

**Poverty Alleviation and National Development in Nigeria Through
Women Empowerment**

By

M. MOJIRAYO AFOLABI

mojirayoafolabi@yahoo.com

CENTRE FOR GENDER AND SOCIAL POLICY STUDIES

OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY

ILE-IFE

Poverty Alleviation and National Development in Nigeria Through Women Empowerment

Abstract:

In developing nations, national development requires a major re-ordering of human society. The economy of any nation is as important as the lives of individuals within the nation. To ensure this quality therefore, there is need to keep the economy buoyant at all times. This to say the least is responsibility of all citizens – male and female, young and old.

Poverty alleviation is a microcosmic strand out of the many divergent means of achieving national development. This paper examines the issue of poverty alleviation and how it is being used to achieve national rebirth through a focus on the development of human resources, especially the female gender – an asset which Nigeria has in abundance. Citing examples from different government projects and programmes in Nigeria, the paper concludes that a focus on human resources development is one of the fastest and most effective means of alleviating poverty and achieving national rebirth in Nigeria. It shows why this would be better done through an emancipation and empowerment of the female gender in Nigeria, and indeed all nations in Africa. The power of the female gender in permeating national consciousness and national development (even in patriarchal societies) is made manifest in this paper.

Keywords: Poverty, alleviation, women empowerment, economy and development

Poverty Alleviation and National Development in Nigeria Through Women Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

The concept of development stands not only on the quantitative value of growth but also on the qualitative factors of livelihood, which is the fulfillment of basic human necessities i.e. provision of basic infrastructure, shelter, food, health, education and safe water. These are big challenges for the governments of developing nations. The rate of population growth, coupled with resource constraints, corruption, among other things, has resulted to poverty in Nigeria at a very, inhuman and disastrous scale. It was no surprise therefore that the President of the Republic of Nigeria and the national ruling party identified alleviation as a major prerequisite to national resuscitation. The need to address poverty, equity and gender arises from the fact that both men and women are both integral parts of national and economic development policies and programs. Conventional methods of poverty alleviation include provision of good health care, good education and higher income that take care of better nutrition, clothing and shelter. Data desegregation has enabled the government to be more focused. It is realized that improvement in the quality of life of the people as productive agents must be the central objective of development policies for economic development. Improvements in human development directly affect an economy positively. Nigeria as a nation is a country of 140 million citizens. The National Population Commission (NPC) puts the population of women in Nigeria at 68.3 million and the female population are contributing 70% of labour force in agriculture.

The development of a nation is based on both the human capital as well as physical capital of that nation. For maximum use of human capital, all human resources should be fully utilized for maximum output. Boutrous – Ghalli, (1996) said development has to do with “improvement of human well – being, removal of hunger, disease and ignorance, and productive employment for all. Its goal must be to end poverty and satisfy the priority needs of all people in a way that can be productively sustained over future generations”. Poverty reduction is a challenge that no country, developed or developing,

has overcome (World Bank, 1997). Poverty has been viewed in different forms. Lipton and Ravallion (1995) define poverty as “to exist when one or more persons fall short of a level of economic welfare deemed to constitute a reasonable minimum either in some absolute sense or by the standards of a specific society”. The Nigerian economy is a developing economy that is not yet stable. Inflation is a steady and perpetual phenomenon. The country also has a low level of education. Generally, the economy produces a base line that has the majority of people below it. Recent studies of poverty in Nigeria show that poverty is widespread (FOS 1996, 1999, World Bank 1996). Poverty is on the increase in Nigeria, as over 30% of the population live in poverty. (FOS 1999) These reports identify women and children as groups that are most vulnerable (UNDP, 1997) Most of the poor in Nigeria are women who as a result of poor educational opportunity and the responsibilities of matrimonial homes have to fight to survive. Many of such women engage in inferior economic enterprises that are sole entrepreneurial activities with a very low financial base. This situation is what the World Development Report for 1990 defined as poverty “the inability to attain a minimum standard of living” (World Bank 1990)

Table 1: Poverty Level in Nigeria 1980-1997

| Year | Estimated Total Population (millions) | Population in Poverty (millions) | Poverty Level |
|-------------|--|---|----------------------|
| 1980 | 65 | 17.7 | 27.2 |
| 1985 | 75 | 34.7 | 46.3 |
| 1992 | 91.5 | 39.2 | 42.9 |
| 1996 | 102.3 | 67.1 | 65.6 |

Source: Federal Office of Statistics, 2001.

