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## **EXPLORING WOMEN POTENTIALS FOR ACCELERATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT (POVERTY REDUCTION)**

By

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### **ABSTRACT**

The foundation of any society is the family. Therefore, if the foundation be destroyed the whole society or nation is already thrown into confusion. This (bitter truth) is theory that propels Nigerian women into soul and nation-saving bid of rural development and household poverty reduction. Nigerian women are unsung celebrities. If nothing at all, their overwhelming one—third of the world's population is alarming while their different areas of contribution to human livelihood especially in rural development and rural home upliftment is monumental. To highlight these areas of development, the paper having discussed the concept of development, it describes accelerate development, shed light on the status of women worldwide and dig deep into the role of women in rural development and household poverty reduction. The study concluded that with the population of women and their potentials some of which manifest in their contribution to food security and home management which is sine qua non to rural poverty reduction, they are a force to reckon with in any society. As a result government programme and policies should address the need-end areas of interest of women.

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **The Development Concept**

The concept of development is elusive; it is perceived not only as a condition of life but also as a goal to be attained, and seen as the capacity to grow and change and develop. These three ideas of development are bound together in effort to understand and deal with the phenomenon of development. The evidence of the condition of under development is frequently given in terms of poverty. This is found and expressed in terms of hunger and starvation, inadequate housing, the barest of clothing, and the shabby states of health care services. The comparative size of the national per capita income is frequently used to distinguish the developed from the under-developed countries. Low per capita income conceals even greater poverty in regions or classes because of an unequal distribution of the national product. The eradication of this poverty- that is, the achievement of a sustenance level of survival — is the first target of

development. Increases in incomes as shown in per capita income statistics can be used thereafter as evidence of progress and of relative well being, at least in gross terms, in comparison with other countries. Such data also helps to identify the relative underdeveloped and relatively developed countries. It is not possible, however, to state when the essential needs of a poverty-stricken people have been met or when their basic wants have been satisfied. Definitions of "essentials" and "basic" are fluid; they change, and the measures of minimum standards of sustenance fluctuate as knowledge grows and as feasibilities and expectations expand. Scientific findings reveals new nutritional requirements for good health, productive life considered adequate diet is no longer believed to be sufficient. A sanitary toilet, clean water, screens, electricity, and other contributions to better housing become more available and more desired, to that extent they have come to be expected and included within the categories of 'essential needs' and 'basic wants' Development, then is not an absolute condition. There is not a fixed point at which a people, region, or country passes from a state of underdevelopment to a state of development. The relative condition of development rather is comparative and ever- changing fluctuates according to what is needed, what is possible and what is desired. This utilization potential increases with the growth and application of scientific knowledge and technology. A country which is not satisfying the expectations of its population is to that extent not developed; the goal of development has not been reached, development is relative to the aspirations of the people- how aspirations are defined and how firmly they are expressed.

### **Objectives of rural development**

Uma Lele from the earlier definition has the objective of rural development as the means to improve the living standard of the mass of the low-income population residing in rural areas and making the process of their development self sustaining. This includes:

- 1 reducing rural poverty;
- 2 increasing rural productivity and income;
- 3 meeting the basic needs of the rural people;
- 4 reducing in equality in income and wealth;
- 5 increasing employment and stemming rural-urban migration
- 6 providing basic rural infrastructures, and
- 7 inducing social change for balanced human and material development (Ojofeitimi, 1987: 36, Sule, 1991; Olopade, 1991)

Rural development is therefore a strategy which is designed to improve the social, political, economic and cultural life of the rural communities. Basic to this strategy is the active participation of the people in the conception, formulation and projects. It is only through active involvement of the people that self-sustenance could be achieved. Besides ensuring the active involvement of the people in the development effort, it has been argued that there is need for a strong commitment from the national leadership to rural development, if the impact on the problems of the rural poverty is to be effective and broad-based. This commitment, which is both political and administrative, must be

enduring and sustained, if the objectives of rural development are to be achieved (Ojofetimi, 1991, 36, Garuba, 1988.40).

