

Education of Rural Women for National Development: Exploring the Imperatives of Gender-Responsive Governance

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Abstract: *Women are proportionally visible in rural communities. However, the substance of the visibility of this vulnerable gender is abysmally poor to the expectations of rural economy nay national development. Acknowledging this reality, this paper argued that the education deficit of rural women embellishing in lack of knowledge and skill exposure constrained effort to explore optimally the potentials and activities of these community artisan female folk towards national development hence the rationale for gender-responsive governance. Adopting qualitative design of data collection and analysis, the discourse revealed that 1.7 billion women and girls live in rural areas across regions and countries of the world while 43 percent of rural women work in agricultural sector of developing economies. In Nigeria, 52 of rural population are women whose agrarian contribution to national development is poor. In other words, the study recommends gender-responsive governance and gender-mainstreaming measures among other fundamentals for the education of rural women for national development.*

Keywords: Education, rural women, rural economy, gender-responsive governance and national development.

Introduction

Education, governance and rural women are critical indices of national development. This is because the sturdiness of national development is premised on the quality of governance for functional knowledge and skill exposure of rural women. This assertive remark lends credence to the fact that education is the bedrock of national development. This is indeed an acclaimed universal value for nation-state desirous for growth and advancement in every sphere of human endeavor. In this vein, Okafor and Madubuegwu (2015) established the purpose of education as aimed to stimulate interest in knowledge and skills for functional behavior relevant in societal context. Though, it may be internalized through informal and formal channels, the ultimate is change that reflects on attitude and behavior.

In developing economies such as Nigeria, gender disparity is wide and threatening with reference to privileges, opportunities and development. The institutionalized patriarchal system in democratizing states such as Nigeria has over the decades elicited vehement and sustained call in the plights and wellbeing of the vulnerable group, the women. And, one of such daunting challenges constraining the full utilization of the potentials of women for national development is education. In this sense, the inequality between men and women in Nigerian is widened by the level of literacy, and skill development expressed in education. In this sense, Okochua (2014) argued that barriers exist today in women's entry into education, training and development programs in most countries. Women's options are severely limited. It is universally observed that training which women received is shorter than which is received by men. There is some indication, however, that education for women commonly emphasizes household or domestic activities. It is centered on education of children (teaching), caring (nursing and social work), home management, food and textile industries. Okochua's view explicitly underscored the need for the education of women in developing economies beyond domestic chore.

Accordingly, it is argued that rural economy is the bedrock of growth and development of national economy. Rural economy is notably driven by the activities of artisan women in communities. To this extent, rural women play a critical role in the growth and development of rural economy. In most parts of the developing world, rural women participate in crop production, and livestock care, provide food, water and fuel for their families and engage in off-farm activities to diversify their family's livelihood (Report of United Nations, 2008:2). This is also in cognizance of the fact that 1.7 billion women and girls live in rural areas and rural women make up 43 percent of the agricultural force in developing countries. Around the world, rural women and girls ensure food security for their communities and are major contributors to their economies (Report of International Labour Organization 2019:1).

Unfortunately, the potentials, energy and drive of these rural women are constrained with daunting challenges as earlier noted. In this vein, Louise, *et al* (2018) embellished further that across the global south, most rural women and girls are disadvantaged. Compared to men and boys, they receive less formal education, some may get less health care, they have fewer

opportunities to work outside the household and when they do, they are often paid less and treated worse than men. Most rural women are constrained by social norms that define them primarily as wives, mothers and confined them to domestic sphere.

This unpleasant situation undoubtedly accentuated the rationale for gender mainstreaming policies, legislations and interventions as seen in most industrializing economies to stem the tide of crises of stratification across the facets of national development. In this regard, this paper argued that gender-responsive governance is not only important but expedient to drive the process of education of rural women for functional knowledge and skills relevant in national development.

Conceptual Discourse

As earlier noted, education is essential for improved well-being of every nation-state. And, it's meaning, content and purpose is depleted with plethora perspectives among scholars and practitioners from the era of antiquity to the contemporary period. Accordingly, Ogundele, (2018) viewed education as enlightenment, creation of awareness, appreciation of self and societal values, doctrines, philosophies, norms, beliefs as well as the development of the self such that one can be most beneficial and productive to both self and the society at large. Beyond the ideals and values, education is concerned with the transmission of skills, knowledge, vocation and culture and that is usually through teaching, research and dissemination of the findings for ultimate utilization (National Teachers Institute, 2012).

