

Overview of Contemporary Women's Issues in North-Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the women economic status in Northeast region of Nigeria. The study asserts that contemporary patriarchy nature of the country as a whole aided by the religious and cultural interpretation have played a vital in widening gender-based economic disparity between men and women. Using both quantitative and qualitative data from various secondary sources, this study analyzes some key backload concerns that attributed to the economic patriarchy of the North East societies. This paper has demonstrated that just like the national ratio of females to males, the North East region have almost equal ratio females to males, however, when it comes to economic status. Yet, the also identify some treacherous issues that need to be explicitly understood in order to minimize the gender-based disparity among local populous of this region.

Keywords: Economic Status, Human Development, Marginalized social, Patriarchy, Poverty

1. INTRODUCTION

In Africa, women are generally been considered in an old-fashioned way which were seen as the bedrock of the socio-cultural values of society. Most of Africa's socio-cultural values have explicitly assigned gender-based roles to men and women (Rani *et al.*, 2004). These roles

were closely associated with expectations; ownership, responsibilities, authority and obligations, and consequently these roles promote various patriarchy and imbalance of power between men and women. Africa's culture emphatically consigned gender-based issue as superior men and subordinate women. In Sub Saharan Africa, women and girls bear the burden of most domestic duties (such as collecting firewood and water) and responsible for raising large families, but ironically, they are the poorest economically (Rani *et al.*, 2004). Consequently, this condition has devastating consequences for both woman and her respective family well-being. For instance, it was discovered that young women in Sub-Saharan regions are at high risk of HIV infection (Rani *et al.*, 2004).

This paper is an attempt to further document the economic status of women in North Eastern Nigeria. However, the paper also can relates the national as well as geo-political issues on the basis of working status, marital status, and occupational status particularly under the shadow of economic and socio-cultural beliefs. Using the last Nigeria's census data (2006 national census), the study has empirically provided evidence-based information for decision-makers, researchers, Non Governmental Organizations as well as economic planners. Such information may assist in clarifying factors that attenuate the effects of interventions aimed at improving women economic standing and prosperity in the North East region of Nigeria.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Based on the quantitative nature of the data involved in this study, secondary data from the 2006 national census and other published documents from various sources were used. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of frequency distribution tables, simple percentages, various charts and bar graphs.

2.1 Study Area

The North East zone of Nigeria covered about 280,419km² (one third of Nigeria's total land area) with estimated population of 23.6 million in 2011 (about 13 percent of the Nigeria's population) according to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The zone shares national boundaries with other Nigerian zones as well as international borders with three other niger countries; explicitly, Republic of Cameroon, Republic of Chad and Niger Republic. Moreover, the NBS (2010) reported that

this geopolitical zone has been a major contributor to national's net food production. Appallingly, this geopolitical zone has being characterized as the worst in terms of socioeconomic grading in the country with an average absolute poverty rate of about 69 percent. Hence, this figure is found to be bigger than the national average of about 60.9 percent. However, this zone was characterized as one of the zone with highest poverty rate in the country.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Women and Economic Empowerment

The religious misinterpretations and socio-economic beliefs of the people of the North Eastern Nigeria often consider women as 'inferior' to men which consequently influence and rendered them subordinate not only in domestically but also professionally. Though, there are various efforts to ensure that women globally attain their rightfully status within society, however, women continue to experience challenges associated with low resource control and educational attainment (Henshaw *et al.*, 1998; Okonofua *et al.*, 1999). Women's empowerment was assessed using three indicators; first, the autonomy in domestic decisions, secondly, equitable access to media, and lastly is their literacy level which is also considered a factor influencing their access to information (Zenn and Pearson, 2014).

