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Abstract:

Culture is an essential element that aids an understanding of how women can participate and contribute to Sustainable Development. The realization of the power of culture to transform and bring about social inclusion, resilience, and sustainable development, is viewed as key to sustainable development. This paper in attempt to discuss the influence of culture on women and how it impacts on sustainable development, examines women's participation in Sustainable Development from the perspectives of culture and women's: roles in society, education, politics, and health. The paper adopts a qualitative method using secondary data to review literatures on the influence of culture on women and their participation in sustainable development in Nigeria. The study reveals that women suffer different forms of exploitation and are oppressed, they face institutionalized discrimination in workplaces, and have different capacities from men, they take responsibility for domestic work as well as engage in paid labor, they play advisor roles to their male relations who are political leaders, and face health challenges that can impede their contributions to development. To attain sustainable development therefore, the paper recommends that a change in cultural perspectives on women should be encouraged to facilitate their participation and contributions to sustainable development.

Keywords: Culture, Development, Women, Sustainable, Development.

Introduction

Culture is a very important part of human and sustainable development (United Cities and Local Governments, 2018), plays an important role in understanding women's participation in sustainable development. The word 'culture' has variously been defined by many as: (1) 'the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts' (Zimmermann, 2017): (2) it 'consists of the values, beliefs, systems of language, communication, and practices that people share in common which can be used to define them as collective' (Cole, 2019): (3) it is a 'particular way of life' (Rothman, 2014): (4) it is 'a large and diverse set of mostly intangible aspects of social life' (Cole, 2019): (5) 'a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which concerns us most, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits' (Johnson, 2013), (6) it is what we value, believe, and know, and what we do together in everyday life that influences the things that we make (Cole, 2019), and (7) it is 'who we are and what shapes our identity' (UNESCO, 2019). Sociologists see culture as very important because it defines what development is in a society, it determines, to a large extent, how members of a society think, feel, behave, and look to life (Cole, 2019). The power of culture to transform and bring about social inclusion, resilience, and sustainable development, has been recognized as key to sustainable development (United Nations, 2019).

Sustainable development, on the other hand, is viewed in the 1950s and 1960s, as economic growth, and productive capacity of a country. In the 1970s, the focus of sustainable development moved to matters on justice due to the gaps between the rich and the poor on social development and income distribution. In that same year, matters on environmental protection was included as another component of sustainable development. The scope of development therefore, covers, economic growth, social development, and environmental protection for the present and future generations (Bayeh, 2016). To achieve sustainable development, an understanding of how the underlying factors such as cultural perspectives on women, can impede or foster the achievement of sustainable development. UNESCO (2019), maintains that no meaningful development can be achieved without understanding and applying the components of culture, with regards to gender equalities, to achieving sustainable development. This implies that, cultural perspectives in gender equality aids us understand better how this can impact on sustainable development.

Culture and the Definition of Women's Role

The issue of women is undoubtedly one of the most topical in today's world at both national and international levels. The concern has often been the widely accepted view of women as a mere appendage to men (Ngara and Ayabam, 2013). The arguments are that, in a rapidly globalizing world, women should not be degraded. Women have long been relegated mainly to domestic roles due to our cultures. In traditional societies, women were reduced to kitchen managers and child-bearers and rearing agents owned by men. They were discriminated against and regarded as second-rate citizens

(Emmanuel, 2016). Although the situation was worse off in traditional societies than they are now, through cultural and religious indoctrination, they are made to believe that they are created mainly for the male gender and not to participate in public life (Ngara and Ayabam, 2013). In some communities, where the cultural perspectives exalt the male gender above the female, women feel guilty and ashamed when they give birth to the female gender (Population Council, Bangladesh, 1998). Adele (1990), considered three important roles performed by women in traditional societies. These are: (1) the procreative roles, (2) the domiciliary role and (3) the indirect political influence of women. (1) In the procreative role, women play the role of child bearing, (2) in domiciliary roles, they play the role of cloths and dish washing, child-rearing, cooking, to help provide the right atmosphere for the man and children to live healthy lives, and (3) in the indirect political influence of women, women play roles of advisers, where necessary to their husbands, sons, or relatives in political positions. Women usually are not only wives, but mothers, servants, nannies, nurses, confidants, advisers, companions, friends, sisters, and so on. These precious but sadly often vilified roles performed by women are not highly valued and are not quantified in economic terms. Stevens (2010), linked female discrimination in work places, to institutionalized form of gender discrimination that results when women are unable to adjust to the male work model. Because women carry the responsibilities of child bearing and rearing coupled with the task of domestic activities, they tend to drop out of the labor force to return later. As a result, they suffer from poverty and lack of mobility. Women need more flexible work hours and schedules to accommodate the demands on their time. Although the female presence in the workplace is growing, men still dominate the work population. Women still do not share in economic and political leadership equitably with men. This happens in many societies today. There is need to help women achieve more work/life balance, to increase their participation and contributions to sustainable development.

