

Economic Impacts of Women in Nation Building

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Abstract

The study of the roles of women in Nigeria involves an analysis of lifetime. Women all over the world play pivotal roles in the advancement of every society. This work focused on the economic impacts of women in nation building. There can hardly be any meaningful account and advancement, if women are excluded. Attempt was made to show their impacts in three eras; first is the place of women in pre-colonial time, the second showed their impacts/roles under the British colonial era. The third era showed the women's contribution from post-colonial till date. In other words, the paper is centered on the role of women in nation building, using the Nigerian experience. Both primary and secondary sources of information were used during the study.

Introduction

Women all over the world play diverse roles ranging from child bearing to occupying educational, economic, political and social positions within and outside their environment. The economic importance of women is pivotal to the society. Society as we know cannot exist without women. In fact, there will not be any account to give without a woman.

Therefore, the contribution of women economically cannot be traced to any period, it can be said that it is a long existing impact that is as old as man. Women play the role of determining the structure and nature of every nation's market because of the uniqueness of their being, using Nigeria which is our immediate environment as case study. Women contributed to the sociopolitical advancement of the nation as well as to the economic advancement. Having a brief appraisal on the socio-

political situation in the Nigerian experience, a number of women fight to have their way into becoming heroes and political activists in pre and post-colonial era, they were also staging war during the colonial administration, which indeed, they were not left out in the independence struggle.

It is gratifying to note that the effort put in the socio-political advancement was also used for the economic advancement. The fast growing markets in Nigeria today is traced to the women's impact. Trade account in Nigeria cannot be completed without appreciating the efforts of mothers. Research literature indicates that women around the worlds play pivotal roles in the well-being of their families and their communities by growing food, earning household income, rearing the next generation, maintaining family health and nutrition and conserving natural resources. (Mermel& Simons 991, p.15).

Conceptualisation of Keywords

ECONOMIC- Economic concerns with the organization of money, industry, and trade of a country, region, or society.

WOMEN- Women is the plural of woman, which means a female human being or female child or adolescent. The word is usually reserved for female adults.

NATION BUILDING- Nation building may be defined as the process through which the boundaries of the modern state and those of the national community become congruent. The desired outcome is to achieve national integration.

Women's Contribution During the Pre Colonial Era

There is obvious evidence showing women's active participation in the economy, politics and war before the advent of colonial rule in Africa. In the case of Nigeria, Paul Zeleza (1997:183) observes that "women's involvement in pre-colonial socio economic activities extended to political participation and military participation". In the history of pre-colonial Nigeria, Queen Amina of Zaria is a prominent name that features in scholarly research. Pat Williams (1999:262) cites Queen Amina as an example of women who served successfully; it seems that the idea of a woman having such remarkable success. She was unique in her quest to expand the economy of the north in the aspect of trade, commerce (locally) and politics. Her business extended to Kaduna

and Zazzau among the Hausa. Emir Korau of Kastina in the former time noted the economic expansion zeal of Queen Amina. Isichci (1983:145) also notes that Amina's reign of imperial conquest was certainly regarded as historical fact in the early nineteenth century, Mohammed, 1985:47 notes that "in Nupe land, particularly among the Bida women, the "soniyan" was a female officer to state whose duties were the organization and supervision of all large-scale women's work and supervision of the market".

In pre-colonial Youruba land, Queen Moremi, was a courageous Queen in the history of the Yoruba who used her office to positively influence economic activities in her vicinity. She decided to liberate her people from the gruesome hands of the arch enemies of the Ife's. Segun Thomas; 2007 opines that "she put her life on the line by refusing to join the bandwagon of cowards at a time when brave men feigned to be women for fear of being killed, mutilated or taken away to a distant land as slaves". According to Efunsetan Aniwura, the Iya'lode of Ibadan, was a prominent woman in the economy of pre-colonial Yoruba land (Williams 199:262)

During this period in the traditional Igbo society, Women made giant contributions in growing their economy. This became evidenced in the unflinching support they gave their husbands in the farms and even sales of farm produce. It is common sense that agriculture was the main stay of the economy of this era. This period witnessed the men getting married to plenty of women and giving birth to a lot of children with a view to spreading their agricultural and economic tentacles. As a matter of fact, a man's worth was measured by the number of yams in his barns, the number of livestock he possessed etc. and this was directly proportionate to the number of industrious women he got married to. In their various capacities, the women constitute themselves, into well-coordinated group which was referred to as 'councils'. Such councils had the responsibility of looking after their interests politically, economically, and socially, thereby becoming a major economic force and power block such as culminated in Aba Women Riot of 1929. Each council was presided over by a woman who was elected not on account of her seniority or wealth, but because of her notable contribution, personality influence and experience. Such leaders supervised the inflow of goods to the collective meeting point which was called the 'market square'

Women's Impact Under British Administration

Colonialism and its system of administration changed the popular division of labour that is mainly characterized the pre-colonial Africa system by Africans. The extent to which colonial policies threatened women's stability and authority especially at the economic front is well illustrated in the case of what has been termed the Aba Women's Riot of 1929. These women fought for many reasons among which was the proposed impositions of taxes on women. Van Allen (1976) says that "another factor that led to the riot was the British monopoly on trade which allowed the British to fix prices on goods and adopt methods of buying that increased their profits at the expense of the women".