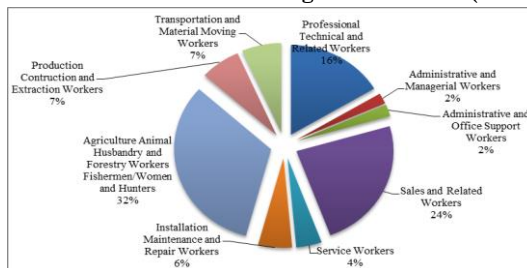
3.2 Women and Labor

In Sub-Saharan African communities, women generally provide the key bulk labor for the agriculture sector. Combined with new evidence of a non-negligible gender gap in agricultural productivity, this has motivated increased attention to raising agricultural productivity among African women (Zenn and Pearson, 2014). This scenario does not only portray the importance of women in Sub Saharan societies but it is also an empowering modality for African women.

A study by Rani *et al.*, (2004) reported that in most Sub-Saharan African communities, women are largely accounted to about 60 to 80 percent of the agricultural labor. Many studies have taking the female share in the agricultural labor force as a proxy (calculated as the total number of women economically active in agriculture divided by the total work force (Okonofua *et al.*, 1999; Ilika, 2005; Denov and Maclure, 2006). It was reported by many studies that

women's labor contribution to African agriculture is slightly less than half (Doss *et al.*, 2011). A study conducted in African countries (Ethiopia, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda) reported that about 40 percent of population of these countries are engaged in wide array of agro-ecological zones and farming systems (WHO, 1999). In Nigeria, the share is 37 percent; with about 32 percent in North and 51 percent in South (Zenn *et al.*, 2013). However, this study empirically challenged the affirmation that women do not disproportionately contribute to agricultural production, explicitly crop production (Zenn *et al.*, 2013).

Figure 1: Distribution of Gross Nigeria's Worker (Sector-wise)



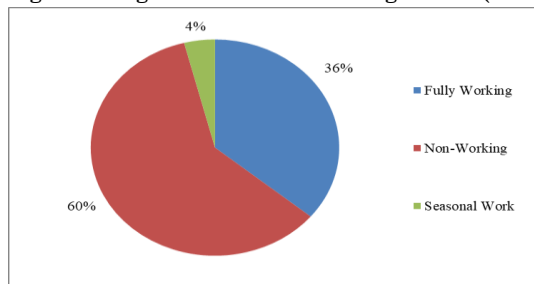
Source: Census Report, 2010

However, the Nigerian non-educated women do provide greater share in the household labor than their respective educated women (Marks, 2014). Moreover, women also do contribute a larger share if they own the land (Hindin, 2003). It was also understood that regular access to personal earned income from other sources (specifically the off-farm activities) significantly reduces female labor share in agricultural production in Nigeria (Odimegwu and Okemgbo, 2003). Moreover, it was also noticeable that regional differences in share of female labor across regions of Nigeria were little than their Northern counterpart (Odimegwu and Okemgbo, 2003). This study further observed that low skill professions like agricultural activities and petty trading are the key sectors have women patronized most (Jewkes *et al.*, 2002; Odimegwu and Okemgbo, 2003).

This shows that women from the Northern extraction tend to be less engaged in professional, technical and managerial jobs than southern Nigeria. Still in this regard, the rural women also suffered most due to the huge differences between the south and the north, an artifact of geo-climatic zones. Food and Agricultural Organization

(FAO) in the year 2015 reported that the Northern zone of Nigeria is lagging in infrastructure and social services as a result of lower private sector participation in addition to larger exposure of the Southern and middle agro-climatic zone to various economic development initiatives. Women are very important part of modern workforce in the world. However, women usually face enormous challenges especially within a developing economy like Nigeria where professions are largely categorized as masculine or feminine (Uchem, 2001). The figure (2) below showed the distribution of overall working status (above 10 years) in Nigeria

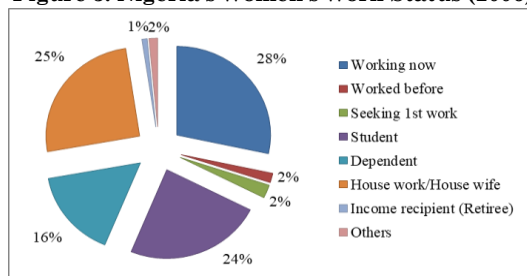
Figure 2: Nigeria's Overall Working Status (2006)



Source: Census Report, 2010

This study understand that greater part of Nigeria's above 10 years were dependent on the minority full time workers (about 36 percent) and the seasonal workers (about 4 percent).

