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**WOMEN, DEVELOPMENT
AND
THE NIGERIAN ENVIRONMENT**

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PREFACE

The concept of sustainable development which has become the touchstone of the world-wide environmental movement was popularised (but not originated) in the famous Brundtland report of 1987. Defining sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, the report went on to show how the over-exploitation of resources in the industrialized nations and the lack of basic needs and over-exploitation of natural resources in the underdeveloped nations would both lead to unsustainable development (Siren et al. 1992). White and Whitney (1992) proposed a broader definition which emphasises both integrated planning and political viability that draw on the support of both the people and their institutions. This broader definition points to an analysis which incorporates major social groups in the process of implementation. An extremely significant group that requires more attention is women. And as argued by Sayre (1990), it is the gender emphasis of environmental needs that makes the analysis of sustainability complete. She rejects the conventional approach to development that devours natural resources without paying adequate attention to either natural habitats or subsistence economies which nurture and sustain large communities of the poor. It is the women that are at the interface between the government, economic interest and local groups. Women are thus an important resource base in the struggle to achieve sustainable development.

Africa has been identified as not only the least urbanised continent but the one with the fastest rate of urbanisation. At the same time, it has more than half of the world's low income countries (World Bank, 1990). The difficulties arising from these factors are embedded in the problems of poverty and rapid urban growth. What is apparent, therefore, is that the emerging African cities are cities of the poor with attendant urban problems. These problems are more visible in Nigeria, since it is the most populous black African country.

In Nigeria, women's studies are in a desperate need of empirical research at local, national and international levels. In realisation of this problem, a national symposium was proposed for 1st and 2nd December, 1994 at the Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Nkpolu. For Harcourt by the Gender Study Team of the Faculty of Environmental Sciences. Although the symposium did not hold, most of the contributors advised that selected papers should be edited in a book of readings (as planned initially). This will assist in disseminating the much needed research findings to policy makers, implementing agencies, scholars and the general public.

Contrasting and different ways of looking and thinking about the topic surfaced because of the diverse disciplines involved. Also, editing was kept to a minimum to maintain the different voices of contributors. The consequence is a bit of unevenness in substantive content and lack of total consistency in

WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT SITUATION IN NIGERIAN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The focus in this chapter is on the employment situation of women in the Nigerian urban environment and how the situation relates to sustainable development. It is observed that the population in the urban areas is growing fastly and the labour force consequently increasing. Female labour force in the Nigerian urban areas is estimated at 2.7 million. Since there has been no relative increase in job opportunities and no concrete employment policies for women, in consequence they have been faced with an array of employment problems. Women are hardly found in policy-making bodies, yet they have been consistently found to prove their worth in their work. It is our belief that employed women are most likely to have smaller and healthier families, thus reducing the current pressure and demands on natural resources in urban areas.

1.0 Introduction

The type of gainful employment provided for many of those actually at work has been a problem for developing countries. In addition, unemployment and underemployment has also complicated the employment situation in developing countries. According to Farooq (1986), while unemployment rate is increasing from 5.6 percent to 10 percent in United States of America (as of 1982) and from 3.5 percent to 8.4 percent in Germany; 5.6 percent to 13.3 percent in the United Kingdom, no less than 40 to 45 percent of the work force in Africa and Latin America is unemployed or under employed. Employment problems of much of the developing countries have been associated with their socio-economic structures especially the demographic base which accounts for 90 percent growth in the labour force (Oluwole, 1993).

According to a United Nations report (1991), nearly two-thirds of the 2.4 urban dwellers in the world reside in countries of the less developed regions. Urban residents of about 1.5 billion in total, comprised 37 percent of the total population of the less developed regions in 1990. The less developed regions are undergoing rapid urbanisation, a process that is projected to continue for decades.

to come. In 1975 as the United Nations Report (1991) shows, 26 percent of the population of the less developed regions lived in urban areas. From 1975 to 1990, the urban population of the less developed regions increased by 95% (an average growth rate of 4.4 percent per year). From 1990 to 2025, the population of urban areas is projected to increase three folds (289 percent); by 2025, 4.4 billion persons i.e. 61 percent of the population of the less developed regions are expected to be urban residents

Rapid population growth especially in the urban areas affects the supply of labour in the economy. The size of the population in Nigeria's labour force defined as 76 percent of the population aged 15 - 64 is about 37.5 million workers. Women constitute 48 percent of this figure. How this increase in population and its concomitant unemployment situation in Nigerian urban environment affects women is a crucial issue. Women face sharp unemployment in urban areas in Nigeria. A major component of the urban unemployment problem in Nigeria is the existence of able-bodied youths who are openly unemployed. And, as already been established by researchers, it is unemployment, where there are women who are able to work, wishing to work, dependent on work for a livelihood but unable to obtain sustainable employment.

