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# CHAPTER 6: THE IMPACT OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION ON THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

According to Tadaro (1992) about 70% of the worlds poorest people live in rural areas and engage primarily in subsistence production. He opined that if sustainable improvement in the standard of living in the third world is to be achieved, it will start in the rural areas in general and the agricultural sector in particular.

According to Lele (1975) rural development implies improving the living standards of the mass of the low-income population residing in rural areas and making the process of their development self-sustaining. However, according to Onherhoraye and Okafor (1994), rural development goes beyond agricultural and economic growth. It includes the creation and fair sharing of social and economic benefits resulting from this growth.

The main gender difference between women and men is that women as a group have lower status than men. Everywhere in the world countries women as a group, have fewer advantages and longer hours than men. Women go to farm with their husbands and when they come back they still take care of their children and also cook the family meal. Moreover, women's work and opinion are often undervalued.

Through the process of socialization, girls and boys are brought up to accept the social system in which they live which in most cases result in gender oppression. By gender oppression we mean the social system in which one sex has been placed in an inferior position subordinate to the other. The rural world is men's world and the

ke cultures and traditions to suit their own interests. Therefore, the women's socio-economic life are unfairly moderated by the men and is the core of rural economy and unfortunately women do not inherit land in most rural societies. Rural world is "patriarchal" - it is dominated and ruled by men.

Traditional education which is learning about the ways of life of rural people. According to Adesina (1988), it

Concerns itself with the teaching and learning processes of the natives. Its curriculum, methodology, organization and administration are entirely patterned to reflect the beliefs, customs and experiences of the society, which the child lives. The objectives of traditional education are political, social and economic. General, the education of women is centered on domestic affairs, the responsibilities of a mother to her child and a wife to her husband. In the end, traditional education strives to prepare the individual as a functional and useful member of society or community in which she lives.

We can therefore conclude that traditional education placed women at a disadvantaged position. Hence, the notion about women as being inferior to men. This could also be the genesis of inferiority complex among some women. Therefore, in most rural societies all over the world, women are seen as inferior to men and have less power to make decisions affecting not even themselves. At times their husbands determine what is good for them. Women are yet to occupy their full leadership roles mainly due to cultural set-up. Okafor (1987) contended that in Nigeria and in many African countries the women have not taken their due roles in leadership. The greatest problem being culture which relegated women to the background, thus we have been born, bred and nurtured in this cultural set up and the generations before us who could have led us to take up roles are those who promoted this very culture banning us from these roles.

Despite cultural inhibition, there are other factors responsible for women's inactive participation in rural development. These include male hostility, mass apathy, poverty, lack of awareness and high level of illiteracy among rural women. Owing to the discriminatory tendency on women, rural development is yet to get immediate and serious attention it deserves. Care (1996) noted that the traditional Afghanistan women have low status in Islamic society which make their lives particularly difficult women rely entirely on their husbands' families for support, and the



husbands' death often mean that widows and their children are left to feed themselves. This makes many of widows suffer from depression after the death of their husbands.

### Causes and Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Walby (1990) provides a useful starting point when she defines patriarchy as "system of social structures and social practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women". Gender is socially constructed in the sense that differences in the behaviour of males and females are learned rather than being the meritable result of biology.

In Beijing, China in September, 1995 which is 20 years after the Mexico city in 1975 which was the first world conference on women. The Beijing conference articulated 12 areas constituting obstacles to women's advancement. Nwafor and Ezege (1998) noted that:

these areas include poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, economy, decision-making, institutional mechanism, human rights, media, environment and the girl-child.

Inferiority complex, loss of self-esteem and lack of confidence are the greatest impediments to women's effective contribution to development. Nwankwo (1987) remarked that no one can make a tangible contribution to development if one is not self-enhanced. She therefore advised women to develop self-confidence and stop suffering from inferiority complex. She maintains that only when women have higher values, then and only then can they talk of contributing effectively to the nation's progress.

Western influences especially the impact of colonialism led to the women's apathy to politics and developmental programmes. According to Ntunde (1990) the Aba women's riots of 1929 and British refusal to recognize the women's War as a collective response led to the abrogation of rights and the enactment of the 1933 reforms further led to loss of women's power and collective action. She further argued that missionary education did not favour the political growth of women as they were trained to become good mothers and wives.

