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## Disproportional Access To Resources And Marginalization of Women: A Case Of Feminization Of Poverty in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Discourse on gender issues will continue to occupy the centre stage at both local and international fora as long as the inequality occasioned by disproportional access to resources between men and women persists. Culture and mores of many ethnic and tribal groups in Nigeria have continued to play significant role in re-enforcing this obvious anomaly. It is only true that in most societies women are most vulnerable when it comes to societal bias based on gender. Existing literature has shown that the poorest in the society are women, who are denied equal rights. This has led many social commentators to believe that poverty has a 'feminine face', culminating to the current terminology of 'feminization of poverty' in the lexicon of social science. This paper relied mainly on library research for data on issues of gender and poverty. The authors established from existing literature the key sources of women's marginalization and subordinate status in the Nigerian society. In it we have argued that in order to achieve true national development, the issues of gender dimension to growth, poverty and inequality need to be redressed, and given a policy priority.

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**Key words:** *Gender, Poverty, inequality, socio-economic development.*

### Introduction

In most societies of the world and particularly developing societies of Asia, Africa and Latin America women form the bulk of the poorest of the poor. And in spite of the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by most countries as well as the outcome of the 1995 Beijing Conference in China, women are still discriminated upon and a lot of injustices go on day in day out against women. These include rape, domestic violence or what is fondly call "crime without frontiers", trafficking in persons, denial of property and land rights by some societies, etc.

Between 1935 and 2000, about seven conventions have been drawn up by International Labour Organization (ILO) to protect the rights of women. Similarly, the United Nations has put in place nine separate conventions and set

aside specific years for governments to ameliorate the conditions of women particularly in developing countries. The first of these started in 1975 in Mexico, then 1985 in Nairobi, Kenya. There have also been about eight international conferences that are intended to produce positive impact on women who are still continually downgraded, marginalized or completely ignored (UN, 2005). Some of these are, 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development; 1993 Human Rights Conference; 1994 International Conference on Population and Development; 1995 World Summit for Social Development; 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which specifically recognized the need for gender equality in development; 2000 Dakar Declaration on Education for All (EFA); 2004 Solemn Declaration of African Heads of State on Gender Equality within the AU Policy Framework. While significant improvement may have been recorded in some countries, the fact still remains that not much has been achieved in this direction in Nigeria. Women's socio-economic position vis-à-vis their men counterpart remained much to be desired and taking much of the brunt of the poverty situation in the country.

Studies (Ering, 2006; Nwagbara, Essia and Ering, 2006) have shown that the persistence of gender-based differences is a function of the religion and culture of the people in the society. They argued that as long as people hold on to their religions and cultural beliefs which restrict women and give men the upper hand, these differences will increase leading to adverse effects in economic growth, increase in poverty among the women and better economic, social and political opportunities for the men. This paper examines women's disproportional position in terms of resource allocation to women and men in Nigeria and its implication for societal development.

### **Method and materials**

The study is essentially library research and relied mainly on data from government publications, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), journals, books and newspapers. Data are also presented in tables to reinforce point raised and to provide clearer illustrations of the disproportionate allocation and opportunities to women.

### **Theoretical underpinning**

There is now widespread understanding about the fact that women are all but excluded from access to and control over national and international resources, and about the harm to human well-being that results. There is less argument among theorists about the approaches that should be taken to explain and resolve the problem. For the purpose of this paper, we will identify and adopt only three approaches to help explain the problem under examination.

Scholars (Marx, 1963; Bernard, 1987) have made varied attempts at explaining the origin and nature of the various forms of deprivations, humiliation and oppression women face in the society. However, two major schools have dominated the social science literature. These are the feminist and Marxist perspectives. On the one hand, the feminists explanations border on the biological determinism and on the other, the Marxist sees the origin of women

oppression as rooted in social relations, particularly relations of production rather than in biological differences.

