
STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES OF INVOLVING WOMEN IN PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: FROM COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

By

DR. E. O. ARUMA
*Department of Adult And Non-Formal Education,
University of Port Harcourt,
Port Harcourt.*

Abstract

Women are viewed as indispensable tools for stimulating sustainable national development at various levels such as local community, local government, state and national in Nigeria as a developing country. Women should be encouraged to work collaboratively to achieve mutually agreed objectives and goals at various levels of Nigerian development initiatives. The paper examined the strategies and challenges of women in their sustainable national development drive in Nigeria. Some of the strategies examined in the paper include women empowerment strategy and integration of women into development strategy. The paper equally highlighted the challenges of low status of women and women's unequal access to land ownership in some cultures in Nigeria as part of the challenges confronting women in their determined efforts to promote sustainable national development in Nigeria. Among the recommendations which the paper contains are the followings: (1) There is an urgent need to raise awareness of women's collective grouping for sustainable national development in Nigeria. (2) There should be a law to prohibit women's unequal access to land ownership which presents a serious challenge to women's contributions to sustainable national development in the country.

Fundamentally, women discrimination is as old as human race in many cultures in the contemporary society. An aspect of universal declaration of human rights which focuses on provision of equal protection against any discrimination in violation of the declaration provides good opportunities for women to participate actively in promoting sustainable national development in Nigeria. According to Olakanmi (2007), Article vii of Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 clearly states that all people

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irrespective of sex are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. The article continued by stating that all people are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination. Indeed, women discrimination which dates as far back as human history in many cultures is addressed by the relevant Article vii of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

Women's unequal access to land ownership should strongly be discouraged in Nigeria. It has been observed that women's unequal access to land ownership made them to lose control of what to do in promoting sustainable national development in Nigeria. This ugly trend seriously needs to be reversed in a developing country like Nigeria. This will certainly promote active involvement of women in sustainable national development.

Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development simply means a process of meeting the needs of present generation without jeopardizing the abilities of future generations to meet their own needs. In the views of Todaro and Smith (2009) sustainable development is defined as a type of development which allows future generations to live at least as much as the current generation in the society. The central focus of sustainable development is that human beings must endeavour to live today and enjoy what the day holds for them with a view of securing the opportunities of future generations to meet their own needs. With the understanding that women should be perceived as indispensable tool for stimulating sustainable national development, women should be repositioned in many cultures in Nigeria in order to actualize the dreams of development initiatives in Nigeria.

The Strategies of Involving Women in Promoting Sustainable National Development in Nigeria

The strategies of involving women in promoting sustainable national development in Nigeria are the followings:

1. Women empowerment strategy
2. Integration of women into the development strategy
3. Women and partnership strategy

1. Women Empowerment Strategy

Fundamentally, women empowerment strategy is an important strategy to stimulate consciousness among women to enhance their poor living conditions in the society. In the context of this, women empowerment as a development strategy enables women to contribute their own little quota towards promotion of sustainable national development in Nigeria. The concept of empowerment simply means to give a person

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more control over his or her own life or situation in the society. Consequently, empowerment gives confidence in people in the society. Mulwa (2008) defined empowerment as a process of enabling people to gain confidence, strength and vision in order to work individually and collectively with others for positive changes in their lives in the society. The concept of women empowerment can be perceived as a process of helping women to have self confidence, ability, knowledge, skills and vision that will reposition them to be able to work individually and collectively with other people through social groupings in order to stimulate positive changes that will improve people's poor living conditions in the society. Interestingly, women are empowered with knowledge and skills to be confident enough to address prevailing situations in their lives or localities with a view to enhancing them for improved living conditions in the society. There is, indeed, a common saying that knowledge is power. There is the need to empower women in Nigeria with relevant knowledge and skills in order to enable them to contribute positively not only to enhance their own poor living conditions, but to promote sustainable national development for future generations. Ultimately, women empowerment will give strong hope to future generations in the society.

Women empowerment as development strategy offers the following opportunities to women to:

- i. Focus on improvement in the areas of health and nutrition of people in the society.
- ii. Focus on stimulating employment creation, wealth creation and income generation.
- iii. Create enabling environment and opportunities for individual members of the society to develop their potentials more adequately.
- iv. Help women as important stakeholders in the society to have a strong voice in their respective local communities.
- v. Help the women, especially the rural women to participate actively in decision-making process and community development projects which will improve their poor living conditions in the society.
- vi. Enable women, especially the rural women to exercise their political franchise and civic responsibilities.
- vii. Enhance women's active participation in politics, community development and socio-economic development.
- viii. Understand that women with their high numerical strength have the capacity to change their poor living conditions in their local environment.
- ix. Develop conscious efforts to contribute remarkably to promote positive changes that will improve people's living conditions among others.

