they have been continually marginalized from many spheres of life in terms of lack of education, financial empowerment, and cultural norms. This is seen through the visible disparity in socio-economic and political status in the country. Although some progress has been recorded in the last decade on efforts to address the incessant challenges of women in socio-economic development in Nigeria, more is still left to be desired in the fight for women empowerment and inclusion in key decision-making processes. This has often sparked insightful debates across Nigeria, like many advocates for the involvement of more women in the country's socio-economic development affairs. Consequently, this paper seeks to examine the problem of Nigerian Women's role in socio-economic development, challenges, achievements, and prospects. Using the feminist theory, which advocates for equality of the sexes in socio-economic participation across boards to enhance growth in the country? This paper analyzes the role and achievements of women in socio-economic development, using secondary data such as journals, books, the internet, etc. The study concludes that 50% of women inclusion in socio-economic development areas will promote huge socio-economic dividends and growth in Nigeria.

Keywords: Socio-economic, Development, Feminist Theory, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the pre-colonial era to the early 21st century, the status and role of the Nigerian women have continuously evolved. However, the oppressed, marginalized, insecure image of this group have remained grossly understudied, and little attention has been given to the numerous integral functions the Nigerian women have carried out through history. Before the colonization of the country, women participated in key social and economic activities. There was the division of labor among gender lines, and the Nigerian women oversaw occupations such as cooking, pottery making, fishing, mat weaving, farming, buying, and selling, etc. Moreover, there was communal living, and the land was owned by women, who equally had access to it through their parents or spouses. Although in a patrilineal setting, a man was the head of the household, older women controlled the labor of younger members of the family. Women in Nigeria were also central to buying and selling (petty trade).

Notably among many tribes, were the Tiv, the Igbo, and the Yoruba, who were the main figures in long-distance trade, with numerous opportunities for gathering and acquiring wealth and titles. The most successful and viable among them rose to the prestigious and enviable chieftaincy title of Tor-Kwase, Ahebi Ugbabe, and Iyalode, a position of great privilege, rights, and power. Politically, women were not as passive or powerless as portrayed by modern-day research and literature. The family was the basic unit of political organization which was usually led by women. This was a common and unique matrifocal arrangement that permitted women to have considerable authority over their children. They and their offspring formed a major deciding bloc in their households. Power, rights, and privileges in a household were also largely based on gender and age, thereby allowing most senior women to exercise their voices on several issues. As the public and private environments were interwoven, the women's ability to control people and resources in a household was similarly an exercise in public power. To gain respect and honor, the women could use the production of food as a major tool. They could control and influence their children and men through this power. Even the power of the gods or spirit could be evoked by the women to gain favor. Similarly, women could simply use their kitchen as an avenue for meetings and interactions with their children, friends, and colleagues.

The annual festivals in Nigeria such as the New Yam festivals, the Calabar festival, the Tiv Traditional Day (TTD), also provide an avenue for the women to meet and deliberate on socio-economic problems and make insightful decisions. However, power was generally dominated by men beyond the household level, but in many specific areas, titles were given to the women. The queen (mother), a well-respected and powerful title among the Tiv, Edo, and Yoruba, was bestowed upon the king's mother or an ordinary woman of substantial status. In her own palace, the queen (mother) oversaw meetings, with the support of her subordinate title holders. Also, the Yoruba and Hausa legends have described eras when the women were either the actual heroines or kings. Famous among these legendary figures were the Queen Amina of Zaria, the Moremi of Ile-Ife, Princess Inikpi of Igala kingdom, who were the powerful queens in the Daura, Ondo, and the Igala histories.

However, the advent of the 20th century posed the most serious influence and challenges to the rights and privileges of Nigerian women. This was the period patriarchy met with the colonial transformation, as the British colonial masters collaborated with the Nigerian male chiefs in communal activities that had existed between the gender, such as tax collection and governance which brought a decline in the position and relevance of the female chiefs and the change in relationships with the duo. Thus, the Nigerian economy began to blossom towards cash crops production for exportation, the European enterprises and the Nigerian men dominated the distribution of such crops like palm oil, cocoa, rubber, groundnut, cotton, etc. This relegated the women to the background to the production of only subsistence crops, giving way to the commercialization of their lands favored by only those with money from the sale of cash crops, who could afford to acquire these. Similarly, the system of western education the colonial masters brought favored the boy child over the girl child. Hence, it excluded largely the women from various new occupations introduced by the British colonial masters.

Today, the most potent tool of change for contemporary women in Nigeria is the formal system of education which has enabled many elite women to emerge educated, intelligent, confident, and proactive on the socio-economic stage. They are in many leading occupations within the country and overseas with the ability to question and challenge the patriarchic nature of the Nigerian system in aspects of culture, socio-economic, politics, and many other ways.

