

GENDER DIMENSION IN NATION BUILDING: AN IMPETUS FOR ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY IN POST COVID-19 ERA

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Abstract

This theoretical paper is a dissection of gender equity and fairness as the master key for the much sought-after security and sustainable economic recovery after the ravaging effects of COVID-19. The paper looks in retrospect the altruistic role of the woman in yester years as a nation builder. As it were, oral tradition particularly in Nigeria has it that women were very much part of the political history and decision-making process of the old traditional societies like the Binis, Hausas, Bokis and Yorubas etc. women were seen at the forefront of every home and societal endeavours, providing security against external and internal insurrection and even going to wars to secure her territorial integrity. However, the place of the woman as a home and nation builder was displaced at the advent of the colonial masters in Africa cum Nigeria and this becomes a stereotype on the part of the woman, it was the beginning of gender inequality. The woman is relegated to the kitchen, doing petty trading, she is only meant to be seen and not to be heard. In the wake of Covid-19, women stereotype grew worst as a result of the long-standing gender role beliefs. Women suffered the most in the wake of the covid-19 because most of them were relief of their jobs; the few that could work were at the same time playing the role of a care giver in the home, many of them could not cope with the dual role and the only option left for them is to quit the jobs and this ultimately affects the economy both at home and the country. To recover the economy from this covid-19 quagmire one must look beyond gender disproportion. As the nation begins to build from the relics of the pandemic, and re-focus not on the things that divide us, but on those that portray our complementarily as male and female, a nation will be built whose

foundation will not be threatened nor shaken by inequalities but we will emerge stronger as a complex yet united whole when we view one another as different yet important in national development. This paper recommended among others that in order to reverse the damage of the pandemic, and ensure a socially responsive recovery, women and marginalized groups must be brought into all consultations and decision-making processes.

Keywords: Nation building, Gender parity, Covid-19 and Economic recovery

Introduction

The tilt in the direction of gender dimension is a search in the right perspective in terms of attempting to deploy ways in which the situation and needs of, and challenges facing women and men (and girls and boys) differ with a view to eliminating inequalities and avoiding their perpetuation as well as promoting gender equality within a particular policy, programme or procedure (iege.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1160). Put simply, it has to do with harnessing the creative power of gender analysis to discover new things. (European Commission Horizon 2020 Article 15). “Gender,” according to *the Canadian Institute of Health Research* refers to socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men and gender diverse people, while “Nation Building”, is the contribution of both male and female citizens of a country or nation to provide adequate ideas or support in order to move the nation forward.

From this informed position, one can deduce that we don’t want to be those who do one thing the same way, but expect a different answer. That being the case, the thrust of this paper is therefore to show how we can deploy gender dimension as the tool for building a viable Nigeria after a devastating Covid-19 experience. This dimension as you would have guessed is FEMALE. The paper is in six parts. Part one is a synopsis of Covid-19; part two is a peep at yester years and the role women played. Part three reflects on trends and imperatives of the roles of women in nation building. Part 4 highlights the gender dimension of covid-19 and part five reflects on the place of women in economic sustainability in the post covid-19 era while part 6 is the concluding

portion with recommendations for enhanced gender dimension in sustainable economic recovery in the new normal.

1. Synopsis of Covid-19

The novel corona virus later known as Covid-19 is an acronym for the novel Corona Virus, 19 being the year that the disease came into existence. With the spread of the disease across the nations of the world, many governments began to take measures to stop or curtail its spread. Some of the measures which were taken included travel restrictions on international travels and the world over. Others were ban on large gatherings including, cinema houses, restaurants, theatres, barbing and hair dressing saloons, and worship centres in most countries. In some countries including Nigeria, there was a total lockdown of activities and restriction of both pedestrian and vehicular movements for a number of months in a bid to slowing the spread of the disease. This, of course, impacted security and economic activities globally bringing many businesses to a stand-still impacting both males and females alike.

After a first victim of the virus in Nigeria on the 25th of February, 2020 more cases have emerged and as at 19th of August, 2021, 185,265 positive cases were recorded and 167,492 recuperated persons have been identified while 2,244 deaths recorded so far in the 36 states, and the FCT (NCDC, 2020; 2021).

In the light of the above, the country's economy and security have borne the brunt of the pandemic. As the year 2020 lockdown persisted, every business sector in Nigeria cum the world at large was equally affected, and till date some countries are yet to fully recover economically. It is rather a sad reality that we are yet to and that might take quite a while, to recover from the effects of Covid-19.