To underline the essence of education in the context of Nigeria's national development, the Nigeria's National Policy on Education, (2013) embellish the following philosophical ideals.

- (a) Education is an instrument for national development and social change.
- (b) Education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and United Nigeria.
- (c) Education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society.
- (d) Education is compulsory and right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, colour, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenge.
- (e) Education is compulsory and right of every Nigerian.
- (f) Education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society.

It is from these ideals that the relevance of education of the girl-child and women becomes a priority for the government, education stakeholders and concerned Nigerians. In this vein, Ayinde (2011) remarked that the kind of education women requires must be the type that must provide her with the mix of knowledge and skill that would emancipate her from the unequal labour and social relation and, getting a combination of three types of skill-reproductive, productive and emancipation which makes significant logistic demands on non-formal education design and implementation. In a similar sense, Ukeje (1988) noted that the education of women needs full recognition of women's conditions in the society. The state and local government should not under the guise of such things as "basic need" address only the reproductive roles of women but the productive and emancipatory aspects should be given their priority attention. Education should develop the women in such a way that not only the increased productivity will be achieved but equally self-confidence and self-respect will be enhanced.

Again, the educated woman is not only able to build her home, career and the society at large, but is also able to turn their creative potentials into productive one. She is able to make out something of a situation or ran environment that seemingly does not have much offer. Education helps to develop her fundamental skills including a sense of self-discipline and responsibility to take initiatives as well as special skills and capabilities for nation-building (Nworgu, 1994: 20).

However, inspite of these lofty ideals and importance of women's education as implicitly illustrated, there were still gaps and impediments towards the education of women. Accordingly, Nnadi and Oga (2014) stressed that gender relation in Nigeria as seen in other Africa countries are always patriarchal in nature and therefore dominated by the male. Women are subjected to subordinate status by men. Although, gender issue have a global phenomenon where Sub-Sahara African is most affected. In retrospect, UNESCO (2003) cited in Anya (2018) raised the alarm of gender inequality in globalizing world of 21st Century that women represents over half of the world's-out of school population; over 113 million children, 60% of who are girls have no opportunity to basic education. In addition, 145 million children aged six to eleven (6 – 11) in developing countries lack educational opportunities. In Nigeria, about 72 million children do not go to school of which 62 percent are women. It was in the recognition of these challenges that Okochua (2014:256) stressed the rationale for government's response to the plights of education of women;

From the challenging societal values and needs, it would have been expected that government would make a more conscious effort towards improving or educating the women in the country. A nation that is striving to maintain a high standard of living and cultural enlightenment needs to develop talent and social status of every woman. Educated women across the world have been able to prove men wrong that they are not weak as seen in the personalities of Late Prof. Dora Akunyili, Dr. Ngozi-Okonjo-Iweala, Prof. Stell Okunna to mention have been able to prove their worth.

To reinforce the call for the education of women for national development amid challenges, the following imperatives are under listed below:

- (i) A woman, who is educated can embrace her personal view in any society, freely communicate their opinion and can contribute her quota to the development of the social life in the community.
- (ii) An educated woman is a cultured woman who knows how to behave in a proper and acceptable manner. She is gentle, polite and respectful.
- (iii) An educated woman is better positioned for paid employment as well as farewell in her chosen business. Such a woman is in a vantage position to contribute towards the well-being and education of her children, thereby raising their standard and contributes to economic development of the country.
- (iv) An educated woman understands the importance of child education.
- (v) An educated woman is aware of her civic rights and obligation to the state.
- (vi) An educated woman understands importance of national unity and cohesion.
- (vii) An educated woman is well disposed to make immense contribution to national development. (Omololu, 1992, 41).

A cursory review of the foregoing analysis revealed the gaps in the specific importance of education of rural women, and its essence in the context of rural economy and national development. However, it is established that education of women is not only imperative for self-development and reliance but meaningful in the process of national development.

In attempt to explicate the concept of rural women, it is described as country's female population residing in villages under municipal authority otherwise known as local government. The rural attributes of this category of female population is further expressed in indigenous language and dialect, shared sentiment, agrarian occupation and low-socio economic status. They were mostly middle-aged and elderly women whose visibility in social, cultural and economic processes of the community is significantly impressive particularly across various parts of Nigeria.