In this paper, we shall critically examine the socio-economic development achievements of women in Nigeria and identify the various socio-economic activities, challenges, and prospects of the women in Nigeria, using secondary data such as journals, books, the internet, etc. Furthermore, the paper underscores the lack of women inclusion in socio-economic pathways to enhance development in Nigeria. It explores the feminist theory that advocates for equality of the sexes in socio-economic involvement across boards to enhance growth in the country. The study concludes that 50% of women inclusion in socio-economic development policies and decision-making processes will achieve growth in Nigeria.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Feminist theory is known as a range of ideologies, social, and political movements that share a common objective too, establish and define in order to achieve the socio-economic and political rights for women that are the same as those of their male counterparts. This means various equal opportunities for women in sectors of education and employment. With its origin from the West in the late 14th- and early 15th-century by the first feminist philosopher, Christine de Pisan in France, feminism challenges the prevailing attitudes towards women with a bold call for the education of all women in the society. Throughout history, women have been confined to the domestic sphere of life, while public life is reserved for only men. Towards the end of the 19th century, women were compelled to cover their heads while in public places in France, and, in some parts of Germany, a husband could sell out his wife because he had the rights. Until recently, women could neither vote nor hold elective offices in Africa, Europe, and in most parts of the United States. Some parts of the world still uphold such restrictions on women, especially in the Middle East and Asia.

Hence, the feminist groups have continued to advocate for the rights of women, such as the right to vote, education, and opportunity to hold public positions, right to work, and earn fair wages or equal pay to their male counterparts, to own properties, to have equal rights within the matrimonial space, and to have access to maternity leave. Feminists have also advocated for the freedom and the integrity to protect women from sexual abuse, rape, and domestic violence. Generally, these are campaigns considered to be the main forces behind many historical societal changes in society regarding the rights of women's rights around the world. Today, feminism is

represented globally by various philosophers and institutions committed to the rights of women and their interests. It is on this standpoint of the feminist theory that the Nigerian women are currently motivated, inspired, and encouraged to owe advocacy institutions and to embark on the appeal for the inclusion of more women in the socio-economic and political activities in order to boost development in Nigeria.

3. THE CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

There are various meanings associated with the term development. The concept is complex and usually debated by many in very elusive and ambiguous ways. However, development can be defined as bringing about social change that allows people to achieve their human potential (soas.ac.uk). Others see development as an important political term. Development is viewed in different contexts and may also be used to showcase and justify a variety of agendas held by many organizations and people. The most significant point is that development is not an outcome, it is an ongoing process. It is dynamic, which means it involves a transformation from one condition to another. Development in international parlance, therefore, encompasses the need and how to provide better lives for people in poor countries. It is not limited to economic growth alone, but human capital development, the provision of healthcare, food and nutrition, access to quality education, and a clean environment (Globalization101.org).

Development is not simply the interactions between human beings; it involves the natural environment, which is the conversion of natural resources to cultural resources (soas.ac.uk).

In this study, we shall examine development in two perspectives, social and economic. Social Development focuses on the need to “put people first” in development processes. Poverty is more than low income; it is also about vulnerability, exclusion, unaccountable institutions, powerlessness, and exposure to violence. Social Development promotes the social inclusion of the poor and vulnerable by empowering people, building cohesive and resilient societies, and making institutions accessible and accountable to citizens (World Bank, 2019). Social development also means working with governments, communities, civil society, the private sector, and the marginalized, including persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples, Social Development translates the complex relationship between societies and states into operations (World Bank, 2019).

Empirical evidence and operational experience show that Social Development promotes economic growth and leads to better interventions and a higher quality of life (World Bank, 2019). Similarly, development is seen as a multi-dimensional process to achieve a higher quality of life for all the people. Economic development, social development, and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development (United Nations, 2020). For these reasons, "The empowerment of women and their full participation on a basis of equality in all spheres of society is fundamental for development (United Nations, 2020).

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN IN NIGERIA

The women in Nigeria are the main reservoir of every human activity as they control the major socio-economic life wire of the country. These include agriculture, domestic labor, childbearing, petty trading, subsistence, etc. In ZakiBiam in Ukum local government area of Benue State, the women farm yams in large quantities for export. This agricultural engagement has created the biggest yam market in Nigeria. It has also employed many women, adding to the socio-economic development of the area and the country at large. They also play a significant role in entrepreneurial skills such as hair making, sewing, baking, and cooking. Women act as a key pillar of employment in Nigeria. They are regarded as the currency on which both socio-economic and political transactions and alliances are built.

