PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR INSTITUTE OF ADMINISTRATION (ICIA 2025)

AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY ZARIA - NIGERIA

Website: *https://icia.org.ng* **ISBN:** *978-978-695-265-9* ***Volume I, 2025***

ENHANCING WOMEN CONTRIBUTION FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Bridget Terfa Ikyembe, and Mercy Doose Terwase Adeleye

Department Of Local Government And Development Studies, Faculty Of Administration
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
Email: pbtikyembe@yahoo.com ; dooadeleye@yahoo.com
Phone: 08084491502; 08110942766

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to analyse the contribution of women in socio-economic and sustainable development in sub-Saharan Africa. Women in Sub-Saharan Africa constitute almost half of its population, and the larger population of women reside in rural and urban areas. This large number of women contributes to agricultural activities, food processing, marketing, education, political representation, and ICT, which in turn boost the economy for sustainable development with a very significant impact on poverty reduction. Paradoxically, in Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, the economy remains bleak. Although there may be some modest improvement, poverty has remained a global concern, and its eradication is on the top agenda for development programmes for many nations. There is evidence of women constituting a very significant factor in poverty eradication. Rural women are responsible for more than 55% of the food grown in Africa. Moreover, women comprise 67% of the agricultural force in developing countries. Women make substantial labour contributions to agricultural production, but are at a disadvantage when it comes to acquiring formal education and specialised skills that would improve their productivity. The culture of second-class citizenship accorded to women is slowly changing following the Beijing conference of 1995. However, women are still faced with challenges of deprivation and participation in developmental issues due to traditional and cultural value systems. In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were initiated, with Goal 1 focusing on poverty reduction, Goal 5 on gender equality and empowering women and girls, and Goal 8 on inclusive economic growth and decent work. Drawing on Gender and Development Theory and preliminary data from Soba LGA, Kaduna State, the paper highlights factors mitigating women's capacity development, such as early marriage, socio-cultural biases, and lack of capital.

Keywords: *women's contribution, socio-economic management, sustainable development, Africa.*

Introduction

Women's contributions refer to their ability to achieve rights and well-being while reducing household poverty, increasing productivity, efficiency, and economic growth (Adema *et al*., 2014). As Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen argued, 'Nothing is more important for development today than the economic, political, and social participation of women.' In Africa, women's roles in economic growth are indispensable, particularly in rural areas where they engage in farming, processing, and marketing to alleviate poverty. Over three-quarters of Africa's economically active population works in agriculture, with women comprising 60-80% of the labour force (World Bank, 2023). Despite this, they face disadvantages in education and skills acquisition due to cultural norms, such as the notion that 'women's education ends in the kitchen' (post-Beijing 1995 shifts notwithstanding)." The contribution of women to the economic growth and development in Africa cannot be overemphasised. They virtually take part in local economic activities and therefore are attempting to cast off their traditional role and improve their living conditions. These women are predominantly living in rural areas and are making increasingly important contributions to socio-economic development. They engage in agricultural farming, planting, weeding, sowing, fertiliser application, spraying, harvesting, processing and transporting these products for sale. They work in the market, gardening and livestock farming in particular to reduce poverty. Over three-quarters of the nation's economically active population works in agriculture industry. Women make up over half of the world's population and the majority of the world's poor. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had a conviction that to pursue a development policy without a women-in-development focus would be wasteful and self-defeating (Mboho, 2021). The importance of African women to the economic development of the continent are women who form an indispensable part of human resources for development. Without their contribution, the economies of African countries cannot be expected even to be maintained at their present low levels, much less advance to meet the targets and levels which are consistently being set by African countries.

Generally speaking, the women's position or place is in the home in Africa, from when the cockerel crows, they go to fetch water, cook meals and look after their husbands and children. They tend to their vegetable plots. When they return from the field, they resume their domestic chores. Their day is a long one, and girls are brought up from a young age to perform household duties, especially in Africa, where they are married off very young and spend little time at school. Women as a factor for national development and what could possibly be done by the United Nations' Agencies to enhance, promote

and stimulate their continuation towards economic growth and national advancement for the third world nations. It is often argued by scholars and public commentators that women constitute an important, central, critical, crucial and significant factor in the development process; they are regarded as prime movers of social and economic activities in both rural and urban centres. Women account for more than 60-80 per cent of the total food production of the agricultural labour force and contribute up to 80 percent of the total food production. Thus, rural women are vital producers, processors, and marketers of most agricultural products in developing countries. It is in realisation of this that development agencies are beginning to take special cognisance of the prudence of including women in every development project. Giving an example of a female who manages the national programme in Chad for the Sahel's Development Commission (SDC) on International Women's Day, March 8th, 2019, she gave insight into the work being done by women and involvement in the SDC's projects on the management of run-off water in the Chadian Sahel. In order to reduce poverty and further a country's economic development, it makes sense to address women and their economic contributions.