In the developing economies in Sub-Sahara Africa, rural women engage in crop production, livestock farming, fishing etc. In a specific sense, the Report of International Labour Organization, ILO (2018:3) document that rural women comprises one quarter of the world's population. Women also make up 41 percent of world's agriculture labour force, a ratio that rise to 49 percent for low-income countries. In many South-East African and Sub-Sahara African countries, more than 60 percent of working women are engaged in the agricultural sector. Significant number of women in rural economy work (as subsistence farmers, small-scale producers) in plantations and agro-industries. Basically, the ILO report findings ostensibly showed the strategic importance of rural women in the growth and development of rural economy.

Invariably, studies from several other countries confirm that rural women participate extensively in agricultural food production either in the fields or within the confines of the compound, depending on the degree of their food crops, commercial crops that are labour intensive and don't necessary require mechanical implements. In addition, to working as seasoned and causal laborers in agriculture generally, women also work on plantation either as seen in India, Malaysia etc (Ahmad, 2018:590). Indeed, rural women carry the world on their shoulders by ensuring the sustainability of rural livelihood and overalls well-being as well as performing the bulk of rapid care and domestic work within families and the Household in rural areas (Report of International Labour Organization, 2019:1).

In a specific reference to Nigeria, Eze and Ahamd (2017) noted that rural women in Nigeria cannot be seen as homogenous group. There are vital difference bordering on age, class, marital status, ethnicity, race and religion. Women do most of the household work and less likely to be involved in decision making (especially outside family). Nigerian rural women are left with so many activities at domestic levels in terms of children, food, preparation, animal care, domestic cleaning etc. In affinity to Eze and Ahmad's view, it has been observed that most rural women in the 774 local government areas of the country engage in subsistence agriculture, small-scale trade and industrial activities but enormously constrained in contributing effectively in the development of rural economy. These peasant female farmers and artisans are struggling in poverty, infrastructural deficit and inadequacy of basic social services and virtually absence of vocational exposure for development and self-reliance. To further conceptualize the challenges of rural women in developing countries with emphasis on multi-facted social factors, Louise et al (2018), argued that across the globe south, most rural women and girls are disadvantaged. Compared to men and boys, they receive less formal education, some may get less health care, they have fewer opportunities to work outside the Household and when they do, they are often paid less and treated worse than men. Most rural women are constrained by social norms that define them primarily as wives, mothers and confined them to domestic sphere.

Women in rural areas face constraints in engaging in economic activities because of gender-based discrimination and social norms, disproportionate involvement in unpaid work, and unequal access to education, health care, poverty and financial and other services. They are also disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of environmental disasters and climate change. (Report of International Labour Organization, 2018:3). In Nigeria situation, the intersection of religion and tradition complicate women's position via-a-via development issues. In Northern Nigeria, Muslim women are the most disempowered because of the religious belief of keeping women in Purdah. Comparably, the Christian women are relatively freer and can be involved relatively in limited development activities depending on ethnic region. Cultural and religious barriers inducing inferiority status, discrimination in relation to opportunities, and priority for male child over female and restricted position as "home makers and domestic managers" as well as barriers that has impoverished rural women, disempowered and subjects them to all forms of abuses (Mohammed, 2018:

291). It was in cognizance of this deplorable socio-economic and educational status of rural women, the United Nations Millennium Development Goal, MDGs (2005) in response to the crises of gender inequality and plights of community women remarked in its report; to eliminate all forms of discrimination and empower rural women, the following goals should be pursued by all nations and governments;

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme Poverty and Hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5: Improve material health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV and AIDs

These goals are clarion call for national governments across regions and countries of the world to expedite actions on gender-responsive governance in deference to the potentials of rural women for national development.

Governance is a relatively a view having entered the political lexicon in the 1970's and 1980's with a large number of underdeveloped countries struggling to deal with political and economic problems which poor leadership generated for their countries. To conceptualize the term, "governance" Hyden and Samuel (2011) indicated that defining governance has preoccupied three different constituencies over the years. One is the academic community, which adopted the concept from various perspectives in the 1970's and 1980's. Another is the international donor community, which began applying the concept of in its programmes in the early 1990s. A third is civil society activists, who have been in the forefront of shaping governance discourse in recent years. Furthermore, Baran (2018) defined governance as exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage affairs at all levels. In economic sphere, governance is a process that affects economic activities (such as globalization, economic liberalization, labour levels, banking, and investment taxation). In political sphere, it is a process that is concerned with political decision-making to formulate laws and policies (decentralization, participation, resource allocation and entitlements). At the level of administration, it is concerned with process that facilitates policy, implementation and service delivery. In another perspective, governance at the level of state represents established mechanisms, process and roles of the government in responding to the exigencies of social order, security and welfare. It also reflects in the structures, and processes of interaction between the persons in government and the masses on issues of collective interest (Madubuegwu, 2019:1).

