

## A PARADOX OF EQUALITY AND ‘HER STORY’ IN AFRICA

*Folashade E. Daramola*

Department of History and International Studies  
Bowen University, Nigeria

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### Corresponding Author\*

*Folashade E. Daramola*

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**Abstract:** Gender equity and equality issues are essential to the social and economic life of every country. Gender equity can be viewed as the basis for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women in all areas, particularly in the distribution of power, influence and economic independence. The term equality can be seen as a human rights issue and as a precondition for and indicator of sustainable human development. Using the historical and analytical approach, this work, therefore, re-examines the challenges faced by African women in the social, political and economic spaces. Data collection is based on Government reports, Administrative reports and other relevant secondary sources gathered through a multidisciplinary approach. It can be deduced from this work that gender inequality has impeded socioeconomic development in Africa. Findings from this work have therefore stressed that the enhancement of women’s status in society would not in any way reduce the social, economic and political standing of men. The whole society stands to gain a lot and this will thereby accelerate the pace of development. Also, this work will

bring to the fore that women control a marginal proportion of the nation’s economic resources and have therefore been particularly confronted by unprecedented social and economic hardship which has largely constrained their participation in various spheres of life. The economic hardship that has been persistently experienced has been more punitive for women, given the multiple demands and responsibilities they are confronted with. This has largely inhibited women’s drive towards personal empowerment and, consequently, effective participation in societal affairs. This work on gender inequality will, therefore, act as a catalyst to present-day women in Africa, to seek educational, economic, spiritual and political empowerment which could in the future lead to social justice, thereby fostering equality between the genders in all spheres of human endeavor.

**Keywords:** *Women, Equality, Development, and Africa.*

## INTRODUCTION

It is conspicuous that women have not so far had a chance to play a much significant role in the social, political and economic arena in Africa. In most societies in Africa, cultural and religious attributes have resulted in discriminatory laws or practices that, beginning at birth, prevent women from becoming

full and equal partners in their nation's societies and economies<sup>1</sup>. Women are essentially disadvantaged in the society and disadvantages suffered by women are so pervasive and universal that the international system, especially through the United Nations Organization; has had to especially focus on, and seek to address the problem. This is the sense in which there have been international conferences on women and their interests, particularly the Beijing in September 1995, to articulate issues of concern to women, and to seek for ways of significantly involving them in societal processes such as governance, while also significantly reducing their disadvantages and oppression<sup>2</sup>. But there is a wide gap between theory and practice. African women and in other parts of the world are still marginalized, exploited and their human rights violated. Besides, their ambitions and aspirations towards achieving equality, maximum advancement and effective participation in private and public life continue to be thwarted simply because they are women.

This paper, therefore, focuses on the Paradox of Equality and 'Her Story' in Africa. In this work, the challenges faced by contemporary African women would be interrogated. These challenges would be divided into three sections which are Social challenges of contemporary African women, Political challenges of contemporary African Women and Economic challenges of contemporary African women. These challenges extend beyond social, political and economic; therefore references would be made to other aspects of challenges faced by post-colonial African women. Also, this work will examine how these challenges have inhibited development in Africa.

## **SOCIAL CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN WOMEN AND ITS EFFECTS ON DEVELOPMENT**

The prevalence of rape or sexual assault cases is one of the major social-cultural and psychological challenges in African contemporary society<sup>3</sup>. Rape is a menace that is on the increase all over the world. Rape is one of the most serious crimes committed against females and it is of great concern to all. Some people see rape as a tool of warfare in some parts of the world, in many parts; the scourge is simply an evil act, which affects the economic, political, and social lives of its victims. In Africa, there is the prevalence of this cankerworm in both urban and rural areas. In Africa, the situation is quite worrisome and impinges seriously not only on the victims but on womanhood in general. Countries like Liberia, Uganda used rape as post-war warfare. This has posed enormous challenges to societal development socially, and often economically.

