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TOPICS:

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BOOK REVIEW
DIDACTIC MATERIAL

The Rome Consensus

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WOMEN & NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Fatile Jacob Olufemi

ABSTRACT

The role of women in the development of the nation is quite significant, even though largely impeded and unrecognised. This article seeks to point out such critical areas of women's contribution, while highlighting inhibiting factors toward a greater contribution and, proffering solution so as to produce a well-rounded development of the nation, with an active involvement of its feminine folk.

INTRODUCTION

The close of the 20th century witnessed an increased prominence of women in the world generally. Prominence in terms of world politics, the corporate setting and in the socio-economic aspects. The 21st century will even witness a greater prominence of women. Culture and tradition that have kept women in bondage are gradually giving ways. Thus, in recent years, women have received unprecedented attention from individual researchers and academic institutions reviewing their roles and status. Chaslton noted that this avid intellectual interest has been outpaced only by the profusion of voluntary non-governmental organizations that ostensibly seek to defend women's rights and clarify women's position on

socio-economic, legal, cultural and political issues¹.

Government agencies and departments have been co-opted (albeit often reluctantly and superficially) into campaigns to protect the basic rights of women. Thus empowering women is increasingly being recognized as a condition for and as an indicator of the level of success in the attainment of sustainable human development. Infact, UNDP reported that women constitute more than half of the world's population and have contributed significantly to the well being of human race². This point is very crucial to the relevance of women in the 21st century in national development.

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Women issue has therefore become an important and integral part of contemporary discourse on development and democratization worldwide. No wonder, Udegbe argued that despite the fact that women have been placed according to the societal norms, stereotypes and traditional ideology that relegate women to housewife roles while their counterparts are providers and final authority, the contributions of women are still noticeable in major strata of the society³. Delving into archives, it would be discovered that women have indeed contributed to the political, social, economic and professional growth of both developed and developing nations of the world. Notwithstanding this, Boserup and Bryson however agreed that women in Africa have been systematically excluded from the benefits of planned development in both the colonial and past-colonial eras⁴. This is in spite of their importance to major sectors of their economies especially agricultural food supply, the large informal sector and the service and farm labour force⁵.

Not only that, women everywhere in the world are poorly represented at the national level and in many situations are severely disadvantaged. Women are those with a 'silence voice' isolated by society from the decision-making process and taking no part in the

decisions, which affect their lives. Even where they are the targets of development programmes, women are rarely involved in the process of planning and implementation. They may play a crucial role in society and be fundamental to the economy, yet are usually treated as an afterthought in development planning. All too often, for example, a component part addressed specially to women has been added to a major development programme simply to appease feminist pressure groups.

Women are the major food producers of the third world and by denying them their rights the economies of whole communities are undermined. It is not sufficient to incorporate them in some artificial way into the development process. Indeed, they are an integral part of that process.

In Nigeria, women form a sizeable proportion of the country's population. They are an important segment in the development process. Whitehead observed that women should be given every opportunity to develop their potentials so that they can take a rightful place in nation-building. He added that researchers have pinpointed the exclusion of women in development policy as a major source of failure or lack of satisfactory results in development efforts⁶. Awori also contended that although women have

always participated in development, their work has not been given due recognition, their knowledge has not been fully utilized and their experience has not been taken into account⁷. Thus, achieving sustainable economic development and consequently national development in Nigeria therefore depends heavily on promoting the welfare and productivity of women. There is no doubt in the fact that women had already played roles in food production, household maintenance and reproduction and more importantly in community development. But gender-differentiated resource allocation and prevailing social norms prevent them from playing a full role.

It is in realization of this fact that the United Nations (UN) declared 1975 as the International Year of, and thereafter set aside 1975-1984 as a decade to appraise and review the situation of women. Thus, there is a strong need to re-evaluate conventional thinking on development. The western notions of housewives are highly inappropriate in most parts of the third world. They often result in unsuitable programmes in which, for example, women are taught to embroider, knit or sew. While there is nothing wrong with these activities per se, they are frequently very far from women's real interest and work experience and fail to free them from exploitative relationships.

The purpose of this article is to critically analyze the role of women in national development in Nigeria. Since national development has to do with human activities that seek to ensure social welfare, growth and creativity within human environment, it seems reasonable that the role of women in national development in today's society should be a subject of major concern. It must be pointed out right from the beginning that the article is not an empirical study, rather, it is a purely theoretical reflection on the subject.

SOME THEORETICAL ISSUES

This section deals with some conceptual clarifications as well as review of theories, which are considered relevant to women and development.

It would be most appropriate to begin this theoretical exploration by raising some pertinent questions such as what is development. What is the existing relationship such that we are able to describe a particular state of affairs as underdevelopment?

Development is a problematic concept and there are many views on the meaning of the concept as there are scholars. Rodney noted, "it is a many-sided process"⁸. However, a simple definition of development as a change or a transformation into a higher state will serve as a useful beginning towards understanding the concept of

development. This is because the word "development" itself has undergone a great deal of change in the scholarly literature. The earlier writers generally were more concerned with growth. Much of the development effort of the 1950's and 1960's was based on this approach. The Gross National Product Approach (GNP) is a purely economic model, which asserts the primacy of economic factors, most especially capital formation and high per capital income as initiator and index of development respectively. This approach assumes that balanced economic growth is the most appropriate strategy for realizing the objectives of national development⁹.

Rodney in his own argument claimed that at the level of the individual person, development implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being¹⁰. But for Rodney, the achievement of any of these aspects of personal development is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole¹¹. He, however, seems to have subsumed the person within the social structure as a necessary condition for development.

In search of a more acceptable approach to the concept of development, Seers and others of like minds directed attention to the

conditions of human beings rather than building nations. This group of scholars propounded the Development Model Approach, which contends that man should be the central focus of development and so, any development that is anti-human is no development at all. Any effort that would therefore qualify as development must be capable of eliminating or at worst, reducing inequality and unemployment¹².

To the political scientists, development connotes increase in the capacity of political agencies, political unification and political participation¹³. Myrdal, on the other hand is of the opinion that development involves total and full mobilization of the whole societal system and that it has to be comprehensive and should invoke total political commitment¹⁴.

