

FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR FORCE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Women are major stakeholders in the development of the society. However, their contributions are hampered by certain impediments that affect them as individuals. More women work today than ever before. This paper examines factors that affect women's active participation in the labour force and discusses some measures for correcting this anomaly.

Key words: women, labour force

INTRODUCTION

Labour force is the totality of the people who work for a purpose and are paid remuneration for the work done. The nature of the work affects the accompanying wage or salary, as such there should be cordiality between employer and employee. Nnadi (2002) posited that in the interest of sustained productive economic activity, effort is made to manage the employer-employee relations to sustain the work. The labour force of any nation is the foundation upon which economic activity rests. According to the World Book Encyclopedia (1992) labour force is that part of a nation's population that work for pay or is actively seeking work. Encyclopedia Americana (1995) reveals that labour force generally has been accepted to comprise all those persons who, whether employed by others or self-employed are working for a living on a full time, part time or temporary basis or who are seeking employment. The term sometimes has been limited to identifying only those individuals actively gainfully employed. The labour force produce most of a nation's goods and services. According to the World Book Encyclopedia (1992), its size and productivity help to determine a nation's growth. The economically active population according to them consist of people of all ages who are

employed or looking for jobs. Economists sometimes use the term human resources for the total number of people available to work if needed.

Rapid changes in the economy of Nigeria have brought the importance of human resource development into sharp focus. Nigerian women over the years have played significant role in economic development of Nigeria. Ugbomeh (1983) stated that in Delta state of Nigeria, rural women in Ndokwa East and west local Government have always played significant roles in food production. Olayiwole and Jacob (1993) affirmed that significant differences occurred in male and female tasks between Muslim and non-Muslim households. They explained that although women in non-Muslim households played major roles in crop and livestock, production, discriminatory practice against women in the allocation of land, technology and extension information were reported. It is against this background that Idachaba (1992) stated that the rural women in Nigeria must be integrated in the development process through active mobilization and the liberalization of access to new economic opportunities especially in agriculture, emphasizing the past policies with gender bias in favour of men, needed to be modified.

This paper examines the factors that affect women in participation in the Nigerian labour force. It discusses the important role of education as an instrument for liberalization of the women for new economic opportunities.

Factors Affecting Women's Participation In The Labour Force

There is no gainsaying the fact that women's role in the home and national development is enormous. Despite this, there has always been an unequal and biased treatment in favour of males. Ononamadu (2000) noted that many authors believe that the total amount of labour inputs by sexes are often quite disproportionate with women doing more work than men. Accordingly Galletti(1965) in a study found that women work 312 hrs harder than men in Abeokuta/Ijebu province, 348 hrs in Ibadan province and 422hrs in Ondo province. United Nations Economic Community for Africa (1972) also concluded that men spend about 1800 hours annually

on agricultural activities, while women spend about 2600 hours. It is evident that women have always been deeply involved in tasks that take much of their energy. This suggests that they have been actively involved in labour however, they have not been accorded a corresponding reward to match their efforts. CTA (2000) reported that there is a gender bias in the collection of presentation of data concerning females. It was concluded that African women have yet to attain a stable threshold for personal well-being or fulfil their aspirations for gainful economic activity.

Hayes and Hopson (1972) stated that the individual freedom to choose the kind of work he will pursue is determined by the type of society in which he lives. In primitive societies choice is highly restricted or may not even exist while in developed societies the possibility to choose is much greater. The status given to women in our society seems to make them see themselves as not capable of venturing into a vocation/profession considered masculine. The consequence is that their potentials in these vocation/profession remain untapped to the fullest. The girls are over protected; their safety is over stressed. They are made to believe that rough job are meant only for male and they do not need them.

Osakwe (1990) revealed that a basic assumption which still hold is that for the great majority, a woman's home responsibility and her family have priority and that her working arrangements must dovetail in with these. This means that the trained women of today will set their sight lower. That they will settle for the less than full-time job. The job without top responsibility and top financial rewards. Home and family responsibilities have often times made highly placed women resign their position in the service in order to attend to these responsibilities thus became unproductive. The outcome of all these frustrating situation women have found themselves is that women are unable to take up challenging assignments in the labour force in comparison with their male counterparts who are directly and indirectly well predisposed to.

The following are specific factors that affect women' active participation in the labour force:

Family responsibilities: the duties of a woman who is wife at home are so enormous that they could affect their duties in the place of work. This is especially so if the woman is raising a family. It is always difficult to give adequate time to both work and home activities.