The Ghana Prisons Service Annual Report of 2008, for instance, indicates that out of a total of 9,837 prisoners, 79(0.8%) were rape offenders with 447 (4.5%) convicted of defilement (child sexual abuse)<sup>4</sup>. A lot more are out there living in the agony of their plights. In Nigeria, the Ministry of Health and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) carried a research on the incidence of rape and came out

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<sup>1</sup> Olaitan, A.W. 1998. Women In Politics In Nigeria In Amadu Sesay , Odebiyi Adelanwa (Eds) *Nigerian Women In Society and Development*. Ibadan. Dokun Publishing House . P.73.

<sup>2</sup> Olaitan, A.W. 1998. Women In Politics In Nigeria In Amadu Sesay , Odebiyi Adelanwa (Eds) *Nigerian Women In Society and Development*. Ibadan. Dokun Publishing House . P.73.

<sup>3</sup> Acquaye, V. 2015. Some Psychological Implication of Rape on Female Victims in Ajayi S.A , Ayantayo Kehinde (Eds) *Women In Development*. Ibadan. John Archers Publisher. P. 361.

<sup>4</sup> Acquaye, V. 2015. Some Psychological Implication of Rape on Female Victims in Ajayi S.A , Ayantayo Kehinde (Eds) *Women In Development*. Ibadan. John Archers Publisher. P. 361.

with startling figures which show that there are 18000 rape cases<sup>5</sup>. The coverage of rape in South Africa has been controversial and notoriously misinformed for years. This is as a result of the low report of rape cases and poor record-keeping and reporting of rape statistics. These unreported cases may be partly due to myths surrounding rape, such that victims and their close relations are never willing to talk about it. In Botswana, a 2009 study shows that about 4.9% of 1244 women of 13-24 reported having been raped in their families and 10.3% of 654 women that have been raped in their lifetime in a 2011 study<sup>6</sup>. The effects of rape on women and development are victims of rape are often made to suffer unquantifiable anguish, some diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociation from reality, depersonalization, they endure physical violence, avoid social life, get infected with sexually transmitted infections, encounter serious difficulty in remembering events, relives moments of sexual assaults and unwanted pregnancy amongst other ills<sup>7</sup>.

In Africa, women are usually subjected to physical and mental torture including wife-beating. African women experience physical and mental torture in the hands of their husbands, uncles, fathers, brothers, and stepfathers. A lot of women are subjected to punches by their husbands for trivial offenses as disobedience<sup>8</sup>. The data based on this research suggested that it is indeed a huge problem and also it was said to be common in about 20 to 30 percent of households in 14 of the states in Nigeria especially in Edo, Imo, Cross River, Delta, Plateau, and Taraba<sup>9</sup>. Some reasons responsible for wife-beating as provided by men include rudeness, disobedience, stubbornness, provocation, lack of respect, refusal of sex and many others.

To this effect, rape has hindered the participation of women in the development of Africa, thereby; the victims of rape find it difficult to speak out leading to others falling in the same trap. Also, a victim of rape may end up withdrawing herself from school because he or she may not be able to bear the psychological trauma thereby depriving the victim of her right to education. Another effect of rape to development is the fact that rape victim is often exposed to sexually transmitted diseases which may lead to death.

In addition to the above, widowhood is one of the most pathetic challenges facing African women. Widowhood is a term that refers to either a man (widower) or woman (widow) who has lost his or her partner to the cold hands of death. For this paper, the term “widowhood” would be narrowed down to women that are widows. The agony of this period is quite unimaginable as well as some strange inhumane and dehumanizing tribal and cultural demands and treatment meted out to the widows all in a

<sup>5</sup> Ulasi, J.2000. *Becoming a Woman, Exploring the Challenges that Face Our Girls*. Lagos: Mbeyi and Associates Publishing co. P.55.

<sup>6</sup>Ewalefoh, E. 2016. *The Contemporary Challenges of Rape: AMenace To Womanhood and Development*. M.A Seminar paper Department of History, University of Ibadan. P.11

<sup>7</sup> Ewalefoh, E. 2016. *The Contemporary Challenges of Rape: AMenace To Womanhood and Development*. M.A Seminar paper Department of History, University of Ibadan. P.2

<sup>8</sup> Imosemi, B. 1999. International Women’s Day on Violence Against Gender- Voice of Womanhood, *Daily Times* March 9. P.17.

