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# **NIGERIAN WOMEN: VERITABLE TOOLS FOR PROGRESS**

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**By**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper discussed Nigerian women as veritable tools for progress. Their roles and contributions to the progress of the nation as wives, mothers, politicians and supporters etc. All Nigerian women required for advancement and those attributes that may constraint them for greater progress, though not available they are generally on the march for better tomorrow. The paper pointed out the sad effects which colonialism has had on the political, economic, social and cultural status of an average Nigerian woman. The paper also threw more light on the fact that with the overwhelming restrictions on the Nigerian women, they have made some tremendous achievements in different areas of life in the country and in participating in some noticeably areas of progress especially in agriculture and in area of*

*business. The paper made mention of the effects which these programmes Better Life and Family Support Programmes had on the contribution of women to the progress of Nigeria. It also appreciated the fact that women have good potentials than the roles they are involved in, in the progress of the country presently. Some recommendations were made which may help to bring up women's resources in order to tap and use them for better result in national progress.*

**Key Words:** Women, Tools, Progress, Economic & Contributions

Women are the backbone of national progress as they control and direct most of the non-monetary aspect of the economy in the home and outside their homes. Women also play vital roles in improving the economy of the home through hawking / trading, wage labour and so on. All over the world, women work both in the home and outside to get money for the up keep of the house. The top most topics in international programme concerning progress are women.

Women are the primary means of reproduction of life and this has placed them in the position of the life blood of humanity. Women are the first teacher the child comes in contact with. Women are maintainers, organizers, beautifiers who also sustain the home. They are peace makers (Prov. 14) and symbols of beauty and major molders and builders of characters of the child. Women are mothers of all human races. Mothers are wives and they have a considerable impact on the productivity of male workers. As workers in their own rights, they can conveniently be linked to the rejected stone in the Bible which has become the cornerstone of the house. Through the psychological, physiological and intellectual make up, women perform more than mere contributing and supportive roles in the production programme.

Major areas of women involvements in the development and progress of humanity had not been recognized until recently when government deemed it necessary and fit to focus on issue of women as an integral component in the progress of the nation (Dahunsi, 2013). Women are now challenging the status quo and doing all they could to correct the culture that does not recognise the importance of women in the development of a nation. They are more vocal, stronger, determined to be seen and heard; also clamoring for an improvement in their socio-economic status and for the recognition of their immense contributions and involvement to the progress of humanity.

### **Objective**

This work is set to look at women as an important tool for progress and development in Nigeria.

### **The progress of the women in Nigeria**

Some areas have been identified where women are active in national progress which are- education, health, culture, politics, economy, agriculture, enhanced environment, quality and peaceful co-existence. Women take active parts in agriculture, their contributions are outstanding most especially in the rural areas.

Women in Nigeria who had farms of their own had half the sizes of the men's farm, (Aderibigbe, 2010). Women plant the same type of crops like the men but they are hardly involved physically in land preparation and molding but they are involved in fertilizer application, punning, thinning, weeding and harvesting. In some parts of the country women are involved in land preparation and molding. They have full control in their contribution to agricultural advancement. Though, there are traces of division of labor based on sex, the functions of women could not possibly be neglected or over ruled if reasonable quality and quantity production is to be achieved.

### **Women and culture**

Culture is a must for a healthy society; Encarta Dictionary (2007) defined culture as sharing beliefs, values of group that is the beliefs, customs, practices and social behavior of a particular nature of people. Culture can be linked with people with shared beliefs and practices that is a group of people whose shared beliefs and practices identify the particular place, class or time to which they belong. Culture is the complete ways of life of a particular group of people, community, race it assists in ways of thinking, dressing, and vocation and so on, also it promote the lives of individual. Culture helps in achieving set goals and aspirations and in reshaping the future of the people if well planned and utilised.