In other words, the concept of governance has evolved to cover not just public sector management of efficient services and an enabling environment for development, but also the promotion of human right and freedom (Nadiba and Zambrano, 2008:5). Hence, gender rights and advocacy remains one of the key priorities of modern governance to further underscore the import of the Report of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2017, :3),

There is growing global awareness that gender equality is the corner stone of inclusive growth providing equal access to public and economic opportunities to both men and women is vital to accomplishing a more sustainable economy and improving national well-being. Governance is key to delivering gender-equality results. Meaningful changes on the ground require a coordinated competent and powerful whole-of-government commitment and bear and effective mechanism in place with and across government institutions to be able to translate public policies, programmes services and budgets into concrete benefits for men and women.

This indication explicitly showed the imperative of gender-responsive governance in mitigating the challenges of women in social relation, privileges and opportunities with men. In other words, the thrust of gender-responsive governance is premised on;

- (i) equal participation of women in decision-making
- (ii) equal opportunities in influencing social, political and economic affairs
- (iii) equal access to benefits (Baran, 2018:4).

The significance of gender-responsive governance in the context of the empowerment of the rural women elicited more global awareness and consciousness at the event of fifth-sixth session of the Global Status of Women held on 29th February, 2012 at Amsterdam. The commission after extensive deliberation on; "the Role of Gender-Responsive Governance and Institutions for Empowerment of Rural Women" resolved that;

- (i) Rural women have critical role to play in shaping the response to development challenges such as poverty, hunger and global crises including the economic and financial crises, etc.
- (ii) Empowerment of rural women will significantly benefit including their families, local committees and national economies.
- (iii) To unleash the potentials of rural women, there is need for enabling gender-responsive governance and institutions with the goal of transforming unequal gender relation and changing public system that deny women equal rights and opportunities.
- (iv) Gender-mainstreaming as an important strategy for ensuring that governance processes, policies, laws and service delivery that are gender responsive.

- (v) Gender-responsive budgeting is an effective tool for delivering results for women in all sectoral areas, including the agricultural sector.
- (vi) Need for increased use of needs assessments in rural areas, including through consultations and dialogues with rural women and women’s organizations in order to support better policy development and implementation for the benefit of rural women.

These resolutions obviously accentuate the strategic relevance of rural women in the process of national development. And, the task for government to mainstream the empowerment of this vulnerable female folk in national policies and programmes for optimal impacts in national development.

Subsequently, the concept of National Development indicates the overall development on a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or a nation (Lawal and Oluwatoyin, 2011: 238). In a similar perspective, the term, national development is used to a state of maturity which characterizes a nation-state. This maturity resonates from the interplay of modern political, economic, and social forces and processes in building and advancing a nation-state.

Issues and Challenges in the Education of Nigerian Rural Women

Emphatically, there are obvious gap and disparity between men and women, and boy and girls with reference to certain privileges and opportunities for self-development and societal advancement. This is mostly seen in developing economies of Africa, South and Latin American continents with varied intensity and peculiarity. Notably, the literacy index ratio among rural women is abysmally low. It is also further observed that over two-third of the world’s illiterate people are women, many of whom live in rural areas. In Cambodia, 48% of rural women and 14% of rural men are unable to read or write. In Burkin Faso, the illiteracy rate for women is 78% compared to 63% for men. The global secondary school attendance ratio of rural girls is 39% as opposed to 45% for rural boys compared to 59% and 60% of urban girls and boys respectively. (Report of Global Rural Women Network, 2018:4).

Accordingly, the importance of education in the development of women was highlighted at the event of Beijing Platform for Action-where it is identified as one of the 12 critical areas of concern and affirmed as gender equality and women empowerment. The elimination of gender-based discrimination in education at all levels as well as the eradication of illiteracy among women, improving access to vocational training, science and technological education and continuing education are all highlighted as important measures on the platform. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) goal 4 also aims to ensure inclusion and equitable quality education alongside the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all (Report of National Bureau of Statistics, 2018:16).