<sup>9</sup> Imosemi, B. 1999. International Women’s Day on Violence Against Gender- Voice of Womanhood, *Daily Times* March 9. P. 17.

bid to prove innocence or culpability<sup>10</sup>. In Ghana, most of the widowhood rites are being spearheaded by women who suppress the widows, torture, strip them naked, shave their hairs and force them to drink concoction prepared with leaves, hairs, and fingernails of their late husbands. Also, the property of the late husband would be taken away. In a different part of Nigeria, widows suffer inhumane treatment such as drinking water used to bathe the corpse of their husbands, sleeping with such corpse alone throughout the night, having their hair shaved, wearing black dresses for sometimes, being forced to marry their late husbands' brother and at times losing their property to their in-laws<sup>11</sup>. The Ishan, Yoruba and Onitsha customary laws, for instance, make a mockery of women's inheritance rights such as widows cannot inherit their husbands' property<sup>12</sup>. The irony of life is that such widows had worked and labored with their husbands but received nothing following the death of their husbands. The effect of this on women and development is that women tend to have traumatic experience especially when the husband's death is very sudden and unexpected. Also, these experiences affect their economic status and thereby make them wallow in lack. It causes extreme poverty, banishment, violence, homelessness, health problem and discrimination.

Another social challenge to African women is early marriage which is a form of insurance<sup>13</sup>. This massively affects the educational progress of girls in many countries. In rural areas of Africa, it is not uncommon for poor families to endorse the early marriage of girls to lighten the family's economic burden. In these circumstances, early marriage becomes a reason to leave school. For example, in Ethiopia and some countries in West Africa, marriage at seven or eight is not uncommon, although in some cases girls happen to be able to carry on their education even after moving to their in-laws' household<sup>14</sup>. Despite the policy change in Ethiopia, whereby the minimum official age of marriage for girls became 18, in some parts of the country girls are still married before the age of ten<sup>15</sup>.

In many parts of Africa, parents still hold heavy sway on the selection of husbands for their daughters even when such children are above twenty-one years of age. The marginalization of women could be observed in the marriage institution as women do not have the locus stand to indicate or willingly choose their husbands<sup>16</sup>. Even hitherto, young girls are forced to marry men chosen for them by their fathers without their consent or that of their mothers. There are instances of young girls of 12 or 13 years withdrawn from schools to be married to old men even old as their fathers.

When a man performs courts or church marriage, he is legally bound to practice monogamy. The law stipulates a stiff penalty for such a man to marry another wife when the legal wife is still around-

<sup>10</sup> Odebowale, I. T. 2012. Women In Political, Social, Academic and Economic Leadership, Rebirth and Transformation. *International Journal Of the Feminist/ Womanist Theorist*, Vol 4 March P. 333.

<sup>11</sup> Imosemi, B.(1995) " International Women's Day on Violence Against Gender-Voice of Womanhood, *Daily Times*, March 9. P.17

<sup>12</sup> Fadeyiye, O . 1997. *Social Studies*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ibadan: Glory Land Publishing Company. P.147

<sup>13</sup> Fadeyiye, O . 1997. *Social Studies*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ibadan: Glory Land Publishing Company. P.147

<sup>14</sup> Faseke, M. 2005. *Nigeria Women Professionals:A Historical Analysis*. Lagos. Tidings Publications. P. 6

<sup>15</sup> Faseke, M. 2005. *Nigeria Women Professionals:A Historical Analysis*. Lagos. Tidings Publications. P. 6

<sup>16</sup> Fadeyiye, O. 1997. *Social Studies*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ibadan: Glory Land Publishing Company. P.147

hale and hearty; otherwise he commits bigamy which is punishable by imprisonment<sup>17</sup>. However, many men, even lawyers, and judges have married second wives and thereby committing bigamy without the law taking its cause. For the fear of losing their homes, such women will not complain or sue their husbands. Women are thus marginalized in this regards and this is nothing short of a denial of human rights.

After marriage, women are usually compelled to adopt the religion of their husbands if they still want to keep their matrimonial homes intact. Although the constitution allows freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, in most cases, women are not given the opportunity of retaining their faith after marriage particularly when it involves marrying from a different religious background. This is marginalization and denial of human rights as far as women are concerned.

