

VISION 20:2020 AND GENDER ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

The economic development of any nation is a very important issue, as it indicates its position in the Committee of Nations. Nigeria, as a nation designed her vision which is tagged Vision 20:2020 to stimulate the economy of the nation and to attain her aspirations of being one of the top twenty (20) leading economies of the world by the year 2020. This paper focuses on the feminine gender issues as a challenge to the attainment of the Vision 20:2020. The paper towards its conclusion looks at violence against women in a number of human endeavours. The inequalities are in education and agriculture, gender status and gender based violence.

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Introduction

All human societies are made up of women and men, and most of the men have more power and society accord higher status, education and empowerment to them than women; whose contributions are generally associated with reproductive work which is often unremunerated. Gender inequality refers to disparities between males and females. In Nigerian context, it refers to the fact that females have disproportionately low levels of access to all sectors vis-a-vis their male counterpart.

Nigeria, being a patrilineal society gives very little opportunities to women to achieve their potentials. They are less educated and hardly given any chance in the male dominated world (Igbuzor, 2000). Gender disparity is significant in all strata of economic and social activities in Nigeria. Harnessing the potentials of the entire citizenry, will fast track development and social harmony.

In this regard, the paper focuses on feminine gender issues as a challenge to vision 20:2020, the paper is divided into two sections. Section one highlights Nigerian vision 20:2020 whereas, section two presents feminine gender issues: challenges of the vision 20:2020 under the following sub-topics: status of gender, gender inequality in education, gender inequality in agriculture and gender based violence. This give a clearer picture of female gender issues which the vision 20:2020 would have to put in place for Nigeria to be a player in the committee of nations and to be productive and competitive globally.

Nigeria and Her Vision 20:2020

The content of the Nigerian vision 20:2020 is highlighted in order to have an idea of what the vision is all about. Nigeria vision 20:2020 is an economic transformation blueprint,

optimising the key sources of economic growth to increase productivity and competitiveness, terms of growth in national output and total factor productivity (NPGSIFP, 2008).

Education constitutes an important core of human development. It opens up opportunities for both individuals and groups. It is a vital tool for transformation and key to a sustainable development of a nation. The vision acknowledges that human capacity development is hinged on strong learning system and that education is the most crucial instrument for empowering the citizens with knowledge and skills which in turn provides access to productive employment. The goal of the vision 20:2020 in education sector is to ensure that all children irrespective of gender, ethnicity to complete the full course of basic education (NPG, 2006). Education is one of the Millennium Development Goals and it is crucial to the achievement of MDGs attaining goals of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. Agriculture is a major driver of economic growth in Nigeria. In the context of the nation's vision 20:2020 of becoming one of the twenty largest economies of the world by the year 2020 a vibrant and technological agricultural sector is critical for the growth of the national output that will support expansion in industrial sector to enhance foreign exchange earnings, provide gainful employment, food for the growing population and reduce poverty among women.

The Nigeria Vision 20:2020 advocates integrated sectoral planning and to enhance linkage and synergy likewise a cluster based industrialisation which will turn the six geopolitical zones into economically viable industrial clusters built around different sectors based on the geography of the different zones (Abdullahi, 2009). The Nigeria vision 20:2020 acknowledges that attention will be given to equity concerns privatisation, the need to safeguard workers' interest and to ensure that the process does not aggravate the already precarious unemployment problem in the country.

Performance management and accountability; institutionalise monitoring and evaluation for public service across all levels of government to improve plans and programmes into inputs and outputs are put in place in the vision 20:2020 (NGPSIFA, 2008). Nigeria vision 20:2020 acknowledges the issue of gender whereby the rights of the Nigerian women are to be upheld.

However, despite the positive aspects of the vision, there are some flaws that could mar the attainment of the mission of the vision. Even though, there are clear social, economic, institutional and environmental dimensions on how the vision could be actualised, politically it is not. This has hampered the level of participation of women in politics in Nigeria. This may not be unconnected with the female gender issues which has been one of the Impediments of development in Nigeria.

No wonder Igbuzor (2010) is of the view that, Nigeria vision 20:2020 agenda is an attempt by Nigerian ruling class to hoodwink and deceive the people into believing that the state is striving to make Nigeria to become one of the twenty largest economies and the world by 2020; that Nigerian Government had no intention, strategy and execution capacity to

make Nigeria one of the largest economies by 2020.