Pregnancy: the biological reproductive role of the woman expects her to get pregnant in order to deliver a child. The period of pregnancy and child nursing are very demanding and much is expected from the woman in the home. Even though there is maternity leave there isn't enough time to attend to the child.

Low socio-economic status: in the traditional Nigerian society, the female is accorded a low status that leaves her with less choice than to be at the background. The international Bank for Reconstruction and Development/the World Bank (1994) stated that women's disadvantaged social position which is often related to the economic value placed on familial roles, helps perpetuate poor health, inadequate diet, early and frequent pregnancy and a continued cycle of poverty. They explained also that parents may invest less in girls because they perceive them to have less economic potentials since girls often become part of another family at marriage and generally earn less income. They further state that women's low socio-economic status can also expose them to physical and sexual abuse and mental digression.

Physical factors: these are the basic factors such as nutrition, water and health services. The health of the women has always been affected because of their disadvantaged position in the society. Poor health reduces women's productive capacity to carry out their multiple productive and reproductive responsibilities. CTA (2000) reported that women because of their desire to take care of other members of the family, eat the less nutritious foods. This has significantly affected their nutritional status and perpetuated lower standards of health. This affects their overall contribution to the labour force and subsequent economic development.

Education and literacy: the value and importance of educating women has not been adequately recognized. High illiteracy and low enrolment rates, especially in secondary schools, affect women's ability to acquire the skills needed for income-generating activities and will have repercussions for generations to come (CTA, 2000).

Role Of Education As An Instrument To The Liberalization Of Women To New To Economic Opportunities

Women in most States of the Federation have played significant role in food production. Before the advent of western type of education in Nigeria, parents and other older siblings passed traditional skills and knowledge in food production from one generation to another. Food production then was more on subsistence level. In modern times the Nigeria worker has had to face technology in the form of both increasing mechanization and sophisticated Managerial/Administrative techniques (Okorie, and Ezeji, 1988). Okorie and Ezeji (1988) further explained that the advance of technology has radically changed the way the labour force is being utilized. It is through educational process that individual acquire knowledge and skill that would make them perform their work easily and increase productivity. Philosophy of Education Association of Nigeria (1996) stated that schooling is only one among a number of social agencies concerned with the process of education. According to them the part that schooling as a process plays in the life of a people that can lead to education is that it is only from school that one can acquire specialized knowledge in the areas of the studies like science philosophy history etc. such knowledge is important because it enable one to comprehend oneself, others and world better. Such understanding would enable one to react to life situation with greater understanding.

Nigeria like other developing countries has set to acquire, adopt and apply techniques derived from scientific knowledge because the important of contribution of science and technology to development has never been in doubt. It is generally believe that the acquisition of the requisite skill is a means of increasing the productive power of a nation.

Every Nigerian Citizen therefore irrespective of sex should be given access to education to acquire requisite skill to increase her/ his productive capacity. Okorie and Ezeji {1988} observe that the highest possible welfare is achieved only when each individual produces to the limit of his capacity.

Friedman and Sullivan (1974) divided the urban economy in a developing country into three major employment sector distinguished according to the organizational form of activities within each sector. These sectors are arranged hierarchically in an ascending scale of labour productivity, economic power and social status. Occupying the lowest ring, is the individual enterprise sector, unemployed and self-employed workers that make up the street economy of a city. It is followed by a family-enterprise sector which consists of workers in small trade and service establishments and industrial workshop having fewer than 50 employees and a low capital to labour ratio. Highest in the rank is the corporate sector which includes, in addition to workers in corporate enterprise those family – run business that are larger establishment in the family sector as well as the government bureaucracy, Universities and free profession. Friedman and Sullivan (1974) states that workers in the corporate sub-sector are indeed a favoured group. According to them, some of the advantage accruing to them are the result of a militant unionism that is concentrated here. More often their advantages stem from social legislation passed in imitation of advanced industrial societies. Workers in this sector have privileges such as shorter work hours, longer vacation, maternity leave. Mobility between white and blue-collar occupation is relatively low within the corporate sub sector and School leavers particularly those with secondary education may remain unemployed for relatively long period in hope of gaining a salaried position. This is because of low educational attainment. In corporate sector as in this bureaucratic organization, skill levels are carefully differentiated in this sub- sector. The average wage may be below subsistence but at the highest levels in such white-collar jobs as section chiefs in government ministries or senior clerk in private business, a

salary of up to three-time subsistence may be paid. As the principal beneficiary of development policy, corporate manufacture is also the most productive source of work in the urban economy. Izuwah (1997) reveals that Nigeria has a larger population estimated at about one hundred million. According to her about 50% of Nigeria's population are females. Nigeria population and its varieties should make development possible. Unfortunately due to low attainment in education women are found more in the individual – enterprise sector and family enterprise sector. The production in these sector of the urban economy is on the subsistence level, people in these sector benefit little or none from development policy.