In developing countries, rural women are responsible for more than 55% of food grown; in Africa, they produce 70% of the food. Moreover, women comprise 67% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries (Report of Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women, 1992). The United Nations (UN) reports 1973 further interrogates the place of African women in the development process: Who farms Africa?" "Who feeds Africa?" "Who raises her sons and daughters?" Before that, the life of the rural women has always been hard. It is often cruel. She rises before dawn, walks two hours or more to fetch water, spends some ten hours in the field during the peak season, carries food and wood home, grinds and pounds the grains, cooks while nursing the baby, and minds the produce. She works this way until the day she dies. The role of traditional women contributing economically to their families has become a tradition, even with the advancement in civilisation. These traditional practices remain part of the culture, operating in both rural and urban areas. In the agricultural sector, women farm alongside their husbands and children in developing countries like ours. Other roles include pottery making, weaving, among others. Women in Purdah are involved in food processing and also trading with the help of their children. Often, these women supply the means of sustenance for their entire households. Women's role in society since the early ages has been largely confined to men. It is the truth that at present, women hold down the task of rural development; they have a major responsibility for farm and home, but they are denied access to the knowledge and the resources. In Africa, "a woman who is without a craft or trade or who is totally dependent on her husband is not

only rare, but is regarded with contempt. Ikyembe (2022) observed that women in pre-colonial Africa were an integral part of the political setup of their communities. They carried out separate, complementary functions from the men. There was no formal education in the pre-colonial era. Even men's education started in the colonial time, not the pre-colonial era. In Borno, for instance, women played active roles in the administration of the state. They held very important offices in the royal family. Today, women make up half of the Nigerian population, and their contribution to national development is not in doubt. Women are active in all facets of development and are capable of playing even more meaningful roles. In the North, women took part in the production of palm oil and palm kernel. They also participated in dyeing (especially in the coastal areas of Calabar, Oron and Niger Delta areas) and cassava flakes processing into garri, while in the eastern part of Nigeria, women of Okposi, Uburu and Yala were very active in salt production till today. Going through the literature and seeing the living conditions of women and their status in developing countries in general, we find a lot of similarities between these societies because the cultural constraints on women start from the family. "Even today, there exist autocratic methods of family organisation with men as decision makers and women obliged to obey them (Haninder and Kumar, 2009). Men have economic resources that give them power, while women in these societies have no remunerative jobs and without revenues, women are without power. This is an implication of traditional societies influenced by local cultures, which do not go with the idea of modern society, where men and women should have equal opportunities, and women are denied these opportunities. Applying Blumberg's (2004) Gender and Development Theory, enhancing women's economic power through greater access to resources and decision-making can directly mitigate these inequalities, increasing their self-confidence, household 'voice and vote,' and control over life options, ultimately fostering gender equality and sustainable socio-economic growth across Africa.

Concept of Management

Management in any organisation involves planning, designing, initiating action and demanding results on the basis of allocated resources. Management is simply the guidance, leadership and directing of a group's efforts towards achieving organisational objectives. This set of activities includes planning, organising, leading, controlling and decision-making, which is directed at an organisation's resources like humans, financial, physical and informational, to achieve organisational goals effectively and efficiently. This means working with or through people to achieve organisational goals.

Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has become a conscious concept and a drive for many nations. This entails a constant improvement in health, agriculture, education, economies and most importantly, politics, which is the hub that has a greater functional relationship with the reset. It is also a fact that good governance is a prerequisite for sustainable development.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is Rae Lesser Blumberg's theory, "gender and development theory, which focuses on promoting gender issues for women's development (Blumberg, 2004). This theory was propounded by Rae Lesser Blumberg in 1995 and is adopted here in line with women's contribution to socio-economic management and sustainable development in Africa. In other words, enhanced female economic power is proposed as the prime factor in reducing gender inequality. She argues that when women are empowered economically, their self-confidence increases, their "voice and vote" especially in household decisions increases, and their control over life options increases. The theory emphasises that women's level of economic power directly impacts their control over various aspects of their lives, such as marriage, divorce, and access to resources, and increases their role in community affairs. In essence, Blumberg's theory provides a framework for understanding how economic factors play a crucial role in shaping gender inequality and how these factors influence women's lives across different societies and contexts.