The women in Nigeria have made some great impact on their support and contribution to the development of the nation, through the fierce resistance of various marginalization processes, starting from the British colonial era to forestall and include women in socio-economic engagements. This can be seen through the numerous protest by Nigerian women, such as the Abeokuta women uprising (the Egba Women's Tax protest) led by the Abeokuta Women Union (AWU) in the late 1940s, against the high imposition of undue taxes by the Nigerian colonial masters. Under the colonial rule, the women believed that their socio-economic roles were declining as their taxes increased. They debated that they should not be required to pay taxes different from men if they were not granted

representation in the local government authority. As a result of this, four women got representative seats at the local government authority and stopped the taxation of women.

In November 1929, the Aba Women's Riots popularly referred to as the Women's War, led by thousands of rural women of Calabar and Owerri provinces, all from the six ethnic groups (Igbo, Bonny, Ibibio, Ogoni, Opobo, and Andoni) in the eastern part of Nigeria, was a protest against the Warrant Chiefs who were accused of perpetual restriction of women in governance positions. From history, this action is the first in West Africa and has been considered the most strategic anti-colonial execution planned and organized by the Nigerian women to address socio-economic and political injustices in Nigeria. The events also forced the warrant Chiefs to resign while 16 native courts were ambushed and most destroyed. In 1930 the system of Warrant Chiefs was abolished by the British colonial government, and women were appointed to the Native Court system.

These protests and reforms were set up by the Nigerian women and have been a preliminary measure to the advent of a multitude of Nigerian/ African anti-colonial nationalism. The active participation of many women in socio-economic activities is a great phenomenon that has come to stay. The Nigerian society has witnessed amazons such as Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Kasevkiidun u Tiv(Mrs.Lubona), Madam Tinubu of Lagos and other few activists, women have generally been relegated to the background in political participation. But national and international debates on this scenario seem to be gaining momentum since the Beijing Conference in 2005.

The Nigerian women have broken even such that they are currently a force to reckon with in the socio-economic developmental processes of the country. In 1979-1983, which was the second republic, Mrs. Franca Afegbua emerged as Nigeria's first female senator. From the fourth republic in 1999 – 2007), the first female speaker, Mrs. Margaret Icheen emerged from the Benue State house of assembly, making her the first in entire Africa at that time. Also, three women were elected to the house of the senate (upper chamber) while fifteen got elected to the House of Representatives (Lower chamber). The period of the fourth republic is believed by many as the re-awakening for the Nigerian women in respect to political appointments and elected offices. President Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian government favored several women as they were adequately involved in visibly key areas with relevant and prominent portfolios. The Aviation and Transport ministries were led by women, the ministers of state for science and technology, and the sensitive ministry of finance was headed by a woman (Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala). The leadership of these women proved that they possess the desired quality, characters, and talents required both for domestic enhancement of human wellbeing and the international reputation of Nigeria.

5. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN NIGERIA

Socio-economic challenges are the various factors that have negative effects on the livelihood of individuals' socio-economic activities. These include but not limited to, lack of education, cultural norms, financial empowerment, etc. As socio-economic activities are known to affect and shape humanity, we shall discuss below three key challenges as the effect of the existence and development achievements of the women in Nigeria.

5.1. Lack of Education: Education is the process of acquiring skills, knowledge, beliefs, habits, and values through training, teaching, training, discussion, and directed research. This is usually done in formal and informal settings under the guidance of educators. It is largely a formative impact on how one thinks, acts, or feels. In 1948, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights recognized and adopted education as a basic human right. But all through history, this has remained unimplemented as the women in Nigeria refused this fundamental human right and have faced various obstacles to obtaining a certain level of formal education. In many other climes such as Europe and America, the quality of education represents a huge integral indicator in the development of human capital and investment. The rapid socio-economic development of many countries has been observed to rely majorly on the number and quality of educated women in the country. For instance, if the women in Nigeria are well equipped with the knowledge about the Covid-19 pandemic and understand the necessary precautions to indulge in, they will operate from an informed stand and in turn educate their families and the small communities they live in (Albert-Makyur,2020). Education bestows on the women a disposition of acceptance and inclusion for the competences and skills they have, and the ability to nurture ideas and to add value to the society. The National Policy on Education states that access to education is a right for all Nigerian children regardless of gender, religion, and disability to have equal access to education, (National Policy on Education,2004). This is far-fetched as many Nigerian girls and women remain out of school in the 21st century. This has grossly affected the desired

productivity to grow the nation's wealth as the majority of its popular who are women are incapable of adding values.

