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SUSTAINING FAMILY ECONOMY THROUGH EMPOWERMENT IN A CHALLENGING GLOBAL ECONOMY

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**Abstract:** *Food and financial crisis, climate change, extreme poverty, urbanization, water scarcity, energy security, migration and population growth to mention just but a few constitute the rising global challenges. The consequences of these challenges are biting hard on an average Nigerian. The family, a basic social unit consisting of parents and their children, considered as a group, whether dwelling together or not has its own share of these consequences. The paper discusses the challenges of global economy with particular emphasis on food security and agriculture as well as resource scarcity. The paper also contends that women empowerment as a process of increasing the capacity of women to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes is capable of maintaining the economy of the family amidst trending global challenges. The paper recommends that sustaining family economy is not limited to the effort of the "breadwinner" but also extends to the immense contribution of the "family manager", the woman, hence a need for women empowerment.*

**Keywords:** Women, Sustainability, Food Security, Resource Scarcity, Empowerment, Global Challenges, Economy, Family

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## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary times, there have been challenges emerging globally as a result of nature and human activities. Global challenges as the name implies are demanding or stimulating situations occurring worldwide. These situations has not only scourged the global economy but also affected individual family in different nations. Gelsdorf (2010) categorized emerging globally challenges as ranging from climate change, food and financial crises, extreme poverty, urbanization, water scarcity, energy security, migration and population growth. World Economic Forum (2013) added that global challenges cut across five specific aspects namely; demography, leadership, food security and agriculture, sustainability and resource scarcity and conflict. World Economic Forum referred to demography as population trends (pregnancy and childbearing), the concept of leadership was explained in the context of gender gap in women participation in key positions, food security and agriculture was explained in terms of the boom in agriculture and rising level of food insecurity, sustainability and resource scarcity was also explained in terms of population growth and improved living in relation to resources (such as energy and

water) and the pressure it places on global environment while conflict was explained in displacement caused between men, women and children as a result of war. However, empowerment covers personal independence and well-being which are the ability to be directly involved in and participate in achieving changes for better living conditions. The citizens are supposed to be guaranteed a prerequisite living standard that will allow them pursue their legitimate affairs and self-actualisation, things that guarantee their personal productivity. It also means enabling people to take greater control of their own lives. Borode (2011) explained empowerment as the process of improving the human capital among women for effective participation in sustainable development activities. In the midst of global challenges there is a need to sustain national economy by maintaining family economy. This paper therefore seeks to address the national economic problems by discussing challenges of global economy with particular emphasis on food security and agriculture as well as sustainability and resource scarcity and ways of empowering the family (particularly women) as a smallest unity in given society. The paper also conceives that stable family economy will give rise to stable national economy.

### **CHALLENGES OF GLOBAL ECONOMY**

There is no specific scope or definition of global challenges. In the simplest form and for the purpose of this paper, global challenges are demanding and stimulating situations occurring all over the world. It can also be referred to as any element that poses a threat to the state of well-being of a nation. In Nigeria for instance, some of the demanding and stimulating situations occurring in the country are terrorism, poverty, food insecurity, crime, inadequate social amenities and infrastructure, poor leadership, corruption to mention just a few. Global challenges were broadly grouped into five by World Economic Forum (2013) as demography, leadership, food security and agriculture, sustainability and resource scarcity and conflict. The Millennium Project (2009) categorized globally challenges into fifteen namely; sustainable development and climate change, clean water, population and resources, democratisation, global foresight and decision making, global convergence of information technology, rich-poor gap, health issues, education, peace and conflict, status of women, transnational organized crime, energy, science and technology and global ethics. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this paper, specific emphasis will be made on food security agriculture, and resource scarcity in Nigeria. Nigeria is one of such countries rich in natural resources but largely untapped. Despite the exuberant resources, government has not been able to successfully cultivate and evenly distribute these resources to ensure the well being of its citizens. Some of these resources that are abundant but scarce as a result of inequitable government are food, water, hydro-electric energy and crude oil. Resources are essential for human survival, quality life and well-being, for instance, food as a resource is what people consume to stay alive and healthy. The availability of food for people is what is typically referred to as food security while unavailability of food for people is known as food insecurity.

Food security is the availability of all people, at all times, to enough food for an active and healthy life. It has two aspects; ensuring that adequate food supplies are available, and that

households whose members suffer from under nutrition have the ability to acquire food, either by producing it themselves or by being able to purchase it (Dada, 2011). Food insecurity on the other hand was referred to by Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (2010) referred to as the consequences of inadequate consumption of nutritious food, considering the physiological use of food by the body as being within the domain of nutrition and health. It occurs when people do not have adequate physical, social or economic access to food. According to Olaniyi (2011) there are four major elements of food security namely; food availability, food access, food utilisation and not losing such access. Owing to the oil boom in the country and trends in Nigerian transportation system, agriculture in Nigeria as suffered neglect by both young and old, men and women which resulted to low production of food in the country as against its demand. Food availability in Nigeria is quite epileptic, Attah (2012) reported that Nigeria's situation on food security is highly precarious and pernicious as a significant percentage of the Nigerian population is left with only the bilious taste of poverty. Also, World Food Summit plan of Action (1996) iterated that food insecurity occurs when;

- People experience a large reduction in their sources of food and are unable to make up the difference through new strategies
- The prevalence of malnutrition is abnormally high for most time of the year, and this cannot be accounted for by either health or care factors
- A large proportion of the population or group is using marginal or unsuitable strategies, and
- People are using —coping strategies that are damaging to their livelihoods in the longer term or incur some other unacceptable cost, such as acting illegally or immorally.