Our concern is to see women oppression and deprivation of resources not purely from the biological factors as the feminist would have us to believe, neither from the Marxist prognosis but from the socio-cultural point of view. Women's deprivation and disproportional relations in opportunities and resources have their foundation in the socialization process. Sears, Maccoby, and Levin (1957) have argued that the considerable variation in the roles played by men and women in different societies suggest the possibility that, except for child-bearing, there are no inherent differences, that maleness and femaleness, male roles and female roles, depend solely upon what the culture makes of them. The differences that do exist in attitudes, interests, and behaviour seem in many instances readily explicable by reference to cultural facts – the ways in which children are reared and the expectations attached to males and females.

The differential socialization or training help in moulding the character and behaviour of the boys and girls as they grow up. They begin to see these roles as naturally assigned to them, a situation which oftentimes leads to deprivation, marginalization and subordination of women. The questions here are how do we help our women get out of these underprivileged positions? How do we make them get out of poverty and to contribute maximally to building their societies? These questions will be addressed by two main approaches.

The first is the anti-poverty approach, better known as the Women in Development (WID) approach, emerged at the end of the 1960s (Moser, 1991). It's underlying premise is that women are members of the poorest of the poor. The approach which was a reflection of the World Bank and International Labour Organization (ILO) priorities at the time of its emergence, relies on the active participation by women. The concern is to improve the incomes of poor women with the aim of meeting their basic needs of food, clothing, shelter and fuel. This approach seeks to increase women access to productive resources such as land and credit. The argument is that women are poor because of their unequal access to basic resources.

However, the approach has been criticized, scholars argued that a number of income generating projects exist which have tended to increase the workload for many women and this double burden has been ignored. Moreso, the low status of women in the society which limits their access to land, credits, machinery, market for their products and other resources is overlooked, (Kihoro, 1992; and Synder & Tadesse (1995). Generally, it is the contention of scholars that if projects are generated and managed by women, there is the potential of empowering them with long term effects on the socio-economic well being on them.

This lead us to the “empowerment” approach. The approach which is also known as Gender and Development approach came into being in the mid – 1980s. It has its roots in women subordination to race, class, colonial history and the position of developing countries within the international economic order. The focus of the approach is to empower women to work to change and transform the structures that oppress and limit them. It is a bottom-up approach

which has to do with a process of change whereby consciousness-raising and the development of women's organizations help transform private empowerment to political action. The approach stress women's access to productive resources such as land, credit, education and training. Women access to resources will improve their self-reliance and internal strength and will enable them to redefine and implement their own approach to development. The approach is a global one, and help to explain women's potentials to development, and have exponential effects for children, families and communities.

The three approaches examined above provide explanations for why women are marginalized, poor and how they can get out of this underprivileged position of poverty. The argument is that women are disadvantaged and poor because of their disproportional position to resources, and one of the ways is to free resources and create provisions for the equitable distribution of resources. Women's access to resources will empower them to contribute maximally to the socio-economic development of society.

### **Gender and poverty: an overview of literature**

Chant (2007) maintains that the "feminization of poverty" has traditionally been viewed as a global phenomenon, and associated with three apparently intuitive notions. These are, first, that women are poorer than men; second, that the incidence of poverty among women is increasing relative to men over time; and third, that growing poverty among women is linked with the "feminization" of household headship. He however, observed that the "feminization of poverty goes beyond incomes to include gender disparities in obligations and responsibilities.

Zuckerman (2002) argues that, although women and men share many of the burdens of poverty, they frequently experience poverty differently, have different poverty reduction priorities and are affected differently by development interventions. These gender differences are insufficiently captured in conventional poverty analyses, designs and monitoring systems. This deficiency weakens the chances of success of poverty reduction interventions. Therefore, addressing the gender dimensions of poverty and creating gender responsive interventions enhances the likelihood of success of poverty reduction strategy efforts.

