GENDER AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF OGUN STATE MINISTRY OF WOMEN AFFAIRS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT
Gender equality has been identified globally as one of the development strategies for reducing poverty. To implement this strategy, the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in Ogun State plans and implements projects aimed at improving the economic and social standard of women and children considered as the most vulnerable groups in society. In spite of these efforts, women still have limited access to the projects of the ministry and men still dominate key sectors of the economy. This study therefore examined the projects formulated and implemented by the Ministry specifically geared towards gender equality and access to development. A survey research design was adopted. The population of the study embraced directors and coordinators of projects in the Ministry, and beneficiaries. The research instruments were structured questionnaire, interview, and direct observation. The work was anchored on gender and development theories. Findings revealed that the Ministry embarked on several programmes geared towards gender equality and access to development. But some of these programmes are not popularized in the state. Factors such as inadequate funds, mobility, manpower, enabling environment; failure to domesticate some policies in the state; and harmful traditional practices limited the effective implementation of these programmes. Consequently, women in the State were not sufficiently empowered to achieve gender balance and improved socio-economic standards. The study concluded that the programmes of the Ministry have limited impact and need more publicity in order to meet their stated objectives. The study recommended among others that the Ministry must intensify effort to enlighten and empower women educationally, socially, politically, and economically; and create awareness of its programmes to the citizens through publicity and workshops organized especially at the grassroots level.

Keywords: Development, Gender Equality, Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development.

Introduction
Gender equality has been identified globally as one of the development strategies for reducing poverty. Upon discovering that the women who constitute about 50 per cent of the total population in Nigeria and contribute significantly to national development are the lowest income level earners, constitute the highest percentage of the poor and vulnerable, and are predominately in the informal sector of the economy (Nigeria Vision 20: 2020, 2010), the federal government
through the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development sought programmes to empower the women.

To implement this strategy, the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, plans and implements projects/programmes aimed at improving the economic and social standard of women and children considered as the most vulnerable groups in society. Such programmes include economic and political empowerment programmes, sensitization programme on the activities of the African decade of persons with disabilities, girl child education task force advocacy, and programmes on violence against women. The ministry ensures the effective implementation of treaties, conventions, declarations and policies approved by Nigeria for the promotion of human rights and advancement of Nigerian women such as the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), African Women’s Protocol, Beijing Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), National Gender policy, Child Right Act, amongst others.

In spite of these efforts, women still have limited access to the projects of the ministry and men still dominate key sectors of the economy. This study therefore examined the projects formulated and implemented by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in Ogun State specifically geared towards gender equality and access to development, as well as identified factors limiting the effective implementation of these programmes. A survey research design was adopted. The population of the study embraced directors and coordinators of projects in the Ministry, and beneficiaries. The research instruments were structured questionnaire, interview, and direct observation. A total 1500 (250 each) was administered to six Local Governments (two randomly selected from each of the three Senatorial Districts) in Ogun State.

Conceptual Clarification

Gender and National Development

Development which has the core values of sustenance, self-esteem and freedom from servitude “is a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, population attitudes and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty” (Todaro and Smith, 2004: 17). Its essence is to increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life; raise the level of living through increase in income, provision of more jobs, better education and greater attention to cultural and human values; and expand the range of economic and social choice available to individuals and nations (Todaro and Smith, 2004). National development is therefore the overall development of a country which entails the social-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a nation which can be achieved through development planning (Lawal and Oluwatoyin, 2011).

Gender equality which according to Reeves and Baden (2000) means women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in the public sphere, have been identified as a core development objective. This is because it enhances productivity, improve development especially for the next generation, and make institutions more representative. Attempts made to reduce poverty can only be successful if the differences in the status of women and men in key areas like population and families, health, education, work, power and decision making, violence against women, environment and poverty are taken into consideration (Lin, 2011; World Development Report on Gender and Development, 2012; ILO, 2012). To Ejiro Joyce Otive-Igbuzor, a country director at the Centre for Development and Population Activities in Nigeria, gender equality is an imperative for development, democracy and global progress (Otive-Igbuzor, 2006).
It is on these bases that the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW which till date has been ratified by nearly 187 countries of the world takes care of civil rights of women, legal status of women, reproductive roles and rights, and the impact of cultural factors on gender relations and on barriers to the advancement of women. In the same vein, the African Union adopted the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) that has so far been signed by 46 out of the 53 African countries and since February 2011 ratified by only 30 countries to assert the right of women by ensuring their social and political equality with men and control their reproductive health (World Development Report on Gender and Development, 2012).