Technological advancement has made most of the office practices where knowledge and skill acquired in arts and humanities are needed obsolete. Most of the administrative jobs are now computerized. Technological and science based courses are appreciated due to their relevance to the growth of the economy. Adoba (1988) stated that educational bias and prejudice steer girls/women toward the arts and humanities. On graduation because skills and knowledge acquired are not relevant to corporate manufacturing which is the most productive source of work in the urban economy, they would not have opportunity to contribute their quota in this sector as well as benefit from higher social status accorded workers in this sector and other government welfare package. Izuwah (1997) affirmed that education is a necessary institution in human capital formation. She further state that education provide the relevant knowledge, skill personnel and prepares people for new task, wants, needs, values and desires that generate demand for the product for development and further development. Women are discouraged from a wide range of high status subject. They are directly or indirectly discouraged from entering Universities or other higher institution of learning. Izuwah (1984) in her studies found less female enrolled at various educational levels Izuwah's finding confirms the claim of Ogunka (1977) and Achebe (1979) that parents tend to prefer sending their son to school to sending their daughters. Also fewer females than males have

opportunity to study mathematics, science and technology. Another study on the total enrolment in Nigeria Universities by academic year and sex in 1980/81 carried out by Izuwah (1984) showed that in all faculties far less female than males were enrolled in Nigeria Universities between 1980/81 and 1989/90. Though female were represented in all faculties, the representation indicated 37% education, Art 33%, Pharmacy 31% medicine 23%, science 25% and 24% law. The weakest fields of representation were engineering and technology 6%, and environmental design 13%. In another study by Izuwah, total enrolment in Nigeria Universities by level of courses and sex 1980/81-1989/90 reveal that 24% females enrolled in first-degree courses 25% in post graduation diploma and certificate courses and 23% in post –graduate higher degrees. All these studies confirmed the fact that women are not adequately equipped with the right type of education to cope with the challenges in the labour force. As a result of this inadequacy a great number of women though with great potential which can be seen from their successful agricultural activities were not give opportunity in corporate manufacturing sector which is the most productive source of work in urban economy. The productivity of the a great number of women in Nigeria still remain at the subsistence level due to lack of appropriate scientific knowledge and technological skill. All labour is not homogeneous or of equal gravity. Workers differ in health, education, skill, ambition and other ways. Any nation concerned with economic development and material progress must give attention to these qualitative consideration to influence output (Encyclopedia International 1980) for example computers are marvelous machines, but useless without a work force capable of running and maintaining them. Encyclopedia International (1980) states that the important of education to economic performance can be seen in the link between money income and number of years of school completed. Education is a very useful tool in bridging the inequality in labour force. There are other factors that hamper women upward mobility in the labour force.

CONCLUSION

Women are not naturally incapable of taken up responsible and challenging position in the labour force but because of the discrimination and unequal opportunities compared to their male counterpart they most times do not get into these positions. Also poor societal conception about the worth of a woman which made the women to have poor self concept, this in turn lead to their settling for lowest position. Family responsibilities, poor health and frequent pregnancy and continue cycle of poverty are other factors that militate against women forging ahead in the labour force. When these hindrances are properly addressed the women folk would compare favourably with their male counterpart in the labour force.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Women need more than just adequate to remain alive. The following suggestions would help the women folk forge ahead in the labour force.

1. Women should be encouraged to read science and technological base courses which have much relevance to the economic development of country by given them scholarship and also bringing the cut off point Scores in competitive entrance examination lower for women in these courses. As is done for those Nigerians in the so-called disadvantaged states. This will go a long way in bridging the gap of inequality between male and female upward mobility in the labour force.
2. Provision should be made for institutional care for infants at a cheap rate to ease the problem of working mothers. This is because most working mothers rely on a cheap but an extremely risky type of child care and in so doing some mothers have lost their babies because they were left with maids who were either too young and inexperience or others equally dangerous with personality problems.

3. There should be massive enlightenment on the importance of providing equal opportunities for children of both sexes (female and male) for parents both in the rural and urban areas. This could be done through television programme, radio programme, men and women associations/clubs, churches and posters
4. Lectures, seminars and symposium should be organize for girls and women from time to time in their localities to develop in them positive attitudes towards science and technological base courses and encourage their going into such fields of study.

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