5.2. Financial Empowerment: Empowerment itself is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions. Financial empowerment, therefore, is the transfer of personal money power (financial independence) to an individual. It is a process of moving from financial instability to a position of financial stability through investment (Duncan, B.P & Harris, A, 2018). Financial empowerment is important to every individual, men, and women alike. A nation that has its population financially empowered is endowed as its citizens feel happy, and can exercise confidence, satisfaction, peace, and joy in all that they do, thus could be productive and live fulfilled lives. Studies show that citizens that are empowered with finances have more positive experiences even within the range of low-income earners. This translates into growth in the nation. The women empowerment is an ongoing socio-economic process that involves empowering Nigerian women as a mechanism to reduce poverty in Nigeria. This means the development of women in socio-economic and political power. It also reduces the over-dependency and vulnerability of women in all aspects of life. It is argued that the major rate of growth in Nigeria is because of the little socio-economic, educational, health, political, and legal empowerment of women in Nigeria. Like many other women in African, Nigerian women play a subordinate role to their male counterparts. The women live majorly below the poverty line than men and take up fewer executive positions than men in Nigeria. This and various other challenges stand as an impediment to socio-economic development in the country.

5.3. Cultural Norms: These are things that bind people to move in a similar direction. The term 'culture' refers to attitudes and patterns of behavior in each group. 'Norm' refers to attitudes and behaviors that are approved as typical, normal, or average within a certain group. Every nation has cultural norms that influence every facet of the citizen's lives, including their attitudes, how they behave, what they value, even though most often unaware that they are been influenced at all. The women in Nigeria have faced socio-economic challenges in the quest to build a progressive nation since the pre-colonial periods. Traditionally, in Nigeria, the duties of women were revolved around the domestic care of the entire family and child-rearing, with roles clearly and rigidly defined, they automatically assumed the positions of washing, cooking, farming, etc. Even when they were married, they saw themselves as objects to be seen only and not to be heard. This scenario has created male supremacy and dominance culture with little attention or consideration given to the feelings and thoughts of women in many spheres of existence. Another key challenge is patriarchy, a system or an arrangement where the identification of generation is done through the male offspring, and the responsibility of continuity and preserving the status of the family tree clearly rests on the male children, with special attention and preparation for their adult duties. However, women are expected to conform to the dominance of men and subjection, making them incapable of making sound decisions and unable to express themselves or contest for public offices. The undue discrimination, marginalization, and exploitation by male dominance through the implementation of cultural norms/beliefs, religions, and traditional prejudices placed the men folks as superior human beings above women, thereby inhibiting socio-economic and political participation and growth in Nigeria.

6. SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACHEIVEMENTS OF WOMEN IN NIGERIA

Even though Nigeria provides a good case-study for underdevelopment in the modern world, characterized by a range of major socio-economic challenges such as lack of education, unemployment, insecurity, diseases, etc. There are a few remarkable milestones achieved by the women in Nigeria in the 21st century. We shall identify a few sectors where many women have achieved and made a socio-economic impact in the country. The year 2018 has been great and remarkable for Nigerian women in the space of politics and governance. This period saw many women rise above numerous stereotypes by taking bold steps towards national engagement and development. Several notable women made progressive efforts and achievements in the sectors they were leading.

Dr. Obiageli Ezekwesili, was the former Minister of Education Minister. She performed excellently by making good education policies for the nation and encouraged women to go to school. She led the Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG), an advocacy group to demand from the federal government to release the remaining Chibok schoolgirls who were abducted by an insurgent group known as the Boko Haram in Chibok, north-east Nigeria, and many other Nigerians in captivity. As an active and patriotic citizen who is tired of the existing status quo, Dr. Obiageli Ezekwesili took a bold step to join the race to lead Nigeria as a presidential flagbearer of the Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN). Although Obiageli stepped down at some point due to personal reasons, this great move

encouraged more women in Nigeria to enroll in politics. Obiageli has continued to inspire many youths in Nigerian over the years, to believe that a new Nigeria is possible and achievable with the right, visionary, and committed leadership.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (Dr.) is an expert in the economist and international development. she occupied the World Bank Group seat as the Managing Director from the year 2007-2011. She was the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2003-2006, and Minister for Finance and the Coordinating Minister of the Economy during President Goodluck Jonathan's administration in 2011. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala served for two tenure because of her development and financial expertise and contribution to the socio-economic growth in Nigeria. Delivered on her mainstream job by saving the economy from recession, and through the dangerous fight against corruption in Nigeria. There are many prestigious awards and positions that accrues to this pursuit of development. Currently, Okonjo-Iweala is the Special Envoy to Mobilize International Economic Support for Continental Fight against the Covid-19 pandemic (African Union,2020).