Another social challenge is women trafficking. Women trafficking refer to the illegal movement of a woman from one place to another or from one country to another, usually of nefarious activities such as sexual exploitation or prostitution, forced labor, and other unwholesome activities. Many reasons are responsible for woman trafficking and they are lust for worldly riches, ignorance, abject poverty, unconducive environment, unemployment and so on. Ugandan women are trafficked to India, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and the United Arab Emirates<sup>18</sup>. Dozens of modern anti-trafficking laws have been passed around the world but the progress of the anti-trafficking movement is still very low<sup>19</sup>. The effect of women trafficking on women and development are the victims in the process of trafficking are abused and exploited and this could result in infectious diseases like HIV, AIDS and so on, also they could suffer from severe psychological and physical injuries.

African women infected with the Human Immune Deficiency (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) are at present on the increase. The present rising incidence of the diseases among women in Africa is largely due to the practice of commercial sex as an alternative source of generating income. The UNAIDS Report on the global HIV and AIDS epidemic in June 2000 give the following figures ( highest estimates) for HIV prevalence among adults in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda and this is represented in the tabular form below<sup>20</sup>.

<b>COUNTRIES</b>	<b>FEMALES(15-20)</b>	<b>MALE(15-24)</b>
MALAWI	16.4	8.00
MOZAMBIQUE	16.11	8.97
TANZANIA	9.27	5.28
UGANDA	8.99	5.12
ZAMBIA	18.68	9.32

Sources: UNAIDS Report cited in Isakson J. Spissoy J and Gunnar N. 2002. *Socio-Economic Effects of HIV/AIDS in African Countries*. Report of CMI Michelson Institute Bergen, Norway PP. 13-14.

<sup>17</sup>Fadeiye, O . 1997. *Social Studies*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ibadan: Glory Land Publishing Company. P.141.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO, 2006. *Human Trafficking in Nigeria: Root Causes and Recommendations*, Policy Paper, No.17.

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO, 2006. *Human Trafficking in Nigeria: Root Causes and Recommendations*, Policy Paper, No.16.

<sup>20</sup> Isakson J. , Spissoy J and Gunnar N. 2002. *Socio-Economic Effects of HIV/AIDS in African Countries*. Report of CMI Michelson Institute Bergen, Norway. PP. 13-14.

The implication of the above table on women and development is that several women who could have achieved financial prowess and attain the position of economic prominence at a local and national level have had their lives cut short as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Lack of regard for womanhood in the traditional society still rears its ugly head during the colonial and post-independence periods. Women are still regarded as chattels that could be bought and sold at will.<sup>21</sup> Most of the practices which held women in bondage during the traditional period and which led women to be subordinated, exploited and marginalized are still present with us. This includes a lack of respect for womanhood, physical assaults and mal-treatment at the slightest provocation, widowhood practices, and sex-assault. Inaccessibility of women to formal education robbed them of a lot of advantages such as having gainful employment, claiming equality with men and participating actively in decision-making processes that are designed to move their country forward.

### **POLITICAL CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN WOMEN AND ITS EFFECTS ON DEVELOPMENT**

In contemporary Nigeria, we remember women like Prof. Dora Akuyili (former NAFDAC boss and Minister for Information) Mrs. Obiageli Ezekwesli. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (former Finance Minister), Mrs. Farida Waziri ( former EFCC boss), Haija Rukayatu Rufai ( former Minister of Education)<sup>22</sup>. Others include Hajiya Zainab Maina (former Minister of Women and Social Welfare) Hajiya Hadiza Ibrahim Mailafia (former Minister for Environment) Ms. Ama Pepple (former Minister for Land and Housing), Mrs. Deziana Allison Madueke (former Minister for Petroleum Resources), Mrs. Omobola Johnson (former Minister of Technology)<sup>23</sup>. In 2015, there were thirteen women in the Federal Executive Council<sup>24</sup>.