This table (1) reflects the poverty situation in Nigeria. It shows the rate of increase in poverty in relation to population. Tables 2 and table 3 give a clear picture of the degree of poverty in Nigeria.

Table 2: The Poor and Core Poor in Nigeria

| Year | Non-poor % | Moderately poor % | Core poor % |
|-----------|------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1980 | 72.8 | 21.0 | 6.2 |
| 1985 | 53.7 | 34.2 | 12.1 |
| 1992 | 57.2 | 28.9 | 13.9 |
| 1996/1997 | 34.4 | 36.3 | 29.3 |

Source: Federal Office of Statistics, 1996 and 2001.

Table 3: Poverty by Size of Household

| Size of Household | Poverty Headcount | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------|--------|-------------|
| | 1980 % | 1985 % | 1992 % | 1996/1997 % |
| 1 | 0.2 | 0.7 | 2.9 | 13.1 |
| 2-4 | 8.8 | 19.3 | 19.5 | 51.5 |
| 5-9 | 30.0 | 50.5 | 45.4 | 74.8 |
| 10-20 | 51.0 | 71.3 | 66.1 | 88.5 |
| 20+ | 80.9 | 74.9 | 93.3 | 93.6 |
| All Nigeria | 27.2 | 46.3 | 42.7 | 65.6 |

Source: Federal Office of Statistic (2001) Poverty Profile for Nigeria 1980-1997

Empowerment is a process of eliminating poverty in the economy. Empowerment of women has become essential to the success of development programmes. This could be seen in the declaration and platform for action of the 1990 World Conference on Education for All. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development of 1992, the Human Rights Conference of 1993, the International Conference on Population and Development 1994, the World Summit for Social Development of 1995, and the Regional Preparatory Conferences for the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. This recognition of women's pivotal role in the development process has been extended to the goals and priorities of organizations and agencies in the system of United Nations.

The Nigerian Women

From the above NPC record that show that women contribute 70% of labour force in agriculture, it could be seen that women do not just sit at home , they are effective members of the society. They participated well in the pre-colonial Nigerian economy, which was at a subsistence level. They majorly contribute at the domestic sector as well as the production and distribution of goods and services. During pre colonial period women had independent access to income from their craft or trade. It is rare to see woman that is full house wife, or totally dependent on her husband, they either follow their husband to farm or have their own businesses women with no work is regarded with contempt. Politically, women were part of the administration of their communities, they also hold a chieftaincy titles such as Iya laje, Iya loja, Iyalode like their male counter parts etc. Colonization of Nigeria affected the women adversely. With all the roles that Nigerian women are playing the fact still remains that Nigeria is a patriarchal society- a society dominated by men and which subjects women to subordinate positions no matter the level of their wealth, enlightenment, and achievement. Discrimination and oppression from males are seen to be part of the culture. Report of Domestic violence is at significant level. The modern day Nigerian woman combines reproductive, productive and community services together as normal activities without complaining.

The effect of Poverty in Nigeria

The UNDP Human Development Report (HDR) of 1998 on Nigeria describes the country as “a rich country with a poor population” and “the poorest and most deprived OPEC country” (UNDP 1998). Details of the HDR for Nigeria in 2003 is as follows:

| | |
|---|-------|
| Life expectancy at birth (years), 2001 | 51.8 |
| Adult literacy rate (% age 15 and above), 2001 | 65.4 |
| Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%), 2000/01 | 45.1 |
| GDP per capita (PPP US\$), 2001 | 850 |
| Life expectancy index, 2001 | 0.45 |
| Education index, 2001 | 0.59 |
| GDP index, 2001 | 0.36 |
| Human development index (HDI) value, 2001 | 0.463 |
| GDP per capita (PPP US\$) rank minus HDI rank | 13 |