Taking a wholistic approach, Fadeiye strongly feels that development could be described as those changes or progress, which enhances better quality of life for the generality of the people in the society. Such desirable and positive changes are observable in all human endeavours with particular reference to social, economic, political and cultural aspects of life, which usher in progress for the overall benefit of the entire population in the society. Such development should be genuinely geared towards the eradication of poverty, reduction of

inequalities, checking unemployment and facilitating easy access to basic needs of life, such as food, health care, education shelter, electricity, transportation and communication¹⁵. Thus, development should involve the active participation of all and sundry so as to bring about concrete and meaningful transformation in the lives of people in the community, state and even in the nation or the country at large.

At this juncture, it is necessary to operationalise the concept of national development. Different scholars have described the concept of national development from various perspectives. The National Educational Research Council perceives development as “the plan, usually initiated by the government, for economic social and political development of the nation”¹⁶. According to Aderinto and Abdullai, national development encompasses social and political development¹⁷. Other scholars also see development as rapid mechanization and massive production of material goods and services as some of the notable yardsticks for measuring national development. Thus, national development could be referred to as the processes of development that a nation experiences or undergoes.

One of the vital issues that is connected to, and has profound effects on national development is women empowerment.

Women empowerment according to Fadeyiye is a notable pre-requisite for national development¹⁸. The contributions of women in all spheres of human endeavours to the overall development of the home, the community, the state, the nation and the world at large could no longer be dismissed with a wave of the hand. From time immemorial, women had played an immense role in bringing outstanding changes and rapid transformation to their different states and countries¹⁹. It is important to stress that women now constitute important partners in progress in any serious movement towards national development in all its ramifications. It is a common knowledge that no nation, regardless of its status, whether developed or developing can rise beyond the quality of its citizenry. Hence, the essential role of women in national development can no longer be underestimated.

In a concluding section of one of the few critical reviews of theories of economic development and cultural change, Andre Gunder Frank provided a figurative expression of the dominant theory, which has been guiding development policy in many developing nations for several decades. According to Sanda, Frank raised the question, which struck at the root of the problem and provided the answer, which other scholars have utilized to blindfold

development-oriented political leaders for a long time²⁰.

Indeed Frank had queried: How are the people in the underdeveloped countries to achieve economic development? By waiting for Christmas and then accepting the gift of diffusion from Santa Claus in the North.....?²¹

What Andre Gunder Frank is trying to point out here is that the first major theory of development, which emphasizes reliance on aid, in any form, deserves to be rejected.

A number of scholars such as Bauer, Hayter, Hudson and Goutlet and Mende (1973) agreed that foreign aids could not solve the problem of underdevelopment of third world nations; instead, such aids could only increase the dependence of the underdeveloped nations on the developed societies²². Thus, there is a renewed concern for a deeper and radical re-analysis of the continued states of underdevelopment in the third world and Africa in particular following the realization that dependence on foreign financial, technical and other aids has compounded the problem of underdevelopment in these societies.

However, a major re-thinking of the traditional and conventional theories of underdevelopment has provided

another dimension to the debate on the reason for underdevelopment in the third world. Rodney and Ley agreed that the underdevelopment theory is in essence a theory of the history of underdevelopment nations: it is a theory of their relations of production under colonialism and imperialism²³. Amin in his own analysis, sees socio-economic development in terms of self-centred system and a peripheral system. Development is equated to a fundamental difference between capital accumulation ... economic and social development characteristic of self-centred system and that of a peripheral system²⁴.

For Everet Hagen and other scholars, endogenous factors are responsible for third world under-development. That is, if we are searching for reasons why most of these nations are underdeveloped, we must consider the critical internal requirement for societal development²⁵. Infact, Hagen claimed that the extent of creativity present in the population and the degree to which such creativity is being geared towards innovations in production technologies, rather than permit such creativity to be geared towards other spheres such as war, philosophy etc. is a pre-requisite or a necessary concomitant of development²⁶.

Onyemelukwe pointed out that many single factor theories have pointed at the

absence of capital or savings or entrepreneurship or appropriate technology as responsible for the persistence of underdevelopment. He noted further that other scholars have attributed this problem to the neglect of the agricultural sector, (in favour of premature industrialization), rapid population growth, inefficient or inadequate use of human resources, especially labour, the absence of popular participation in the development process, inefficient combination of the factors of production, and the existence of numerous leakages in the economy²⁷.

It is therefore appropriate at this juncture to stress the fact that neither development nor underdevelopment can be understood fully without the recognition of both exogenous and endogenous factors involved in the process.

Having considered the meaning of development and some theories of development, it is necessary for us to take a cursory look at feminist theories of social change, which is equally relevant for our analysis in this paper.

Feminists agree that there are deep-rooted social, economic and political inequalities between the sexes, which need to be changed but they fundamentally disagree in their analysis of why this situation has come about and

how far it could, and should be altered through government policy²⁸.

Within feminism, five theoretical perspectives on the role of the state can be seen as analytically distinct: the social-democratic, Marxist, classical liberal, radical and conservative views. In practice, these categories are not so clear-cut; there is considerable overlap between them, particularly on the question of practical policy goals. Most feminists cannot be neatly placed in one perspective; there is considerable variation amongst advocates within each complex and evolving body of theory²⁸.

The socialist feminist tradition stretches in a complex and evolving tradition from classical works by Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, August Bebel and Alexandra Kollontai to more recent theorists such as Sheila Rowbotham and Juliet Mitchell²⁹.

Socialists believe that the problem of equality is one facing women as a class which calls for collective solutions, with direct intervention by the state to change the condition of sexual segregation. Socialist feminists share the belief that equality of opportunity, which is the primary demand of classical feminists, whilst useful, is only one stage of change. Socialists argue that formal equal rights might lead to access to

boardroom or the medical school for a few upwardly aspiring women but this is not enough in itself. Middle class professional women with a successful career might gain in material rewards and social status but they are left with the double burden job plus home responsibilities³⁰. In socialist theory, the nature of the problem is one that is on a social scale and therefore needs social solution through public policy.

Marx did not discuss equality of sexes in detail in the main body of his work; however, Engels applied Marx's theoretical framework to women in the origins of the Family, Private Property and the State³¹. Engels argued that women suffer a triple burden, oppressed by domesticity, legal inequalities and capitalism. The low pay given to women results in higher profits for companies, and the unpaid housework which women do is essential for society.

In this analysis, it follows that only by changing the economic system can the position of women be transformed. As Engels wrote:

To emancipate woman and make her equal to man is, and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labour and restricted to private domestic labour. The

emancipation of women will only be possible when women can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims everything, but an insignificant amount of her time³².