2. The Gender Dimension in Nation Building: Yester Years

Oral tradition in Nigeria has it that women were very much a part of the political history and decision-making process of traditional societies like the Binis, Hausas, Bokis and Yorubas. Notable among these societies were Princesses Inikpi of Igalaland; Moremi of Ife; Efunsetan Aniwura of Ibadan; Otu-agud of Boki; Madam Tinubu of Lagos; Queen Amina of Zazzau; Queen Kambasa of Ijaw and Emotan of Benin (See Uduk and Robert, 2014, p.24). These women exemplified to what extent the involvement of women in nation building can engender a peaceably

free society, and shape the political system of the period. The statement below by Burundians sums up this claim in a lot of ways:

...conflicts arose between individuals, within a family, between different families or between the inhabitants of different territories. To manage such conflicts, traditional society had well-organized regulatory machinery in which women generally played a major part. Under this system a woman was recognized as having an advisory role and as playing an active part in strengthening solidarity and social harmony generally. Within this structure, women played the more unobtrusive yet leading substantial role, both in their families and within their own circle *as* peace builders and by extension, nation developers who understand the importance of peace in engendering economic sustainability after the effect of any pandemic or crisis (emphasis mine) Ntahobari and Ndayiziga (2003, p 16).

Women were responsible for the maintenance of equilibrium in the society occasioned by intentional upbringing of children who became responsible members of the society- “women taught their children -daughters and sons proper behaviour and the ethos of society, and impressed on them the importance of such values as honesty, uprightness and the necessity to compromise (Lihamba 2003, p. 115)”

To sum up the altruistic posturing of women as caregivers, bearers of life, and moulders of destinies, Arays Isse, a Somalian poet asserts:

The language with which we speak,
The fundamentals of our behaviour and conduct,
She taught us with great skills,
Mother is indispensable for being and learning.
When a family is built, women are the foundation and
the fundamentals of learning and values ultimately
leading to decency (Mohammed 2003, p.102)

This reflects the indispensable nature of women in the overall building of societies whether then, now or the future.

3. Trends and imperatives

Colonialism made women to disengage in political participation in the country. During that era, women's roles were limited to trading and other social activities, leaving out politics for the men; the colonial masters being themselves chauvinistic in nature. That was the beginning of gender inequalities. One explanation why gender inequality worsened during the Covid-19 crisis is long-standing gender role beliefs. Conventional feminine gender roles prescribe that women are highly communal, displaying traits such as warmth and concern for others, taking the role of caregiver within the home and lower status roles in society even being tagged as weaker vessels. In contrast, conventional masculine gender roles prescribe that men are highly agentic, displaying traits such as stoicism and strength, and taking the role of provider outside the home and higher status roles in society (Eagly and Wood, 1999). While men's roles have remained aligned with expectations over time, women's roles have rapidly expanded beyond the home, with more women working outside the home than ever before (United Nations, 2020). Despite this, gendered expectations remain the same. Women are still expected to perform most of the domestic and care work in addition to additional frontiers explored by some.

Consequently, with the closure of many businesses during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, employed women are not only expected to be the primary caregivers within their families but to also remain productive at work. Balancing these two expectations is challenging at the best of times, and near impossible during the lockdown (Power, 2020). Indeed, women, especially those in relationships with men, may be expected to reduce their work time to take over caregiving duties, whereas men, particularly those in relationships with women, are not (Brescoll, Uhlmann and Newman, 2013; Morton, Postmes, Haslam, Hornsey, 2009). Thus, it is no surprise that women report greater stress and anxiety, as the pandemic has both increased the role-strain and expectations put on them as well as reduced external support (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2020).

4. Gender Dimensions of Covid-19

The mortality rate from Covid-19 appears higher among men (WHO, 2020b). However, in terms of social impact, Antonio Guterres- the UN

Secretary General argues... Covid-19 is deepening pre-existing inequalities which are in turn amplifying its impacts on the lives of women and girls” (UN News, 2020b) indicating that any government which has plans for economic recovery, post Covid-19, must have leadership and equality for women at the core of its policy thrusts.

Records show that more women lost their jobs being in the secondary labour market worldwide, and feminization of poverty increased as at April 2020 in four segments as shown below:

Food and accommodation (144 million)

Retail and wholesale (482 million)

Business service and administration (157 million), and

Manufacturing (463 million) (UN News, 2020a).

