

Feminization of Poverty in Nigeria and Challenges of Sustainable Development and National Security

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Abstract

The feminization of poverty is a serious social problem which is excruciatingly bedeviling the socio-economic and political development of the numerous Nigerian women particularly in the north eastern part of the country comprising some states such as Borno, Yobe, Adamawa and others. The paper vividly explores a plethora of factors which were responsible for the feminization of poverty and how it adversely affects the womenfolk. Some of the factors explored in the paper were in the area of education, health, food security, crimes and economic development of the womenfolk. It was strongly argued that as a result of poverty and social deprivations, many Nigerian women especially in the north were at disadvantaged educationally; they suffered from nutritional diseases, hunger and starvation; they engaged in crimes such as corruption, Boko Haram insurgency, cattle rustling and kidnapping of innocent people, and also economically, the women were left behind. However, the solutions to the challenges encountered by women have also been adequately proffered in the paper and it is for their progress and development. These include the intensification of the education of women; the provision of quality health care services; the intensification of agricultural education for women and enhancement of food security; the reinforcement of community policing and Criminal Justice System for the control of crimes and finally, it was recommended that the government should establish more industries in order to create job opportunities which could ginger sustainable development and national security for the women in Nigeria. However, the methodology that was adopted in the paper was the qualitative method whereby the author of the paper specifically placed emphasis on the content analysis which involves the use of textbooks, pamphlets, research journals etc. and also, all the literatures consulted were relevant to the topic of the paper which is Feminization of Poverty in Nigeria and Challenges of Sustainable Development and National Security.

Keywords:

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Background to the Study

As the world is now transforming into a global village that is a single community that is connected by electronic communication systems, the fundamental roles that the women are anticipated to play towards the socio-cultural, political and economic development of the nation in different parts of the world Nigeria inclusive cannot be underestimated. If the womenfolk can be adequately empowered educationally, they can excel better. With the basic knowledge and skills, they can acquire, they can offer mammoth contributions towards the production of children who would be socially responsible and facilitate the rapid development of the nation in Nigeria. In the area of agriculture for example, the womenfolk who have the potential knowledge of agriculture can make gigantic moves towards bringing about development by feeding the nations and also create job opportunities for the people to be self-reliant and self-sustaining. However, the politics and law are the other areas where the womenfolk can offer generous contributions for development if they can be sufficiently empowered. The women for example, who are adequately equipped with the knowledge of law and politics can be dynamic and exemplary leaders capable of maintaining social control and conformity which subsequently enhance rapid development of Nigeria as a nation. To sum it up, if the womenfolk can be collectively empowered, they can control and develop the economy of Nigeria because they are the potential agents of change.

The feminization of poverty most particularly in the rural areas of Nigeria is now increasingly becoming a serious social problem which is adversely bedeviling the development of Nigeria as a nation and some strategies need to be deployed by the government in order to substantially improve the situations. The Nigerian women especially in the rural areas are highly impoverished in almost all the sectors of the economy - education, food security, health, industry, politics etc. Nigeria is a country which is vastly endowed with a plethora of natural resources—human, agricultural, solid mineral, atmospheric, water resources etc. and it unfortunately occurs that the resources of the country are not being efficiently and effectively harnessed in such a manner that the masses and the women in particular can be empowered for development. Despite the gargantuan resources blessed with Nigeria, the poverty is one of the ubiquitous features of the country as it was one of the 25 poorest countries of the world in the previous years (Khalid, 2011). According to a 2016 UN report cited in Alubo 2016, Nigeria is one of the poorest and most unequal countries in the world with over 80 million or 64% of her population living below the poverty line. Poverty and hunger have remained high in rural areas, remote communities and among female headed households and these cut across the six geo political zones, with prevalence ranging from approximately 46.9% in the southwest to 74.3% in northwest and northeast (Alubo, 2016).

Feminization of Poverty in Nigeria and Challenges of Sustainable Development and National Security is a paper which vividly explains the challenges of poverty encountered by the Nigerian women most particularly in the rural areas of the country and also the challenges are in the areas of education, food security, health and the economy in general. Greater emphasis is however placed on the north-eastern part of Nigeria which is an area or zone adversely affected by the 'Boko Haram' insurgency that claimed the precious lives and valuable properties of numerous innocent people despite

the efforts being made by the Federal Government of Nigeria, the Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) and other highly committed and patriotic stakeholders towards the restoration of normalcy in the area.