Under socialism, domestic tasks would be placed on a collective basis with communal state-funded services for common needs as the care and education of children and the production of food. Women would be free of household work and able to participate equally in paid work in public sphere. The socialist solution is to liberate women from the private function of wife and mother and make her into a public worker in the socialized economy. Women would therefore change and become more like men.

Thus, the socialist theory stresses that the state has to intervene directly to remove the structural constraints in women's lives. The liberal focus on equality of opportunity is insufficient; it is limited to the right to participate without systematic disadvantage in meritocratic competition for individual, unequal rewards. In contrast, socialists argue that the aim should be for substantive equality for women as a group based on the equality of human needs (Nelson and Olesen, 1977; Caulfield, 1981)³³.

In contrast, both liberal and radical feminists doubt the efficacy of the state action as a means of changing gender roles at a personal level. Instead, the liberals argue that the primary change has to come in the attitudes to gender roles acquired through our early socialisation, the family education and the media. The classical liberal perspective stretches in an unbroken line from John Stuart Mill's, *The Subjection of Women* (1869) to Betty Friedan's, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) a century later.

Mill argued that women are brought up to restrict their real nature. According to him, instead of developing the full range of their emotional and intellectual capacities, women are forced into a denial of themselves. They are taught to believe that they can only live through their children and husbands; they become dependent and submissive. They learn to be obedient slaves, with social controls reinforced by the legal institution of marriage which at that time, denied women any rights over their property and their children, and even failed to provide protection from brutal violence. Mill argued passionately that the situation should change to let women develop their full potential both for the benefit of women and that of society as a whole. The solution for Mill was for the state to remove the legal restriction, which denied women equal and civil

political rights. They should have opportunities to vote and participate in public life, to have access to property, to education and to professional occupations. Given these opportunities, especially in education, Mill felt that the position of women would change over time. Mill argued that the law should recognize that there are no inherent differences between the sexes³⁴.

Friedan agreed with Mill that women at home have become "dependent, passive, childlike, and they have given up their adult frame of reference to live at the lower human level of food and things a slow death of mind and spirit"³⁵. The solution to Friedan, as for Mill, was self-development and personal growth through the challenge of education and work.

In the liberal tradition, the state should remove barriers to individual achievement through creating legal equality, preventing employment discrimination and, to a limited extent supporting the condition of female work, such as facilitating child care. Women should be able to compete with men on an equal basis if they wanted careers and conventional success. While the role of the State is primarily restricted to guaranteeing individual rights, women can only make use of opportunities within the system³⁶.

In the opinion of the radical feminists, the problem which women face is not the result of legal inequalities or the result of legal inequalities or the capitalist system, the problem is reproduction and family. Firestone argued that class inequalities need to be abolished, racial inequalities needs to be eradicated, but behind both of these are more fundamental sexual inequalities. For radicals, male dominance is the oldest and most fundamental form of inequality. Unless revolutionaries abolish social institutions like the family and school, sexism will remain. The critique of socialist feminism is that it is insufficiently radical; it fails to recognize that sexual oppression is the fundamental source of all oppressions including class³⁷.

Morgan observed that:

Sexism is the root oppression, the one that, until and unless we uproot, will continue to put forth the branches of racism, class, hatred ageism, competition, ecological disaster, and economic exploitation³⁸.

If the problem has biological roots, Firestone claimed that to change the situation, women need to control the means of reproduction, which includes the use of technological development to revolutionize the process of childbirth. Firestone criticized the socialist advocacy of daycare centres, arguing

that this still puts the primary burden of childcares on women. He argued that we need to turn to medical and technological developments, which will revolutionalise the process of childbirth and abolish the family, the source of all psychological, economic and political oppression³⁹.

In their own contribution to the feminist debate, conservative theorists expressed strong doubts about how far traditional gender roles could, and should be transformed. Amongst the most well known of these theorists are Steven Goldberg in the *Inevitability of Patriarchy* (1977). For Goldberg, authority and leadership are and always have been, male-dominated. For the purposes of this discussion, the essential point of this theory is the assertion that sexual / physiological differentiation leads inevitably and universally to differences between males and females. If this is the case, then nowhere are most women going to change traditional sex-roles to achieve equality with men in public power, status and rewards⁴⁰.

In this theory, woman's greatest strength is not to compete for male goals, where she will lose, but to cultivate her natural feminine role in the nurturing of the species. Attempts to make traditional sex roles more egalitarian will therefore fail, as patriarchy, male dominance and male status in supra familial roles are inevitable.

It is appropriate to conclude this theoretical analysis by emphasizing that from these contrasting perspectives, it is clear that theorists see the nature of the problem of sexual equality and its solutions in very different ways. Both liberals and socialists aims are sexual equality to give women and men equality of opportunity or of rewards. In contrast, both radical feminists and conservative critics suggest an ideal of sexual differences, that we should value that, which is distinctive in women.

The next section of this article highlights historically, the various roles that women have played in national development in Nigeria.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA.

The natural role of women cannot be underestimated in the overall development of the nation. In fact, they are an important segment in the development process. They should therefore be given every opportunity to develop their potentials so that they can take their rightful place in nation-building.

Enemuo acknowledged the fact that women constitute half of the world's population and have contributed significantly to the well being of human race. In Nigeria, for instance, women

have always played five key roles – mothers, producers, home manager, community organizer and social cultural and political activist⁴¹.

Despite their contribution to the development of the various communities, it is disheartening to know that they receive only one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one-hundredth of its property. Besides, their large number and crucial functions notwithstanding, the division of roles between the male and female sexes, as prescribed by most cultures, assigns the subordinate position to women. Women are submerged in extreme poverty, are still victims of all kinds of abuse, discrimination and exploitation are largely illiterate and are still victims of ill health⁴². Thus, a concerted policy must be formulated for the participation of women in the overall national development.

Currently, things are changing. Women's role in national development is being acknowledged. A country cannot hope to prosper if half of its resources – its women are neglected and ignored. Development officials now recognize this and continue to adopt them. Women in Development (WID) policy particularly, in rural areas to build better lives, to take part in and to benefit more fully from wider development process.