The role of women and their enormous contributions to overall development is not in doubt especially as there can be no meaningful advancement where women are excluded. In Nigeria, the vulnerable conditions of women are more critical, given lingering gender inequalities, domestic violence, lack of social protection, among several other issues that exacerbate injustice and deprivation limit their ability to reach their full potential.

Harnessing the creative power of women holds greater potentials for sustainable national development, and would benefit a nation’s society and economy at large and is therefore essential for solving this century’s problems in post Covid-19 era.

5. The place of women in Economic Sustainability in the Post Covid-19 Era

The coming of General Ibrahim Babangida’s regime brought the role of women in the country’s politics to the front burner. The office of the first lady was first institutionalized by Maryam Babangida. Other women who have made impacts in the country’s politics include Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the former Minister of Finance and first female Director, WTO; Dr. Obi Ezekwesili who also left an indelible mark on the history of Nigerian politics. The late Professor Dora Akunyili, a one-time Minister of Information, also performed creditably when she was the Director-General of National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC). Indeed, she waged war against adulterated drug peddlers and dealers, starting in her home state, Anambra. Without a doubt, there are many other women in politics that have done very well

and are still performing excellently well. Little wonder, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, was reported as saying: “When we empower women, we empower communities, nations and the entire human family.”

To tell the truth, the impact of women in nation building through political involvement has left a reinforcement in the path. We can confidently assert that women are not only loaded with valuable potentials, but also have the legal right to contribute to sustainable development of their societies. If women must remain or continue to be a driving force in nation building in this post Covid-19 era, our governments both at the state and federal levels have to adequately provide for the position of women in their administrations and make amendments to primitive and archaic policies that have placed women at the receiving end in spite of their education and intellectual capabilities.

While there are clear economic and social advantages of having more women in the workforce and political office in this post Covid-19 era, one undeniable justification remains : Men and women need to acknowledge that it is only through joint decision-making and cooperation that we can emerge as an adaptable, prosperous, and thriving society that takes into account the well-being of all; not just a select few in this new normal.

Conclusion

The pandemic has laid bare the world’s social and economic inequalities and vulnerabilities. Inclusive rebuilding is an imperative, not an option. The first, most critical step is to significantly increase investment in the social infrastructure necessary to eliminate the barriers to women’s equal participation in the economy. No one is better equipped to resolve the economic crisis in this post covid-19 era, the time to unleash women’s talents is now. Indeed, gender dimension in nation building is an impetus for economic sustainability in the post Covid-19 era.

A prerequisite for the design of any COVID-19 recovery strategy is that women must be included in all recovery taskforces, and at every stage of decision-making processes, like national security meetings and economic summits having proven their worth over time. The role of women in post covid-19 era is indispensable as always. In line with our position that there should be gender equity for any meaningful and sustainable national development, the following would suffice:

- i. governments at all levels must be intentional about educating the girl-child as the outcome of the pandemic indicates that not paying adequate attention to the girl-child impacts the nation negatively in terms of call to response;
- ii. promote all-round equity, and empower women. Because empowering a woman means empowering a larger percentage of the nation;
- iii. available records show women as responsible for half of the world's food production, and produce about 80% of the food in rural areas in developing countries, yet farmers are perceived as male, and so women find it difficult accessing resources such as land, credit and agriculture inputs, technology etc. We propose that the empowerment of women should be paramount in raising levels of nutrition and enhancing the wellbeing of family members, communities and the world's poorer peoples, women being primary care-givers;
- iv. gender responsive pandemic preparedness and plans which consider and address inequitable gender norms, roles and relations between and among women, men and children should be put in place;
- v. so as to reverse the damage of the pandemic, and ensure a socially responsive recovery, women and marginalized groups must be brought into all consultations and decision-making processes;
- vi. to avoid a repeat of the possible resultant outcomes of Covid-19, adequate data that inform policies should be collected, analysed, disaggregated and published;
- vii. there should be equity, fairness and justice in the distribution of cooperate resources capturing complementary rather than equality;
- viii. with continued shift in culture and values, and a more equitable allocation of resources, both women and men will have a greater influence on Science and Technology agenda, and the re-establishment of research priorities that front-burn women issues as Science and Technology

- has witnessed increased outputs owing to the increased involvement of women in management and decision-making processes; and
- ix. women and girls' experiences from previous pandemics indicate women and girls can be especially active participants for change while also experiencing the effects of the crisis in different ways. Given that the Covid-19 is not gender-blind, relevant agents and agencies of governments' response to it should be intentional and not gender blind ensuring there is an equitable disposition in tackling its impact.

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