According to Woodhouse (2003) the face of poverty is a female one. Two thirds of the poor in Asia are female. Despite the fact that its 33 years since Esther Boserup first brought world attention to the role of women in economic development, 30 years since the first explicit acknowledgement of women's roles in the development process was included in a foreign policy act, 28 years since the first World Conferences on Women in Mexico and nearly 15 years since The Beijing Platform for Action, set the stage for promoting gender equality, we have not made much progress in understanding gender inequity as a core poverty issue and therefore an essential starting point. After 30 years of knowing that poverty affects men and women differently, that not understanding these differences results in women losing from the development process and that focusing on just women and not the process itself, doesn't address the issue.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2007) report found that more women than men were living below the poverty line, and that the number of women living in poor households had increased from 108 to 112 for every 100 men over the last 15 years. It maintained that while it is important to recognize the diversity of circumstances across female-headed households, (Chant, 2006), argues that an average of 30% of households in 12 countries in the region were headed by women in 2005, and these accounted for a disproportionate number of poor and extremely poor households.

In terms of human capital development, however, a comparison of Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index data (GDI) reveals major variations. Countries such as Nicaragua and Venezuela demonstrate high levels of gender inequality in favour of men. In Brazil and Peru, however, the human capital of women has on average, exceeded that of men (UNDP, 2007).

Like other scholars, Budlander (2000) pointed out that gender is now considered a central issue for a number of developmental issues. A study sponsored by the Population Crises Committee in Washington D.C. concluded that most women in the Third World are poor, powerless and hungry (UN Report, 2002). Similarly, a United Nations Report (1990) on International Economic Cooperation states that there is a crisis of potentially alarming proportions and far reaching implications that has emerged which shows that 70% of the fast growing poverty stricken population consist of women and particularly the elderly. In the 70s, the argument is that there is a link between women and poverty. Attention was drawn to the disproportionate number of female-headed households among the poor and the fact that women in poor households were largely responsible for meeting families' basic needs.

The 1990 World Development Report pointed out figures on health, education, nutrition and labour force participation and that women were often severely disadvantaged compared to men, and faced all manner of cultural, social, legal and economic obstacles than men, even poor men do not. Women work longer hours and when they are paid at all, for lower wages. The report noted that increasing number of female headed households has led to "feminization of poverty" and that the problem of gender inequality were relevant in both North and South.

In 1995 Human Development Report stated that "poverty has a woman's face. Of 1.3 billion people in poverty, 70 percent are women". It noted that the causes behind the feminization of poverty differed in the South and North. The report then called on governments to introduce affirmative actions to promote equality and ensure that women had access to productive resources.

Snyder and Tadesse (1995) have argued that because women comprise more than half of the world's human resources and are central to the economic as well as to the social well being of societies, development goals cannot be fully reached without their participation. Therefore, women must have both the

legal right and access to existing means for the improvement of oneself and society.

There is growing evidence to suggest that gender inequality and women's limited capacity to respond to economic opportunity inhibits growth in a number of ways. Also, Bertelsen and Holland (2006) identified these areas or ways as, first, education, as it affects women's capacity to make effective choices about employment, family planning and investment in children. Second, labour market participation impacts on productivity, income and savings, and thirdly, institutions govern women's asset use, time burden, and intra and extra household bargaining positions.

Similarly, (UNECA, 1975) maintained that the mechanization of agriculture should be encouraged because it would decrease the workload of women and free them for other roles. This would eliminate polygamy since wives would no longer be needed as a cheap source of farm labour and increase school attendance since children, particularly girls, would no longer be needed for work on the farms.

#### **Gender and poverty: situation analysis**

Data below present the situation report of the disproportional position of women to men in terms of resource allocation which has tended to push women to underprivileged positions in the society.

**Table 1: Sex of holder by means of obtaining land**

<b>Means of Obtaining Land</b>					
<b>Sex</b>	<b>Rents</b>	<b>Share Cropping</b>	<b>Use free</b>	<b>Distributed</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	77.55	83.88	75.58	73.59	75.05
Female	22.45	16.12	24.42	26.41	24.95
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*Source: NBS (2004)*

Table 1 summarizes the means of obtaining land across gender. It shows that on both aggregate and disaggregates levels, males have access to land use more than females. On aggregate, 75.05% of males have access to land use either through rents, share cropping, use free or land distribution against 24.95% of females. At disaggregated level, the highest imbalance is by obtaining land through share cropping while the least is through land distribution. Lopi (2004) has also found similar trend in Southern African. In the paper title "gender and poverty", she argues that women's rights to arable land are weaker than those of men. Women mostly enjoy use rights to/and owned by husband or sons.