Aiyetan quoted the finance minister in Nigeria, Mrs. Esther Usman as saying that the Federal Government of Nigeria appreciates the importance of women in the process of economic development and will continue to welcome their participation in projects and programmes designed for their upliftment⁴³. While it is a fact that women constitute about half of the projected national population of Nigeria, this numerical strength has not found a corresponding expression on representation in Nigeria's public life, but since the coming of the current civilian administration, significant studies have been made towards giving women the pride of place in the scheme of things. Nigeria has witnessed renewed vigour in promoting women empowerment through targeted programmes and deliberate intervention programmes.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN TO POLITICS:

In Nigeria, politics is an area in which women have always been involved but rather in a passive way. Long before the colonial masters, women like Amina of ZauZau, Moremi of Ife were among women of repute, who sacrificed themselves in the service of their communities. Abdullai asserted that in the Nigerian oral tradition, women were concerned about the life of their communities and they served their

communities behind curtains⁴⁴. What was strange about this period was the fact that women were offered as sacrifices in order to better the situation of others. Moremi, for instance, made a voluntary sacrifice of her only child named Oluorogbo to save Ife from further invasion. She proved to her community that a woman could achieve perhaps where men have failed. Another legendary woman who contributed to the development of her community was Daurama, the daughter of the King of Daura who married Bayajidda, a stranger who killed the dangerous snakes of Kusugu well (Ibid.). The snake was a menace to the people. Daurama offered herself as an object of settlement between the warrior villager and the Duara people so that the community could prosper. She was a unique personality in the history of Northern women politicians in Nigeria. In addition, Halldwell (1967) observed that women's access to politics is exemplified by the Queen Amina's resounding military and political successes. Queen Amina who came to power in Zaria between 1588 and 1598 AD, was a formidable woman with special character. She is believed to have fought wars and won them all. Through these conquests, she expanded her area of jurisdiction as far as River Niger, Kwarafa Empire and up to Kano into the north. She is remembered for putting up walls around Zaria. Unlike

the two other earlier mentioned, Amina's intervention was physical and a demonstration of power.

The pre-colonial societies were those of folk culture, comprising of multi-communities. Some scholars have argued that the socio-political unit seemed to have been the community of elders restricted to males. Membership into the governing group was basically through demonstration of courageous acts. For this reason women were left out of the ruling party. If a woman demonstrated an unusual show of courage, she was called a witch. Thus, it was perceived that women in the pre-colonial era were insignificant in the political process. But this is wrong and erroneous as women had access to political participation through a complex and sophisticated network of influence, rights and control of resources. In Nigeria, political power varied from one society to another. In some societies, women shared equal powers with their male counterparts while in some, they were only seen as subordinates⁴⁵.

In Yoruba land, for instance, tradition speaks of female obas (kings) in Ile-Ife, Oyo kingdom, Ilesha and Ondo. Examples of female obas who ruled in the Oyo kingdom were Iyayun and Orompto. Women also held public offices; such were Iya kekere who was in charge of the king's treasury and

paraphernalia of state. Another public office held by women is Ayaba (i.e. the wife of the king). The Ayaba controlled both men and women in the palace. Members of the Oyomesi could gain access to the Alaafin through Ayaba⁴⁶. In the Delta region of Nigeria we had Queen Kambasa of Bonny, who in her lifetime was seen as a remarkable liberated woman, who did not allow anybody to dictate to her what she should do or not do. She equally believed that women had equal rights with men in everything without inhibition whatsoever. Also, Mrs. Olaniwun Adunni exemplifies the contribution of women to the political development of Nigeria. Born at Ibadan in 1905, Mrs. Adunni Oluwole did quite a lot to re-awaken and revitalize the struggles of women in Nigeria for political emancipation, and gender equality between males and females. She is remembered not only as a female leader of great stature, but also as one of the most colourful and dynamic political leaders of modern Nigeria. Also, she played a dominant role during the 1945 general strike in Nigeria.

The pre-independence days were a lucrative period for women activists in Nigeria. In 1946, the market women of Abeokuta felt alienated from the Alake and his administration as they were not consulted over the issue of tax. The combined pressure of the Abeokuta

Women Union and Majekobaje Society finally led to the dethronement of Alake in 1946. So also, Mrs Soleye, Mrs. Osimosu and Mrs Soyinka were leading activists of their own time. In Ibo- speaking areas, the Aba market women who were organized by Mrs. Ekpo became very vocal. Her experience during her stay in Ireland taught her a lot about the position of women in the realm of things.

The period covering the struggle for independence is the least eventful in terms of involvement and participation of women. The Nigerian political scene was virtually monopolized by men⁴⁷. During the struggle for independence, political parties were formed without much female presence, except a few women like Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of National Council of Nigeria Citizen (NCNC); Hajjiya Gambo of Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) and Malama Naonusa of Action Group (AG). Infact, Hajia Gambo Sawaba was the first woman in modern time to call for women solidarity. Her audience was basically women of low social status. This group of women were later recognized and absorbed into NEPU. All these women contributed to the politics of the day but never held political posts. They were only instrumental in mobilizing women for the post independence politics.

The post-independence era ushered in a new set of women interested in politics. Prominent among them was Madam Lilia Dongoyaro who was the leader of the women wing of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Mrs. Oyibo Odinamadu who was the running mate of Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and Hauwa Kulu Abata who was also the woman leader of Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) in the Second Republic. In addition, a few women like Professor Bolanle Awe; Mrs. Akinrinade served as commissioners or ministers at state or federal levels. It was during the Buhari/Idiagbon regime that the Federal Military Government directed that there should be at least one woman in the cabinet of all the states of the federation.

Thus, in the past forty-six years of Nigeria's independence and barring insignificant breaks, it can be said that in politics and leadership matters, Nigeria women have been contented to remain at the back burner of actions. They have been grateful and satisfied to be random beautiful adornments in parliaments, houses of assembly and executive councils among the fierce-looking men who they accept as the real brokers of Nigerian politics⁴⁸.

It is pertinent to mention, however, that in Nigeria today, we have more women as councillors and chairmen of Local Governments, members of State

Assembly, Commissioners, Members of Parliament, Deputy-Governors and Ministers. No wonder, Obada observed that women are now coming up to participate in politics, which shows that women have now come of age in this country. For instance, Mrs. Kema Chikwe, the former Minister of Aviation, Mrs. Okonjo-Iweala, the former Minister of Finance are all women who had served or are currently serving under the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria. Also, Florence Ita Giwa, Stella Omu, Janet F. Adeyemi, Binta Garba Koji and Florence D. Aya, just to mention a few women, are now coming into the mainstream of Nigerian politics.