Culture, Women and Education

In many parts of the world, females are the victims of educational inequalities. In most less developed countries, boys dominate in schools. In Africa, sons are given first priority to receive education before daughters. Even when education is free, parents can only afford to educate some of their children. They usually decide to educate their sons rather than their daughters. In countries where parents prefer their daughters to be taught by female teachers due to religious reason, the case is worse. In such countries, girls' enrolment is usually low due to the presence of male teachers (Emmanuel, 2016). A major social disadvantage for women in politics is low levels of education. A UNICEF survey in Nigeria in 2004 revealed that only 60% of women between ages 30-45 years managed to complete their elementary education, while only 26% proceeded to the secondary level. This perpetually translates to why comparably few numbers of women qualify for jobs in the formal sector (Ngara and Ayabam, 2013). When women earn their pay, they spend it on the family. And the higher the educational level of a woman, the higher the living standards for her family. To foster national development through changes that can be expected in the nature of labor-force participation, a better educated female population is highly needed. This will reduce poverty and speed up economic development and productivity, as well as the efficient use of resources (Emmanuel, 2016). It is important to note that certain cultural practices serve as impediment to educating women. The practices include early marriage, and isolation in their husband's homes (Sani, 2001). The educational gap between women and men is one major problem that has impeded Nigeria's much needed development. However, more women are becoming literate in Nigeria. Their contribution to education is greatly manifested in the moral upbringing of their children.

Culture, Women and Politics

Early history on the indirect political influence of women and their contributions to politics can be seen as the contributions of women like Nana Nsima'u of Sokoto Caliphate, Queen Amina of Zazzau, Rambas of Bonny, Queen Emotan of Benin Kingdom, Moremi of Ife, etc. to politics. It is however weighty to mentioned that these women might have been looked at as societal deviants in their days. This is because women were expected to be seen and not heard. The contributions they made to their respective societies were done at their own peril. At the in which they lived, the male dominance in the society was unparalleled. In such societies, women were not allowed to take part in community decisions on which their collective destiny rested. Rather, because of the prevailing culture, the women were seen as lacking the ability to take rational decisions on their own.

However, Sani (2001) provides evidence of women leaders who represented not only fellow women, but also men in the decision making of their communities. Women's political power varied from one society to another. In some societies, women shared equal power with men while in others their roles were complementary or subordinate. For instance, in traditional Igbo societies, women had structures of political participation equivalent to those of men. They formed groups and were involved in crucial community matters. One of such groups was the Umuada which comprised all the married daughters in the community. Despite a largely subordinate status of women in Yoruba land, women occupied positions of socio-economic and political importance. In fact, there were female kings in Ile Ife, Oyo Kingdom,

Ondo etc. There were also Iya Oba (Queen Mother), i.e. Queen and so on. In Hausa land, women held political offices and titles like Magajiya (*Queen*) and Iya (*Queen mother*) before the 1804.

The role performed by women in the period of colonization cannot be over-emphasized. There was the Aba Women's riot in 1956. The effectiveness of their organization, clearness of their purpose and sense of union in their agitations spoke much about women. The importance of that singular exercise towards Nigeria's independence remains priceless. Again, it is worthy of note that in contemporary times, despite the merciless struggle, and endless attitudes of lust for power among men, and constraining influence of culture, women still hold rights to participate on issues regarding their own in the political arena. There are indications however that the roles of women are increasingly being given appreciation and recognition in recent times.

Culture, Women and Health

Certain cultural practices have proven to be detrimental to the development of women themselves, and to national development by extension. Early marriage is one of the prominent factors that can bring about challenges to women's health and wellbeing. When young undiscerning girls are married off early, they are deprived of the right to education. These young girls have shown to experience Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF) due to the in-maturation state of their reproductive body parts. When labor is prolonged, it often results in the damaging of their urinary bladder and weaken the muscles in the lower body parts. This problem is also contributing to the increasing mortality rate of 800 per 100,000 births in Nigeria (one of the highest in the world), a country where life expectancy for women is already very low (Emmanuel, 2014). It is doubtful whether such 'women' can contribute to national development. Rather than searching for anything else in life, the quest to survive is ultimate for such young girls. As a result, they are not able to contribute to national development (Emmanuel, 2014).

Methodology

The library method was used to gather information for the study. Analysis was based on articles obtained from reputable journals and content analysis. No direct responses were gathered from any population. Hence, explanations on the subject matter of discussion was done completely on materials and the works done by others.

Conclusion

Women's upbringing in the family basically prepares them for their future and participation in sustainable development, and is largely influenced by culture. The level of education they receive, indicates whether there would be a reinforcement in the emphasis on negative sex divisions that can hinder them from contributing to development, or whether they would acquire skills necessary for them to participate in all sectors of life. The culture of most societies is vividly and evidently anti-women and this poses obstacles to women who would have contributed their own quota to sustainable development either as individuals or as group. The contributions of women to Nigeria's development can only be guaranteed when we move from the level of analysis to practical steps of empowering women to enable them contribute to development. Women's economic roles, education, political life and health should be given priority. Barriers to women's development, and progress which are in the form of harmful cultural practices must be dispensed to allow them participate in sustainable development.

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