Biodun (2011) opines that the quest for Nigeria to be among the top twenty economies of the world in the year 2020 may be a mirage as it lacks the educational wherewithal to achieve the projection. Though, some Nigerians have expressed their fear, the launch of the Nigeria vision 20:2020 is a step in the right direction.

Female Gender Issues: Challenges of Vision 20:2020

Women constitute fifty percent of the population in Nigeria and contribute in many ways to the national development (NPC, 1991). However, various studies and surveys have shown that women are in the lowest income level in most organisations and constitute the highest percentage of the poor and vulnerable. They are also, predominantly in the informal sector of the economy. Gender disparity is significant in all strata of economic and social activities in Nigeria and is exacerbated by social and rigidities, harmful traditional practices and religious belief. In order for Nigeria to remain competitive and ensure sustained economic growth and development, she has to maintain and overcome female gender issues. Thus, the need for the government to strengthen the national machinery and institutional capacity for the advancement in these areas:

- i) Status of gender equality.
- ii) Gender equality in education.
- iii) Gender equality in agriculture.
- iv) Abolish gender-based violence.

Status of Gender

The status of women and girls in Nigeria is low. Gender disparity and discrimination persist in most areas of development. Nigeria is a highly patriarchal society, where men dominate all spheres of women's lives. The day-to-day realities of the Nigerian women are guided by traditional and religious value systems. The culture of patriarchy has detrimental consequence for woman in particular. Women are in a subordinate position (particularly at the community and household levels) and male children are preferred over female, the influence of the parents is particularly significant in shaping and perpetrating patriarchy (World Bank, 2005).

Nigerian men are therefore, governed by the patriarchal system of socialisation and cultural practices, which favour the interests of men above women. This is evident in high percentage of women's employment restricted to low income-generating activities while men are employed within informal sector which are located in the upper levels and are predominantly engaged in higher income-generating activities. Therefore, the need to support initiatives that ensure financial independence for women is a critical step for mainstreaming gender into governance especially with respect to politics and public life in order to liberate Nigeria's human capital resource for active participation in the vision for a free market economic (GDA Nig, GSSAA, 2006).

Consequently, the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society denies the rights of women to inheritance to their father's property. Just as obnoxious, is the police extant edict

which denies a woman the right to stand surety for bail. What has been widely condemned as inhuman and gender insensitivity may have expunged from the law book but unconfirmed reports still indicated that women were being denied rights to bail (Suleman, choices Vol. 1, No.9). As if that is not enough, even the tax authorities generally assume that males are the breadwinners and meet the whole financial and material needs of families and neglect to acknowledge existence of female-headed households. According to tax benefit related to child care, benefit, are restrictively granted to male workers whereas female workers (including single mothers, divorced women with children in their care as well as married women, some of whom are family bread winners) are being denied access to these benefits and pay relatively higher taxes (NGP, 2006).

For Nigeria to compete within the global economy, the status of the Nigerian women have to be recognised and also should have foil access to full tax benefits as other women in other countries enjoy. How do Nigerian government, for example, achieve vision 20:2020 in a situation where women do not enjoy certain benefits as their male counterparts, marginalised and cannot assume certain positions and are treated as a second-class citizen? The Government of Nigeria has to harness the available human resources (women and men) to contribute their quota for attainment of the vision. The status of women has to be improved and this can be done through education.

Gender Inequality Education

Education is an indispensable tool for individual and societal liberation and development. It is a companion, which no misfortune can depress, no crime can destroy, no enemy can alienate and no despotism can enslave... without it, what is man? A splendid slave, reasoning savage, opines (Ojo, 2006). In noting the importance of education to national development in all ramifications, the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) has considered education to be "an instrument per excellence for effecting a nation's development". Education is at the heart of empowerment because growth and success to achievement requires education. Throughout history, education for women was discouraged owing to fear by men who knew when educated women become empowered and strong are threat. Education provides the necessary impetus or tools needed to position women in the mainstream of all spheres of life (Udo, 2006).