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Gender in Basic Education (2006) recognized the need to ensure gender equality by placing priority on girl-child education as prelude to the literacy of Nigerian women. Over the years, data and statistics from the surveys and research in developing countries, including Nigeria have increasingly suggested that development is gendered exercise, impacting differently on women and men, girls and boys. Ruling social norms, political and economic factors endemic in any particular society determine how development benefits different groups of the society. Consequently, promotion of the goal of gender equality has become globally accepted as a strategy for reducing poverty level among women, improving health and living standards and enhancing efficiency of public investments. Hence, the National Gender Policy in Basic Education is the response to the challenges of achieving gender equality in education as expressed in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which states that access to quality education as expressed in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is the right of every Nigerian child.

Gender Development Index (GDI)

Table 1: Nigeria’s GDI for 2018 relative to selected Countries in Africa.

	FM Ratio	HDI value		Like Expectancy		Expected years of Schooling		Mean Years of Schooling		GNI per capita	
	GDI value	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Nigeria	0.868	0.492	0.567	55.2	53.2	8.6	10.1	5.3	7.6	4,313	5,838
Congo Democratic Republic	0.844	0.419	0.496	61.9	58.9	8.7	10.6	5.3	8.4	684	917
Ethiopia	0.844	0.428	0.507	68.2	64.4	8.3	9.1	1.6	3.9	1,333	2,231
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.891	0.507	0.569	62.9	59.4	9.3	10.4	4.8	6.6	2,752	4,1333
Low HDI	0.858	0.465	0.542	63.0	59.7	8.5	9.9	3.8	5.8	1,928	3,232

Source: Adapted from the Report of Gender Development Index, (2018).

NB: The Gender Development Index, GDI was introduced in 2014 on the basis of sex-disaggregated Human Development Index, defined as a ratio of the female to the male HDI. The GDI measures and gender inequalities in achievement of three basic dimensions of human development: health (measured by female and male life expectancy by birth), education (measured by female and male expected years of schooling for children and mean years for adults age 25 years and older) and command over economic resources (measured by female and male estimated GNI per capita). The Gender Development Index is calculated for 166 countries. The 2018 female HDI value for Nigeria is 0.492 in contrast with 0.567 for males, resulting in a GDI value of 0.868, placing it into Groups.

Furthermore, the tables below showed relatively poor enrolment of the girl child or female gender in various levels of education (primary to secondary).

Table 2: Distribution of Enrolment of School Age Girls in Primary Education by Year and Sex

Year	Male	Female	% F	% M
2014	13,255,789	12,545,408	48.6	51.4
2015	13,393,310	12,049,225	47.4	52.6
2016	13,435,940	12,155,241	47.5	52.5

Source: Adapted from Report of National Bureau of Statistics on Social Statistics in Nigeria (2018).

Table 3: Distribution of Enrolment in Junior Secondary School by Year and Sex

Year	Male	Female	% F	% M
2014	3,311,470	2,891,624	46.6	33.4
2015	3,260,109	2,920,182	47.2	52.8
2016	3,181,810	2,786,332	46.7	53.3

Source: Adapted from Report of National Bureau of Statistics on Social Statistics in Nigeria (2018).

Table 4: Distribution of Enrolment in Senior Secondary School by Year and Sex

Year	Male	Female	% F	% M
2014	2,321,183	1,971,306	45.9	54.1
2015	2,629,526	2,281,418	46.5	53.5
2016	2,417,192	2,058,117	46.0	54.0

Source: Adapted from Report of National Bureau of Statistics on Social Statistics in Nigeria (2018).

In reference to observation and studies of education of rural women in Nigerian communities, the situation is very unpleasant. Hence, rural women in Nigerian villages grapple in poverty and illiteracy. There are fundamental issues underlying the challenges and expectations in the process to educate women in rural communities for self-reliance and contribution to national development. Currently, the population of Nigeria is over two hundred million in accordance to the world meter elaboration of the latest data from the United Nations (www.worldometer.info). Nigerian rural population is reported as 48.48%. And, 52% of the rural population is women and proportional percentage of them within the age bracket of 20 – 70 years engage intensively in the informal factor of the rural economy which is predominantly agrarian. For instance, most of these rural women are identified as crop producers, poultry farmers, cocoa farmers, while others were seen as low income earners in cash crop factories and small-scale enterprises (such as crop seller, wood seller, water supplier).