Men and women tend to spend income under their control differently, with important micro and macro-level effects. For example, women tend to hold back less for themselves and devote income more single-mindedly to children's nutrition, health and education. Women tend to spend their income more evenly on both daughters and sons; therefore, resulting in enhanced overall human capital development. They also tend to have fewer children and to have them later in life. Choosing to have fewer children may be the single most important determinant of a female's life prospects. Additionally, rural women in Africa tend to favour sustainable land use and conservation practices since they usually bring the water and firewood, which takes more time and effort in degraded environments. Women's freedom and control vis-à-vis these options (relative to males), however, depend not only on their relative economic power but also on the macro-level legal system and overarching gender norms for their group. These may respond more slowly to growing female economic empowerment.

Women's increasing role in economic decision-making within the household must be translated into decision-making power in the community. This should be accomplished by increasing their

participation in the decision-making process at all levels, access to and control over productive resources, opportunities for productive employment and access to education and health services.

Achieving gender equality is more difficult in the context of decentralised social and economic decision-making. Centralised regulation should set minimum standards and conditions for a fair social environment, including rules against discrimination. State provision for poor women should support them, rather than as dependents of men, treating them as citizens rather than as targets.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a comprehensive literature review with primary data from a preliminary survey to provide local insights into women's contributions in Nigeria. The research design is exploratory and descriptive, focusing on women's roles in agriculture and related activities in Soba LGA, Kaduna State, as a case study representative of rural Sub-Saharan Africa.

The population comprised adult women (aged 18-65) engaged in agricultural and economic activities in Soba LGA, estimated at approximately 50,000 based on local demographics (Kaduna State Bureau of Statistics, 2023). A purposive and convenience sampling technique was used to select 114 participants (sample size determined via Yamane's formula for finite populations at 95% confidence level and 10% margin of error), targeting women farmers and traders accessible during field visits in 2024.

Data collection instruments included structured questionnaires (with yes/no and Likert-scale items on labour involvement) and semi-structured interviews (10 key informants, e.g., community leaders). Surveys were administered in-person over two weeks in March 2024, with ethical considerations (verbal consent, anonymity). Secondary data was drawn from reports like the UN and World Bank publications. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics (percentages, frequencies) using SPSS for quantitative survey data, and thematic analysis for qualitative interviews.

Limitations include the preliminary nature (small sample, non-random sampling may limit generalizability) and reliance on self-reported data, potentially subject to recall bias. Future studies could expand to larger, randomised samples for robustness.

Findings

The Role of Women in Agriculture

Today, it is generally accepted that women occupy an important position in agricultural development. Women provide labour through cultivation of land, land clearing and processing of seeds to be planted and weeding and harvesting activities. Because most farmers, for example, in Nigeria operate at the subsistence, smallholder level in an extensive agricultural system, hence, in their hands lie the country's food security and agricultural development. Particularly striking, however, is the fact that rural women, more than their male counterparts, take the lead in agricultural activities, making up to 60-80 per cent of the labour force. Ironically, their contributions to agriculture and rural development are seldom noticed. Furthermore, they have either no or a minimal part in the decision-making process regarding agricultural development. Gender inequality is therefore dominant in the sector, and this constitutes a bottleneck to development, calling for a review of government policies on agriculture to address all the elements that place rural women farmers at a disadvantage. The women-in-agriculture programme in Nigeria, which was established in cognisance of this and the shortcomings in extension services for women, has been a huge success. Women's groups, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and civil societies have empowered and given rural women farmers a voice and effectively championed their cause. Women farmers now have better access to farm inputs and credits, although many barriers remain and would have to be addressed to further enhance their role. Rural women farmers deserve better recognition and greater appreciation of their tangible contributions to agriculture, rural development and food security. (Diao, X. Hazell, P., Resnick, D. & Thurlow, J., 2007). Farming is predominately rural women's occupation. Another role played by women is the rearing of domestic animals as a source of meat provision and protein to our growing population. Women are engaged in livestock production and management, apart from farming, women own chickens, goats and sheep among other things.