Justice AdebukolaBanjoko of the supreme court was the first-class justice to serve in that capacity. In 2018, Justice Banjoko convicted and sent two former governors, Jolly Nyame and Joshua Dariye, to jail. This restored the hope of many Nigerians in the country's judiciary system. It was a great achievement that encourages young female Nigeria to pursue a career in the legal profession.

Kemi Adeosun led Nigeria's ministry of finance during the recession in 2016. Adeosun got the country out of recession through hard work, dedication, and commitment. Adeosun also initiated some policies such as the Whistle blowing policy which has led to the recovery of over N540 billion looted funds. Through the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), thousands of ghost workers were discovered and removed from the government payroll. Another policy is the implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA), which saved billions of government funds and has been channeled towards the provision of infrastructure across Nigeria. These and many more are the socio-economic achievements by reputable women to enhance development in Nigeria.

Amina Mohammed was the former Minister of Environment who led the Ogoni cleanup initiative. Presently, Amina heads the United Nations as a Deputy Secretary-General, with optimal track record of performance through the achievements of the project on millennium Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria. Abike Dabiri-Erewa is known as a seasoned journalist and lawmaker. Currently the Senior Special Assistant on Foreign and Diaspora Affairs to President Buhari's administration. Abike has worked very hard to discourage and protect many young Nigerians from illegally leaving the shores of the country. This major role has seen the repatriation of those trapped in Libya, Lebanon, and the killing of Nigerians in South Africa and many other foreign countries.

MosunmolaAbudu, popularly known as Mo Abudu, is the first woman to own a pan-African TV channel in Nigeria and the rest of the continent (Pulse,2019). Mo Abudu has employed many Nigerian women in the industry. This establishment has added value to the efforts of the government in Nigeria. Having more women at the core of planning and implementation will bring a gender approach which is called good governance (Albert-Makyur, 2020).

Finally, women such as Sarah Jibril, Virginia Etiaba, General Aderonke Kale, and many others have contributed immensely to their various fields of life to the socio-economic development in Nigeria. The entertainment sector is also not left behind as Nigerian women have made laudable achievements. Notable among them are women like Agbani Darego -Model and Beauty Queen. The first woman from Nigeria and Africa to win the Miss World crown. With this title, Agbanihas encouraged and supported Nigerian women to embrace the beauty world and innovate cosmetics and body beauty products to earn a good living.

7. FINDINGS

The women in Nigeria have been neglected from socio-economic activities since the pre-colonial era. This is a result of a lack of education, lack of financial empowerment, and cultural norms, thereby preventing Nigeria from the developmental objectives it desires. Women are known to nurture and add value. If included, there will be equal balance and stability in society. This has been witnessed globally in seven notable countries with feminist leadership such as Denmark, Germany, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Taiwan, and New Zealand. These leaders who are women have been recognized to have managed the Covid-19 crisis very well. However, in Nigeria, no woman

is involved in the Presidential Task Force (PTF) or the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC).

8. CONCLUSION

The pre-historic era has overwhelming evidence from what has been examined in this study, that women are a productive and formidable force for all nations to reckon with. They are a store of incredibly human resources required for every society's development. Their huge contributions and value-adding mechanism cannot be underestimated in households and national socio-economic achievements. The present role of women in national development is astonishing towards the security, peace, and direction of the socio-economic activities in Nigeria. To identify and harness their incredible human resources to ensure the best performance in socio-economic development, great attention should be made for holistic empowerment and development of women along the following lines.

- a. A financial policy from the Nigerian government through its central bank for women to acquire loans with no interest rate but redeemable within a year. This will boost businesses run by women and enable them to add socio-economic value to society
- b. Establishment of Agricultural-business women cooperatives. This will encourage socio-economic network and development activities.
- c. A national education policy to encourage the participation and enlightenment campaigns in primary /secondary schools to emphasize the involvement of the young girls in choice of subjects like their counterparts. This will build a formidable structure for continuity in socio-economic developments in Nigeria.
- d. Basic and quality education for the women in Nigeria especially those in the rural areas. They should be given equal training and employment opportunities with their male counterparts. This will provide a multiplier effect on the education of young women in Nigeria.
- e. Political programs and parties should involve women in politics through vigorous campaigns of enlightenment and bring out procedures on incorporating them for elective positions both at local and national levels.
- f. The Nigeria nation needs to remove or abolish the responsibility of institutional, artificial, and cultural norms/barriers hinged on culture and religious considerations which have incapacitated the ability of Nigerian women to effectively and freely participate in local and national affairs particularly at the social, economic and political levels.

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