Conceptual Framework

Poverty

The concept of poverty is relative because what is perceived as poverty in one society may not be a poverty in another society but the fundamental fact is that, it is a social problem. Aigbokan (2000), defines poverty as the inability to achieve a certain minimal standard of living. The minimal standard of living here, comprises the food, shelter and clothing that an individual person cannot live without them because they are the basic necessities of life which are highly required for growth and survival. Poverty can also be defined as a situation of pronounced deprivation of wellbeing (World Bank, 2000). The wellbeing here entails a condition of satisfaction and the capability to function well in the society so that progress and development can be adequately attained. Poverty can also be perceived as a state of hunger, lack of shelter, sickness, inability to visit health centres for medical services (Kura, 2011). It may also be perceived as socio-economic and political deprivation which may result in lack of access to basic necessities of life (Nasir, 2002). However, the concept of poverty has also been defined as a condition of a lack of political and social visibility as well as basic requirements to sustain physically healthy existence through sufficient food, clothing and shelter acquired for normal functioning of mankind.

From the foregoing, it can be clearly understood that poverty is a formidable issue that is posing threats to human lives as it deprives them so many opportunities which can ginger socio economic and political development of societies. The 'Boko Haram' saga and other forms of insecurities especially in the north-eastern states of Nigeria such as Borno, Yobe, Adamawa etc. have contributed tremendously in the pauperization and impoverishment of many womenfolk, a challenge which urgently needs the continuous intervention of government and stakeholders for development (Alubo 2016).

Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development is fundamentally important in the paper because it is something which many societies especially the developing ones are painstakingly and assiduously aspiring to attain. Most of the countries of Europe and America which are industrially developed today are the countries characterized by high level sustainable development. According to the Bruntland Commission (1987), sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. However, the concept of sustainable development can also be defined as the process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potentials, over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems (Munasinghe, 2004).

In a developing country like Nigeria, sustainable development can be successfully attained when the womenfolk are sufficiently empowered by the government at the

Federal, State and Local Government level especially in the north-eastern part of the country where the struggle to achieve development has become a formidable challenge due to the Boko Haram insurgency which claimed the lives of many innocent people in the country. However, the empowerment of women should be specifically on education, health, food security and the general economic development.

National Security

The issue of national security especially in Nigeria is something that is of utmost importance because it is an unarguable fact that the attainment of sustainable development is not likely to be attained when the national security is seriously threatened. In the context of this paper, the concept of national security entails the activities involved in protecting a country and its people against the foreign attack or danger which may be obnoxious to the lives of the masses. National security may also be described as a capacity to control those domestic and foreign conditions that the public opinion of a given community believes necessary to enjoy its own self determination or autonomy, prosperity and wellbeing (Ojukwu, 2011). Nigeria now is practicing a democratic system which is an idea incorporated in the country from the United States of America and the only thing that can aid the Nigerian democracy to be sustainable is the effective national security where the masses can have a happier life and live comfortably and enjoyably with each other for development. All the issues on women empowerment and development especially in the north-eastern states of Nigeria such as Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa in particular can only be attained when a conducive atmosphere for national security is adequately created and also, thanks to all the efforts that the Federal Government of Nigeria is making under the able leadership of president Muhammadu Buhari towards the restoration of normalcy in those areas.

Theoretical Framework

Normally, a theory is set of idea which explains something. A research is anticipated to be buttressed by a theory because it provides a foundation stone for its development. The researcher underpinned the paper with the 'Feminist Theory' of 'Gender Inequality' whereby the author of the paper decided to place greater emphasis on the 'Radical Feminism'. The feminist theory of gender inequality was propounded by Atkinson cited in Ritzer, 2008 which first of all postulates that the women are of absolute value as women but they are universally devalued by men. The theory further explains that the women have fundamental roles to play as they are wives and mothers who produce children; they take care of men and they also contribute substantially in shaping the society in such a manner that progress and development can be effectively achieved.

Going by the fundamental assumptions of the theory, it can be asserted that since the women have the capacity to offer their own contributions towards the development of the society, there is the need for them to be enormously empowered by the government, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders who are potential agents of development. It is a well known fact the empowerment of women can aid them in no small measure to the development of distinct sectors of the society viz education, health, agriculture, politics and the general revitalization and improvement of the economy

where the challenges of hunger and poverty can be eradicated or brought to the barest minimum in the society.

The Women and Challenges of Sustainable Development and National Security in Nigeria

A lot of challenges exist which adversely affect women in Nigeria towards the attainment of sustainable development and national security and also, all these challenges occur due to feminization of poverty especially in the north eastern part of the country where the Boko Haram insurgency is gravely posing threats to the lives of the masses.