2 Integration of Women into Development Strategy

The integration of women into development strategy is also an important strategy to involve women in sustainable national development in Nigeria. Fundamentally, both men and women should enjoy good opportunities to participate actively in political life and decision-making process that will stimulate sustainable national development in the society. Sadly enough, the gap between men and women in issues of decision making, especially concerning development at various levels notably local community, local government, state and national continues to widen in Nigeria. The views of women are not sought in the decision making process for sustainable development in some communities in the country. JDP/Caritas Nigeria (2010) observed that the interests and concerns of women are not represented in key decisions that affect people in the society. There is, therefore, an urgent need to reverse this trend in Nigeria. Essentially, women should be integrated adequately enough into sustainable national development in Nigeria. Todaro and Smith (2009) rightly remarked that the fact that the welfare of women and children is strongly influenced by the design of the development policy, underscores the importance of integrating women into development projects. The views of women at various levels including at local community level should be sought in project identification, planning, implementation and management of community development projects in the participating communities in the society. The involvement of women at the various levels of community development as stated in this paper will certainly guarantee a certain level of sustainability of community development projects in the participating local communities.

Understandably, an important objective of community development is to improve the poor living conditions of people in the participating local communities in the society. It will be very good that women are adequately integrated in community development processes in order to ensure that the objectives of community development of improving the poor living conditions of people, especially those of the women and children as the most vulnerable groups in the community are achieved in sustainable national development of Nigeria as a developing country, Todaro and Smith (2009) noted that women should be drawn into the mainstream of development in order to improve the living conditions of people, especially the poorest individuals in the society. Indeed, it is appropriate to create enabling environment for all people irrespective of their gender, to work consciously for the promotion of sustainable national development in Nigeria. Consequently, Nigeria must encourage social justice for everybody to work in promoting sustainable national development through social action.

2. Women and Partnering Strategy

Women and the partnering strategy is another important strategy which can be employed to promote active participation of women in sustainable national

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development in Nigeria. The concept of partnering is, indeed, universal in virtually all areas of human development activities in the contemporary society. The concept of partnering with women and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), corporate organizations, governmental agencies and international organizations as well as institutions will obviously promote meaningful participation of women in sustainable national development in Nigeria. Fasel (2000) noted that in recognition of cultural differences in the contemporary global environment, the concept of partnering can easily be applied across all areas of organizational boundaries in the society. Partnering goes beyond organizational boundaries in order to impact positively on people's lives in their various communities.

The idea of partnering with women and other stakeholders in community development process is to encourage supporting women community based organizations to help themselves in order to promote sustainable national development at local community level. Partnering in action is a community development approach for stimulating and sustaining successful engagement and collaboration across organizational boundaries. Indeed, partnering encourages collaboration with people, institutions, and organizations in order to achieve meaningful results. The concept of collaboration can be defined as the act of working together with another person or group of people, institutions or organizations in order to achieve something. Fasel (2000) in her own view simply defined collaboration as the act of working together. It must be made abundantly clear that partnering with other people, institutions or organizations is becoming very important to stimulate sustainable national development in Nigeria. Aruma (2006) asserted that partnering with relevant stakeholders and development partners becomes very imperative in order to tackle certain challenges in various local communities in the country.

Consequently, women are strongly encouraged through social groupings and activities to explore the opportunity of employing partnering strategy to elicit collaborative engagement of development partners and other relevant stakeholders to enable them to promote sustainable national development which will be to the benefits of their various local communities in the country. Fasel (2000) remarked that most organizations and institutions encourage partnering across organizational and institutional boundary in order to succeed in such endeavours in the society. The beauty of partnering in the context of community development is that no stakeholder works in isolation. Aruma (2006a) stated that the idea of partnering is for people to pool their available resources for the purpose of improving efficient and effective service delivery in every human endeavour in the society, Aruma (2006) as well as Aruma and Aruma (2009) stated other benefits of partnering in certain areas of human endeavours to include among other things the followings to:

- (i) Attract additional investment

- (ii) Improve local capacity building
- (iii) Enhance available expertise
- (iv) Increase people's performance
- (v) Enhance effective implementation of people-oriented development projects.
- (vi) Enhance efficiency and productivity.

The implication of this that partnering helps to improve the poor living conditions of people in the participating communities in the society.

Challenges of Women Involvement in Sustainable National Development Activities in Nigeria

1) Low status of Women in the Society

The low status of women is a serious challenge which greatly hinders the active participation of women in promoting sustainable national development in various areas of human endeavour, especially at local community level in Nigeria. Understandably, the non-integration of women into certain areas of human endeavour for sustainable national development will retard meaningful achievements in those areas at local community, local government, state and national levels in Nigeria. The low status of women perhaps translates into slower rate of development initiatives (Todaro and Smith, 2009). The full integration of women into various areas of human endeavour that will stimulate conscious efforts to promote sustainable national development will certainly guarantee future generations' capabilities to sustain their developmental concerns and initiatives at local community, local government, state and national levels in Nigeria. Todaro and Smith (2009) identified the most important factors for sustainable development to include education and enhanced economic status of women in the society. These are critical factors which stimulate people's conscious efforts to initiate the achievement of sustainable national development in the country.