The 2000 Millennium Declaration recognises that gender equality is central to achieving all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This means that gender equality promotes universal primary education, reduces child mortality, improves maternal health, reduces vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and influences poverty reduction directly through women’s greater labour force participation, productivity and earnings (Sandler, 2007). Women’s network and groups worldwide have taken action to promote gender equality and women empowerment.

Although much has been done to reduce the gap in education and health globally and the lives of women have increased dramatically, the low income countries especially those in South Asia and Sub-Saharan have not improved much. For instance school enrolment for girls 5 – 19 years in Nigeria are equivalent to those in the United States around 1860 (World Development Report on Gender and Development, 2012). About 10.5 million Nigerian children are out of school. These constitute the largest number in the world. 78 per cent of young women aged 20 to 29 in the North-West cannot read or write due to early marriage, early child birth, poor sanitation, and the shortage of female teachers (British Council Nigeria, 2012).

Even though fertility rate has dropped dramatically in all regions since 1960, meaning that fewer women are exposed to the risk of child birth, and reduction in parity, it has been rising in Sub-Saharan countries. In Nigeria, the total fertility rate rose from 4.7 children in 1999 to 5.7 in 2008 (Hogberg and Wall, 1986; US Agency for International Development, 2006; World Development Report on Gender and Development, 2012).

Despite economic progress, income growth in most developing countries has made insignificant progress toward gender equality in the area of female mortality and access to economic opportunities. Women still have less voice, less power, less control over resources and are very much vulnerable to violence at home. In most African countries, women cannot acquire land without a husband’s authorization. They are not involved in household decisions about spending their personal earned income (Katz and Chamorrow, 2003; Reed, Raj, Miller and Silverman, 2010). In Nigeria, women occupy fewer than 30 per cent of all posts in the public sector out of which only 17 per cent are senior positions (British Council Nigeria, 2012).

Notwithstanding the various efforts made globally for women to run for public office, the number of women holding parliamentary seats is not encouraging. In 1995, women accounted for 10 per cent of the members of the lower or single national parliaments and in 2009, 17 per cent (UNDESA, 2010). It is believed that women are more supportive of health and welfare expenditure than men. A study of Europe suggest that female suffrage increased spending on health, education and welfare expenditure over time (Funk and Gathmann, 2007; Aidt, Dutta and Laukoianova, 2006).

In Nigeria the gender gap in politics is pronounced and below global average. As at 2011, the total percentage of women in political offices is about 8 per cent. This is just 6 per cent increase
since democracy kicked off in 1999. Of the over ten thousand candidates that contested from the various political parties in the general elections, 9.1 per cent were women (Oladoye, 2011). Of the 360 members of the Nigerian House of Assembly, only 25 are women. Only about 4 per cent of the Local government Councillors are women (British Council Nigeria, 2012). Apart from social and cultural factors, several factors such as godfatherism, male dominated party executives, labelling, violence, lack of confidence to run elections, perception of politics as a dirty game, and money politics limit the aspiration of women and impede their access to leadership positions (Agbalajobi, 2010; Akinyede-Afolabi, 2011; Oladoye, 2011).

The lack of women in decision-making position is one of the reasons given for the low investment in the health and education sectors of the Nigerian economy which are crucial to human development. If more women are in key positions where they can influence decision making in the country, it will ensure that policies and provisions that will enable children especially girls go to school and remain in school till they graduate are made; ensure that the budget is gender neutral by giving equal preference to the rights and needs of men, women and children; and enable women who are more in the agricultural sector especially in the areas of labour and food processing benefit equally from the provisions in that sector like their male counterpart.

The 2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development identified four important areas aimed at improving policies pertaining to women. They include reducing excess female mortality and closing education gaps, where they remain; improving access to economic opportunities for women; increasing women’s voice and agency in the household and in society, and limiting the reproduction of gender inequality across generations (World Development Report on Gender and Development, 2012).