The following are some of the challenges:

Poverty and Women Education

Education can be referred to as the process of acquiring or imparting knowledge and skills to the people and it is something which is fundamentally significant as it becomes a weapon of liberation from ignorance, poverty and diseases as well as a tool for the achievement of sustainable national security and development. Education is a way of fighting against poverty in the society. However, Education is also a philosophical as well as a sociological concept denoting ideologies, curricula and pedagogical techniques of the inculcation and management of knowledge and the social reproduction of personalities and cultures (Scott and Marshall, 2005).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics 2016, and the UNICEF 2015, there were some socio-cultural and economic factors impeding the development of the education of women in Nigeria and emphasis was placed particularly on the northern part of the country. Poverty was the major factor as there were many parents who could not send their children to schools so that they could acquire knowledge and skills that would help them to be socially responsible and contribute to the development of their societies. In the north-eastern parts of the country which comprise states like Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, it can be asserted that the issue of poverty coupled with Boko Haram insurgency have contributed tremendously in the feminization of poverty whereby numerous women were adversely affected. Gender disparity is also another contributory factor that deters the development of the education of women in northern Nigeria where the education of the boys is given much more emphasis by both the parents and sometimes the government which as a result of that, the females would be at disadvantage ending in poverty and other social problems of life (SEED, 2015).

Poverty and Women's Health

The health is another important sector of the economy which is highly needed. There are several women in Nigeria which are adversely suffering from many diseases that are even deadly in nature because they cannot adequately afford to pay their hospital bills and all that is as a result of poverty which is a social problem that hinders their progress and development in the society.

According to the Fourth World Conference on Women which took place in the year 2000, the poor women suffered from poor health and a higher incidence of maternal deaths and it further explained that both the women and men in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular faced numerous health challenges which were related to poverty. However, it was also explained in the conference that the women living in poverty tend to have poor nutrition, no access to clean water and sanitation and also lack access to medical care particularly on obstetric and gynecological issues which consequently lead to poor health among women. In a related development, the National Gender Policy in 2016 stated that the women in the country were specifically vulnerable to several violence and the risk of HIV/AIDS and the maternal and child mortality and morbidity rates remain alarmingly high with related implications for the overall health and population growth rates.

Furthermore, the poverty affects health not only in monetary terms but also in terms of access to information and education regarding health issues especially in the preventing and treatment options (Amzat, 2009). This scenario can be said to be prevalent in the northern-eastern part of Nigeria especially in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states where so many women became completely impoverished as a result of Boko Haram insurgency, a factor which hinders the women from having adequate accessibility to healthcare facilities which can help them to grow healthy and contribute to the socio economic and political development of their areas.

Poverty and Women's Food Security

It is a well known fact that the food is something that is essential as there is no any life that can exist without food. It has been researched that there were many Nigerian women that were suffering from hunger and starvation as well as nutritional diseases coupled with food insecurity which normally occurred as a result of poverty and deprivations affecting societies in Nigeria especially in the north (NBS, 2012) The challenges of social security in the form of Boko Haram especially in the north eastern part of Nigeria has claimed so many precious lives and valuable properties such as the agricultural land which have been rendered completely useless by bombs and other explosives (Audu 2013, USAID, 2014). As a result of that, the masses especially the women became impoverished suffering from hunger and starvation and even diseases which were obnoxious to human lives. However, the efforts being made by the Federal Government of Nigeria in the construction of camps for the internally displaced persons in the north-eastern states of Nigeria are worthy of recommendations because the level of social control and conformity is continuously progressing and people are observing their socio-economic activities smoothly unlike before when the human lives were threatened.

Poverty Women and Crimes

As a result of high level of poverty in Nigeria, many women are now blindly engaging in crimes for the sustenance of their livelihood in the society and such crimes include corruption, prostitution and joining some of the groups of men in cattle rustling and kidnapping of people. The issue of women engaging in crimes is almost everywhere in the country as it affects the geo-political zones of the country. According to the Federal

Office of Statistics 2016, the poverty and other forms of social inequalities in Nigeria against the womenfolk have contributed unpleasantly in making them to engage in crimes which rendered their lives very unproductive as some women do not have anything to offer towards the socio economic and political development of Nigeria as a nation. In the north-eastern part of Nigeria for example, there have been cases of women Boko Haram insurgents who were clearly seen engaging in bombing of mosques, churches, markets, public service organizations and other places of historical importance where the lives and properties of many innocent citizens and foreigners in Nigeria were devastatingly destroyed (Boyi 2017, Shehu, 2010). All these crimes may be as a result of poverty and high level of ignorance.

Poverty and Women's Economy

Gender inequalities within the Nigerian societies clearly reflect the wide disparities existing between men and women which in turn contribute to feminization of poverty (Hajara, 2011). It was clearly indicated that the 70 percent of the population in Nigeria estimated to be living below the poverty line, over 65% are projected to be women indicating that the men have greater access to high-paying, secured employment etc. (World Bank 2010).

Furthermore, many researchers discovered that 76% of the federal service workers were men whereas the women made up 24% of the workforce and also occupy less than 14% of the overall management positions despite the appointment of women to the positions of permanent secretaries. In addition to that, it was also discovered that 17.5% of the Nigerian medical doctors were women whereas 82.5% were men and all these disparities have a significant impact on the capacity of women to contribute to the economic growth of the country (World Bank, 2010).