Women should be encouraged to participate actively in leadership positions in all areas of human endeavour notably local community, local government, state and national levels in Nigeria. There is the need to re-orientate and conscientise the masses of this country, especially at local community level to understand very clearly that education of women repositions them to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development at the local community level, the local government, state and national levels in Nigeria. JDP/Caritas Nigeria (2010) noted the popular saying that educate a woman, you educate a nation. It should also be noted that when you educate a man, you educate an individual, but when you educate a woman, you educate a nation. The implication of these common sayings tend to indicate the importance of women in promoting sustainable development at local community, local government, state and national levels in the society. Todaro and Smith (2009) stated that the rate of return on education of women is certainly higher than that of education of men in a number of

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developing counties. Essentially, knowledge is power. Women are encouraged to acquire knowledge through education in order to enhance their poor living conditions in the society. Education of women gives hope to future generations. Educated women should endeavour to mobilize people in their local communities, local government areas, states and Nigeria as a developing country to really understand the urgent need to promote sustainable national development at various strata of the country.

It is pertinent to note that the stability of various homes in Nigeria is very critical to guarantee sustainable national development in the country. Understandably, the credit of a stable home usually goes to the women who supervise the day to day activities of their children among other things. JDP/Caritas Nigeria (2010) asserted that when a home is stable that the credit goes to the woman who engages in taking care of the children from birth to adulthood including doing other day to day activities to keep the home in its proper perspective. Indeed, character moulding of the children is a critical aspect of the woman's responsibilities in not only building a stable home, but in stimulating consciousness for promoting sustainable national development.

2) Women's Unequal Access to Land Ownership.

Essentially, women's unequal access to land ownership in many local communities remains a huge challenge to women in their efforts to contribute reasonably enough to sustainable national development in Nigeria. The culture of many communities is not kind enough to women in the area of land ownership in Nigeria.

It has been observed that women are not allowed by tradition to own land in certain local communities in Nigeria. This obnoxious tradition of certain local communities greatly hinders women's determined efforts to contribute meaningfully to sustainable national development in the country. Agbo (2005) remarked that women are denied right to land ownership in Nigeria. It is a known fact that women are the backbones of Nigerian farmers who work tirelessly to contribute reasonably to enhance agricultural productivity in Nigeria. Unfortunately, they are denied right of ownership of land in their own local communities.

In spite of the precarious position of women in issues relating to right of ownership of land in their local communities, many women are still worried on how to contribute to community development in many communities in Nigeria. The women are not integrated into the decision-making process in a typical Nigerian local environment. In the context of the culture of many traditional communities whatever a woman owns is automatically transferred by inheritance to her husband who is assumed by tradition to own the woman as a wife and all that she has in her husband's house. Schaefer (2005) called women the most exploited of oppressed people. The earlier Nigerians

reverse this trend, the better for the country in promoting effective contributions of women to sustainable national development.

Conclusions

Women should be viewed as indispensable tools for the promotion of sustainable national development at various levels in Nigeria as a developing country. Essentially, women should be encouraged to participate actively in contributing to sustainable national development in Nigeria. Women should work diligently to achieve mutually agreed objectives and goals of women groupings at various levels of the country's developmental drive.

The desire to attain sustainable national development is a serious challenge to women in Nigeria. Certainly, acceleration of full integration of women in sustainable development initiatives is critical to the achievement of sustainable national development in Nigeria. Indeed, women's efforts should truly reflect strong commitment to achieve sustainable people-oriented development which will primarily enhance people's poor living conditions in various local communities in the country in particular and the country in general.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the issues discussed on the strategies and challenges of involving women in promotion of sustainable national development in Nigeria:

1. There is an urgent need to raise awareness for women's collective groupings to stimulate sustainable national development. This will help women to achieve mutually agreed objectives and goals at the local community, local government, state and national levels in Nigeria.
2. There should be a law to prohibit women's unequal access to land ownership in Nigeria. This will enhance women's efforts to acquire land for developmental purposes in the country. Indeed, enhancing women's unequal access to land ownership will promote sustainable national development in Nigeria.
3. Partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governmental agencies and corporate organizations will obviously promote meaningful participation of women in sustainable national development in Nigeria. The women groupings at various levels notably community, local government, state and national should endeavour to partner with viable non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governmental establishments and corporate organizations to promote sustainable national development.
4. There is an urgent need to encourage social justice among women so as to work collectively in promoting sustainable national development in Nigeria. This can

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be achieved through social action of women with a strong focus on sustainable development initiatives.

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