It then indicates that there has to be potentials or capacity for development, other wise objective cannot be successfully achieved. Capacity for Development It has now been generally agreed that people's well being should form the center of the development interest. This led Lakshmanan (1982) to observe that improving the living conditions of the citizenry forms the central focus of the development concept. According to him, the concept of development has come to mean different things to different people. While some writers view the concept as dealing with rising Gross National Product or increasing per capita income, others like Dudley Seers see development as meaning creating conditions for the realization of human potential (Ojofetimi, 1987). Since the pursuit and attainment of certain high levels of per capita income has not been accompanied by discernible changes in the conditions of living of the people which is the focus and object of development, others have come to define the problem of development as a selective attack on the worst forms of poverty. Development goals must be defined in terms of progressive reduction and eventual elimination of malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, squalor, unemployment and inequalities (Ojofetimi, 1987). Joseph La Palombara defines development as: "Self-sustained growth: a continuous process of growth which is produced by forces within the system and which is absorbed by the system. It is the ability to absorb varieties and changing types of political demands and organization" (La Palombara, 1967). Sule is of the view that the development concept can be viewed from two perspectives:

- a. Introducing new ideas and technology; and
- b. Modernizing the existing facilities in order to increase the means of production. The introduction of new ideas and technology could lead to an improved quality of life and better standard of living. They may lead to an increase in human potentials and thus raise national productivity or per capita income (Sule, 1991).

### **Accelerated Rural Development**

Development in whatever form is a transformation or change process; which can be static, slow or rapid. Thus, development process has speed, which can be increased or accelerated as well as slowed down or decelerated. The critical questions are:

1. What constitutes rural development?
2. What strategies would bring about speedy (accelerated) rural development?

### **Strategies for Accelerated Rural Development**

Rural development is a strategy which is designed to bring about an improvement in the social and economic life of the rural communities. Mabogunje says rural development is concerned with the self-sustaining improvement of the living standards of the poor people residing in rural areas. It is a transformation of the organization of the people's

productive activities. Specifically, rural development means growth in the productive capacity of the rural residents leading to increased output and consequent increase in income. In addition, rural development entails improved access to opportunities such as potable water, electricity, good roads all of which make living condition more comfortable.

Uma Lele sees rural. Development. "As improving living standards of the mass of the low income population residing in the rural areas and making the process of their development self-sustaining" (Uma Lele, 1979). Three features with substantial implications for how rural development programmes are designed and implemented include:

- i. Improving the living standards of the subsistence population involves mobilization and allocation of resources so as to reach desirable balance overtime between the welfare and productive services available to the subsistence rural sector.
- ii. Mass participation requires that resources be allocated to low-income regions and classes and that the productive and social services actually reach them.
- iii. Making the process self-sustaining requires development of the appropriate skills and implementing capacity and the presence of institutions at the local, regional and national levels to ensure the effective use of existing resources and to foster the mobilization of additional financial and human resources for continued development of the subsistence sector. Subsistence thus means involving as distinct from simply reaching, the subsistence populations through development programmes. (Uma Lele, 1975).

The above definition shows that mass rural poverty is the main problem that rural development focuses to eradicate. Therefore, accelerated rural, development means the set of condition that bring about rapid increase in the productivity and income of the rural poor as well as increase the number of rural people that have access to potable water, health care facilities, functional education, electricity etc. Accelerated rural development can be said to mean rapid massive attack on rural poverty.

### **The Status of Women Worldwide**

It is estimated that women grow half the world's food, but they rarely own land. They constitute one - third of the world's paid labour force but are generally found in the lowest-paying jobs. Single-parent households headed by women- which appear to be on the increase in many nations - are typically found in the poorest section of the population. The feminization of poverty has become a global phenomenon. As in the United States, women world wide are underrepresented politically.. A detailed overview of the status of the world's women issued by the United Nation in 1995, noted that "too often, women and men live in different worlds- worlds that differ in access to education and work opportunities, and in health, personal security, and leisure time". While

acknowledging that much has been done in the last 20 years to sharpen people's awareness of gender inequalities, the report identified a number of areas of continuing concern:

Despite advances in higher education for women, women still face major barriers when they attempt to use their educational achievement to advance in the work place. For example, women rarely hold more than 1 to 2 percent of top executive positions. Women almost always work in occupations with lower status and pay than men. In both developing and developed countries, many women work as unpaid family labourers. (Figures show the paid labour force participation of women in seven industrialized countries).