According to Nwankwo, Nigeria lags behind other African countries in Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). According to them, while South Africa has 10 percent representation of women in elective positions, Nigeria currently has less than five percent. At the re-institution of democratic government in 1999, twelve women were elected to the House of Representatives and three women gained seats in the Senate. In the 2003 election, the first cohort of women senators was displaced, but three other women attained office as senators. Out of the twelve women that served in the house, four lost their seats and eight were re-elected. Still, the number of women nearly doubled as thirteen additional women were elected into the House⁴⁹.

Women in Elected & Appointed Office, 1999 and 2003

Office	No. Available	No. of Women In 1999	No. of Women in 2003
President	One (1)	No woman	No woman
Vice-President	One (1)	No woman	No woman
Senate	109	3 women	3 women
House of Representatives	360	12 women	21 women
Governors	36	No woman	No woman
Deputy Governors	36	1 woman	2 women
State House of Assembly – Speakers	36	1 woman	2 women
House of Assembly	990	12 women	23 women

Source: Agbaje Adigun, Larry Daimond and Ebere Onwundiwe, eds., (2004), *Nigeria's struggle for Democratic and Good Governance: A Festschrift of Oyeleye Oyediran*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

The situation presented is only reflective of the country's level of overall development and well-being. Nigerian women have remained guilty of the twin sins of complacency and valueless hiding of their precious talents in a country where everything including an overwhelming population demands urgently their involvement in more significant political actions. Nigerian women have for long allowed a country in which they have even greater stakes than men, to gamble about in a world of transient opportunities. They have therefore consistently reduced their chances of contributing significant ideas to politics that determine the fates of their dear children and husbands⁵⁰.

In a world with about 160 countries, you can count on your two hands the number of women who have been leaders i.e. less than five-percent (5%). This is why the present aspiration of women to emerge from the cocoon of acquiescence and indifference in socio-political matters in which they have been for long and move into active political participation is attractive.

WOMEN AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Women play a crucial role in Agriculture: they produce approximately seventy-five percent (75%) of the continent's food. The number of female farmers in Africa continues to grow as men migrate

to urban areas in search of paid employments⁵¹. Until recently, the role and importance of women in the agricultural and industrial development of the country was hardly appreciated despite the significant contributions they have made. Women produce an estimated 60 to 70 percent of the food crops consumed in the country. Even so, our cultural norms and traditions marginalise women's work and have created in women a "subordinate" mentality. With the rapid pace of urbanization in the country fuelled by the drift of able-bodied men to the urban centres, a greater role for women in rural agro-based industries is anticipated in the years ahead.

It was during the 4th National Development Plan that the advancement of women as an integral part of socio-economic activities in the country was considered and accorded recognition. However, the Nigerian government did not issue any policy statement on the role of women in Agriculture. In 1973, with Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) assistance the Home Economic Planning for Rural Development Project was established in the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and charged with the responsibility of surveying needs and developing programmes that would promote and enhance the well-being of women and children particularly in the rural areas⁵².

Okorji observed that the agricultural landscape confers on women the responsibility of production of crops to meet the rural family's nutritional needs. According to her, if women are allowed to have control over the income earned from their farm enterprises, food production will expand and women will be able to play the role of supplying the urban market with the surplus that will result from their production⁵³. No doubt, many Nigerian women work on the farm and female farmers are the main producers of all the crops, fruits and vegetables on which the family and the farm workers are fed. Their work includes cultivation, sowing, planting, harvesting and selling of farm products.

The women in Agriculture are acknowledged in food processing, food preservation, food storage and marketing of foodstuffs. Akinrinade observed that this is evident from the data that the women's role extends throughout the entire food system – 50% storage; 100% processing, 60% marketing; 100% cooking⁵⁴. Ajayi (1995) also claimed that 75 percent of harvesting done in Kwara and Kogi States of Nigeria were done by women. Women are however, not very prominent in the harvesting of tree crops in the country. Women and children are virtually involved in the transportation of farm produce to the homes in the rural areas⁵⁵.

It is therefore necessary to appreciate, compensate and evaluate the work of female farmers in order to assess their contribution to the agricultural, economic and national development. If the food crisis gets worse, it is likely that more attention and aid be directed at female farmers; new evidence of their importance in cultivation is mounting for development experts to ignore⁵⁶. The importance, which has been attached to food matters, is no doubt predicated on the critical roles of adequate food in the development process⁵⁷. Despite their enormous contribution to food production, the women in Agriculture are responsible for the production of articles like mats, pottery, weaving and dyeing. All these are evidences of women's contribution to national development in Nigeria.

Several programmes have been established in the last two decades to remove the drudgery in farming and increase production. The Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) have in recent time shifted from purely Home Economics – based activities to food processing and utilization of products. In Lagos State alone five resources centres have been established with well-equipped kitchens. Women commissions were also established in all states of the federation by the Better Life Programme and State Governments. Activities of this programme, according

to Agbalajobi have increased the awareness of rural farmers and boosted their faith in the production of food items needed in the communities. In Lagos State, about 66 women groups are actively involved in Agricultural production. The Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative Bank (NACB), People's Bank and Community Banks were also established to facilitate access to loans by the female farmers. Women were encouraged to join existing cooperative groups or form their own to facilitate access to land ownership, loans and credits, machinery and other direct extension services⁵⁸.

Notwithstanding these achievements, there are still a lot of constraints to women's production efforts. These include the land tenure system that denies women land ownership titles and access to fertile agricultural lands; lack of access to credit facilities; time constraints due to performance of domestic and reproductive duties, which in traditional societies are regarded as their primary function; the by-passing of women in extension programmes aimed at improving farm practices and hence, output and the undesirable effect of the country's economic woes.

WOMEN AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Female education has been boosted over the past decade but there are still

gender differences in levels of education. If African countries are to achieve sustained development, the gaps must be closed, and women integrated into development. There is strong evidence that there are high private returns and even higher social returns from female education⁵⁹.

The most significant factor in socio-economic progress and national unity is the planned programme of democratizing education, in order to provide equal opportunities for all and thereby develop our communities. The women education programme exemplifies this policy thrust. Since women and girls constitute about 50% of our population, it was decided that marginalising them was a waste that Nigeria could not afford⁶⁰. The National Policy on Education (1931 revised edition) states, *Inter alia*:

“With regard to women's education, special efforts will be made by Ministries of Education and Local Government Authorities, in conjunction with Ministries of Community Development and Social Welfare and of Information to encourage parents to send their daughters to school”.