Source: http://www.undp.org/hdr2003/indicator/cty_f_NGA.html

The effect of the poverty is much to the extent that the seventh position of Nigeria in the exporter of oil in the world and the largest in Africa could not be felt since the cash income of the average Nigerian is not sufficient to provide for minimum requirement of livelihood in terms of food, water, fuel, shelter, medical care and basic education (Achor, 2001). The report of CBN 2000 shows that the nationwide incidence of poverty stands at 69.2%. From the comments of Achor (2001), the Nigerian national economic portrait akin to the albatross situation - water, water every where, but none to drink. In the midst of plenty of both human and physical resources, Nigeria is still wallowing in poverty. Due to the patriarchal nature of the society, the norms and culture, women are more affected. There are several cultural restrictions and perceptions that tend to prevent women from exploring/ participating in socio-economic opportunities/activities.

Efforts to Alleviate Poverty in Nigeria

Alleviation of poverty in Nigeria has been a long programme of every government in power. A brief reference suffices to recall efforts at alleviating poverty in Nigeria, the effects of those programme and the gender blinded nature of the majority of the programmes.

- In 1972 General Yakubu Gowon initiated a programme tagged “National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) and the Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank **was** meant to fund agriculture and not much record could be made.
- **In** 1976 General Olusegun Obasanjo initiated Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) with its focus on increased food production. The programme was successful only in creating awareness of food shortage and the need to tackle the problem.
- In 1979 President Shehu Shagari started a “Green Revolution Programme” with two major objectives - reduction in food importation and boosting of

crops and fibre. The main objective was to encourage big mechanized farming. It ended in 1983 with the outcome of enriching few senior civil and military officers, both in and out of office,

- In 1983, General Buhari's "Go Back to Land" Programme was launched but with very little or no success. His emphasis was on fighting corruption and inculcating discipline in the citizenry - War Against Indiscipline.
- Between 1985 -1993, General Babangida established the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) for rural development, which was meant to provide feeder roads, electricity, and potable water and toilet facilities for the rural dwellers. Other programmes of Gen. Babangida for poverty alleviation are the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) meant to fight unemployment through provision of opportunity for self employment for school leavers; Peoples Bank, National Economic Reconstruction Funds (NERFUND) and Community Banks which were to provide capital for funding small businesses without stringent collateral requirements. It also included the National Agricultural Land Development Agency (NALDA) which was to concentrate on clearing of arable lands for cultivation.
 - General Babangida's wife, Maryam Babangida, also went in to the business of caring for the Nigerian poor. She set up "Better Life Programme" and started the era of the first lady's syndrome which put women in the agenda of federal government started with this government. The "Better life for rural women" became the better life for rich women.
- The mid 1988 saw the introduction of structural adjustment programme which brought Nigeria further down the poverty line.
- In 1993 General Sanni Abacha and his wife Mariam Abacha introduced both "The Family Support Programme" and the "Family Economic Advancement Programme" to care for the poor. General Abacha did not record any success in any poverty reduction effort.

- Between 1996 and 1999, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was established under the collaboration of the Federal, State and Local Governments to embark on elaborate poverty alleviation programme. The programme focused in particular on women development to enhance their economic and political access and encourage them into productive ventures.
- In 1999, projects on poverty eradication were harmonized and rationalized by the civilian administration under the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP).
- the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), consist of other programmes such as:
 - Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) which consist of Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP), Mandatory Attachment Programme (MAP) and Credit Delivery Programme (CDP). It is aimed at providing gainful employment to the teaming young school leavers and unemployed youths across the country.
 - Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS)
 - Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS) and
 - Natural Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS).

Problems of poverty alleviation programmes

In the above listed activities of the Nigerian government, proper sex desegregation was not done to actually reflect the area and nature of needs of different groups in the Nigerian society. To actually alleviate or reduce poverty, there is a strong need to have a proper strategic plan of how the alleviation programmes will be implemented to reach the most affected group - women, especially at the grassroots. Another issue that affects good programmes including that of poverty alleviation in Nigeria is the issue of continuity as a result of frequent changes of government. Each government wants to have its own plan of activities, and in so doing abandon the good policies put in place by its predecessor.