In the African continent, Mrs. Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia was the first African woman to be elected president and also Wangari Maathai, former Environment Minister in Kenya won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004<sup>25</sup>. Burundi and Tanzania have been recorded and recognized to be countries with women legislators crossing over the 30 percent bar and this is in line with the Beijing Spirit and the Southern African Development Community Targets<sup>26</sup>.

Despite the efforts being made by African women to pull themselves out of the shadows, the gender imbalance in politics persists. Women, unlike their male counterparts, are facing challenges in the political arena. Very few educated women participate in politics because of the negative perception

<sup>21</sup>Fadeyiye, O. 1997. *Social Studies*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ibadan: Glory Land Publishing Company. P.147.

<sup>22</sup>Acquaye, V. 2015. Gender Imbalance In Nigeria Politics: A Religio-cultural Approach. In S.A Ajayi, K.J (ed) Ayantayo. *Women In Development, Essay in Memory of Prof. Dorcas Olubanke Akinde*. Ibadan. John Archers Publishers. P.101.

<sup>23</sup>Acquaye, V. 2015. Some Psychological Implication of Rape on Female Victims in Ajayi S.A , Ayantayo Kehinde (Eds) *Women In Development*. Ibadan. John Archers Publisher .P 103.

<sup>24</sup> Acquaye, V. 2015. Some Psychological Implication of Rape on Female Victims in Ajayi S.A , Ayantayo Kehinde (Eds) *Women In Development*. Ibadan. John Archers Publisher.P.103

<sup>25</sup> Acquaye, V. 2015. Some Psychological Implication of Rape on Female Victims in Ajayi S.A , Ayantayo Kehinde (Eds) *Women In Development*. Ibadan. John Archers Publisher.P. 104.

<sup>26</sup>Acquaye, V. 2015. Some Psychological Implication of Rape on Female Victims in Ajayi S.A , Ayantayo Kehinde (Eds) *Women In Development*. Ibadan. John Archers Publisher.P. 104.

of women. Many women have to get permission from their husbands to attend a meeting or be involved in some activity outside the home. They have less bargaining power, which may be dependent on their ability to earn income. Furthermore, women are still largely responsible for household labor and child care, leaving or no time to participate in other activities. Religious and cultural traditions may also be a barrier and could create constraints for women involved in politics.

One of the major political challenges to African women's political participation is insufficient to finance to fund political activities<sup>27</sup>. Money has assumed an unhealthy priority in determining who wins the elections in the country. Electoral offices are presently occupied by the highest bidder. Women find it difficult than men to raise the kind of campaign fund required. Women are said to be amongst the poorest people in the world and a poor person cannot play a significant role in politics<sup>28</sup>. If political participation did not involve so much money there would be more women in politics. When the political process is monetized and the cost of contesting elections prohibitive, it hinders the entry of honest and hard-working people into politics, and this has become the lot of women in Nigeria. From the above, this hurts women and development.

The ideology of equal representation of both men and women in the decision-making process is considered pertinent for the proper development of any country. An assessment of the political system in Nigeria reveals that gender inequality has been observed in the decision-making process and political participation<sup>29</sup>. Women's political representation at all levels of public decision-making statistics on political position by gender for the year 1999. The statistical indicators show that political participation by the female gender is still very much low in Nigeria with a participation rate of less than 40% in key political positions<sup>30</sup>.

**Table 1: Gender and Politics/ Decision-Making Political Positions-1999**

Positions	Male	Female	Total	% Female
Ministers/Special Advisers	35	9	44	20.5
Speakers	35	1	36	2.7
Governors	36	-	36	0
Deputy Governors	35	1	36	2.7
Local Government Council Chairman	765	9	774	1.2
Councillors	8,667	143	8,810	1.6
State Assembly Members	978	12	990	1.2
Senators	106	3	109	2.8
House of Representatives Members	347	13	360	3.6

<sup>27</sup> Chukwelezi, C.O 1999. Women In Politics: A Challenge to Socio-Cultural Values in Nigeria. *Nigeria Journal of Social Studies Review*. Vol 8, June. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Acquaye, V. 2015. Some Psychological Implication of Rape on Female Victims in Ajayi S.A , Ayantayo Kehinde (Eds) *Women In Development*. Ibadan. John Archers Publisher.P. 103

<sup>29</sup>Aderigbe, G. and Ayegboyin, D. 1998. Religion and The Family. Discriminatory Policy and Women: An Overview of Yoruba Traditional Religion. *National Association for the Study of Religions and Education (NASRED)*.P.94.