**Table 2: Use of agricultural input by sex**

Agricultural input	Sex	
	Male	Female
Inorganic fertilizer	9.7	16.42
Organic fertilizer	13.29	6.58
Insecticides	3.82	2.24
Herbicides	1.23	0.67
Storage of Crops	1.67	1.13
Purchased seed	4.31	9.7
Irrigation	0.22	0.05
Bags, containers	9.18	4.97
Petrol	0.37	0.15
Spare parts	0.26	0.09
Hired labour	12.47	22.94
Transport of crops	9.52	7.04
Renting animals	1.18	0.42
Renting equipment	0.4	
Local hand tools	13.96	15.78
Imported hand tools	1.08	0.98
Repairs and maintenance	3.26	1.89
Other crop costs	0.52	0.85
Animal feed	5.03	2.21
Veterinarian services	2.5	0.8
Paid labour for herding	0.53	0.44
Maintenance of pens	0.32	0.06
Transport of feed	1.34	0.57
Commission	1.09	0.48
Compensation	0.38	0.09
Other livestock	0.63	1.18
Hired labour	0.71	1.06
Fuel	0.16	
Hired labour	0.24	0.14
Spare parts	0.05	0.08
Rent and maintenance	0.4	0.64
Hiring of equipment	0.03	0.09
Other inputs	0.15	0.24
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: NBS (2004)

Table 2 reveals that in the area of agricultural inputs, males have access to these inputs more than their female counterparts.

**Table 3: Access to credit facilities**

Type of credit facility	Female	Male
Access to credit facilities	45.7	54.3
Bank loan	21.9	78.1
Micro credit	27.9	72.1
Grants	28.0	72.0
Esusu	55.7	44.3
Cooperatives	34.7	65.3
Others	33.0	67.0

*Source: NBS, 2007*

The credit facilities available and used by both men and women include bank loan, micro credit, “Esusu” (“Esusu” a local credit system where members collectively contribute into and benefit in turn from the contribution), grants, cooperatives and others. Table 3 shows clearly the disparity in access to credit facilities between males and females.

**Table 4: Percentage of households owning certain assets**

	Livestock					Transport					
	Home	Land	Small	Large	Both	Donkey	Camel	Vehicle	M/cycle	Bicycle	Canoe
Total	63.1	63.6	26.7	1.9	13.4	3.9	0.7	7.6	42.1	27.4	2.2
Male	64.7	66.7	27.1	2.1	15.4	4.6	0.8	8.3	41.9	29.9	2.2
Female	53.9	45.2	24.2	0.8	1.7	0.3	0.2	3.0	42.8	12.4	2.6

*Source: NBS (2006)*

From table 4, inequality can also be observed in the area of ownership of certain assets such as home, land, donkey, camels, vehicle and what have you. This disparity in the area of ownership has had negative impact on women and consequently their poverty status.

**Table 5: Percentage of households by occupancy status**

Sex	Own	Rent	Subsidized	Free	Other	Total
Male	64.7	22.1	0.8	12.2	0.2	100
Female	53.9	22.1	0.9	23.1	0.0	100

*Source: NBS (2006)*

Table 5 shows that gender inequality exist in area of occupancy status by household. A glance at the table reveals that the females are at the disadvantage with 53.9% against a higher rate by the males with 64.7% in personally owned houses.

The general picture as shown in the analysis above , shows that there is a strong disproportional distribution of and access to resources between male and their female counterparts. These clearly point to the reasons why women

formed the bulk of those who are poor in the society. The persistence of gender-based differences over time is a function of the religion and culture of the people in the society among other factors. And as long as people hold on to their religious and cultural beliefs which restrict the woman and give men the upper hand, the differences will increase leading to adverse effects in economic growth, increase in poverty among the women and better economic, social and political opportunities for the men.

Women generally have no access to skills training and therefore remain in low-paid manual and irregular employment, while new technologies are transferred to and controlled by men. Most women are contributing to the economy through household unpaid work and sustaining their families. Gender-based differences presume the existing imbalance in terms of resource allocation of women and men in society. Due to the dysfunctionals in the social structure, one gender is systematically discriminated against to the intent that inequalities are created in access to societal services, resources, property, wealth, culminating in stratification by gender. The facts in the tables above speak volumes.