Urban unemployment according to Ogbonna (1985) is apparently resulting from planners' inability to equalise the demand for and supply of unskilled labour. On the demand side, they have failed to develop and implement plans with sufficient job creating capacity of a generally non-specific nature requiring non specific education. On the supply side, according to Ogbonna, planners' increasing emphasis on Universal Primary Education would provide continual flow of unskilled labour to urban centres. Ojo (1977) appears to share the above view as he feels that the Nigerian employment problem, like that of other developing countries, consists mainly of the surplus of some categories of workers particularly the unskilled and a shortage of skilled manpower. It is more of an urban phenomenon.

The international conference on population (1984) which specifically addressed the situation of women regarding employment, among other issues, emphasized the need for an articulated policy on women employment with a view of accelerating it. The situation since then appears not to have changed significantly (Ware, 1989). The percentage of unemployed women in Nigerian urban environment is alarming. The consequence is that sustainable development may elude us if positive action in that direction is not taken. Sustainable development according to World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987), "seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future ... It is a process in which exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations".

The discussion here is aimed at addressing the employment situation for women in Nigerian urban environment with a view to highlighting the problems encountered by women and the implications of such problems with regards to sustainable development. Sustainable development is a vital concern

both nationally and globally. The mutuality of concern dictates that both developed and developing countries assign high priority to research that will refine our knowledge of sustainable development and that will enable us to delineate development policies which will restore and protect the tenuous balance between population resources and the environment. Understanding the employment situation of women in urban environment would help in formulating such policies including population policies.

2.0 Women, Urban Employment and Labour Force Situation

For Arowolo (1985) the employed comprises all persons, including family workers, who worked during the time-reference period or who had a job in which they had already worked but from which they were temporarily absent for illness or injury, industrial disputes, vacation or other leave of absence, absence without leave or temporary disorganisation of work due to such reasons as bad weather or mechanical breakdown.

On the other hand, the labour force or economically active population is that part of the population (aged between 15 - 65) that works for pay or profit including those looking for such work. In the absence of officially analysed results of the 1992 census, an estimate of the situation in the Nigeria labour force can only be from 1965 census exercise. Based on official definition adopted in the 1965 census, the labour force was 18,305,836 made up of 13,886,760 males and 4,419,070 females. It was only in the then Western Nigeria that women showed significant contribution to the labour force (41 percent compared with even Lagos with just 30 per cent contribution). Projections in 1980 (ILO, 1992) estimated the labour force at 27,404,000 made up of about 20.5 million males and 6.9 million females. Despite the rising rate of increase in the labour force as a result of the rising growth rate of the population and school enrolment, there has been no relative increase in job opportunities. In recent years, according to Oluwole (1993) unemployment in urban areas of African countries reached rates such as 11.6 percent in Ghana, and 14.9 percent in Kenya. Education of the unemployed has risen sharply. In tropical Africa including Nigeria now, there is mass unemployment among primary school leavers and increased unemployment among leavers of tertiary institutions.

It is extremely difficult to give an accurate estimate of the extent of urban unemployment in Nigeria because of lack of reliable census information, but the magnitude of urban unemployment problem has been indicated by various studies (Ojo, 1977; Blaug, 1987; ILO, 1992; World Bank, 1993). The indications are to the effect that the rate is high and even higher for women. The average urban unemployment rate in sub-Saharan Africa is about 18 percent - up from 10 percent in the mid 1970s. Nigeria's rate of urban unemployment in 1989 was 9.7 percent (ILO, 1992). This was expected to triple in the 1990s (ILO, 1992). Bos et al (1992) project a female urban labour force of about 28 million for Nigeria in 1994 and with majority of these living in the urban environment, the employment situation becomes hopeless. According to the Fourth National Development Plan, only about 3 million of these workers hold paid positions in modern sector of the economy.