These four areas identified by the 2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development are crucial if Nigeria must achieve gender equality. Two major strategies that will ensure that these four areas are properly addressed are gender mainstreaming which ensures that the rights and needs of men and women are given equal attention at every level, and gender budgeting which guarantees the consideration of gender in every level of the budget.

Unfortunately, gender mainstreaming which was established in 1995 has faced a lot of challenges such as inadequate budgetary allocation for achieving gender equality initiatives, poor perception and trivialization of gender issues by policy makers and the general public, poor mainstreaming of gender policies arising often from inadequate funding, inadequate number of gender experts, absence of political will, late release of appropriated funds and poor funding for social mobilization and advocacy amongst others (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2012).

In Nigeria, budgeting is still conventional in nature. Apart from the budget of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, all other budgets are not gender sensitive and are not people oriented. For instance, in agriculture where women are responsible for carrying out 70 per cent of agricultural labour, 50 per cent of animal husbandry related activities and 60 per cent of food processing activities, gender is not put into consideration. The failure to integrate gender into budgets is due to the fact that few women occupy key political positions at all levels. And even the few involved contribute little or nothing to the budget.

Programmes on Women Empowerment in Nigeria

Bearing in mind that women constitute about 50 per cent of the total Nigerian population and contribute significantly to national development (Nigeria Vision 20: 2020, 2010), and that the country is predominantly rural with approximately one-third living in urban areas compared to
two thirds in the rural areas, the Better Life for Rural Women established in 1986 by late Mariam Babangida set out to stimulate and motivate rural women towards achieving better living standards; educate women on simple hygienic family planning, the importance of childcare and the increased literacy rate; and inculcate the spirit of self-development particularly in the field of education, business, the art and agriculture (Nigerian Women in Development, 2002; Uga, Ademola and Fajingbesi, 2003; Babangida, 2005; Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2006).

In spite of the 418 multi-purpose women education centres established all over the country, and the 7,635 farmers’ cooperative societies set up across the country, the project did not survive the initiator. No sooner than the promoter ceased to be first lady did the project collapse giving way to the Family Support Programme (FSP) and the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), an initiative of Maryam Abacha which gulped over ten billion naira of tax payers’ money. This programme eventually led to the upgrading in 1995 of the National Women Commission founded by the Babangida regime to the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in the 36 states of the federation. The aim of the Ministry was to further the interest of women and children by bringing about speedy and healthy development of the Nigerian women, in the mainstream of national development process and to ensure the survival, protection and participation of all children as preparation for meaningful adult life (Tell, 1998; Maduagwu, 2000; Babangida, 2005; Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2009; Ajadi et al, 2010).

The FSP project was succeeded by the Child Care Trust, an initiative of Stella Obasanjo, the late wife of former President Olusegun Obasanjo. That project focused on the underprivileged children, especially the physically retarded as well as the orphans. The wife of the vice president also started a pet project - the Women in Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) through which some previously trafficked women were integrated back into normal life (Ucheghu, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

The work was anchored on Gender and Development theory. Gender and Development theory (GAD) emerged in the late 1980s as a pre-Beijing perspective in response to the failure of the Women in Development (WID) Approach to change the lives of women and influence broader development agenda. WID focused on women in isolation ignoring unequal gender relation in various social and economic settings (Reeves and Baden, 2000; Tasli, 2007).

GAD deals with social, economic, political and cultural forces that determine how men and women participate in, benefit from, and control project resources and activities differently. Hence the approach shifts the focus from women as a group to the socially determined relations between women and men (UN INSTRAW Glossary-Related Terms and Concepts). The approach ‘seeks to ensure that all decisions concerning development be reached through the local equitable participation of men and women in the development process’ (Williams, Seed and Mwau, 1994: 7).

Although GAD approach aims at enabling women participation on an equal basis with men in all ramifications and emphasizes the importance of women’s collective organization for self-empowerment at the local, regional and national level (UN INSTRAW Glossary-Related Terms and Concepts, Tasli, 2007), the approach has been accused of having some weaknesses. Jude El-Bushra identified three areas of confusion of the concept - Confusion as to what the concept connotes as it has been given different interpretations and implementations by different individuals and agencies; confusion arising ‘from the assumption that gender transformation equals women’s economic betterment’; and ‘confusion generated through over simplification of complex issues and expressing them in slogans’. These slogans which are abstracted from their
contexts and used carelessly may be misleading such as two-third of the world’s work is done by women (El-Bushra, 2000:56-57 in Tasli, 2007).