The content of the poverty alleviation programme is another important issue in terms of implementation tools. The top-down arrangement with little or no input from the

grassroots do create problem during the implementation period. Other issues that are equally important to note and address when putting such programme in place are, the intention of the government that put the programme in place. Most of the time the intention is to achieve and not for cheap political popularity. In most cases only lip service is paid to gender equality or equity. Corruption is another which has affected the economy of Nigeria greatly. This always affects the implementation of good programme, in the sense that the actual beneficiaries often turn to be the privileged class or even the implementers. Harber (2002) reflect the effect of corruption as robbing schools, hospitals and welfare services of funds and scaring away investors (p.269)

Table 5 below shows the selected indicators of human poverty for Nigeria and the position the country is occupying in related cases. Nigeria ranks 80th among 108 developing countries for which the index has been calculated, shows that more efforts are needed if poverty is truly to be alleviated in Nigeria nation. Concentration of plans on the most affect group (women) will go a long way in reducing poverty in Nigeria.

Table 5: Selected indicators of human poverty for Nigeria

| Human Poverty Index (HPI-1) 2004 | Probability of not surviving past age 40 (%) 2004 | Adult illiteracy rate (%ages 15 and older) 2004 | People without access to an improved water source (%)2004 | Children underweight for age (% ages 0-5) 2004 |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| 1. Barbados (3.0) | 1. Iceland (1.4) | 1. Estonia (0.2) | 1. Thailand (1) | 1. Czech Republic (1) |
| 78. Rwanda (36.5) | 158. Uganda (38.5) | 127. Algeria (30.1) | 114. Mali (50) | 108. Philippines (28) |
| 79. Malawi (36.7) | 159. Côte d'Ivoire (38.6) | 128. Tanzania (United Republic of) (30.6) | 115. Guinea (50) | 109. Indonesia (28) |
| 80. Nigeria (37.3) | 160. Nigeria (39.0) | 129. Nigeria (30.9) | 116. Nigeria (52) | 110. Nigeria (29) |
| 81. Burundi (37.6) | 161. Guinea-Bissau (40.5) | 130. Guatemala (30.9) | 117. Fiji (53) | 111. Sri Lanka (29) |
| 82. Yemen (38.0) | 162. Congo (Democratic Republic of the) (41.1) | 131. Lao People's Democratic Republic (31.3) | 118. Congo (Democratic Republic of the) (54) | 112. Maldives (30) |
| 108. Chad (56.9) | 173. Zimbabwe (57.4) | 164. Burkina Faso (76.4) | 125. Ethiopia (78) | 134. Bangladesh (48) |

Source UNDP 2007/2008 Human Development Report

NEED TO INCLUDE WOMEN IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES/PLANS

For significant improvement of poverty alleviation programmes, there is need to empower women. At the planning stage, men represent women in decision making, believing that they can speak on their behalf. Women need to be involved at every stage of the plan, so that their view could be heard and addressed. To be effective in such position/ decision body, they need to be equipped in terms of empowerment, encouragement and attention. Nigeria women are discriminated against, and majority of them are barely literate, because of cultural restrictions. Nigeria needs to transform into a society where women would be free from harassment, discrimination, cultural restrictions, and all forms of violence against them for proper implementation of poverty alleviation programmes. This self actualisation is important for reduction of poverty in our society. Knowledge of their rights as human beings, the power of their votes, economic empowerment and realization of the importance of their contributions in national developments are necessary tools of self actualisation. It has been realised that women who are economically buoyant and enlightened do not suffer violence as much as the poor ones, which shows that financial/education empowerment is one of the major ways to reduce women marginalisation.