Table 1: Women's Labor Involvement in Agricultural Activities (Based on Preliminary Survey in Soba LGA, Kaduna State, 2024)

Areas	**Women's Labour** **Yes**	**(%)** **No**
Initial clearing	92.71	7.29
Planting	99.12	0.88
Weeding	100.0	-
Staking	90.63	9.38
Fertilizer Application	76.92	23.08
Spraying	33.33	66.63
Harvesting	100.0	-
Transporting	100.0	-
Processing	100.0	-
Sales	100.0	-

Source: *Survey of Women in the Nigerian Economy in Soba LGA, Kaduna State (2024), Percentages based on self-reported involvement; '100%' indicates all respondents reported participation but may not reflect population-wide absolutes due to sample limitations (e.g., convenience sampling in accessible villages).*

The table above reflects the extent of women's involvement in all aspects of agricultural activities. This was a preliminary investigation through a cursory glance at the women farmers at Soba local government area of Kaduna state, which shows that young and old women and children provide or participate in the labour for planting, fertiliser application, harvesting, processing, transportation and the sale of activities. For example, women in the Northern region provide a hundred percent (100%) of the labour required in these areas (Awal, 2024). Preliminary investigation shows that goats and sheep are dominantly reared by women in the Northern part of Nigeria, and seventy percent (70%) of Nigeria's population of domestic animals, sheep and goats are found in the same region, even poultry.

This dominance in agricultural labour aligns with Blumberg's (2004) theory, where women's economic power in agriculture enhances household decision-making, reduces fertility rates for better human capital development, and promotes sustainable land use practices, as women often prioritise conservation in degraded environments.

Food Processing

Another equally important activity in which women are found is food processing, which is significant to enhancing women's contribution to national development, as it helps reduce wastage and spoilage because of inadequate and poor storage facilities in most third-world countries. It also helps to make edible food for many people. Women, for instance, make “kuli-kuli” from which they can process groundnut oil, which is largely used by our people for cooking. Per Blumberg (2004), such economic activities in food processing bolster women's empowerment by allowing greater control over income allocation, often directed toward children's nutrition and education, leading to reduced gender disparities and enhanced overall human capital in African societies.

Marketing and Retailing Business Activity

It is also argued that the marketing and retailing of most agricultural products in Nigeria is done by women. Even a cursory glance at the Nigerian food market shows that most small-scale sellers are women. Most women in Kaduna, for example, are discovered to be engaged in one trading activity or another. Even those found in the Civil Service, like teaching and professional services, are found to be traders.

In a research study we carried out for this paper, we discovered that 70% of the women in Soba Local Government Area of Kaduna State are engaged in trading, and 20% were found to be engaged in harvesting and transportation of farm products only. When these groups were asked why they were not trading, they argued that they did not have the capital to start a trading business. Only ten percent (10%) of the women interviewed were found not to be engaged in either of these activities. This category indicated that they did not have money for trading and their husbands were not prepared to release them for a field job such as fertiliser application, harvesting and transportation because of purdah. Jummai Hassan (2024), when commenting on the role of women in the economy, said that women do engage in cottage industries such as cloth making, weaving, leather works, etc. The contribution of women to the industrial sector is not only restricted to cottage industries, but also to the transformation of our agricultural produce. Women transform agricultural produce into a variety of processed and preserved products, which help in averting a great loss of food

Nigerian women make *Manshanu,* which is identical to Danish butter; they prepare Madara (similar to Canadian milk), and they prepare *Kamu,* which is similar to custard. Women are indeed converters

of raw materials, for instance, converting groundnut to oil, paddy rice to processed rice, corn to flour and cassava to Garri, among others (Adema, Williams *et al*, 2014).

In the same vein Oluremi Omokore (Bashir and Yerima, 2017) in her class essay adds that in African countries women account for more than 60% of the agricultural labour force, contributing up to 80% of the total food production and receive less than 10% of the credit to small scale farmers and one percent (1%) of the total credit to agriculture. They (women) are half of the world's population. Do two-thirds of the world's working hours, receive one tenth of the world's income and own only one hundredth of the world's property (Rifkatu, 1995). The foregoing indicates that sustainable development could only be achieved in the third world by integrating women into developmental activities. Blumberg's (2004) framework illustrates that women's economic power in marketing and retailing increases their influence in household and community decisions, with macro effects like fewer children and more equitable spending on daughters and sons, contributing to sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Women's Contribution to Socio-economic Management and Development for Sustainable Development