The colonial masters ignored and deprived women of political power. Their efforts were channeled towards domestication of women. On this, O'Barr (19984) noted that:

All colonial officials shared a belief that the role of rural women was that of household helpmate to men, and that women were outside the proper realm of politics. The colonial powers did not try to manipulate female leaders: they often did not even know that female leaders existed. Among the Igbo, for example, the British made a male 'Obi' into a salaried official, but by-passed his female counterpart, the 'Omu' thus destroying the 'dual-sex' political system.

The quest for women liberation can be associated with the rejection of the age long societal values according to Okwuobi (1988). He argued that in the past women behaved naturally according to their feminine nature and enjoyed the support and admiration of their male counterparts. He argued that today because of changing value system women are being treated as men. He therefore, advised women to be themselves and not get the idea of seeking equal social recognition and respect with men. He further argued that the slogan that "what a man can do, a woman can do even better" is an illusion. This is a typical example of male hostility against women.

According to Ogbonna (1987) rural women are subjected to the negative bullying tendencies of the men folk with the result that the contributions of the rural women into the rural economy are not recognized. In his own contribution Obayi (1989) noted that some men see the birth of male children in their families as almost the birth of no children. Care (1996) noted that in certain areas of Afghanistan, where Islamic fundamentalist militias are in control, girls have been banned from attending school.

Nigerian women have been subjected to inequalities in the political, social, economic and cultural fields. Eze (1984) noted that this is essentially because of two self-reinforcing variables. First, because of the capitalist socio-economic organization prevalent in most African countries, provisions in several legal systems that pretend to guarantee equality of all before the law. Secondly, in the past, women were thought of as only good in child bearing and rearing, cooking the family meals, doing domestic chores, limited agricultural practices and petty businesses. Thus according to him their entire socio-economic life were unfairly controlled and dominated by the men.

It is not an overstatement that most aspects of Nigerian customs, traditions, beliefs and values do not place women in the best comparative advantage. Thus, the contributions of Nigerian women, to rural



development inspite of their rich potentials and natural virtues being neglected and curtailed. Secondly, most women are overcome the inferior mentality or psychological inhibition traditionally inflicted on the rural women by their male counterparts.

Some rural are yet to identify and appreciate the great potentials and capabilities of women in every aspect of life and unless the rural men learn to give women every opportunity to develop their talents unless this is done the enormous contribution of women will elude us.

At present the contributions of women to the rural economy are seriously under estimated – the ‘invisible women’ syndrome. According to Idriss (1992), official statistics rarely make any effort to measure even though it is more than clear that not just unpaid household work on the farm and trading activities of women make a vital and significant contribution to the well-being of poor rural households. According to Onokerhoraye and Okafor (1994), in the case of women the combination of farm and household responsibilities may amount to as many as 12 hours or more. Rural women do not have the luxury of coming home from work and putting up their feet to rest. Straight from the farm they are children and household chores to attend to. Only at bedtime do they have opportunity to rest.

In their own contribution, Nwafor and Ezegebe (1998) note that

The traditional family – life values leaves the females with more marriage burdens than their male counterparts. The Nigerian society expects the women in marriage to place priority on family matters and those who do not, receive societal sanctions and disapprovals. The men in marriage may not and are not punished.

In the Gambia, under International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) – financed Jahaly and Pacharr Projects according to Idriss (1992), it was found out that women who had traditionally cultivated swamp land were losing access to men once the land was improved.

Okwuosa (1992) noted that women are discouraged to come forward with themselves with matters of public governance in the community. Active political commitment is considered unfeminine and unhealthy for women.

Sex role stereotyping serves to exclude women from public life. Oputa (1987) noted:

.....the myth of women as a sexual functionary still persist in many cultures.... The definition of a person in terms of only one aspect of their personhood is straightforward depersonalization. Males, their correlatives, are not limited in their personhood to only the sexual or child giving function. All the challenges of reality are legitimate spheres for their superior capacities. This is an undisguised doctrine of male chauvinistic superiority.

### The Role of Women in Rural Development

All the evidence according to Idriss (1992), suggests that the poorer the household, the more hours women work and the greater their investment in both economic production and family welfare. From a situation of multiple disadvantages often as single parents, women can move to one in which they contribute and benefit three-fold-in the home, in society at large and, not the least, in the development of the next generation.