Education has a strong, sustained impact on female productivity, which is

especially important in Agriculture⁶¹. Not only that, the education of a woman has become a worldwide necessity. Women education can be in form of basic adult education, functional literacy and empowerment through popular education. Basic Adult Education (BAE) includes Adult Literacy Education, which refers to the acquisition of the 3R's - the skills of reading and writing and computation⁶². With basic education, a woman is more than equipped to fight poverty and make life worth living.

Functional literacy motivates women to attend literacy courses to enable them improve their working status or to obtain employment. Through functional literacy, an important aspect of the personality of the individual is developed and such an individual is given an opportunity to participate in the human and material progress to national development.

Empowerment according to Young (1995) means people taking control over their own lives, gaining the ability to do things, to set their own agendas, to change events in a way previously lacking. Oreh claimed that for full empowerment to occur, women need to be organized and mobilized to challenge legally and through other legislative action, those traditional constraints to their full participation in

national life and this can come about through popular education. Popular education is about political learning which takes stand on the side of marginalised people. It is aimed at challenging attitudes and structures that oppress people. People can learn through school, the media, speeches and books, work in organizations; in communities' etc. popular education is both for literate and illiterate women⁶³.

Harbison observed that it is universally accepted that education equips men and women with necessary skills and values to take up responsibility in the society⁶⁴. Paukert also contended that education is the key to human development⁶⁵. Olojede in a recent study claimed that in Nigeria, the educational policies are not discriminatory. She argued further that an examination of Nigeria's major educational policies such as Universal Primary Education (UPE) and the 6-3-3-4 system shows that there is no discrimination against women. The same thing is applicable under the new Universal Basic Education (UBE) introduced under the current civilian administration in Nigeria. The school curricular is open to all, regardless of gender. However, the enrolment of girls/ women is relatively low compared to that of boys/men⁶⁶. Olojede stated further that the low participation of women in education especially at the higher levels cannot be traced to

educational policies which are gender neutral. To a large extent, the educational imbalance between men and women in Nigeria can be traced to societal traditions and myths aforementioned, which relegate women's education to the background vis-à-vis men⁶⁷.

Today, educated women are found in virtually all professions. Their presence in Medicine, Law, Education, University Teaching, Architecture, Engineering, Insurance, Accountancy etc. is enough testimony of vast changes that have occurred.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN IN MEDICINE AND HEALTH CARE DELIVERY

In Africa, women suffer a greater incidence of morbidity than men⁶⁸. In Nigeria, a large proportion of death and disease is preventable. Women are the health care agents of the family and improving women's health, important in itself, also enhances the health prospects of the family and future generations. It is important to state that in the world today, the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS is particularly widespread. Women are at greater risk than men because they are more likely to become infected when they are exposed to HIV/AIDS⁶⁹(Ibid). In parts of Africa, HIV infection is spreading rapidly among females – who may pass on the infection at childbirth.

A review of the contributions of women to western medicine in Nigeria should include the achievement of the first woman medical graduate Dr. Elizabeth Abimbola Awoniyi. She supported the causes of the Nigerian women in her professional and religious life until her death in 1970.

There is a unique feature of women in medicine in Nigeria as well as in other developing countries where there is an acute shortage of medical personnel. All are engaged in part-time or full time work in hospitals, health centres or in general practice. In April 1997, this active group of women formally launched the Medical Women's Association of Nigerian. The Association is affiliated to the Medical Women's International Association⁷⁰. At present, there are branches of the Medical Women's Association of Nigeria in Lagos, Ibadan, Benin, and Port Harcourt. The Association meets every two years and arranges scientific meetings on local problems. It has discussed and worked on the survival of the child in the Nigerian environment, the handicapped and safe childbirth in present day Nigeria. It has organized health talks and discussions on radio and television in different parts of the country and provided free medical care to motherless babies home. It launched a crusade against the mutilation of women in form of female circumcision

and child marriages. It has spoken professionally on the abortion bill and joins the lobby against inimical change to the present Marriage Act in Nigeria.

Many women serve the health industries as nurses, midwives, radiographers, physiotherapists, dental hygienists and occupational therapists who have contributed significantly to national development in the country. In fact, the contribution of women in Nigeria especially in the last two decades has been to stimulate and encourage more women in the health profession.

WOMEN IN TRADE, COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

The contributions of women to national development in the area of trade, commerce and industry have been immense but it took a dramatic turn within the last three decades in Nigeria. An examination of the role of women in this area must acknowledge the importance of their activities prior to the colonial period. Before the advent of colonialism, there was some trade between localities. Women dominated the trading sector of the economy as could be seen from a visit to the market. Weaving and later sewing were traditional business areas as well as looking after the home and children⁷¹. Also, Mba argued that the skilled women in Nigeria engaged in crafts art manufacturing including weaving (and its

association tasks such as combing cotton, spinning and dyeing, bead making, mat making, soap making and beer-brewing). Women were engaged in simple productive processes to formation of palm fronds through the various stages necessary to fabricate it into a broomstick; or the cleaning, cutting, dehydrating and pulverizing of yam into edible yam flour (elubo)⁷². Such basic processes form the basis of most of the modern and sophisticated industrial activities currently engaged in within our shores.

Mabogunje observed that the overt subordination of women to their husbands hides their economic independence. Most women traders operate on a small scale but many travel from town to town seeking profitable lines. Women do play a prominent role in marketing in urban and rural areas. Retail and wholesale trade in foodstuffs and in cloth is mostly confined to women⁷³. Lloyds described women's public status as being determined not so much by that of her husband as by her own position in her market. The market women can form powerful pressure groups⁷⁴.

The advent of the British brought in new and strange commodities for trade and consumption: it introduced new processing operations, it developed a currency system and it introduced formal

trading and banking systems in the country⁷⁵. At independence, Nigeria was the largest producer of palm oil in the world and it is important to state that the women had been actively involved in its production, but regrettably, it is not often, if at all remembered, that they played a major role in this regard.

In the past twenty years, more and more women have come out to work as the economic conditions have dictated. Women in general are better-educated today than in the past and social attitudes toward women in 'men's profession' have improved. Women are now taking jobs not only to supplement husbands' or families' income but also to assert their "coming of age". The number of women reading engineering and other technical subjects in Nigerian higher institutions has increased tremendously in the last fifteen years. Therefore, it is expected that when highly qualified women are available, they will get the opportunities currently being monopolized by men.