Education is an instrument per excellence for affecting national advancement. In this case, without any gender prejudice, women should be educated in consideration of their crucial role in society. Women, whether as producers or reproducers, are mainly responsible for the care and general well-being of the younger ones", that the nation can depend upon for its future advancement. Apart from their key role in the education of future generations, women fulfill economic functions in both urban and rural areas. This therefore, makes them vital for the survival and meaningful development of any nation, hence the need to educate them. For centuries, gender has been a key factor that has affected illiteracy rate in the world, Osuman (1997). So, for Nigeria to achieve her vision 20:2020 gender inequalities in education must be reduced to the barest level.

Countries like U.S.A., Japan and Germany that Nigeria is competing with have overcome

gender inequality in education and of course, in politics. Daily Trusts Newspaper of 3rd November, 2010: 31-40 focused on an extract from TIME in honour of female politicians kicking through glass ceilings. It takes a look at 10 women who have made it to the top: Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, Dilma Rouseff, President of Brazil, Julia Gillard, Prime Minister of Australia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia, Tarja Halonen, President of Finland, Laura Chinchilla, President of Costa Rica, Dalia Grybauskaite, President of Lithuania, Sheik Hasina Wajeel, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, President of Argentina and Hohanna Sigurdardothir, Prime Minister of Iceland.

These are female Presidents and Prime Ministers, though Nigeria is yet to produce a female president, Sarah Jibril's attempt was a step in the right direction. As more Nigerian women are educated at all levels of education and given the opportunity to serve, they will never underestimate themselves as it is rightly said by Angela Merkel, "you could certainly say that I have never underestimated myself. There is nothing wrong with being ambitious" (Daily Trust, 2010), Dilma added her voice to the course of women that "parents should encourage their daughters to aspire for greatness. She said, "I would like parents who have daughters to look straight in their eyes and tell them: "yes, a woman can" (Daily Trust, 2010).

Without given the opportunity to be educated, these women wouldn't have attained these positions they are today. President Ebele Jonathan's administration has tried in placing women in high political positions but there is still more to be done for Nigerian women to be in the mainstream of things globally. According to Ashimolowo and Akingbile; "in Nigeria like in many developing countries, women in general are marginalised politically, educationally, technologically, culturally, socially and in every aspect of life. In survey conducted by UNDP (1998), it was concluded that marginalisation of the women or girl-child was due to cultural and economic constraints militating against women empowerment", hence the need to bridge the gap. Education being the core of human development and the most crucial instrument for empowering the citizens with knowledge and skills which in turn provides them access to productive employment must be made available for Nigerian women.

Gender Inequality in Agriculture

In Nigeria, women play a dominant role in agricultural production. This was confirmed by the findings of a study financed by the United Nations Development Programme, Quast (2005), The study revealed that women make up 60% - 80% of the agricultural labour force in Nigeria, depending on the region, and they produced two-thirds of the food crops. Yet, despite this fact, there is a widespread assumption that men and not women make the key farm management decisions. As a result, agricultural extension services in Nigeria (as in other African countries) have traditionally been focused on men and their farm production needs, while neglecting the female majority of agricultural labour force (Quast, 2005). However, with greater part of the agricultural work done by women using primitive tools, their contributions are grossly neglected. According to Ezeani (1990), Nigerian women remain economically exploited in that much of their labour output never got quantified as part of the Gross National Product. The economic roles of women have

continued to be viewed as an extension of their domestic roles". Women's agricultural roles are central to society's survival but remain unrecognised. Women need agricultural resources and services that will enable them to carry out their roles effectively and adequately. Women in Nigeria have toiled under unfavourable conditions. Their aspirations are hampered by unfavourable conditions that deny them access to so many things. Ujo (1989) observed that "if democracy is to have its full meaning particularly in Nigeria, the rights of women must be taken seriously."

However, the main source of food problem in Nigeria is the failure to reach women with effective programmes to increase food production. There is a gender bias and inequality in the design of development policies, which tend to marginalise women from the benefit of such schemes. According to Ajani and Aina (2002), in Nigeria, female farmers are often among the voiceless particularly when it comes to influencing agricultural policies and projects. The exclusion of women from decision-making militate agricultural production. In Nigeria, gender affects participation in agriculture. Women's specific problems which result into low productivity in agriculture are related to tradition which operates within the society. Also women's attempt to increase her earning capacity by engaging in independent economic activities is united by lack of time and by customary prohibitions against a women's right to own or control economic resource (Henn, 1984).