Ogunjimi (1994:16), noted that the traditional woman is jack-of-all-trades in the home – the cook, the washerwoman, the cleaner and the child incubator. While, according to Emuakpor (1981:12), in the rural Nigerian setting, women bear the major share of traditional burdens of the work in agriculture, animal husbandry, food processing, water and fuel shortage in addition to home and family tasks. Obviously, the traditional woman works for longer than her male counterpart.

Women form the bulk of peasant farmers in the rural areas who feed the local communities and the teeming population of the cities. According to Okoye (1979), agricultural work done by women includes replanting activities, such as land preparation, digging and ploughing, followed by planting the seed cutting, hoeing and weeding. Women account for between 60 to 80 percent of agricultural labour force in rural areas. Women do preservation processing required in agriculture.

Women often gather leaves and other items that animals feed on. Their work also include grazing sheep and goats and in some places, even cattle, which means walking over long distances in search of pasture or water. In case of cattle, women milk them and do other preservation processing that might be required. Women come about their animals either by buying them or could be given a female animal by somebody to keep so if the animal reproduces they could be given a female animal by somebody to keep so if the animal reproduces they could share them proportionally. Often they look after the family animals



according to Agueue (1998). In a number of African countries, notably Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Benin, the role of market women has been well documented. In these places, they account for up to 80 per cent of trade foodstuffs and the provision of rural areas with essential services according to Onokerhoraye and Okafor (1994).

Women are mostly responsible for effective distribution and supplies of goods, particularly food items and services to and from villages. According to Agueue (1998), thus, women play indispensable roles in the commercial life of nations. Even where they are secluded, they manage to process foodstuffs and other items for their little children to sell for them. Women also dominate such industries as pottery, weaving and catering services in most areas.

Women play very important roles in the environmental sanitation of the rural societies. According to Agueue (1998) by keeping homes, village squares, village shrines, market places, churches, and other social centers clean therefore play indispensable role in enhancing the public health of rural societies.

Many of the nurses, midwives and other para-medical staff in rural dispensaries, health centers and hospitals in most rural areas are women. They stay around sick relations in the rural hospitals, treating of wounds and other family care mostly done by women. They show sympathy and care for the destitutes.

Onmulu (1969), noted that Madam Tinibu saw to it that the influence of colonialists did not have unnecessarily domineering influence over the weak Oba Dosumu of Lagos. Late Madam Funmilayo Ramson Kuti also expressed great interest in the political development of Nigeria and agitated against the payment of Tax by women in Abeokuta. A few women relatively are now elected into legislative houses in the local government, state and federal houses of representatives. Some women are local government chairpersons, commissioners, advisers, etc.

Modern economy necessitated a rapid change in the roles played by men and women. Women started taking paid employment and doing various sorts of work either to augment whatever the husband can provide or to carry the entire burden of the family, (particularly at the death of the husband). Women are mainly engaged in commerce and service industries. They are found in an overwhelming proportion in low paid jobs whether unskilled, skilled, or professional. According to ECE (1979) an analysis of twenty-five countries shows that certain occupations are almost completely filled by women examples include secretaries, nurses, cleaners, dress making etc. where 80 per cent or more

of all workers on the average of the twenty-five countries are shown. Even in female-dominated occupations, administrative and supervisory posts tend to be held by men.

## Strategies for Improving Women Participation in Rural Development

### National Council of Woman Societies (NCWS)

The federal government of Nigeria on Tuesday, June 19, 1990 inaugurated this body imposing on it the responsibility of ensuring the full participation of women in national development in the areas of promotion of civil rights and in political, cultural, social and economic welfare schemes.

Although, Decree No.30 of December 7, 1989 establishing the commission for women also stipulates among others that government will do according to Akpanya (1999):

- (1) Establish bodies in the states and local government for women.
- (2) Monitor and liaise with appropriate government organization and international bodies including United Nations organs of matters concerning women and development
- (3) The commission will also take over the control of better life for rural women programme now family support programme.
- (4) The body should look into raising political awareness amongst women. It also should focus on national unity. However, the tribal and religious sentiments generating controversy should be rejected

According to China today (1995), Chinese women have equal rights with their male counterparts politically, socially, and culturally. Similarly there are on a par with men both at home and in society. According to the editorial prior to this state of paradise enjoyed by Chinese women, they have suffered the worst oppression and discrimination more than any other part of the world for several thousand years of dynastic rule in China. But Chinese women fought every bit as hard as men when the people's republic of China came up in 1949, they finally won their independence and freedom. For instance, Chinese women now have the right to marry whom they wished and the right to keep their own family names after wedding and in property and inheritance etc.