African women's participation in socio-economic growth and self-reliance is a major thrust in the planning process aimed at enhancing women's participation in socio-economic management activities. Their contributions to socio-economic growth are progressively being more recognised within Africa. Attempts at enhancing women participation have been made, including a conference in 1985 to discuss the issues of women tagged "Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies" (NFLS) for advancement of women held in Kenya; the Beijing Declaration Conference held in September 1995; United Nations Declaration September, 2000 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Mama, 2000) with MDG Goal one targeted to reduce hunger and poverty. Others were the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFM), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the Gender and Development Plan of Action 2007, among others. These bodies have articulated laws that offer an enabling milieu for women's integration into the national economic mainstream. They have also approved full action plans to advance the conditions and rights of women in their communities in order to promote women's socio-economic reliance. These plans include; creation of employment access to resources and credit, eradication of poverty and hunger, combating malnutrition/poor health and illiteracy of women as well as to ensure the inclusion of women in all efforts at ensuring sustainable development (Chen *et al*, 2016) stressed that the goals of socio-economic growth cannot be attained

without women's full participation in growth process and also in shaping the goas women themselves have improved their own recognition over the years through vigorous and conscious efforts in organizing and articulating their concerns and in making their voices heard through prominent groups such as Women Non-Governmental Organizations (WNGOs) with the hope of empowering themselves. Because the majority of the population in the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) live in rural areas, with approximately 70 percent being women (Nnaji, 2018). In Africa, rural women contribute almost 80% to the production of food consumed in most rural areas, yet they are marginalised in terms of their needs to progress and are not often featured in socio-economic growth initiatives. It is on the basis of this that the Women Non-Governmental Organizations (WNGOs) have women and the girl-child as their main targets with the aim of emancipating the female gender, attempting to improve their standards of living and fighting against gender inequality. Women in Africa are generally the most neglected, and they have been consistently lost out in the course of socio-economic growth. This situation is worse for the rural women. Therefore, the Lagos Plan of Action for economic development of Africa, in line with the United Nations (UN) charter, advocates the needs, rights and concerns of all women to be fully incorporated into individual countries' development planning to benefit all sectors of the population. This does not seem to be feasible in the rural areas of Nigeria. Moreover, when women work, they are more likely to do more than men to be in occupations and in the sectors that pay much less and they have lower productivity levels, typically in farming or self-employed or unpaid family workers in non-farm household enterprises. Unlike men, their chances of enhancing wage work – a job with a salary and an employer which tends to offer the best working conditions in terms of both remuneration and security – do not increase with age. Even when they hold similar levels of education and experience, a Nigerian woman earns less on the job than a man (Maceira, 2017). Through Blumberg's (2004) lens, integrating women into socio-economic processes via economic empowerment enhances their role in community decision-making, reduces inequality influenced by macro-level norms, and supports SDGs by promoting inclusive growth where women control resources more equitably.

Women's Access and Contribution to Socio-economic Management through Education for Sustainable Development

Education access is the bedrock of socio-economic development. Therefore, the contribution of women to a society's transition from pre-literate to literate is likewise undeniable. Basic education is key to a nation's ability to develop and achieve sustainability targets. Research studies have shown

that education can improve business, entrepreneurship, and agricultural productivity, enhance the status of women and girls, reduce population growth rates, enhance environmental protection, and widely raise the standard of living. It is the mother in the family who often urges children of both genders to attend and stay in school. The role of women is at the front and of the chain of improvements leading to the family's or the community's long-term capacity (Osundima, 2019). The most significant evidence on the importance of women's contribution to socio-economic management and growth comes from research by the World Bank's Gender mainstreaming strategy launched in 2001 (Gyabeng *et al*, 2019). The research highlighted that societies that discriminate by gender tend to experience less rapid socio-economic growth and poverty reduction than societies that treat males and females more equally, and that social gender disparities produce economically inefficient outcomes. For example, it is shown that if African countries had closed the gender gap in schooling between 1960 and 1992 as quickly as East Asia did, this would have produced close to a doubling of per capita income growth in the region. The primary pathways through which gender systems affect growth are influencing the productivity of labour and the allocative efficiency of the economy (World Bank, 2015). In terms of productivity, for example, if the access of women farmers to productive inputs and human capital were on par with men's access, total agricultural output could increase by an estimated 6 to 20 percent. In terms of allocative efficiency, while an increase in household income is generally associated with reduced child mortality risks, the marginal impact is almost 20 times as large. If the income is in the hands of the mother rather than the father. Identification of women as constituting a reliable, productive and cheap labour force makes them the preferred workforce for textiles and electronic transnational corporations, perception of women as "good with money", including being better at paying back loans, has led them to be targeted with resources aimed at alleviating poverty, such as cash transfer programmes that will bring economic development of the nation. In the past, women were not given right to some economic pursuits and this day, greater numbers of them are still being denied this right. Adema, (2014) was of the view that empowerment entails the improvement of women in their political, economic and social conditions. It therefore involves the transformation of patriarchal society through a process of enlightenment, sensitization and collective organization and therefore necessitates collective action by women to discard patriarchal beliefs and attitudes. Historically, well known that women are the central role in the society, ensuring the stability progress and long-term development of nations. Globally, women comprise 43 percent of the world's agricultural labour force – rising to 70 percent in some countries. For instance, across Africa, 80 percent of the agricultural production comes from small farmers, most of whom are rural women. It's