WOMEN IN LABOUR AND MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

Much work in the society goes unrecognised and undervalued and most of it done by women. In industrial countries, roughly two-thirds of women's total work time – but only a third of men's – is unrecognised. In

developing countries like Nigeria, the proportion is similar for women, but for men it declines to less than a quarter. Women in developing countries tend to carry an even large share of the workload than those in industrial countries – on average 13% higher than men's share and in rural areas 20% higher (than men's)⁷⁶.

Only a third of women's work enters the system of Accounts. The rest remains unrecognized. Three quarters of men's work is recorded and hence recognized.

Women's recorded work time:	33%
Women's unrecorded work time:	67%
Men's recorded work time:	75%
Men's unrecorded work time:	25%

In the same vein, the share of workload in developing countries like Nigeria is stated below;

General share of Workload:

Men:	43%
Women:	57%

Rural areas share of Workload:

Men	40%
Women	60%

Besides, women in Nigeria and other developing countries spend an average of 1.6 hours a day collecting water during the dry season, 30 minutes to 7 hours collecting fuel wood. This work is not reflected in the official statistics

owing to discriminatory legislation or practice and cultural norms. Women in Nigeria are excluded from land and property ownership and big business enterprise⁷⁷.

It is pertinent to point out that women are the least advantaged workers in that their jobs are the hardest and yet least rewarded in monetary terms. They perform a greater variety of tasks than men do but only a few of these tasks are compensated. The problem is that their tasks are performed in different locations. Such routine tasks as fetching firewood and drawing water performed by these women as part of their house keeping functions are now globally acknowledged as contributions to national prosperity and national development.

Women are also contributing to national development through its management. While statistics are hard to come by, certainly, Women Engineers, Factory Accountants, Biochemists, Agriculturists and Pharmacists are contributing to the nation's wheel of progress management development.

According to Okojie in a paper titled: "Nigerian women in public sector management" he described management styles that have been described among women managers- the "battle axe" or martinet approach and

conciliatory or feminine style. The battle-axe management style was said to be characteristic of the pioneer female managers who finding themselves in an all-male environment, adopt unduly aggressive, ferocious, dictatorial and hostile management style. Such managers are feared and disliked⁷⁸.

Women managers of today are highly knowledgeable and skillful. A lot of women are now involved in executive management responsibilities, professional work and active politics. In recent times, Mrs. Kema Chikwe who was the Minister of Aviation in Nigeria till May, 2003 and Dr. (Mrs) Dora Akunyili, who is currently the Director of National Agency for Food Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), had both applied the battle-axe management approach in their respective positions. In particular, Dr. (Mrs.) Dora Akunyili is resolute and firm in her relentless fight against fake, adulterated, expired and sub-standard drugs, unwholesome food substances and cosmetics in Nigeria. She is courageous and determined to wipe out corruption from the country's health care delivery system despite threats to her life and her immediate family⁷⁹. In recognition of her efforts she was conferred with the coveted prestigious Integrity Award by the Transparency International (IT) in May, 2003. To

date, she has received hundreds of awards, locally and internationally. These women are intelligent, ambitious and eager to balance the scale of injustice. They have made marks and are still making such in the development and management of the country's affairs.

Other examples of such women who are first class professionals in their own rights are Professor Alele-Williams, Professor (Mrs.) Bolanle Awe, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Chief (Mrs.) Ndi Okereke, Chief (Mrs.) Cecilia Ibru, Professor Joy Ogwu, Chief (Mrs.) Rosaline Nkechi Coldwill, Professor (Mrs.) M. Mbah, Late Justice Atinuke Ige, Chief (Mrs.) Kuforiji Olubi, Senator Ita Giwa, Justice (Mrs.) Fatti Abubakar and Mrs. Hilda Adefarasin to name just a few. Thus, when women are in management positions, they go all out to show good leadership qualities confirming the popular cliché that "what a man can do, a woman can do better".

WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Environmental degradation is fast becoming a major concern in Africa. With rapid population growth, the need for more farmland and wood has increased significantly. Large areas of forest, wetlands and grassland savannah have been converted to farmland. But areas of arable land per head are

continuously shrinking. Women are both severely affected by and contribute to the steady deforestation and resulting water resource depletion through their extensive use of fuel wood, water and farming activities. A vicious cycle with respect to agricultural production, home management, soil fertility and land degradation has come into play, with women bearing the brunt⁸⁰. As deforestation spreads, women are forced to walk further to collect fuel wood and a significant amount of time would be spent. And this will get worse as the rate of deforestation is rising.

Human living generates waste. These wastes can be classified as domestic, industrial and others. Traditionally, women are those most involved in the disposal of domestic waste. In the rural areas, women, assisted by their daughters, sweep and keep the surrounding environment clean. The resultant household refuse is neatly packed away in nearby farm gardens and fallow lands as a way of increasing their fertility. Also, in the urban areas, increased populations have meant a proportional increase in quantity of refuse generated both domestically and industrially. Women and their young girl children, have a primary responsibility for collecting refuse from their homes and depositing them in centralized dumps for municipal authorities to collect and finally dispose of. Thus,

have contributed and are still contributing to national development in terms of environmental conservation and protection in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing discussion, this paper has pointed out the critical areas where women have contributed to national development in Nigeria and areas of gender inequality were also identified. It is important to stress at this point that the general socio-cultural practices against women constitute the major impediments to women's access to education, employment and participation in policy institutions and implementation of affirmative policies. The UN decade for women was a deliberate attempt to focus world attention on the problems of women and to showcase the potential losses to society arising from any attempt to ignore the contributions of the womenfolk, who constitute half the human race in the process of development. The experiences of women in Africa reflect changing patterns of vulnerability to poverty and destitution; therefore a new form of security has to be instituted. Women's abilities to respond to the vagaries of the market and to provide for themselves and their families through the market require an asset base, which

includes land, credit facilities, education and skill.

As women become healthier, more educated, gain access to land and credit, and as legal and social restrictions on their employment are removed and existing equal opportunity laws are properly enforced, they will become more productive in their numerous occupations. In fact, the economy and society will be strengthened in many ways so as to engender national development.