With the introduction of NEEDS—the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy, a Nigerian Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper in 2003, which has the function of mobilizing the resources of Nigeria to make a fundamental break with the failures of the past and bequeath a united and prosperous nation to generations to come, women position in the economy as just consumers should change, while their contributions should be recorded and recognized. According to IMF Country Report No. 05/433;

NEEDS focuses on four key strategies: reorienting values, reducing poverty, creating wealth, and generating employment. It is based on the notion that these goals can be achieved only by creating an environment in which business can thrive. Government is redirected to providing basic services, and people are empowered to take advantage of the new livelihood opportunities the plan will stimulate.

Over 5years have gone on this programme, no remarkable improvement has been recorded. With Nigeria being signatory to the Commission for Africa and United Nations

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which focus on eradication of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, infant mortality provision of food and shelter by 2015, that is 6years to come, some changes are expected to be obvious by now to show Nigeria's commitment and effort towards the fulfillment of the goals. Affected groups should be catered for. The programme should not be used to enrich the rich members of the nation, as this will create a wider gap than before and compound the existing problems on ground.

The Need for Women Empowerment to Achieve Successful Plans and Projects

Involvement of women in both planning and implementation stage could only be possible and resultful if only they are resourceful. They can only be resourceful when they are empowered. Therefore for meaningful contribution of women in the struggle of eradicating poverty and not just being an add on member to the planners, real women empowerment should be done. This involve translating the five components of women empowerment into action, that is

women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

(POPIN, 2008: Guidelines on Women Empowerment)

Fulfilment of these five components will enable the women to be functional members of the society who would participate in the on going race of alleviating poverty in the nation.

Reference

- Achor U (2001), *Managing the environment in popular neighbourhoods: a manual for action*, Lagos, Shelter Right Initiative.
- Ajakaye, D.O. and V.A. Adeyeye, 2001. the Nature of Poverty in Nigeria, Nigeria Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) Monograph Series. No. 13, pp:21-27
- Attoe S.A. Effah, “ Women in the Development of Nigeria Since Pre-colonial Times”, pp.1-4 <http://www.onlinenigeria.com/links/LinksReadPrint.asp?blurb=150>
Accessed 26/4/2006
- Boutrous – Ghalli, (1996) *Agenda for Democratization* (supplement to reports A/50/332 and A/51/512 on democratization (UN Publications)
- Central Bank of Nigeria (2000), *Annual report and statement of account for the year ended December 31st 2000*, Abuja, CBN
- Nigeria Federal Office Statistics Bulletin 1996, 1999,
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2000), *National policy on poverty alleviation*, Abuja, Government Printers.
- Harber C (2002), Education, democracy and poverty reduction in Africa, *Comparative Education*, 38, 3, pp.262-276.
- Human Development Report (2007/2008), -COUNTRY Fact Sheets - Nigeria
- IMF Country Report No. 05/433; Nigeria: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper— National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy
- Lipton, M. and M. Ravallion, (1995), Poverty and Policy, in J. Behrman and T. N. Srinivasan (editors), *Handbook of Development Economics*. Volume 3B
- Longwe, Sara H. (1990): *From Welfare to Empowerment: The Situation of Women in Development in Africa, A Post UN Women's Decade Update and Future Directions* 25 pp.
- Priya Verma, (2005) “Nigeria: half of women experience domestic violence”, *Off Our Backs*, v35n5-6,
<http://newfirstsearch.oclc.org.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/WebZ/FFETCH?fetchtype=full...>
Accessed 6/4/2006
- Ravallion, M. and Bidani B. (1994). How Robust is a Poverty Profile? *The World Bank Economic Review* 8(1) January.

The World Bank (1990). *Poverty in Latin America: The Impact of Depression*.
Washington D.C.

The World Bank (1992). *Poverty Reduction Handbook*. Washington D.C., U.S.A.

United Nations Development Programme (1998), *Nigeria human development report*,
Lagos, UNDP.

United Nations Development Programme (2003), *Human development report*, Retrieved
Education, 38, 3, pp.262-276.

United Nations Population Information Network (POPIN) UN Population Division,
Department of Economic and Social Affairs, With Support from the UN Population Fund
(UNFPA)