...most new entrants into the labour force over the next 15 years are children who have already been born, the size of the labour force in the year 2000 is expected to be 62.1 million workers. Given the current economic situation in Nigeria, it would be most difficult to create enough jobs for the large number of people, thus the nation's problems with employment, unemployment and underemployment, especially in urban areas may be further aggravated (NPP, 1992).

3.0 Retrospect and Prospect of Women Employment

It has been argued that for developing countries, the main problem is not so much of open unemployment, or even underemployment, but rather the type of gainful employment provided for many of those actually at work. This situation applies even more to women in urban environment. According to Blaug (1987), employment problem is primarily a problem of inadequate income and only secondarily one of insufficient work opportunities. While one appreciates Blaug's position, given the Nigerian Urban employment situation, one would readily reverse his position to the effect that unemployment is a major problem of employment in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, women (60 percent) are found chiefly in petty trading. Most studies (e.g. Trager, 1977) indicate that these women traders operate largely as retailers, whilst men control the more incentive wholesale sector. These women earn little and like other workers in the informal sector suffer from invisible under-employment characterised by abnormally small productivity or earnings, labour intensity, small scale operation, and unregulated competitive markets (Palmer, 1979).

Although women are scarcely represented in industrial work and then chiefly in work which is labour intensive or needs precision and patience, they in fact participate to a high degree in productive work. Most of this work takes place in the informal sector and is either of a self employed nature in sales of food, processing, or work in the family or household unit, largely in agriculture. Piel (1975), while investigating the urban female life in four Nigerian cities concluded that participation in the labour force is a more important factor in a woman's marital life than her social adjustment. For example, she said that the Ibo women who have recently become traders, are said to feel guilty about neglecting their husbands and children. The feeling among Yoruba women, as she discovered was however different because the practice of self employment and keeping long hours outside their homes has been traditional to the Yoruba urban women.

The general employment situation in urban areas force women to accept jobs for which they are under utilised and under-paid, resulting in most of them falling into the category the ILO (1992) referred to as the "working poor" people who are working and possibly working very hard and strenuously but the employment is not productive in the sense of earning them incomes which are up to modest minimum. Their problems according to Irukwu (1987) in obtaining permanent employment are compounded by the fact that poverty forces them to accept work under any condition. Their primary concern is to earn a little money in order to contribute to the family budget if their husbands are workers.

unskilled labourers or unemployed, or to constitute it if they are divorcees or widows. Closely related to this is the fact that women married to working husbands that are liable to transfers take up any available work, no matter how unsuitable, or even remain unemployed.

A woman's work within the urban and industrial environment as Boserup (1970) feels, is not without problems, as women must simultaneously perform the productive role of wage-earner and the reproductive role of wife and mother. They are harder hit by underemployment and unemployment than their male counterparts, as few openings in the industrial sector are offered to men first.

Aside from not having enough women in the industries because of few openings and biases, women are also few in policy-making bodies. They are found mostly in service organisations. Complaining against the situation, Irukwu (1987) noted that if a woman is lucky to obtain a senior job, she has to work hard to prove that she got it on merit and deserves to keep it. Because they are few and far between, society has yet fully to accept women in the management positions as a matter of routine. A woman in a senior management position, as Irukwu felt, has several problems: proving her worth, ensuring support from other women, not being regarded as a rare bird - or as a man - and being able to run her home successfully while at the same time doing a demanding job.

The exclusion of women from decision-making bodies, according to Mitter (1989) has been justified by stereotyped notion of the roles of men and women in the home and in the economy. It is still too readily assumed that men bring the food and women prepare. The image, as Dankelman and Davidson (1989) believe, stands in sharp contrast to the reality, where even the imperfect statistics indicate that one in four families, on average is headed by a woman. The number of such families grows at an alarming rate as a result of the social upheavals that follow in many a poor country from IMF - stipulated structural adjustment.

Employed women face other problems arising from discriminative policies. For instance, the fixation policies clearly discriminate against women. Married women are yet to be extended any allowance for children. The same applies to housing allowance. Women do not receive housing allowance so long as they are living under the same roof with their husbands, if the latter are employed by government. Yet, with increasing economic problems the family responsibilities are growing for the woman.