Figure 3: Nigeria's Women's Work Status (2006)

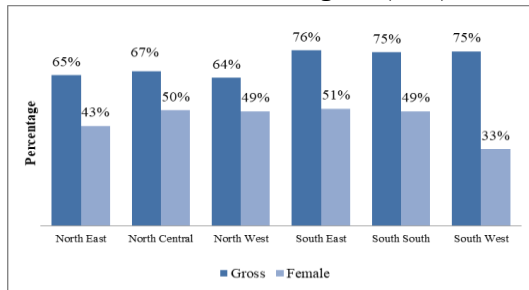


Source: Census Report, 2010

The Nigeria 2006 census data assigned the working age of the country 10 years and above. However, the result from figure (2) and figure (3) above have confirmed that women's are having the highest number of

overall dependents across all categories (i.e. students, dependents and housewives) as compared to the overall working status in Nigeria.

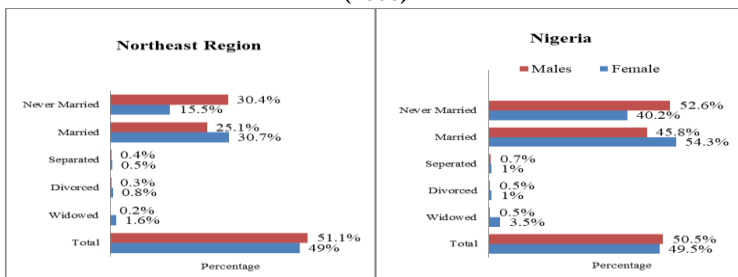
Figure 4: Distribution of Overall and Female Working Population across Geo-Political Zones of Nigeria (2006)



Source: Census Report, 2010

The above figure (4) showed that among all the geo-political region of the country, North West and North East zone were the worst in terms of gross working population while with regards to female working population, the South West and North East are the worst performing zones in the country. However, the most performing zone in terms of gross working population, the zones from the Southern region are at the frontiers. Whereas in terms of female working population, the South East and North Central are at the forefront.

Figure 5: Gender-wise Marital Status of Nigeria and North Eastern Region (2006)



Source: Census Report, 2010

The figure (5) above showed that there is close ratio of male to female within the population at both National as well as in the North Eastern zone. However, this study discovered that at country level, the rate of males’ population is slightly higher than females counter

parts in terms of those that are separated, divorced and widowed except for those who were never married. However, ratio between male and female in the North Eastern region showed that all the ratio were below the national average figures (i.e. never married, married, separated, divorced and widowed).

3.3 Women and Unwanted Pregnancy

Unintended pregnancy poses significant public health risks to every society. However, women usually suffered most. Within the North Eastern Nigeria, it was discovered that among the main consequences of unwanted pregnancy is induced abortion. Though, these induced abortions are mainly conducted secretly and illegally in this region therefore it mainly accompanied by life threatening risks, substantial risk of maternal mortality (Heise *et al.*, 1994; Oye-Adeniran *et al.*, 2004). For example, during the mid-1990s; the induced abortion was estimated to be conducted by about 0.025 percent in Nigeria (NPC, 2004; Oye-Adeniran *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, in 2006 alone, reported cases of induced abortion stands approximately at about 760, 000 cases (Doss *et al.*, 2011).