Despite the social norms regarding support from extended family net works. In many African and a few Asian nations, tradition mandates the cutting of female genitals, typically by practitioners who fail to use sterilized instrument. This can lead to immediate and serious complications from infections or to long term health problems.

While males outnumber females as refugees, refugee women have unique needs. Such as protection against physical and sexual abuse (United Nations 1995: xvi,xvii,xxH,46.70).

Moreover, according to a World Development Report issued by the World Bank in 2000, there are twice as many illiterate women in developing countries as illiterate men. Some societies do not allow women to attend school. Of 1.2 billion people living on less than a dollar a day around the world, 70 percent are female (World Bank 2000c.23,277).

What conclusion can we make about women's equality worldwide? First, as anthropologist Nader (1986:383) has observed, even in the relatively more egalitarian nation of the west, women's subordination is "institutionally structured and culturally rationalized, exposing them to conditions of deference, dependency, powerlessness, and poverty". While the situation of women in Sweden and the United States is significantly better than in Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh, women nevertheless remain in a second-class position in the world's most affluent and developed countries.

Second, there is a link between the wealth of industrialized nations and the poverty of the developing countries. Viewed from a conflict perspective; the economies of developing nations are controlled and exploited by industrialized countries and multinational corporations based in those countries. Much of the exploited labour in developing nations especially in the non industrial sector is performed by women. Women workers typically toil long hours for low pay, but contribute significantly to their families' income. The affluence of western industrialized nations has come, in part, at the expense of women in Third world countries (Jacobson 1993).

**Table I: Percentage of adult Women in the paid labour force by country 1960s, and 1990s.**

| Countries     | Years | Percentage |
|---------------|-------|------------|
| Italy         | 1960  | 32         |
|               | 1998  | 35         |
| Germany       | 1960  | 41         |
|               | 1996  | 42         |
| France        | 1962  | 38         |
|               | 1997  | 48         |
| Japan         | 1960  | 53         |
|               | 1998  | 49         |
| Great Britain | 1960  | 39         |
|               | 1997  | 54         |
| Canada        | 1960  | 30         |
|               | 1998  | 58         |
| U.S.A         | 1960  | 38         |
|               | 1999  | 60         |
|               | 2000  |            |

Source: Bureau of Labour statistics 1999

### **Women and Nigeria's Agriculture**

For the past two decades, Nigeria has Witnessed social, cultural, economic, technical and political revolution that is second to none in the developing world. It is however sad to note that the living conditions of our rural majority and the urban poor has not changed much. This is due to the fact that about 80% of Nigeria's population is engaged in subsistence agriculture. It is also a well known fact that women form a greater majority of the rural population.

There is no doubt that they bear the brunt of rural poverty. They have the roles of working in the fields and farms to produce food and or tend animals, bear and rear children and manage large households with very scanty or no amenities including such basic necessity as water.

The nutritional status of these women is often very poor with a result that they often suffer infections from various diseases. Thus it could be safely assumed that the overall mortality and morbidity patterns among women in Nigeria are probably higher than that of men (Osuhar, 1979).

The average Nigerian rural women are illiterate but like women in other parts of the world, her role is significant both within the home and community. (Janelid, 1975). The development effort of the women begins at the home and family levels. This is because the development of a community depends largely on developments generated by the majority of homes and families within that community. A large part of people's lives take place within the family. People are born into and grew up in it; they are fed, clothed and cared for; they learn to live, love, strive and work to achieve in the midst of family environment. The family is the social unit and in the strictest sense is most closely related with its individual members' survival, well-being, success and happiness. A great part of what we today call "the quality of life" or wellbeing depends on how efficiently and well the family performs a number of services in the private life of its individual members (Olayiwole, 1977).

However, families do not perform or develop in a vacuum, but through the use of available material and social resources and services in inter-action with their environments. It is with the improvement of these services and their supports that this conference is fundamentally concerned.

