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SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL FACTORS OF FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA

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В статье анализируются социальные и исторические факты феминизации бедности в Нигерии. Подчеркивается, что более высокая подверженность бедности женщин является одним из тех социальных процессов, которые существуют с незапамятных времен. Актуальность исследования его социально-исторического аспекта обусловлена необходимостью описания и объяснения причин, последствий и возможных решений, связанных с расширением социальной базы феминизации бедности в современном обществе Нигерии. Анализ процесса феминизации бедности осуществляется сквозь призму исторических периодов социальной истории Нигерии, что позволяет понять, почему проблема феминизации бедности не только существует, но и остается нерешенной, несмотря на социальную политику и законодательство, направленные на искоренение этой проблемы. Рассматриваются особенности социального положения женщин в доколониальную, колониальную и постколониальную эпохи, для которых характерны разные виды социальной эксклюзии и дискриминации. Социальное неравенство, лежащее в основе феминизации бедности, преобладает в сфере ограничения доступа к участию в процессе принятия решений, в сфере образования, в виде запрета на занятие экономической деятельностью, в вопросах наследства и т.д. Акцентируется внимание на том, что права и возможности, которые были у женщин в доколониальной Нигерии, были существенно ограничены в колониальную эпоху, что способствовало гендерной дискриминации и угнетению, подкрепляемым существующими культурными нормами и религиозными традициями. Такое положение вещей настолько укоренилось, что нигерийские женщины все еще остаются бесправны во многих отношениях, в частности они до сих пор не участвуют в процессе принятия решений по социально-экономическим вопросам. Тем не менее подчеркивается, что в постколониальной Нигерии гендерное неравенство в какой-то степени уменьшилось благодаря социальной политике и принятию конституционных законов, направленных против любой формы дискриминации в отношении любого лица по половому признаку. Однако анализ эмпирических данных, описывающих современную ситуацию, свидетельствует о расширении феминизации бедности в условиях современного нигерийского общества. В статье доказывается, что только путем изменения социальных норм и установок, обеспечения равенства на практике, а не только закрепление правовых норм на законодательном уровне, борьба нигерийских женщин за равные права с мужчинами может принести результаты. Среди конкретных предложений по преодолению феминизации бедности формируется такое, как ревизия правовых ограничений по отношению к женщинам, в частности предоставление женщинам права наследования, что может существенно изменить ситуацию имущественного неравенства в Нигерии.

Ключевые слова: феминизация бедности, патриархат, женщины Нигерии, гендерное неравенство.

У статті аналізуються соціальні та історичні фактори фемінізації бідності у Нігерії. Підкреслюється, що більш висока вразливість жінок щодо бідності є одним з тих соціальних процесів, який існує з давніх часів. Актуальність дослідження його соціально-історичного аспекту обумовлена необхідністю опису та пояснення чинників, наслідків і отримання можливих рішень, які пов'язані з розширенням соціальної бази фемінізації бідності в сучасному суспільстві Нігерії. Аналіз процесу фемінізації бідності здійснюється крізь призму історичних періодів соціальної історії Нігерії, що дозволяє зрозуміти, чому проблема фемінізації бідності не тільки існує, а й залишається невирішеною, незважаючи на соціальну політику і законодавство, спрямовані на викорінення цієї проблеми. Розглядаються особливості соціального становища жінок у доколониальну, колониальну і постколониальну епохи, для яких характерні різні види соціальної ексклюзії і дискримінації. Соціальна нерівність, що лежить в основі фемінізації бідності, переважає у сфері обмеження доступу до участі в процесі прийняття рішень, у сфері освіти, у вигляді заборони на заняття економічною діяльністю, в питаннях спадщини тощо. Акцентується увага на тому, що права і можливості, які були у жінки в доколониальній Нігерії, були істотно обмежені в колониальну епоху, що сприяло гендерній дискримінації і пригнобленню, підкріпленими існуючими