Following these indicators of food insecurity, Nigeria is experiencing high level of food insecurity as a result of large reduction of the country's sources of food (shift from agriculture to oil exploration), high level of malnutrition (Ekpo, Omotayo and Dipeolu 2011; Aliyu, Oguntunde, Dahiru and Raji 2012) as well as high level of corruption, illegal and immoral acts (Mohammed, 2013).

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND SUSTAINING FAMILY ECONOMY**

One of such elements that indicate the power of a group of people is their population. As stated by Afolabi (2003), women constitute over half of the world's population and contribute in vital ways to societal development generally. The role of the woman in the family is quite significant, apart from her role in reproduction; she also plays family sustaining roles such as, care giving, management of scarce and abundant family resources, community organizers and social, cultural and political activists (Olugbamigbe, 2013). In the light of the significance of women in the family and the society at large, empowerment of women has been imperative in the past decades. Empowerment as earlier stated covers personal independence and well-being which are the ability to be directly involved in and participate in achieving changes for better living conditions.

Participation in income-generating activities is of vital interest to women throughout the developing world. Women often participate in those activities which they feel bring increased income, which they could use to supplement whatever is available or brought in by their spouses. Women also contribute greatly to the economies of any countries through food and crop production (Borode, 2011). Women empowerment is receiving world attention; United Nations has included gender equality and women empowerment in her development goals. Women empowerment is an essential ingredient for achieving all the developmental goals (Olugbamigbe, 2013). Nigeria as a nation has adopted education as an instrument of social and economic transformation; it was spelt out in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, National policy on Education (2004) that "every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities". Women empowerment is a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation of the economical, political, social, psychological and legal circumstances of the powerless, with its aim has become a recurrent-issue as women access to decision making and full participation in public affairs is now recognized as a fundamental condition for democracy is characterized by full and equitable participation of women in both formulation and implementation of decision in all spheres of public life (Olugbamigbe, 2013).

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) (2008) emphasized that there is evidence of a dual relationship between women's empowerment and the private sector. The challenges to family economy boil around availability of resources such as food, shelter, clothing, water, money and so on which are functions of employment as well as income and indicators of poverty and national security. Therefore, the participation of women in private sector, especially within micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), is critical to family and national development which not only plays a key role in sustaining economic growth and reducing poverty (by creating employment, generating incomes, reducing vulnerability for small producers and poor workers) but also in addressing gender imbalances. Empowerment is quite broad in scope, it is not only limited to creating a boulevard for self-dependence and self-reliance, it also involves management skills in order to make effective use of scarce and abundant resources. Borode (2011) stressed the need for women to be empowered on how to adequately manage credit facilities procured for their businesses. He further stated that lack of management competency is one of the major contributing factors on small enterprise failure. Additionally, Madonsela (2002) and Gender and Water Alliance (2003), around the world, women play an important role as resource managers, they not only grow 80% of the food eaten in Africa, and collect 90% of drinking water in rural communities in developing countries but also manage it effective, hence, empowering women as better resource managers in the family is quite synonymous to improved and effective use of resources available in the family.

## **CONCLUSION**

Although global challenges are not new trends, in the recent times their consequences are more felt especially in the nucleus of the nation, the family. The problem of resource

scarcity and food insecurity in the country which is as a result inequitable government and shift from agriculture to oil exploration is quite high in the country. Indicators such as large reduction in the country's sources of food, malnutrition and high level of crime and corruption point at this. Since the government has failed in its responsibility to tap into the abundant resources of the country, these resources such as water, food and hydroelectric energy are scarce. It is therefore important to reach into the potentials of empowering to accord them the power to sustain the family's economy by developing preservative, management and financial sustainability skills.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The problem as regards food insecurity in Nigeria is not just the availability of food, it also involves handling and preservation techniques. Women as home managers should develop skills to store and preserve some food items like tomato, okro, fruits, yam, onions, potatoes and so on especially when they are in season. Policies that will enhance productivity should be encouraged, Policies that control population should be constituted and implemented. Most of those who bear many children cannot cater for them. Formal education should be given to women especially in the Northern part of the nation to help them develop self-sustaining and self-reliant skills and fulfill the condition stated in National policy on education that "every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunity". A measure of good standard of living must be ensured for citizens. Sensitisation and awareness of safety and security precautions should be given to members of the family. Parents should be empowered in necessary aspect that can help them to raise children that will be fit and viable emotionally, psychologically and economically in the society at large. The neglected agricultural sector should be duly embraced and peasant farmers should be empowered to practice commercial and mechanized farming. Erratic electricity should be addressed as most petty businesses depend on source of power supply.

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