Culture differs from one group of people to another even in the same country depending on the roles they are assigned to having in mind their age and sex. Some culture regards some jobs as men's jobs while some jobs are for women in another. Some jobs are for both in some culture even in the same country. One will be surprised that child bear in gall over the world is mainly women's job. This special and unique job makes women to be less active during pregnancy and period of nursing the child resulting to her working very close to the house as full-time house wives, petit traders and so on. Women must be well advanced in all aspect of life to be able to keep up the pace of advancement with present time socio-economic situations. Besides been gracefully built, women are indispensable at home not only in the kitchen alone, but also in taking care of the home; economically they help their husbands' atimes by rescuing them in the period of financial difficulty even with the little they get from their small trading (Davis, 2012). The duties of women in the homes as cooks, cleaners, wives, mothers, advisers, and teachers are as old as the world itself. They are expected to be major custodian of socio- cultural values of the society although this has been tampered by modern technology and western education and women are marginalized

by men but recently the struggle for equality with men is yielding positive results gradually, as they now occupy reasonable public and private positions. Women should be encouraged to be heads of states, political party leaders, governors, heads of the arm forces and so on, instead of ruling behind the curtains as popularly said-heard and not seen ( a local yoruba adage).

### **Gender in national progress**

Progress and advancement is a process of changing and becoming larger, stronger, more impressive, successful or advanced or of causing somebody to change, Encarta Dictionary (2007). It is a type of social change in which new ideas and concepts are introduced within a social system to produce better levels of living through being more productive and improved/better social organizations/groups and it should be a process of social changes and development in the society with the plan to bring about advancement in terms of greater opportunities and equality, freedom and other valued qualities for the people through subduing the community.

Women are getting more exposed, enlightened, independent and wiser though marginalized as soon as the male counterpart sees an opportunity both in the utilization of resources with access to development of resources. Some women work outside their homes to feed their family and still come back home to fetch water, gather firewood, and care for their families. In Nigeria, women form over half of the rural population and it is estimated that 80 percent of rural labor force is provided by women. Another estimate by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1990) claims that about one third of all African households are headed by women. In terms of sectional allocation, agriculture appears to be the occupation of majority of Nigeria rural women. Yet it is known that agriculture has the largest occupation for women, the poverty is compounded by the fact that only 8 percent of women hold title to the land they work on. In the education sector, women also fare worse than men. Over 60% of African women are illiterates PANA (2011).

Education brings benefits to the educated in the forms of access to information and more economic benefits and political influence and advancement, (Dahunsi, 2011). Education can make women gain more authority in the home and greater control over resources as a prelude to having more say in family decision. Education is required for skill's acquisition and consequently to increase the competitiveness that is in built in women. Lack of proper education may generally limit the upward mobility of women in all aspect of life making them inactive and stagnant, women are grossly disadvantaged, (Aderibigbe, 2010). This therefore raises the issue of women participation in development process. If progress and advancement are about people and there are evidences that a group of those people are disadvantaged, it has implications about their level and degree of participation. Progress should start with people irrespective of sex and it should be promoted or assisted by orientation, organization, values, self-reliance, self-esteem and discipline and

proceeds to the production and utilization of material endowments for improved and sustainable quality of life.

### **Women and self-reliance programmes**

Women have excelled in some areas of life and these are areas they have contributed immensely to the progress and development of the home and the society most especially in trading, transportation, exchange and distribution of food stuff from farm to dining tables. So consistent and fruitful has this process been that most city dwellers are not even aware of how foodstuff ends up on their dining tables. The same unobtrusive efficiency characterizes women's participation in the trade in imported food items and beverages. Women have also been prominent in the processing and preparation of food both publicly and privately generally in various arts/methods and in the provision of other services such as fashion designing, hair dressing, laundry and restaurants.

The Better life programme which was launched in 1987 as well as the Family Support programme in Nigeria brought dramatic and remarkable progress to women. Women became more aware of their position in and outside Nigeria. Wasted and buried talents in rural areas were discovered and utilized for progress of individuals and the nation despite the attendant circumstantial and congenital constraints, some remarkable progress can be attributed to these programmes including:

Co-operative groups for women came into existence and were duly registered. The groups promotes multi-purpose co-operatives that assist traders financially like hair dressing, farming, fish smoking, cassava processing, weaving- clothing, drink processing, tailoring and snacks production for progress and empowerment.