Also beyond the socio-economic roles, the Nigerian women in rural areas also engage primarily in household management. For instance, the well-being of the family (the wellness of the father and children) stimulate their interest in socio-economic activities for survival. Also the Nigerian rural women though artisans were culture-sensitive and custodians. This is because many urban female folks rely on their guidance and counseling in reverence to established traditions and norms.

Furthermore, the level of literacy among Nigerian rural women is poor. Hence, majority of them cannot read and write. Thus, most were not exposed to basic education (primary education) while some did not complete the sequence of basic education. It is expected that Adult Education classes would have been an effective remedial measure but however constrained by its non-existence and poor enrolment as observed in many rural communities in North and South Nigeria. For instance in the Riverine communities of the South-South Nigeria, the reluctance and lack of interest of rural women in adult education is obtrusive and the hinterlands communities in the North-East of Nigeria, though ravaged by insecurity challenges is where girl child education remain unpopular and insignificant. The unpleasant situation of literacy among Nigeria rural women can be attributed to;

- (a) Cultural norm with regards to the sociological status of women in an African society.
- (b) Islamic value that predispose Muslim rural women to be unreceptive to western value and education except Arabic education exposure.
- (c) Less emphasis and awareness on the essence of girl-child education.

- (d) Poverty occasioned by infrastructural deficit (inadequate and deplorable classroom buildings, access road to health facilities) which frustrates enthusiasm and interest to enroll in literacy classes.
- (e) Superstition values shared by rural men that such exposure will usurp the patriarchal relevance of the home.
- (f) Insecurity challenges such as insurgency and heavy military presence which create fear, anxieties and apprehension among rural women and turned most communities into IDP camps seen in the North.

On the other hand, Nigeria rural women are not privileged to acquire self-reliant skills in agro-vocational training for productivity. For instance, it is the expectation of proportional percentage of Nigerian middle aged rural women to be trained in modern techniques of cash crop production such as groundnuts, cocoa, palm kernel etc. Also, they do not have adequate knowledge on how to access agro-credit facilities like fellow women in urban cities. These limitations are obviously attributed to illiteracy, lack of awareness and poverty which are reflective in the rural communities. From this indication, the contribution of Nigerian rural women in the development of rural economy is abysmally low and insignificant despite their visibility in the agrarian and industrial sector of the village economy.

In collaboration to this assertion, Edo and Ikelegbe (2014) highlighted the factors responsible for low productivity of Nigerian rural economy as regarding the roles of women;

- (1) Traditional system of farming that encourages poor quality input, and in some instance, shifted cultivation that has failed to generate the quantity of crop and livestock necessary to meet the needs of rapidly expanding population. The inadequate use of modern techniques is due to poor rural access to information as well as inadequate support service and credit.
- (2) Poor access to information. It is observed that various researches conducted showed that there are serious deficiencies in transmitting research output to farmers in the rural areas. It has been argued that inspite of the larger number of women engaged in rural agriculture men tend to get more information and extension services especially in relation to cash crops which dominate.
- (3) Poor access to credit. Hence, lack of credit market in rural areas has been identified as one of the most serious impediment to agricultural productivity. Credit institutions are mostly urban-based making the sourcing of the information by rural dwellers for purpose of granting credit very costly.
- (4) Rural Human Resource Development. Basic education has been found to be important in farmer absorption of information regarding all aspects of agricultural production. Critically education also improves farmer's strategies for dealing with risk. It is thus a key feature in enhancing efficiency in agriculture by facilitating entrepreneurship and speeding up response to changing market conditions and technological development. The fact that only 30 percent of the rural men and 20 percent of rural women can read and write in Nigeria indicates that rapid agricultural development may be difficult to achieve in the short and medium terms.

In other words, deficiency among Nigeria rural women in literacy and agro-skill exposure could be used as a viable index to establish the non-significant roles of the rural vulnerable folks towards rural development

Exploring the Imperatives of Gender Responsive Governance in the Education of Rural Women for National Development.

A cursory analysis of the report and scholarly submissions revealed that Nigeria rural women occupied strategic position in the growth and development of rural economy. Sadly, as earlier noted, the potentials of these rural women have not been efficiently explored to make significant impact in the development of rural areas. To this end, Nigerian rural women are less productive because of limitations of knowledge and skill exposure.