It is crystal clear that if the women can be empowered very adequately, they would be capable of making giant strides towards the development of their societies but in the northern-eastern part of Nigeria, the task of doing that is likely to be a herculean one for them. This is simply because of the issue of social insecurity in the form of Boko Haram but with time, everything would be very clear in such a manner that the opportunities for development would be very widely opened for women who are zealously aspiring to develop themselves. The strategies that the federal government of Nigeria is deploying towards the reconstruction, revitalization and rehabilitation of areas such as Borno, Yobe, Adamawa and others, can aid in no small measure to the empowerment of women against the feminization of poverty in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be asserted that the feminization of poverty in Nigeria is a social problem that has been perennial in nature most particularly in northern Nigeria where a very large number of women have been excruciatingly affected by poverty. The theory that was employed in the paper was the Feminist Theory of Gender Inequality provided by Atkinson cited in Ritzer 2008. It was clearly explained in the theory that the women

had a universal value but their rights were being denied by the men which further aggravate the feminization of poverty in the society. However, there were some factors that were explained in the paper under the feminization of poverty in the area of education, health, food security, crimes and the economy. In the area of education for example, it was made crystal clear that due to poverty and deprivation, many women could not have accessibility to education, a situation which is very prevalent in the northern part of the country. Health was also another factor that was discussed in the paper. Here, it was discovered that there used to be some women in Nigeria especially in the north that suffered from so many diseases that were actually deadly in nature and also the other problems of health inequalities which occurred as a result of poverty, ignorance and deprivations.

Furthermore, concerning the issues of the womenfolk, food security is fundamentally important. It was clearly explained that hunger and starvation as well as the nutritional diseases were the formidable challenges affecting the development of lives of so many womenfolk particularly in the north and it was also discovered that poverty and deprivation were mainly the attributor factors which need to be addressed to provide a room for development. On the issue of women, poverty and crimes, it was discovered in the paper that some women especially in the north were exposed to so many notorious crimes such as prostitution, corruption, Boko Haram insurgency and joining the groups of some men in cattle rustling and kidnapping of many innocent people. Lastly, the poverty and the women's economy is also a fundamental issue discussed in the paper. Some researchers have discovered that the women were very left behind in the process of offering their contributions to the development of the country's economy and that was due to intense poverty and deprivation imposed on the women by the government as it was noticed for example, in the area of Federal Civil Service where the men had 76% of the federal workers and the women are only left with 24%.

Furthermore, in the area of medical profession for example, the Nigerian women medical doctors had only 17.5% while their counterparts, the men medical doctors occupied 82.5%. All these are glaringly the disparities with further aggravate the feminization of poverty affecting the attainment of sustainable development and national security in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations offered in the paper:

- i. There is the need for the intensification of the education of women at all levels in Nigeria so that they can be able to acquire the basic knowledge and skills that will help them to be socially responsible and contribute tremendously to the development of their societies. Indeed, the education of women is one of the ways of fighting against the feminization of poverty in the country as the women are the potential agents of development.
- ii. In the area of health, the women need to be adequately empowered. There is the need for the government to sufficiently provide quality health care facilities to the

women especially in the rural areas where the feminization of poverty becomes very intense; more clinics and hospitals should be established by the government, the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other potential stakeholders; the enlightenment and mobilization campaign on the importance of health should be created and the women should also be provided with the job opportunities in the health sector. With this, the feminization of poverty can be fought in the society.

- iii. There is the need for the government to intensify the agricultural education in order to enhance food security. More and more women should be encouraged and sponsored by the government at the Federal, State and Local Government level to study agricultural education and also be the practicing farmers so that they can create job opportunities for themselves and other people in the country in such a manner that the fight against the feminization of poverty can be effectively fought and more food security should be sustainably enhanced in the Nigeria.
- iv. With regards to the issue of women, poverty and crimes, something needs to be done by the government especially in the north. The government is anticipated to encourage the masses to develop effective community policing and the Criminal Justice System which comprises the police, court and the prison should be sufficiently empowered by the government in ensuring the prompt payment of the workers' salaries and the provision of social welfare services that will enable them to perform their duties and responsibilities efficiently and effectively towards the maintenance of social control and conformity in our societies.
- v. As the women are the potential agents of development in every society, they need to be adequately empowered by the government economically. Here, more and more local craft and manufacturing industries should be continuously established by the government at the federal, state and local government level in all the geo-political zones of Nigeria and the essence of doing that is to ensure that the masses particularly the women are provided with the job opportunities. With that, the women can rightfully think and feel that they are the integral part of the Nigerian societies and they can also contribute very beautifully towards the socio-economic sustainable development and security of Nigeria as a nation.

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