According to Moser (1993), women are key factors in the economic system yet their neglect in developmental plans have been left untapped, a potentially large contributions. Improving the agricultural pursuits- of women in Nigeria will enhance production and thus promote Nigeria in realising her aspirations of becoming one of the twenty (20) largest economies in the world by year 2020. On the other hand, if women's rights in agriculture is not protected and promoted, Nigeria may not realise her economic growth by the year 2020 and attain her vision 2020 of economic transformation blueprint.

Research has shown that women possess great potentials to help in increasing agricultural productivity and subsequently economic development of the nation like men, but they are often neglected and not empowered. It is therefore necessary to ensure women equality in agriculture.

Gender-Based Violence

Female gender-based violence is any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts or deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (Beijing, 1995). Female gender-based violence is associated with wide range of physical and mental health problems that affect not only the victim, but also her children. It also has an impact on other aspects of women's lives such as their ability to work and ultimately it results in serious costs to the whole society (Heise, 2002).

Women who suffer such violence are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, disorders, injuries and result into disabilities and chronic pain syndromes. They are also vulnerable to a range of sexual and reproductive health outcomes. For example, forced sex, fear of violence both undermine a woman's or girl's ability to negotiate condom or

contraceptive use. Indeed, women who experience violence are at greater risk than those women living with HIV infection and experience unwanted pregnancy (Campbell, 2002).

Female-gender based violence therefore, encompasses a wide range of human rights violations, including sexual abuse of children or even older women, rape, incest, domestic violence, wife battering, sexual assault and harassment, trafficking of women and girls and several harmful traditional practices. Series of violence against women are enumerated in the Choices magazine. It was reported in the "Daily Trust" Newspaper of July 18, 2007, that Mrs. Ijeoma Eze was beaten to death by her 'beloved' husband over triplets. Then another victim of female gender-based violence was a 17 years old Tosin Ojo Ajakaye who was allegedly raped by a political stalwart and thugs. To make things worse for Tosin, she was hectored to withdraw her charges against her captors and in the face of stigmatisation, she opted to remain silent (Daily Trust News).

Another heinous crime of criminal dimension reported by Guardian newspaper of November 4, 2007 was that of Deputy-Inspector of Police, Yekini Jimoh, who shot his wife because she was suspected of infidelity (Rose, Choices Vol. 1). Another case in question is somewhere in Kano where a middle aged woman fell into labour at home and was locked in with her three year old daughter, by her husband who went out for two days. On coming back he found the lifeless body of his wife and the little girl sobbing beside her mum, whom she thought was asleep (Solanke, Vol. 1 No.9). No matter the justification for this attitude against this woman, two lives have been lost, and the trauma that the little girl will pass through in her life time can never be quantified.

A Nigerian commentator on CNN could only rationalise that the only sin committed by the woman was simply that she was a woman. Based on the incidences cited above, the Nigerian Government have to muster every available strength to eliminate gender-based violence. And women should be educated to voice out any form of violence meted out against them. Women should not feel it is their problem and it would not be something important if they should disclose their experiences of violence.

Conclusion

From afore discussion, it can be concluded that women constitutes the major part of the population in Nigeria, but they are not fairly treated as the male folk even when they possess the same experience and qualifications. However, they are absolutely central to sustainable development, economic advancement and social justice (Ashasim, 2004). In ensuring that Nigeria become an equitable society and become a competitive player in the economy of the world by the year 2020; repositioning within the government is therefore mandatory. Therefore, failure to involve women in important aspects of life is responsible for the continued under-development in Nigeria. Any society that discriminates between men and women pays dearly in greater poverty, slow economic growth, weaker governance and lower quality of life. A typical example is Nigeria, where women hold fewer positions in governing bodies, thus little impact on decision making or public policies. The programmes related to female gender should be implemented or else vision 20:2020 may indeed be a mirage.

Recommendations

- The implementation of the National Gender Policy should be done without further delay so that Nigeria can be a key player in the Committee of Nations by the year 2020 as projected in the vision 2020.
- Government should improve women capacity to translate all strategies, plans and programmes by the Ministry of Women Affairs into inputs and outcome.
- Government should include women in the planning and implementation of economic programmes.
- The need to implement policies of government is highly recommended in order to achieve these funds and resources need to be allocated for the education of women.

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