The underlying causes of female poverty are deep-rooted inequalities in the control over assets, pervasive gender discrimination in labour markets and lack of voice in the power structures that control resource allocation. To effectively address poverty therefore, it is important to address these issues, and in particular, the issue of women's political and economic empowerment. Between 4-15 September, 2005, the Fourth World Conference was held in Beijing, China. The theme was "Equality, Development and Peace". The conference adopted what has become known as the Beijing Platform for Action, which consists of strategies towards the empowerment of women. It is important to stress that for any meaningful development to take place, every segment of the population, particularly women must be

empowered. This is to enable them make positive contributions to the society in order for it to make progress and enjoy, to the full, the benefits of the new millennium.

In any assessment of empowerment and maximum development of a society, the role of a state cannot be ignored. In fact, it is decisive. This is why the Federal Government established various programmes such as the Poverty Alleviation Programme, Universal Basic Education, and the Youth Employment Scheme, to enable the women which constitute a vulnerable segment of the population to have access to employment, qualitative education and put an end to the abuse of their rights and promote justice and economic prosperity of the group. Thus, the potentials of the women of this great country would be realized and national development can be achieved.

It is therefore imperative that government should involve women activity in planning projects and give priority to women's training and income-generation in national development. Women are human beings that should be given adequate opportunities to explore and contribute to all spheres of life such as politics, agriculture, economy, trade, commerce, industry and social responsibilities. For instance, politically, women are hardly

empowered over the years; their impacts in local and national decision-making have been very minimal. If men take decisions regarding the allocation of resources, women's needs will continue to receive little attention as resources allocation decision would be in their favour⁸¹. It is crucial to have more number of women in politics and at all levels in political decision-making. An adequate critical mass of women in politics would place them in a comfortable position to share power with men. More women in politics would create possibilities for practicing politics differently and influencing institutional and structural change for good governance and peace in Nigeria. It also means transforming politics in line with the highest aspirations of achieving equality, peace and sustainable national development.

Women will bring into politics, the defence and maintenance of justice and fairness because they themselves are often victims of callous brutality of men or society. A consideration of widespread humiliation of widows in many African countries including Nigeria is important here. Thus, women will bring a unique voice and expertise to the effective resolution of our problem such as childcare, education, healthcare, food security and shelter.

According to Oni, the time when women were relegated to the back ground in politics is gone, adding "therefore" it is time for women to contribute their quota to the development of the country⁸². Nigerian women who are interested in politics should come out en masse to contest in the 2007 election. Women can only fight within, which is why they should be more involved in politics so that when they get to power they will use their position to contribute positively to the development of the country.

But what is on the ground is not encouraging, starting with the constitution which rules out independent candidature. By the current rules, only a party will offer any aspirant the platform for contesting an election and if registered parties are reluctant to nominate women candidates, as parties had shown the tendency to be, an option is to form women's party. However, given the booby traps in the Electoral Act and the experience of the Woman-headed National Democratic and Equality Vanguard (NADEV) which was refused registration in the 1999 and 2003, there is a strong case in favour of women joining the existing parties (Agina-ude 2003:5). If NADEV can mobilize a large membership, it can negotiate the nomination of women by any party of their choice for a number of positions by offering the said party

the votes and support of the NADEV faithful.

It is instructive to note that political assassination which has started rearing an ugly head in many states in Nigeria today continues to deter many people from participating in partisan politics. In Lagos and Ekiti States, two gubernatorial aspirants in persons of Engineer Funso Williams and Dr. Ayo Daramola were assassinated on July 27 and August 14, 2006 respectively. A lot of women for this reason shy away from contesting elections when they had the resources to do so for fear of physical and psychological harm. Unless government takes steps, political violence will continue to deter women from partisan politics.

In addition, government should document the various types of women's associations and be more committed in assisting such groups with resources. Expanding women access to resources need, to be complemented with additional measures to augment the productivity of the resource base if women's income earning capacity is to be improved.

Also, project which aim to improve the health of women must take into account the full implications of women's socio-economic situation; training in health or better nutrition will be ineffective if

women do not have sufficient access to land or cash income. Besides, women's organizations in urban areas, which press for environmental health improvements, should be supported. Moreover, work which attempts to break down the barriers to women's knowledge of their own bodies should be encouraged.

The issue of poverty also needs to be addressed. Where for instance, legal access to land is easily available, without economic clout, the women are still hindered from access to land and its resources. Thus, government needs to provide women with strong economic bases through which women can have easier access to credit or loan facilities, cooperative ventures and jobs. Moreover, the adequate provision of social and health structures need to be in place, thus, potable drinking water should be provided in the rural areas, better hospitals and clinics need to be set up and provided with drugs to attend to their needs⁸³. Also, educational opportunities need to be improved upon and expanded. Thrupp and Green (1995) observed that spending on women's education is definitely an effective investment⁸⁴. There is no doubt that if all these are in place, women's contribution to national development would be engendered.

Besides, government officials, policy-makers and country leaders also need

to be sensitized to gender issues and how this affects national development. This can be done through training workshops. Ifaturoti contended that by raising the level of men's awareness of gender issues and its importance in a non-confrontational way i.e. through their work, it would increase their interest in such issues⁸⁵.

Even in the midst of war, women have kept the family life going; they have cared for the sick and wounded; grown crops and tended animals⁸⁶. Our society, like most progressive societies must seek harmony in the home and basis of complementary roles between men and women. Men tend to argue and theorise before coming to decisions, women tend to have a gut feeling for what is right and are prepared to back that decision with their whole life. A progressive society is one which is neutral to all its constituent elements and that accords them the same rights and opportunities.

Finally, Nigerian women should press for a National Gender Policy and Gender Equality Commission to be entrenched in the Nigerian constitution and this involves harmonizing their demands into one document and pressing for its adoption. The Nigerian woman must continue her uphill tasks to contribute fully to the development of the Nigerian society. The recognition

of women's contribution according to Awe (1992) is not going to be conceded to them on a platter of gold. The doors are not going to be thrown open without an effort⁸⁷. Women must therefore struggle for that recognition and prove by their efforts that they deserve it.

From the preceding discussion, it is obvious that women can contribute positively to the socio-economic and political development in different spheres of life, which can engender national development if given the right

opportunities. They, of course, face many obstacles, however, these impediments can be overcome if the proper perspective is paid to them by government and policy makers. It is therefore important to invest in the women and empower them through access to education, politics, agriculture, medicine and health care, management, removal of legal and cultural discrimination. It is only then that their contributions to national development can be better felt and appreciated.

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