Madam Alimotu Pelewura was also a woman that helped the market of Lagos. She fought to expand the market also by forming a bond within the women in the market in Lagos. Many times she led women to the colonial office at the government house to express their displeasure over emerging issues. She was succeeded by Abibat Mogaji who used the platform of market-based organizations to mobilize by the identity of Egbe omo eko.

The Contribution of Women in Post-Colonial Nigeria

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has enjoyed the contributions of women in different spheres. Looking at agriculture for instance, according to World Bank (2000) "centuries of poor policies and institutional failures have been the major cause of Africa's undercapitalized and uncompetitive agriculture". Lack of prolonged period of favorable incentives, rural public investments and institutional supports have also been identified to be a setback to the continent's agricultural progress. Thus, agriculture in Africa and other developing regions (like Nigeria) has remained below its potential due to extreme undercapitalization and lack of competitiveness in the world market. Despite the obvious limitations, in Nigeria, women's contribution to agriculture is significant. According to the National policy on women (2002), women provide an estimated 60-80 percent of Labour in agriculture especially in food production, processing and marketing.

In the words of Restituta Igube, (2004) "many women are farmers in their own right apart from working on family farms". She explains further; "women are suppliers of labour, food crop and livestock producers, processors of food and fish products, marketers of peasant

farm surplus and transporters of farm supplies and farm products between the farm and home”. In music and entertainment, it is unarguable that woman like Christiana Essien-Ibokwe through her singing and dancing prowess contributed immensely to the Nigerian entertainment industry in the nineteenth and twentieth century’s. The post-colonial Nigeria has experienced a major leap in the movie industry with the emergence of Nollywood. Nollywood have enjoyed tremendous support of the women folk with the key roles of the likes of Patience Ozokwor, Rita Dominic, Liz Benson, Omotola Jolade (one of the most beautiful women in Africa), Genevieve Nnaji, Ini Edo, Mercy John, Tonto Dike etc. There is no doubt therefore that in 2017, the movie industry (which is to a large extent self-sufficient) contributed 2% to Nigeria’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

In sport, women have not been left out in making their marks. The likes of Blessing Okagbare ighotegunor (Nigerian athlete who specializes in long jumping and short sprints) readily rings in our mind. There is no doubt that she is an Olympic and a World medalist in the 200 meters. The super Falcon’s Asisat Oshoala also made also made Nigeria proud, when she won African Women’s player of the year award in 2017 with her sporting career booming round the world. Adekwororoye Odunayo has also made giant strides in wrestling. And the list is endless.

In the intellectual field of education, it will not only amount to the height of insensitivity, but also injustice if we fail to acknowledge the outstanding contributions of Chimamanda Ngozi Adaichie in literary works whereby she is qualified to be referred as a literary icon. The likes of Professor. Restituta B. Igube (Professor of logic University of Calabar), Prof. Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufai (former Minister of Education), and so many female intellectuals out there, who have made substantial contributions to Nigerian (Africa, and the world at large) educational development that cannot be mentioned here for want of time and space.

Women have also made tangible impact in the area of politics and governance since Nigeria’s independence (and Africa’s decolonization). According to Foluso O. Okebukola:

“The 1993 transitional council and interim government of Earnest Shonekan had two women in the cabinet. The successive government of General Abdulsalam Abubakar June 9, 1998- May 29, 1999 also

maintained the two women Status quo in his regime. In the 4th Republic, few women as Usual were elected councilors and chairpersons, only Lagos State produced a female deputy governor. A few women emerged in the Senate and State National Assemblies. It is Worthy of note that President Obasanjo's regime was the first in the history of Nigeria that Nigerian women enjoyed high level of recognition in public appointments at the federal level. From May 29, 1999 till date, more women have participated more in the running of ministries and Federal Government institutions in Recent times, and there has not been indications that they Have been found wanting" The performance of Dr. Ngozi Okonjo- Iweala as a (former) Minister of Finance bears testimony to the position stated above. During her time, Allison Madwueke also did very well as Minister of Petroleum Resources. Also worthy of mention are Patricia Etteh (Former Speaker of the House of Representatives), Stella Odua (former Minister of Aviation), Prof. Dora Nkem Akunyili (Former DG of NAFDAC) and the then current Head of Service Mrs. Winifred E. Oyo-Ita. Indeed, women are not just an integral part of our societal development, but the very basis of it.

Summary/Conclusion

The strength and contribution of women in Nation building is as old as human existence. Following the Bible's account, woman was created to play supportive role to men. Over the years, women have shown and demonstrated the capacity to play this role effectively and very efficiently. From child bearing to home management, from Agriculture to economy, from music to movies, from sport to media, from policies to religion, women have demonstrated capacity to contribute significantly to nation building.

Sequel to the illustration above, it is not fallacious to state categorically that women can be said to have been the economic strength of the nation.

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