The benefits of women employment cannot be over emphasised, specially their implications on the national population policy. This has also got me prospects. After all, employed women have consistently proved their worth more than their male counterparts. Women have always provided cheap source of labour for industrial capitalism. They are utilized by labour intensive industries because they can be paid low wages, and according to Benerea (78), are manually dextrous and will willingly subordinate themselves to patriarchal authority. Other decisive qualities as Savano (1984) noted are their good patience and aptitude for tedious work. Hamman (1979) believes that women are better than men in that they are more patient.

productivity. The single woman is preferred, as her rate of absenteeism is lower than the married woman's. She is less prone to fatigue and illness. Irukwa (1987) also feels that women have displayed a high level of expertise, excellence and professionalism in what ever job they have found themselves.

The key role women play in the achievement of population and development goals is widely acknowledged. Unfortunately, there is still a wide gap between that acknowledgement and the actual implementation of programmes that will enable women to participate fully in the development process, both as beneficiaries and as agents of change (Sadik, 1989). Not only that women can play key roles in population and development, they are also poised to contribute to endogenous development. This is why Ugboma (1994), strongly feels that the time has come for Nigerian women to be given a chance to put our country in order. They need to be given equal opportunity like the men to work in strategic areas of government to show that they are capable and competent and that their education is not for decorative purposes. The time has come for women to be recognised as nation builders.

Improving the role and status of women is integral not only to socio-economic development but also to the reduction in unwanted fertility and in needlessly high rates of maternal and infant deaths. Thus, if a population policy is to be successful, it must give due attention to the various aspects of the role of women. It must be cognisant of the society's attitude towards women and must take into account the economic status of the family, which to a significant extent, rests on the contribution made by women. Besides as was found by World Bank (1992), increases in economic independence for women often stimulate a preference for small families, through changing the opportunity cost of bearing and raising children.

Where women have legal and social rights - to paid employment in the modern sector, political, power, family planning etc. - they tend to have smaller families. A common feature of a woman's right to employment is that it contributes to every woman's ability to control her own destiny. Increasing the right may be the most cost-effective way of attaining the goal of smaller and healthier families. Such an approach represents a considerable commitment on the part of governments. But it is an investment that produces a significant resource for economic development - namely, a quality population and, in particular a workforce that is prepared to make the most economic opportunities, especially in the urban environment which has the concentration of the workforce.

4.0 Conclusion

The world population is growing very fastly. The population of the developing countries is growing even faster with concentration in the urban areas. According to the World Bank population projection, Nigeria's population would be about 111 million by 1995, the concentration of which will, by that projection, be in the urban areas. The workforce in consequence has ever been growing in the urban areas as a result of the above and both the ceaseless rural-urban migration and increase in the number of educated citizens. This increase in labour supply has not in anyway been matched with the supply of jobs, hence

employment problems, which includes unemployment, underemployment and lack of gainful employment. Women are particularly affected by these problems. A good deal of the women labour force is unemployed. Those who are employed are not gainfully so. Some of them have even been referred to as the "working poor". Although women employment can be said to be on the increase, the rate is slow in the urban areas considering the huge female labour force and the increasing number of female headed households.

The fertility rate of the urban women is still very high and it has been put at 5.86. The author agrees with many other writers that gainful employment for women will result to lowering of the fertility rate and consequently smaller and healthier families which in turn facilitates the struggle for the achievement of a balance between population, resources and the environment's sustainable development. For now the situation is gloomy as the general outlook is an impoverished and idle female work force likely to be preoccupied with child bearing.

A multifaceted programme designed to improve the status of women is crucially needed. It should be headed and staffed by those who know most about the issues, particularly women. Every second as the ILO (1992) report shows, a child dies of malnutrition in the non-European world while its country prepares itself to pay foreign debt. There is a growing urgency therefore for women in developing world to assert their role not simply as home-makers but as bread winners and vital workers in the national economy. On the other hand, policy makers, now dominated by men, should realise that the promotion of economic growth through sound economic policy and advancing the status of women through gainful employment, should be seen as serving complimentary not competing goals. It does not erode the status of men, rather it enhances it.

5.0

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