<sup>30</sup>Dauda, R. 2004. The Economic Context of Gender Equality in Akinboye Solomon (Ed.).*Paradox of Gender Equality In Nigerian Politics*.Lagos. Concept Publication Limited . P.84.

Source: UNIFEM (2000) Status of Nigerian Women and Men-Statistical Profile. Ed. Nwankwo Nkechi Eke.

The role of women in politics has been minimal despite the notable initiatives made by pre-colonial female political activists and leader of women's movements, such as the efforts of Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti in 1953 as well as the Post-independence efforts of women, notably the formation of the National Council of Women's Societies, the northern-based 'Matan Arewa', the emergence of women leaders in some political parties, and the inclusion of few women in state cabinets in different parts of Nigeria<sup>31</sup>. The general reasons for women's limited achievement in politics are lack of funds for effective campaigning, administrative expenses, the violent nature of politics in Nigeria, lack of courage and determination by women, poor knowledge of the political terrain, societal attitude towards female political activists, and lack of support from the women-folks<sup>32</sup>. These problems are borne out of the existing socio-cultural environment within which women operate and which have served to highlight women's powerlessness. The almost depoliticization of the female gender in Nigeria has continued to give rise to the emergence of women and democracy-focused non- governmental organizations that have attempted to help women achieve equal representation in government by exercising their voting rights and running as candidates for elections<sup>33</sup>. One reason why women have been deprived of their political rights is that most time women have proven to be more corrupt than men. In Nigeria, when a woman is allowed to take up a political position, the amount of money they embezzle is shocking and for instance, in Nigeria, we have Patricia Eteh, Mrs. Diezani Alison Madueke, etc exemplifies this.

Some scholars have attributed the political challenges among African women to disunity<sup>34</sup>. They cited the proliferation of women organizations, which has amounted to the pursuit of individual economic interests rather than the goal of status advancement for women<sup>35</sup>. Surprisingly, even the attitudes of women to their womenfolk who hold political offices remain uncomplimentary. They are treated, as pariahs are perhaps borne out of envy or on the false belief that political offices should be the preserves of unmarried women or those without committed domestic responsibilities.

Africa's colonial experience was a significant contributory factor to the current political marginalization of women in Africa. The colonialists believed that only men could be active in the public sphere and earn a living to support their families. It was mostly African males who were given some education and got recruited into the colonial civil service and merchant houses. This practice served to reinforce and generalize patriarchal values in Africa. Besides, it marked the beginning of the underrepresentation of women in the formal agencies of government, a situation which has been continued in the post-independence period. The control of greater economic resources from cash crop

<sup>31</sup>. Dauda, R. 2004. The Economic Context of Gender Equality in Akinboye Solomon Ed. *Paradox of Gender Equality In Nigerian Politics*.Lagos. Concept Publication Limited. P.212.

<sup>32</sup>Dauda, R. 2004. The Economic Context of Gender Equality in Akinboye Solomon Ed.*Paradox of Gender Equality In Nigerian Politics*.Lagos. Concept Publication Limited. P.212.

<sup>33</sup>Dauda, R. 2004. The Economic Context of Gender Equality in Akinboye Solomon Ed.*Paradox of Gender Equality In Nigerian Politics*.Lagos. Concept Publication Limited. P.212.

<sup>34</sup> Ugwulebo,E. and Kinikanwo, A .2000, "*Obstacles to Women Liberation in Africa*" cited in *Newswatch*, Pp.17-18.

<sup>35</sup> Ugwulebo,E. and Kinikanwo, A .2000, "*Obstacles to Women Liberation in Africa*" cited in *Newswatch*, Pp.17-18.



production and merchandising by men, under colonialism, greatly affected their domination of the political landscape immediately after independence. Women were concentrated in the production of food crops.