### **The way forward**

We have shown clearly that the ‘feminisation of poverty’ has its root in the unequal distribution of societal resources. This unequal and or disproportional distribution of resources is a function of cultural constraints women face. Therefore, the empowerment of the Nigerian women may be a mirage without government addressing these several cultural constraints that tend to limit women’s potentials. Gender inequality is socially constructed, through society’s formal laws and statutes and through unwritten norms and shared understandings. Gender inequality makes the effect of poverty worse for women and biases the form taken by economic growth. We suggest a radical and fundamental restructuring of our society’s laws and norms to be in line with international best practices. Culture is a creation of man and not culture creating man.

The state (governments at the federal, state and local levels) must assist in abolishing and/or reforming all obnoxious, sexist and barbaric laws and harmful traditional practices that seek to continually oppress and dehumanize women. Again, stiff punishment should be given to those sexist men who hide under the guise of culture or religion to deprive women of their basic rights and access to economic and political opportunities.

Also, women must be empowered. Empowerment is an all embracing concept that has to do with the educational, political, economic, social and cultural aspects. The empowerment of women can help change and stop the dehumanizing and deprivations they suffer in the society. Tied to this is the fact that the oppressor and the oppressed need to be educated, therefore, education as a powerful tool can help change men’s attitudes towards women in the society in order to make for equality.

Women should be encouraged and supported to assumed authoritative decision making positions. Through this, they (women) could help change some

of the sexist laws that dehumanize and deny them access to opportunities and to resources. Consequently, they can contribute to economic growth and the general transformation of society. This is all about gender mainstreaming. It is recognizing that women stand at the crossroads between production and reproduction, between economic activity and the care of human beings, and therefore between economic growth, and human development.

More so, women must be enabled to actively participate in social and economic life. This is the key for long term sustainable development and this agrees with the argument of Synder and Tadesse(1995). The fact is women face barriers to enter the labour market and if they find jobs, their earnings are lower than those of men. Reducing gender inequalities implies benefits not only for women but also for men, children and the elderly, for both poor and rich. Evidences show that removing entry barriers would have a much stronger impact on growth, poverty and inequality than just ending wage discrimination. The argument is that paid work for women effectively reduces poverty and inequality.

The leadership of poor countries must come out with deliberate policies to reduce or lower gender inequality. The argument is that such powers would have the tendency of lowering poverty rates. Less gender inequality in resources such as education, and access to employment can reduce the likelihood of a household being poor. Female labour force participation in particular, plays a key role in cushioning households from the impact of macro economic shocks and keeping them out of poverty.

Other major factors are gender inequality in access to land titles and, as a result, to credits. Microfinance programmes can reduce gender inequality and poverty. The programmes could help in reducing income poverty while also empowering women. Increasing women's resources result in increased wellbeing of the family, especially children.

Finally, women just as their male counterparts, must be introduced and given skill training. Such could be in the area of tailoring, hair dressing salons, soap and pomade making, weaving and craft. In addition, on graduation, policies should be put in place that would guarantee soft loans or grants to enable them establish on their own. However, these graduands have to be monitored from time to time so that such loans are not diverted to other usage. This policy could have an exponential effect in creating job opportunities for other young girls and boys who may be employed as apprentices, acquiring skills and this could make for self-sustaining growth.

### **Conclusion**

We reviewed the position of women in the society against the backdrop of the distribution of and access to societal resources. The findings show that women are seriously discriminated against in most sectors of the economy and this account for the high rate of poverty among female headed households. In order to make for genuine development, where women and men participate together to build, a number policy instruments have to be put in place. Among other things, government must abolish all sexist culture and harmful traditional practices that

hinder women from participating effectively in the development of their society. Our argument is gender mainstreaming, in major sectors of the economy and other instruments is necessary to promote gender equality, and implementing these engendered policy and other instruments is what counts for poverty reduction, development and growth.

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