widely accepted that agriculture can be the engine of growth and poverty reduction in developing nations. Women notably mothers, play the largest role in decision-making about family meal planning and diet. Women self-report more often their initiative in preserving child health and nutrition. (Global Gender Gap Index, 2020). Per Blumberg (2004), enhanced education empowers women economically, increasing their 'voice and vote' in community affairs and human capital development. Blumberg (2004) posits that education amplifies women's economic power, increasing their 'voice and vote' in decisions, control over marriage and fertility, and productivity (e.g., 6-20% agricultural output rise), thereby driving socio-economic growth and sustainable development in regions like Africa.

Women Contribution in Political Representation for Sustainable Development

The most significant success recorded out of the Beijing Conference, September 1995 in China is the need to involve women in all areas that would contribute to national economic development, involving women in politics and the clarion call on state parties to empower them, inclusion in development programmes, women contributing in agriculture, entrepreneurship and Information and Communication Technology, among others.

According to Tagoe and Abakah (2016), women have contributed significantly to progress, development, and governance as men have. The issue today is that despite women constituting the more significant portion of Nigeria's population, they remain politically underrepresented. The declaration committed the international community to eight global goals expected to have been achieved in 2015. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) include a global effort to eradicate various problems of illiteracy, discrimination, and violence against women. The United Nations, after a critical evaluation of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in its end-line, announced that the average percentage of women Members of Parliaments (MPs) had improved since 1995in Africa, such that by 2015, one out of five MPs was a woman (UN 2015). Also, the implementation of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) identified the progress made in Africa towards women's representation in parliament. For instance, the Rwandan New Times (2013) recorded that Rwanda ranked number one in the share of women in National parliaments globally, with 63.8 percent, an exponential increment from the previous 15 percent before the year 1994. (Gyabeng *et al*, 2019)

Currently, the drive towards securing political leadership and participation for women is receiving global support through the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDG Goal 5 deals with the promotion and attainment of gender equity and equality for effective

and active representation, equal participation, and leadership opportunities for men in the process of decision-making in economic, public, or political life (Desa, 2016). For the United Nations Development Plan (UNDP, 2019) strategy for gender equality to make progress, women must receive a more equitable share of whatever assistance is made available by government and international development agencies for rural development.

The movement towards the attainment of gender equality around the globe has been one of the defining or crucial developments of modern times. Modern debates on various media outlets centre on attaining equity and justice for all people, including women; women's rights issues, in particular, have successively gained the attention of policymakers, researchers, and civil society organizations due to the low participation of women in politics or governance (Hannah, 2015). Issues about gender roles have become entrenched and are now of international concern. The awareness and consciousness towards political representation and participation of women across the globe are backed by policy, legal frameworks, and international conferences of 1980, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. All of the conferences recognized and identified the inequality between women and men in terms of power-sharing and decision-making. Thus, the United Nations in 1995 set a thirty-percent benchmark target securing the position of women at all levels of decision-making to facilitate their participation in politics in order to establish an equal and equitable society, while enhancing democracy through the inclusion of women's concerns and perspectives in national policies.

International organizations began setting forth plans of action with women empowerment as the prime focus year 1975 became International Women's Year, named by the United Nations, and 1976-1985 were deemed the Decade for Women. The UN began to lead world conferences for women, highlighting that human rights and women's rights are synonymous. The meetings called for all countries of the world to take significant steps towards equating men and women economically, socially, and politically. Included in these steps are the furtherance of women's education, the availability of healthcare, access to the labour force, and political representation. A series of national and international conferences, workshops, and seminars have been held in respect of this to discuss, find ways to surmount obstacles, and encourage implementation of measures. Aligning with Blumberg's (2004) theory, women's economic empowerment is foundational to political representation, as it boosts self-confidence and decision-making power, enabling greater participation in governance and advancing SDG Goal 5 for gender equality and sustainable democratic processes.