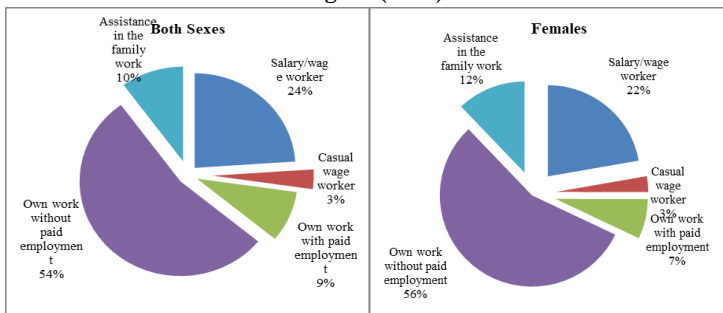
3.4 Women Fertility, Birth Control and Other Related Contraceptives

According to National Surveys, educated women in Nigeria as well as the North Eastern region prefer fewer children than non-educated women. From the year 1990 to 2003; the average number of children per woman has declined from 5.8 to 5.3 (Oye-Adeniran *et al.*, 2004). Even in this regard, the levels of contraceptive use still remained low in 2003 with only about 7% married women tend to use modern contraceptive method and another 6% relied on a traditional or folk method (Ilika, 2005). The study understood that North Eastern women fear for contraceptives side effects and religious misinterpretation positively contributed to lower use of family planning in the region. However, there is only limited evidence about the reasons for unwanted pregnancies in this region. Hence, the study agrees with the popular axioms that issues such as economic constraints, peer pressure, social media and exposure to explicit contents greatly contributed to this menace.

3.5 Occupational Status of the North Eastern Region of Nigeria

An occupational status is among the key component of socioeconomic status that summarizes the educational requirements, power as well as the income associated with various occupational structures of a region.

Figure 6: Both Sexes and Female Occupational Status of in North Eastern Region (2006)



Source: Census Report, 2010

The figure (6) above showed strong correlation between the distributions of occupational status of both sexes and females occupational status within the North Eastern region of Nigeria.

3.6 Women, Insecurity and Violence

Boko Haram re-emergence in 2010 in the North Eastern Nigeria, this Extremist Terrorist Group has been unleashing systematic and unabated campaigns of bombings, kidnappings and drive-by shootings across much of North Eastern Nigeria (Zenn *et al.*, 2013). The Boko-Haram group misinterprets the ultra-Salafi ideology that regards women as inferior to men and considers Christian women, in particular, as “members of an infidel outcast” (Zenn *et al.*, 2013). This terrorist attacks schools in North Eastern Nigeria and Kidnapped over 200 girls from Chibok, Borno State in 2014 and more than 100 in Dapchi in Yobe State (Cite9). This group on countless occasions have distributed pamphlets and delivered sermons calling for girls to be denied modern education and promise to abduct them when they do (Zenn, and Pearson, 2014).

A study by Zenn *et al.*, (2013) reported that; within the North East region there is a shadow sphere of sexual extortion under duress. The

terrorist mostly young men find it difficult to stay in bushes without access to sex (Zenn *et al.*, 2013). Consequently, this terrorist group resolves to kidnaps of women and girls in order to fulfill their crucial military, social as well as logistical roles (Zenn *et al.*, 2013; Zenn, and Pearson, 2014). The kidnapping of school girls by Boko-Haram highlights one of the central features of jihadist groups: the oppression of women and their continued relegation to an inferior status vis-à-vis their male counterparts (Zenn, and Pearson, 2014). The vulnerability of women and girls in the North East region of Nigeria to numerous criminals and radicals was largely associated to misinterpretations of religious convictions and cultural provisions in the region.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study analyzes the women economic status in North East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Though, previous studies such as Denov and Maclure (2006), Zenn *et al.* (2013), Zenn and Pearson (2014), Marks (2014) have proved beyond any reasonable doubt that women's health as well as the mortality of her children was greatly influenced by her societal status largely through socio-cultural affixed roles and expectations. However, this study concludes that besides the negative effects of common axiom which were supported and guided by various cultural and religious misinterpretations on the economic status of women in North Eastern Nigeria. This study further understand that other factors such as history, early marriage and pregnancy, unwanted pregnancy, conflict, violence and other related terrorist activities, acquired skill and technical know-how contributes to the patriarchy of this society.

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