Against this backdrop, rural governance structure and gender main-streaming strategy becomes imperative to realize the lofty ideals of governance for the education of rural women. In Nigeria, there is existence of 774 local government authorities across the 36 states of the federation responding to the plights and expectations of the rural populace amid obvious daunting challenges. In this sense of responsibility, it is expected that Nigeria municipal authorities otherwise known as local government should ensure accountable and responsive governance in effective mobilization and use of human and natural resources for the development of the rural areas across the federation. In a specific response to the anxieties and challenges of rural women through education, the following fundamentals are expedient:

- a). The local government should make it a priority (through legislation and policy) to expose productive rural women to literacy class and skill development initiatives. To this end, rural government structures across the 36 states should ensure viable structures and process of adult education class for women and exposure to entrepreneurship skills in ventures peculiar to the resources and needs of their immediate environment.
- b). The local government across the federation should conceptualize a broad policy framework for the empowerment of rural women in skill development and entrepreneurship development in collaboration with the state institutions (Central Bank of Nigeria, Bank of Industry) and local and global Development Partners to redirect the potentials of rural women for self-reliance and productivity.

c). Local government intervention in rural agrarian resources is also instructive to the empowerment and development of the rural women. Acknowledging the fact that agriculture is the main-stay of the rural economy and over 50 percent women engage in poultry, crop production etc, the local government should make available seedlings, fertile lands at subsidized rates to add to the value of growth and development of rural economy.

Notably, gender-mainstreaming strategy also complements the governance response process. The strategy designed to protect the vulnerable group, the female population is also aimed at ensuring active involvement of rural women in articulating priorities and agenda for their productivity. In a specific response to the expectations of rural women through gender-mainstreaming strategy, the following are the fundamentals:

- 1) Legislations to protect rural women from social exclusion, abuse and victimization. Hence, the need for mechanism to protect and guarantee rights and privileges of rural women in socio- cultural, political and economic processes.
- 2). Innovate a socio-cultural and political platforms where rural women assembly to deliberate and take resolutions on governance issues and other realities affecting their productivity and growth.
- 3). Provide process for participation of rural women in setting agenda for their anxieties, plights and expectations.

The realization of these fundamentals amid natural constraints (socio-cultural and religious norms) shall indeed militate against poverty and hunger among rural women. It is therefore expected that such measures will unleash the potentials and drive of rural women in the development of rural economy. Hence, the development of the rural area through functional role of rural women is key to national development. This is on the premise that the resources (agric, mineral and solid) of a country are derived from rural area where female population is visibly higher. To this end, educated and empowered rural women are valuable assets not only to rural economy but also to national development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Education of rural women is critical to national development. This has become pertinent in view of agrarian roles of rural women in the development of rural economy amid challenges. Hence, it is established that rural women in communities across 774 local government areas of Nigeria federation are grappling in unpleasant situation of inequality, poverty, illiteracy etc. In other words, it is suggested that gender-responsive governance in education, skill development and decision-making provide plausible measures for the strategic roles of this vulnerable population in national development.

To facilitate the task of local government in gender-responsive governance and gender-mainstreaming strategy for the education of rural women in national development, the following fundamentals are recommended,

1. The Federal government (comprising National Assembly and Federal Executive Council) should through legislations and policy expedite process towards the full autonomy of local government system in Nigeria. Thus, it is suggested that the full autonomy of local government shall enable it to ensure effective control and responsibility of rural exigencies nay the anxieties of rural women.
2. Adequacy of social services and infrastructures such as electricity, water, access road etc.
3. The state government in collaboration with rural authorities should conceptualize Rural Development Policy to industrialize and accelerate development of communities and villages.
5. Conceptualization of National Policy on Rural Women and Community Potentials to explore more efficiently the knowledge, skills and energy of this vulnerable population towards national development.
6. The local government councils should consider plights and expectations of rural women in engineering the process of development though education, skill development and agricultural resources.
7. Local government across the federation should conceptualize and develop policy framework of education to target specific literacy challenges of community women in cognizance of social, cultural and religious peculiarities and expectations of their respective environments.
8. The Community Based Organization, CBOs and Civil Society Groups should provide sustained advocacy on the vulnerability and expectation of rural women across indigenous communities in the federation.
9. The need for National Policy on Rural Development with broad organizational framework, specific objectives and targets is also instructive to accelerate the development of rural areas for national transformation.

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