Women's Contribution through ICT for Socio-Economic Management and Sustainable Development

Women play a significant contribution on ICT for socio-economic development. The role of ICT helps women to have access for entrepreneurial acquisition of skills in creating job opportunities for women and girls in the 21st century while ICT and Digital Technology (DT) avail us with huge sums of information which can be used to identify, create, run and even improve many businesses. For instance, in developing countries like Nigeria, many women are gradually taking advantage of the borderless, gender-neutral tool in transforming their business ideas into reality, expanding and improving their businesses (Ikyembe, 2022). Thanks to the state's role in removing the gender digital divide in the use ICT and encouraging the use of the tool by women. Today, we have business profiles popping up on the internet, created and managed by women. On social media, a lot of women have turned their private handles to shops and stores for adverts and displays of their products. The availability of information can help women to take some trades that women can take advantaged from the great gift of technology and become self-reliant. Access to ICT information on the internet can help women/girls to be empowered. The women can search for any information online that they consider useful and meaningful for development, which is very true today a highly developed information and communication technology is a sine qua non for the attainment and sustenance of global relevance of any nation. This is in accordance with the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) agenda, which aims at achieving the emergence and evolution of an all-inclusive information society on the platform of ICTs. And as a means of achieving major global developmental goals, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals. Going by goal 3: promoting gender equality and empowerment through eradication of extreme poverty and hunger by setting up developmental programmes such as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), whose interventions would enhance poverty reduction for women and other vulnerable groups. The main strategies include technology and skills acquisition to empower women. The ICT knowledge-based economy helps working women to be considered the number one beneficiary of ICT in their jobs. Clerical jobs require these skills, and thus, women are introduced to the use of computers in their offices to perform simple tasks. ICT could actually open new markets and increase profits. It has been proven to be a booster to businesses however, in any case where it fails to, the challenge might be from the design and quality of a lack of enough ICT skills (Ikyembe, 2017). Before, when ICT was new, in many developing countries, there was a "gender divide where the lower numbers of women accessing and using ICT

compared to men, especially in the Arab world and Africa. Then, in the developed world, ICT has shown a significant role in empowering women and enhancing gender equality. Blumberg's (2004) framework underscores that ICT access empowers women economically by opening markets and increasing income control, which in turn elevates their community roles, reduces gender norms' constraints, and supports sustainable development through knowledge-based economies.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that women are a formidable productive force and a store of incredible human resources that are required for any nation's development. Because women's contributions cannot be discounted in the household and any national economy, the current role of women's contributions in their various national economies is remarkable towards peace and building an overwhelming economy in their various societies. Their optimal performance is to tap their resources to ensure the nation's development. To this effect, it is important to understand that what could be applied as a solution to one settlement could not be applied to another. As a result of this dilemma, the principle that expresses "multiple problems necessitate multiple approaches" as solutions should be applied. However, for most of the women in the sector, "the combined effects of a poor education and the need to earn money at an early age to supplement the family income, the few positions available in the formal job market, a lack of financial capital and the need to balance work and family life helps to impose an ever-growing burden on women in informal economy". As Blumberg points out, the education of women is highly essential if they are to contribute meaningfully to the socio-economic growth and well-being of society. Through education, they could have a voice and vote in decision-making in respect of all aspects of their own lives, that of their families, and society at large. The assertion that boasts of skilled and competent women comprising lawyers, doctors, engineers, and university lecturers, only to name a few, who have made valuable contributions to various aspects of life, is a clear indication that education is key to changing the situation of women in particular and society in general. But apart from ensuring that policies regarding the education of the girl-child are implemented to the letter, many other policies have to be formulated and/or implemented. Non-formal education programs for female adults have to be intensified. In second-cycle institutions and tertiary institutions, a lot of emphasis must be attached to equipping young persons with entrepreneurial skills that would be of great benefit to them, if they have to operate in the informal sector after their education. Although this has a strong legal framework that protects the rights of and opportunities for women, its effect is weak.

The state can encourage or enhance quality by adopting appropriate legislation and monitoring its implementation. It has, however, limited financial resources. The market provides employment opportunities and freedom of choice, but creates or perpetuates inequality by supporting the traditional division of labour. The household is where the efforts of structural changes are felt. The challenge is finding the proper combination of each of these agents, introducing gender awareness, and achieving social innovation.

Blumberg's (2004) Gender and Development Theory frames these contributions, demonstrating that women's economic empowerment across agriculture, education, politics, and ICT not only reduces inequality but also yields macro benefits like improved human capital, sustainable practices, and inclusive growth, essential for Africa's development.