Ewegbara (1987:5) observed that Nigerian women are becoming like their more liberated counterparts in Western Europe and America. He also noted that the traditional societal norms which use to relegate the women to the background and place them under protective custody of men are fast dying out. However, this is obtaining mostly in the urban areas but with the co-operation of every body it can be fully eradicated in the rural areas.

Ogan (1987) maintained that the fight for women's proper place is for both male and female. He was surprised that women lack such self-esteem that they actively take part into turning themselves chattels. He opined that illiterate women do not have equal ability when compared with literate women to resist societal discrimination. He therefore recommended adequate education for women to equip them to realize their rights-education, economic political etc. Mgada (1987) in her part noted that there should be no sexual discrimination in education. It is the hope of every Nigerian patriot, that women should be educated to help develop our dear country.

Ozigboh (1998) quoting Trotter (1975) who said that the home is the root unit of the social environment and that if the total environment is to be improved if the human organism is to live in harmony with its environment, these relationships must be learned at the source- in the home in the family. In order to make this training of the young possible it would be necessary to educate the largest half of the population- women. In his own contribution, (1990) opined that a mother's level of education has a positive effect not only on her children's health but also on their progress in school.

Adigwe (1987) noted that women are the bedrock of agricultural activities and ways of improving their economic life and that of the country include the following:

- (i) introduction of co-operative societies in all communities and women should be encouraged to be members
- (ii) location of art and crafts centers in various local government areas and communities and equipped with small modern machines to enable them to produce their crafts in an open market.
- (iii) Provision of machinery for clearing, plugging and harrowing

What matters is not the provision of credit per se, but the way in which credit is tailored to suit the requirements of the rural people. In traditional societies, credit institutions include private money lenders,

merchants, friends and relatives. Credit is used to inject required capital into agriculture for higher productivity and therefore better life for the rural person Agueue (1998).

Idriss (1992) noted that in Honduras, women have been formed into groups and provided with credit for Agricultural production. The group approach has also proved successful in Nepal in the production credit for rural women project where disadvantaged rural women have received credit for both individual and group activities. This project is aimed exclusively at improving the economic conditions and social status of 1000 poor rural women by providing credit for income generating activities, training and community development work.

In China, under Sichuan livestock Development project according to Idriss (1992), experience has shown that women can be reached by extension services in numbers proportional to their involvement in livestock production, if proper attention is given to gender issues at the planning stage. Of trainees in livestock production, 80 percent were women. In the planning and design stages of this project, surveys were conducted on women's involvement in livestock production. Their interest in the project, possible increase in labour demand, interest in receiving training, etc. were all mapped out.

One organization that needs our special attention is family support programme for rural dwellers in Nigeria - a brain child of Mrs. Maryam Chacha, which involved in September 1994, as one of the vehicles for promoting rural development in general, but particularly for the elevation of the social status of women in the rural areas, Agueue (1998). The family support programme strategies, according to CBN, are as follows :

- 1) Raising the consciousness of women about their rights and responsibilities in the areas of economic, social and political development;
- 2) Mobilizing women for a better understanding and resolution of their problems through collective action.
- 3) Educating women on simple hygiene, improved nutrition, family planning, child care, care of husband;
- 4) Mobilizing women to seek leadership roles in all spheres of national life and to improve their educational status through literacy programmes.
- 5) Enlightening women, on opportunities and facilities available to them in their local government areas.



- 6) Skills and their development, credit facilities and establishment of cottage industries.

### Conclusion

Gender roles are cultural rather than biologically determined. Only child bearing that is exclusively done by women. Biological characteristics do not bar women from particular occupations. The mother's role is a cultural construction. This is how everywhere lacked generally recognized and culturally valued and

Socialization into gender roles has the consequence of perpetuating rigid and inflexible expectations of men and women. The sexual division of labour must be eradicated in all areas of our social life.

We are not advocating revolutionary changes in the social structures. Rather we advocate reforms that take place within the existing structures. Through meaningful legislation and change of attitudes. Secondly, through the eradication of sexism and stereotypical views of women and men from the socialization of children into adulthood.

To harness women potentials in rural development, there is a need to pressurize the government to enact laws which will eliminate harmful traditional practices like early marriage, widowhood practices, land ownership, etc. However, the education of women should be the center of any meaningful reform.

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