Another area of criticism of the GAD involves gender mainstreaming (gender awareness), an important strategy and instrument aimed ‘at increasing gender awareness in all areas and all levels of public life’ (Tasli, 2007: 25). This instrument is difficult to implement as lack of political will, women’s inferior position in the hierarchy of all social structures, male dominance and resistance, and hostile environment makes institutional change in all spheres of public life impossible (Tasli, 2007).

Since gender equality has been identified globally as a development strategy for improved quality life, efforts have been made locally, nationally and internationally to ensure equal representation of men and women in every facet of life (Nigerian Vision 20:2020, 2010). Since women constitute the highest percentage of the poor and vulnerable and are predominately in the informal sector, effort has also been made towards “changing the balance of the sexual division of power and resources in order to make it more equitable” (Macdonald, 1994).

A number of treaties, conventions, declarations and policies aimed at promoting human right and advancement of women such as Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), African Women’s protocol, Beijing platform for Action, National Gender Policy, Millennium Development Goals, NEEDS/SEEDs have been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, African Union and State Governments.

To successfully implement these agreements, countries established institutions (structures) which will plan programmes/projects toward these agreements. The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development has been established for that purpose. The Ministry through its many departments, each with its specified function, strives to ensure gender balance in all affairs of the state. They ensure that women are educationally, economically, politically, and socially empowered. The performance of these roles depends on the realities on ground and the removal of obstacles that may hinder the achievement of their stated objectives. How well these decisions and policies are implemented are determined by how effective the structures are.

**Programmes Formulated and Implemented by the Ministry Specifically to Address the Issue of Gender Equality and Access to Development**

The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development has established several programmes geared towards fulfilling its vision which are to build a society devoid of gender discrimination, guarantee equal access to wealth creation opportunities, develop a culture that places premium on the protection of the child and focus attention of both public and private sectors on issues that promote full participation of women and children in national development.

The programmes that address gender equality include women empowerment programmes, Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), National Gender Policy, Gender Mainstreaming and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).

These programmes emphasize more on women as they are greatly disadvantaged. Women constitute the highest percentage of the poor and vulnerable and are predominately in the informal sector of the economy. They are most times excluded in decision making processes due to low percentage of women in key sectors of the economy.

Women empowerment programmes have been put in place in order to empower women politically, socially and economically. On political empowerment in Ogun State, workshops were conducted for women in politics. Sensitization meeting was conducted for 100 participants each.
in the three Senatorial Districts in 2008. In 2010, the Ministry in Ogun State coordinated one hundred and eight members of the women-in-politics drawn from the twenty Local Governments in the State. Vocational skill trainings were provided for the women on leadership, protocol and security.

Despite these efforts, women are still under represented in the state. Women occupy only 27.8 per cent of all ministerial positions in the State. At the Local Government Level, just one (5 per cent) Local Government Chairman (Sagamu) is a woman. Even though the Head of Service and the Chief Justice of the State are women, women in the State still have less voice, less power, and less control over resources as has been identified by Katz and Chamorrow, 2003 and Reed, Raj, Miller and Silverman, 2010. This also supports the claim by the British Council Nigeria, 2012 that women occupy fewer than 30 per cent of all posts in the public sector.

In addition, women are economically empowered. Through the Empowerment Centre women selected from some Local Governments in the State were taught tie and dye, sewing knitting and catering. About one hundred and seventy eight youths are currently undergoing training at the centre. The Ministry coordinates the activities of market women in the State and conducts enlightenment programmes for them on their rights and access to the Micro-Credit facilities that would boost their trade. In 2010, the sum of four million naira was disbursed through the Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFE). Since 2011, intensified effort has been made to ensure that women in the state get empowered. For the State Women Advancement Forum (WAFO), three hundred women were selected from the 236 wards in the state and regular capacity and training programmes organized for them to strengthen their socio-economic status.