### **Relevance of Women Extension (Home Economist) To Rural Development and Household Poverty Reduction**

In what way are Home Economists (in extension work) different from other rural workers with similar mission? Here I am referring to personnel from the social welfare, community development, adult education (women's programme), etc. Some distinction and clarification at the field level is necessary, as they too partially perform some activities within the field of Home Economics. This is one of the major reasons for the confusion and consequently the misinterpretation, misplacement and disregard of the special and unique function of extension home economics. Another major reason responsible for the poor image is because home economics is the youngest of the informal programmes for families established by the government. Therefore there is no high ranking Extension Home Economist in most states of the federation to effectively represent the interest of the profession at policy making level.

On the other hand social welfare, community development, health and adult literacy workers have representative in high policy making levels in government. These officials are able to formulate policies that favour their professionals at the expense of extension home economists. How are extension home economists professionally prepared? Is there any difference from their training and the other disciplines? Training for social workers in most countries is social problem-oriented with emphasis on remedial and therapeutic approach. This means that they deal little with health, normal and well adjusted individuals or groups. Their main work lies in case-work, counseling, group-



work and some community organization, directed mainly to helping mandated individual or groups to adjust and cope with their social environments. Community development workers are also trained mainly in the social sciences. They too direct their attention to group work, self-help, predominantly on group or community problems. They are good in inducting social action but have to rely on expert advice (outside their discipline) for the solution of specific and technical problems. Their main thrust is therefore on groups and community organization and action.

The extension Home Economists on the other hand, have broad base training. These are in the social, physical and applied sciences. Their emphasis is family centered. Its broad knowledge base makes the area equally suitable and applicable to healthy normal families and those having problems.

### **Women extension home economics role in rural development**

How do these women training help in rural development? Let us briefly review the areas where home economics women extension workers receive training for rural development

1. Basic and applied science: Chemistry, Biology, Zoology, Bio chemistry, physiology and Micro biology.
2. Horticulture, poultry and other small animals.
3. Food and nutrition, family nutrition needs, planning, selection and preparation, preservation and storage of food.
4. Mother child-care and development; family relations and family life.
5. Family clothing and textiles, handicraft and related arts for home.
6. Housing, home furnishing and mechanics.
7. Home management and improvement.
8. Family and community health, and sanitation.
9. Consumer education: using family and community resources to attain individual, family and society goals (Olayiwole, 1980).

Women extension home economist teach village families how to make the best use available resources in order to have higher incomes and to achieve better family life this is done in the following ways: Food: The village women must learn the importance of food for good health are strong bodies. She must learn to produce and prepare balanced diets for her family and make better use of available local materials. To achieve this, the home extensive Assistants teach the village women and girls how to:

Make doge-yard vegetable and fruit garden within and around their house/compound for kitchen use and surplus for market. Raise poultry, rabbits and other small animals for family use as well as for market.

Prepare balanced (diets) meals for the family; consider cleanliness and sanitation in handling, cooking and serving foods to their families.

Make some popular snack foods like chin-chin, puff-puff etc for more income to the family and for entertainment purposes.

Clothing: The Home Extension Assistants teach the village women

1. Select materials.
2. Draft patterns.
3. Apply design and pattern on plain cloths by tie and dye mending.
4. Sew with hand and swing machine. Take care of clothing through washing and mending. The village women and girls learn simple craft that can be useful at home sold out to others to bring more income to the family. These craft include:

Knitting, Fancy work - (embroidery) Crocheting, Macrame, Weaving, rubber work, etc. Shelter- Home Improvement the Hying conditions of rural families must be improved. The extension home assistants teach the village women how to make the following improvement;

1. Windows for light and ventilation.
2. Better storage areas in the home to prevent food losses.
3. Smokeless stove to improve cooking facilities.
4. Sanitary working and washing places
5. Chicken and rabbit houses to ensure clean environment
6. Beautification of the living areas to enhance mental hygiene, market to bring how to: and can be to consider health and sanitation in every connected with family life such as personal hygiene and sanitation in and around the home. Activities in these areas include:
  1. Providing clean and safe water supply for family use, Open and blind drainage to dispose waste water, safely, Safe garbage disposal, Safe disposal of human waste,

-day care of the home, utensils, etc (Olayiwole, 1980)