Another political challenge on women is the perception that women belong at home. President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria's statement to his wife buttresses this point. His statement goes thus, "I do not know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room"<sup>36</sup>. He made this statement while he was in Germany with Chancellor Angela Merkel, one of the most prominent leaders in the world.

Besides, in a later interview, Buhari boldly reiterated his stance, saying his wife's most important duty was to "look after" him and the home "even if she is working". The sad truth is that while the Nigerian president's comments could be dismissed as the ranting of a 73-years-old with outdated views, in reality, his statements accurately reflect widely held beliefs in a stubbornly patriarchal society. His comments came just three days after the International Day of the Girl Child, meant to focus on the plight of disadvantaged girls all over the world<sup>37</sup>. UNICEF statistics reveal Nigeria is home to the largest number of child brides in Africa, with 23 million girls and women having been married in childhood. Northern Nigeria, where Buhari comes from, has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the country<sup>38</sup>. The region is predominately Muslim, and "Islamic tradition" is usually given as justification for such practices. However, shabby treatment is by no means restricted to the north or one religion. No woman has ever been elected governor in any of Nigeria's 36 states, a female president or even vice – president remains unimaginable to most. Leadership is generally not associated with women. This sad reality is all the more reason Buhari should realize there are concrete implications for how these words could affect the aspirations of young Nigerian girls.

In all, the exclusion of women from leadership positions has robbed mankind of their unique potential for governance. The expansion of the political space in the country through the formation of more political parties has not given laudable opportunities to women to contest in elections and thus these obstacles affected and marginalized the quota of women's contribution to development. Education has also played a role in the challenges of women's involvement in politics because failure to educate the female folks about their political rights has put them in a state of believing that men dominate the political scene<sup>39</sup>. Also, the media has never been helping women. The media does not portray women in a good place of taking up politics. Women are viewed as sex objects instead of an agent of development in society. Thus, the media has not helped in matters when it comes to women involved in politics.

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<sup>36</sup> Alonge Sede, 2016. My Wife Belongs In The Kitchen, Buhari Insists, *Premium Times* Nigeria, October P.2.

<sup>37</sup> Alonge Sede, 2016. My Wife Belongs In The Kitchen, Buhari Insists, *Premium Times* Nigeria, October . P.2.

<sup>38</sup> Alonge Sede, 2016. My Wife Belongs In The Kitchen, Buhari Insists, *Premium Times* Nigeria, October .P. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Okeke, A. 2003 "Women and Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic", Lagos. MIJ Professional Publishers Limited, P.73.

## ECONOMIC CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN WOMEN AND ITS EFFECTS ON DEVELOPMENT

'In Africa of old everybody used to work', President Nyerere once said<sup>40</sup>. In other words, in Africa of old everybody had their social function and their source of income. As a part of a family enterprise, everybody worked according to their capacity and education, though not necessarily full-time. There was usually time for family engagements, for learning or community obligations. Unemployment was non-existent. One major distinguishing factor is that while men are meant to work, women, on the other hand, are meant to assist the men on the farm to make income for the family. The profit is owned by the man while the women only work without any income. The reason for this is the patriarchal nature of the society which views men as the breadwinner of the family. The implication of this on development is that women are subjected to dependent people who depend on their husbands for survival.

One of the contemporary economic challenges faced by African women is less access to productive resources. In an agrarian economy like Nigeria, accessibility of land and credit are majorly controlled by men and women have only the control of the portions allocated to them for family maintenance. Although, since the United Nations Women's Decade (1975-1985), a great deal of conscious effort has been made to enhance women's empowerment in this respect, yet, barely a dent was made in the redistribution of productive resources and values from men to women<sup>41</sup>. Availability of credit plays a pivotal role not only in mobilizing resources but also in using these resources to raise productivity. Unfortunately, because Nigerian women generally do not own land, which they can use as collateral security, they receive an inappropriately small share of credit from banking institutions. Those of them in agriculture, therefore, do not have sufficient funds to purchase improved seeds and to improve the land, which they farm. Lack of equal access to credit facilities also explains why, despite their numerical superiority in retail trading in Nigeria, only a few women entrepreneurs are found in big manufacturing industries and other businesses that require huge capital.<sup>42</sup>

An awareness of the fact of unemployment came with the alarming proliferation of shanty-towns on the city outskirts where people were flocking in search of wage labour<sup>43</sup>. At the same time, the decline of rural living standards accelerated the flight to urban areas, which soon involved new strata of the population. If forced labour, the migrations of adult males, and the segregational policy of the colonial administration had penned women in the rural economy, now they too went en masse into towns thus exacerbating the problem of unemployment<sup>44</sup>.