Finally, the education of women is a societal responsibility, and available resources should be harnessed to meet this challenge, from governmental and non-governmental organizations to the private sector. Improved knowledge and skills enable women and their families to escape from poverty. There is also a need for more training programmes for women to enable them take part in social and economic development. Programmes designed to help women as wives and mothers should be expanded to help them develop small businesses, engage in income-earning activities, and bring a knowledge of science and technology to bear on their daily lives. Management training programmes are necessary for women to enable them to become candidates for executive positions.

Recommendations

The paper, therefore, strongly recommends the monitoring and strict enforcement of laws, particularly those that directly conflict with customary law, in which specific provisions have been made for men and women to inherit their spouses' and for children to inherit their parents' land and property allocation and registration, early and forced marriages, and preference for boys' education. If women are supported to have access to large parcels of land, not only would they be able to grow cash crops like men and acquire more funds, they would also be able to use the land as collateral to access credit from the financial institutions. In order to ease access to credit for all, including women, the whole banking system could be overhauled with a view to reducing collateral requirements, cutting back on the paperwork involved in raising loans, lowering interest rates, and increasing its target clients. The government and NGOs should also see to the infrastructural development of the rural areas. These agencies must build good roads, more hospitals/clinics, and schools, and provide portable water, good

and affordable housing, electricity, etc. These facilities will make rural areas attractive and people living there, including women, will continue to contribute to their socio-economic growth and well-being as well as that of the entire country.

References

Adema, W., Ali, N., Frey, V., Kim, H., Lunati, M., Piacentini, M., & Queisser, M. (2014). Enhancing women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship and business leadership in OECD countries. OECD. https://doi.org/10.1787/5jxjrtlvmb0v-en

Awal, M. (2024). The role of rural women in socio-economic development of society: A case study in Yeji, Ghana [Unpublished master's thesis]. Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Bashir, A. S., & Yerima, D. (2017, November 16). Agriculture as a tool for job creation in Nigeria. Daily Trust, p. 22.

Blumberg, R. L. (2004). Extending or including the 'new' poor? Lessons from international experience. In R. L. Blumberg (Ed.), Gender, family, and economy: The triple overlap (pp. 1-25). Sage Publications.

Chen, M. A., Jhabvala, R., Kanbur, R., & Richards, C. (Eds.). (2016). Membership-based organizations of the poor. Routledge.

Desa, U. N. (2016). Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development. United Nations.

Diao, X., Hazell, P., Resnick, D., & Thurlow, J. (2007). The role of agriculture in development: Implications for Sub-Saharan Africa (IFPRI Discussion Paper 01536). International Food Policy Research Institute. https://doi.org/10.2499/9780896291614Global Gender Gap Report. (2020).

Gyabeng, E., Abakah, E., & Asamoah, M. K. (2019). Low participation of women in parliamentary representation in developing countries: The case of Ghana. Journal of African Studies and Development, 11(5), 67-78. https://doi.org/10.5897/JASD2019.0542

Harender, K., & Kumar, S. (2009). Socio-economic condition of rural women in rural India. Journal of Rural Studies, 25(2), 145-156.

Ikyembe, P. B. T. (2011). ICT as a catalyst for women empowerment in Nigeria. Ahmadu Bello University Library Complex.

Ikyembe, P. B. T. (2022). Women empowerment in developing countries. Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited.

Maceira, H. M. (2017). Economic benefits of gender equality in the EU. Intereconomics, 52(3), 178-183. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10272-017-0669-4

Mama, A. (2000). Feminism and the state in Africa: Towards an analysis of the national machinery for women in Africa. Feminist Africa, 1, 1-15.Mboho, K. S. (2021). Women and socio-economic growth in Nigeria: A development strategy. AKSU Journal of Administration and Corporate Governance, 1(1), 72-85.

Nnaji, A. (2018, January 3). NGO makes case for women development. The Nations Newspaper, p. 26.

Osundima, O. A. (2019). Sustainable development: Does improvement in education and health of women improve female labour force participation rate? Sustainable Development, 28(1), 13-24. https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1971

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. (2016, March 8). Women play a key role in Chad's economy. https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home.html

Tagoe, M., & Abakah, E. (2016). Issues of women's political participation and decision-making in local governance: Perspectives from the Central Region of Ghana. International Journal of Public Administration, 38(5), 371-380. https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2014.999321

World Bank. (2015). World development report 2015: Mind, society, and behavior. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-0342-0World Bank. (2023). Women, business and the law 2023. https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl"

World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality