

Article

Women Empowerment and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

DR (MRS) Louisa N Amaechi

Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology Owerri Nigeria

Abstract: A nation that cannot feed her citizens effectively is facing a very big global economic challenge. This was one of the reasons why UN inculcated food security measure as one of the 2003 MDG goals for the developing countries before 2015 target years. Nigerians economic down turn started when agricultural economy was neglected and attention was given to crude oil economy as the major export of the country's economy. The neglect export of the country's economy. This neglect of the country's agric economy gave rise to the present social and economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, food security, low agric export system, youths restiveness, social insecurity and the general infrastructural decay and decay in other systems. Therefore one of the striking measures to address the countries economic system is through the revival of agriculture with particular reference to women empowerment.

The paper therefore discussed women empowerment, importance of agriculture to Nigerian economy and the need for women empowerment in agriculture. The paper also highlighted strategies for women empowerment, demerits of not empowering women and challenges confronting women farmers in Nigeria.

The paper recommends an immediate action to empower women farm with enough financial and material support for women farmers in Nigeria

Key words: women empowerment, strategies, demerits and challenges of women farmers.

Introduction

The development of any country, state or nation is related to the development of a woman. This appears on an African adage that says "train a woman, you train a nation but train a man you train an individual". This is because the society is made up of homes and women are the home makers. The development of a woman is the development of the entire nation. The united nation development program of 1996 warned that as long as there is under utilization of the resources and skills of women in agrarian societies exists, there can be no development. In that regard Adeyemo (1984) asserts that the rural sector constitute the social and economic environment of the total population and that unless it can be set moving, many development objectives will be frustrated. The 1992 provisional population census report issued by the federal government of Nigeria office of statistics reported women in Nigeria to represent 49.7% of the total population and presently, women have out numbered that. Despite the increase in women population in Nigeria, it has not affected the age long inferior status the society bestows on women. The gender insensitivity of not only on male folk but the entire society and finally the women themselves accepted the discrimination in production. The economic down turn in the country's economy has impoverished Nigeria and placed it as one of the poorest countries despite her enormous natural and human resources of which women are involved. The Nigerian women typically bear the brunt of poverty in the country, most of whom are complete house wife left for cooking, taking care of husband, children and managing the domestic affairs with little or nothing their husbands usually keep for them. Such restricted home function usually result to unnecessary violence to women, brutal killing of women, brutal killing of women by

their husbands or husbands relations. Sexual harassment by their husbands, domestic accidents, undermining their reasoning and brain.

Therefore, empowering the women will not only help to improve their social and family welfare, but will go along way to arrest hunger and poverty, eradicate disease and stimulate them into sustainable economic development for the entire nation. Iheduru (2012) p 48

It is worthy nothing that Baumann in 1928 recognized the importance of women in farming in Africa in his classic article titled "the division of work according sex in Africa culture". Another Scientist called Kaberry also published a much quoted study of women in Cameroon farm in 1952 showing a greater population of women in farm, while an empirical data on male and female activities was documented in Nigerians. Cocoa farmers published in 1956 by Galleti, Baldwin and Dina. These evidences shoe that women participate in farm work more than men in Africa.

In most of the countries in West African sub-region, women participate in agricultural production more than men. In Nigeria in particular most especially in south-east, south-south and western region, agricultural production and development is purely in the hands of women and girls. Since Nigerian women show more interest in agricultural production, there is an urgent need for the federal government of Nigeria to put everything at hand to encourage the women farmers. The women farmer undoubtedly, remain the key actors in food production in sub-Sahara Africa, a force to be reckoned to end hunger, unemployment and poverty in Nigeria, in Nigeria, it is very clear that women are actively involved in production ,processing and marketing of agricultural products. yet in

farming and marketing, decision or policy making, access to loans, farm inputs, loan and other agricultural incentives, they are less considered or favoured. This governmental attitudes shows that women are not always empowered for greater productivity in agriculture. If the credit facility is given to men, sometimes they do not utilize into agriculture, rather the fund is diverted, either to increase the number of wife they have, or lavish in a hotel or use it to buy more expensive cars and build more houses. By so doing the government goal to improve agricultural productivity is completely defeated and frustrated. The issue of food insecurity, poverty and hunger cannot be completely eradicated in Nigeria without the empowerment of women farmers.

Impact of Women Farmers in Agric in South-East Nigeria

A research work of agric produce in Nigeria in south east 2015/2016 shows that 60% of rice production in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State was done by women, a greater proportion of women in Afikpe produced cassava more than men.

women with credit facility on agriculture in 2012 made a profit from rice production worth of N2,135,562 while another profit per-woman farmer was N30,508,03 both on cassava and rice, Ijeoma (2012) p 44 in Orsu Local Government Imo State, the women farmers cultivated cassava and yam worth of million in 2016 agric year, while the women farmers in Ohaji Egbema and Obuti cultivated immensely, cassava, yam, plantain and other food items which takes care of food security in Imo State. Indeed, women have played significant role in the improvement of agriculture and need to be empowered by the government in the security.

They carry out about 60-90% of the total task in the production of rice, cassava, yam, fishery, livestock, food processing, storage and marketing of agric production, Effiong (2015) p 48. In order to investigate the role of women of women in agriculture investigation was conducted in the three south eastern states comprising of imo, Anambra and Ebonyi states, on the production, processing and marketing of leaf, vegetable, fruits, cassava, rice and some species of beans. The results of that agric survey shows that about 65% of the task was done by the women farmers, Aju (2014) p 49. They usually enjoy or get an income but ranged between N951,206 to N1710039 and profit margins raging N52641 to N80547 per agric year.