Culture, as related to the conceptualization of women's work, should be stressed<sup>45</sup>. In some surveys, women, for instance, those in purdah, may not be interviewed directly by enumerators, hence their contribution to work and family income is neglected. It is often said of northerners in Nigeria that,

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<sup>40</sup>Cutrufelli, R.M.1983.*Women of Africa-Roots of Oppression*. London. Zed Press P. 87.

<sup>41</sup>Cutrufelli, R. M.1983.*Women of Africa-Roots of Oppression*. London. Zed Press. P.87.

<sup>42</sup> Dauda, R. 2004. The Economic Context of Gender Equality in Akinboye Solomon Ed.*Paradox of Gender Equality In Nigerian Politics*.Lagos. Concept Publication Limited. P.85.

<sup>43</sup>Cutrufelli, R. M.1983.*Women of Africa-Roots of Oppression*. London. Zed Press. P.87.

<sup>44</sup>Cutrufelli, R. M.1983.*Women of Africa-Roots of Oppression*. London. Zed Press. P.87.

<sup>45</sup> Dauda, R. 2004. The Economic Context of Gender Equality in Akinboye Solomon Ed. *Paradox of Gender Equality In Nigerian Politics*.Lagos. Concept Publication Limited. P.56.

instead of the women in purdah going to market, the market comes to them. Yet, these women were classified as housewives. Sometimes the husbands insist on answering questions on behalf of the wife/wives, and it is common knowledge that women hardly give their husbands a total picture of their earnings capacity out of fear that their 'feeding allowance' from the husband would be cut.

The women working in the informal sector are usually self-employed, trading, or in family enterprises. They are handicapped by lack of capital for large-scale investments, lack of education for training in more up-to-date training, and the ability to use modern technological applications such as computers. These, therefore, limit their ability to compete favorably with not just small-scale enterprises owned by men but also industries owned by companies and/ or the government. In some cases, women cannot even get needed loans from banks and other financial institutions because they do not have the legal titles to land properties as family lands are traditionally registered in the name of the males.

Women's historical experience of discrimination puts them at a disadvantaged position economically. The socio-economic status of women plays a significant role in enhancing their participation and representation in political decision making bodies. In other words, lack of economic resources is one of the biggest obstacles that prevent women from participating in politics in greater numbers. Furthermore, they have no money on their own; the money belongs to their fathers, their husbands or their in-laws. Women's participation in political life depends largely on access to employment which gives them not only material independence but also certain professional skills and greater self-confidence. Moreover, the low level of literacy among the females compared to the males means the formal-sector jobs are less accessible to the women. There is fierce competition with men for the few available openings, and, in some cases, the employers are reluctant to hire a female because they might take more excuses from work than the males. Women have not been adequately integrated into the mainstream of their society's economy, the majority of them still have limited access to productive activities, formal-sector employment, social and physical infrastructure. Arising from all these are high mortality rates, high illiteracy rates, low earning and low productivity, resulting in low status or social importance. These have thereby posed as effects on women and development.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the efforts being made by women to pull themselves out of the shadows, these disparate challenges persist. Women, unlike their male counterparts, face difficulties in diverse ways. It has become an uphill task for them to be able to play a significant role in their societies. In light of the above, challenges faced by women can be classified into social, political and economic. These have affected their contribution to their societies. These challenges vary from society to society. They include rape, widowhood, women trafficking, early marriage, disunity among women, lack of funds, lack of education on the political right, lack of availability of credit, less access to productive resources, colonial experience and among others. These have also resulted in African's women marginalization, subordination, violence, abuse, illiteracy, poverty and so on and have thereby limited their quota to the development of their societies. Equality will no longer be a paradox but a reality if women can overcome these already discussed challenges.

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