Also Micro-Credit amounting to one hundred million was released to 3,850 women in the state particularly those in the rural areas to help improve their lives and ultimately reduce poverty to the barest minimum (sowumi, 2012; Balogun, 2012). Even though effort has been made to empower women economically, micro-credit facilities are the least popular programmes (48.4%) as majority of the respondents’ encountered problems accessing these facilities.

Gender equality entails that persons with disabilities be integrated into every sector of the economy. This implies that persons with disabilities need to be rehabilitated and economically and politically empowered. Unfortunately, not very much has been done in this area. Although a temporary rehabilitation centre has been built by the state and treatment provided for lunatics and destitute at the Neuro Psychiatric Hospital in Abeokuta, destitute are still seen wandering the streets.

On empowerment for persons with disabilities, as at May 2012, only 43 out of the 107 applicants were given employment. Vocational skill development has been extended to the less privileged and physically challenged in the state and ex-trainees of the Federal Farm Craft Centre for the blind were empowered with the sum of four hundred thousand naira. Training for the blind, ex-prisoners, deportees, and destitute was one of the least popular programmes in the State (48.8%).

National Gender Policy was introduced to ensure that women like their male counterparts contribute to development by ensuring the society is devoid of discrimination, citizens enjoy their fundamental human rights and that health, social, economic and political wellbeing of all citizens are guaranteed in order to achieve equitable rapid economic growth. The policy is in support of CEDAW and the African Protocol on the Right of Women in Africa.

In line with this policy, the Ministry established Gender Desk Offices in every Ministry in the State. This is to ensure that equal treatment is given to men and women on matters pertaining to employment, benefits and development. This exercise has been faced with some challenges such as poor perception and trivialization of gender issues by policy makers and the general public,
inadequate funding, low awareness of the public on the contents of the National Gender Policy, and the increasing number of women. These challenges have also been identified by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2012.

On health matters, the Ministry organised awareness campaign on cancer especial breast cancer and cervical cancer. In conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, the State Ministry held training workshops on the reduction of maternal and child mortality. The Ministry sensitized the public on the dangers associated with Female Genital Mutilation.

Although CEDAW is yet to be domesticated in the State, the Ministry has held several campaigns against gender based violence. Gender based violence still abound in the State as cases witnessed at the Social Welfare Centres attest.

Factors limiting the effective implementation of these programmes include inadequate awareness, funds, mobility, manpower, failure to domesticate some policies in the state, as well as harmful traditional practices.

5.2 Conclusion

The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in Ogun State has programmes geared towards gender equality and national development but these programmes have limited impact on the citizens as many are yet to benefit from some of them. Programmes such as gender mainstreaming and micro-credit facilities that will guarantee gender equality in the state are the least popular at 49 per cent and 48.4 per cent respectively.

Although 62.9 per cent of the citizens are aware of political empowerment in the State, the level of involvement and participation is not encouraging as women are still under represented in the State. On economic empowerment, intensified effort should be made to see that more women in the State gain access to the micro-credit facilities provided by the Ministry. It is also a fact that not much has been done to economically and politically empower persons with disabilities in the society.

In spite of the challenges faced by the ministry in the implementation of its programmes, the ministry must strive hard to actualize its vision. This is important since it has been established globally that gender equality is a development strategy for reducing poverty level; improving health and standard of living; and enhancing efficiency of public investment. Projects mapped out to ensure that the society is devoid of gender discrimination, guarantee equal access to wealth creation opportunities, and promote the participation of women and children in national development should be implemented to their fullest.

5.3 Recommendations

The Ministry must intensify effort to enlighten and empower women educationally, socially, politically, and economically. Women should be enlightened on the need/benefit of education, social, political and economic empowerment as it will alleviate the poverty level in the nation. This can be achieved through publicity and workshops organized especially at the grassroots level. Women need to be encouraged to stand up for their right and believe in themselves.

The state should endeavour to pass the bill to domesticate CEDAW and work hard to ensure that all forms of discrimination against women and girls are reduced to the barest minimum. Efforts should be made to ensure that bills already passed by the house such as Gender Mainstreaming Bill, Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill, Child Right Act, National Gender Policy are well implemented. Effort should also be made to ensure that more people with disabilities are empowered.
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