➤ Some women are involved in

- Detergent making;
- Production of honey;
- Establishment of day care and lower basic schools;
- Organization of adult literacy classes; (Addelrahman, 2004)

### **Women progress in politics**

Nigerian women played a vital role in politics during the pre and post-colonial era, African social system and the form of division of labour which existed. Women are actively involved in politics and government; they are regents, women chiefs, the authority of first born daughters in some communities well established and respected, and the age grades are very important and cannot be ruled out.

The birth of colonialism disrupted the functioning of these traditional institutions, suppressing them and imposing alien systems through education, religion and other socio-cultural institutions. British colonial rule, eliminated women from their existing institutional position in traditional politics replacing the traditional political system with a western oriented system in which women had no place.

Women formed an effective group of spokes women for political stability and humane rule as well as for the interest of women at the highest political level in the kingdom (Pellegrino, 2010).

### **Hindrances to progress of women in Nigeria**

One of the problems facing women in Nigeria, and the world today is illiteracy. Many programmes are being instituted to help minimize the problem, and reach women affected by it. However, even issues such as illiteracy contain discrepancies. There are larger numbers of illiterate women than men and not just in Nigeria but in nations all over the world, percentages of illiterate women are greater than those of illiterate men, ([www.worldmapper.org](http://www.worldmapper.org), 2006).

What are the roles of culture in reducing if not eradicating illiteracy level of women which is on the high side when compared with men? Illiteracy is a very big obstacle among women in the rural areas that is hindering their development and there should be need for this to be checked and reduced. Historical, religious, and social aspects of women have been known to be factor supporting their high level of illiteracy, there may be other factors involved in the problem. There are other challenges or potholes that must be tackled in order to totally wipe away illiteracy as it affects women, and what need be done to effectively bring changes to the lives of women. Top on the list is feminist issues that make literacy inaccessible to women: tight schedule, family responsibilities, lack of motivation, poverty, opposition by husbands, in- laws and poor access to literacy programmes.

The next obstacles is when women combine work with schooling this may encourage younger girls in the school system seeing that older ones successfully combine both which may make them do same and remain in school. Some men do not want to be at par with their wives in position of authority. The fear of such men isthat these women may become proud, uncontrollable and may later seek for divorce.

Another problem is that the government does not recognize the importance of women in their cabinets; we appreciate the present president of Nigeria for allowing more women in his cabinet. The question is will another president permit this golden opportunities and recognition given to women? So if there is a group of women with a particular reason as to why they are not literate, the government does not always recognize that need and such needs should be identified then solved.

There are no enough research work on methods and means of correcting the problem of the high rate of illiterate women. Implementation of the below suggested solutions is very important, if we really need to move forward for progress.

### **The following solutions may help to solve the problems of women which are:-**

- Government to create more literacy programs that will combine effectively the practical needs and the strategic needs of women, and such programs should be

*Nigerian Women: Veritable Tools for Progress – Dr T.O. Dahunsi; Dr Nike Funmilayo Oyedeji and Musa Abubakar*

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made to introduce women to learn skills which in turn can be used to generate income of their own.

- More women to be employed by government to teach and in other areas in the system and this will make women independent.

### **Conclusion**

The contributions of women cannot be discountenanced in house hold and national economies. The current role of women in national progress and advancement are considerable but the potential is far more considerable. In order to identify and tap these resources so as to ensure optimal performance in national progress, efforts should be made for holistic advancement of women.

### **Recommendations**

- The following are to be considered for women to be better utilized for progress
- Children and security/allowance should be put in place because a properly brought up child is an asset to the society and not to the mother alone;
- All women programmes for the achievement of the objective of women progress should carefully be designed and well executed;
- Converted efforts have to be made by women themselves to be heard, seen and involved in all ventures, including politic because the best advocates for women emancipation must be women themselves;
- Shift emphasis in regional development efforts to the provision of infrastructures and location of production ventures in marginalized areas;
- Identification and removal of all appearances of discrimination based on sex at home, offices and in politics;
- Ensure major policy interventions to bring women's social status and economic opportunities at par with those of men;
- Cottage economic activities that are socially acceptable and economically viable should be identified and concerted efforts should be made to integrate such activities in to the purdah system to carry the women in purdah along with development process.

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