культурними нормами і релігійними традиціями. Таке положення речей настільки вкоренилося, що нігерійські жінки все ще залишаються безправними в багатьох ситуаціях, зокрема вони досі не беруть участь у процесі прийняття рішень щодо соціально-економічних питань. Тим не менш підкреслюється, що в постколоніальній Нігерії гендерна нерівність певною мірою зменшилася завдяки соціальній політиці та прийняттю конституційних законів, спрямованих проти будь-якої форми дискримінації щодо будь-якої особи за статеву ознакою. Однак аналіз емпіричних даних, що описують сучасну ситуацію, свідчать про розширення фемінізації бідності в умовах сучасного нігерійського суспільства. В статті доводиться, що тільки шляхом зміни соціальних норм і установок, забезпечення рівності на практиці, а не тільки закріплення правових норм на законодавчому рівні, боротьба нігерійських жінок за рівні права з чоловіками може принести результати. Серед конкретних пропозицій з подолання фемінізації бідності формулюється таке, як ревізія правових обмежень жінок, зокрема надання жінкам права успадкування, що може істотно змінити ситуацію майнової нерівності в Нігерії.

Ключові слова: фемінізація бідності, патріархат, жінки Нігерії, гендерна нерівність.

The higher susceptibility of women to poverty (feminisation of poverty) is one social process that has existed from time immemorial. Examination into its historical background to understand its causes and possible solutions cannot be over flogged due to the fact that women constitute about half of the Nigerian population and contribute greatly to national development as such, so any problem that affects them, threatens national growth; hence deserves attention which should help in minimising or eradicating it. This paper x-rays the historical epochs of Nigeria with the aim of understanding why the social problem of feminisation of poverty not only exists but also persists despite social policies and laws to discourage it. Women through the three eras of pre colonialism; colonialism and post colonial discussed in this paper faced different types of social exclusion and discriminations some of these inequalities are in the areas of participation in decision making; education; exclusion from economic activities; inheritance and so on. The empowerment they enjoyed and feats they achieved in the pre-colonial Nigeria were distorted by colonialism which fostered gender oppression; complemented by cultural and religious practices that all disempowered women from participating in socio-economic and decision making activities even in the present day. The post colonial Nigeria has however alleviated these inequalities to some extent through social policies and constitutional laws which are against any form of discrimination against any person based on gender. It is against this backdrop that this paper digs into the historical factors which have initiated and perpetuated feminisation of poverty in Nigeria today. The paper concludes that only by ensuring equality in practice and not only by laws, can the struggles of the Nigerian women yield the same fruits as those of men. It recommended among others the abolition of all obnoxious practices against women and their inclusion in inheritance.

Keywords: feminisation of poverty, Patriarchy, Nigerian women, gender inequality.

INTRODUCTION

Social problems associated with discrimination, exploitation and other forms of social inequality suffered by women as a group are not new phenomena or identified distinctively with Nigeria alone but the world at large.

This paper intends to seek and expose the nature of feminisation of poverty during the 20th Century in Nigeria and how it has set the stage for what is currently faced by women today. It also is aimed at analysing the causes of feminine poverty and make recommendations on how to overcome or reduce this social problem to the barest minimum.

Feminisation of poverty is a social problem that predates history. The concept may have been coined in the recent past (in the 1970's) but the process has long lived. Feminisation is the process of making something suitable for women or possess female attribute. Feminisation of poverty is therefore the process of making poverty common among women or suitable for women. It can simply be defined as the burden of poverty carried by women and the fact that they are more susceptible to it due to deprivations in the areas of choice and participation. According to [1], feminization of poverty is a change in poverty levels that is biased against women or female-headed households.

Prior to the 70's when Diana Pierce coined the concept of Feminisation of poverty, the process which made women more prone to poverty or lack in Nigeria existed. It existed through cultural practices, societal structures and colonisation. It is obvious that globalisation and cultural diffusion have made feminine poverty more prominent and severe.

In Nigeria, gender inequality which ferments feminisation of poverty existed in different ways and degrees in various regions due to the fact that different regions had different cultures and political systems before

the colonisation by the British and the amalgamation of the various nations or groups that make up Nigeria. Although almost all the societies were Patri-lineal with men making the decisions and passing on inheritance from one man to another and inheriting wealth belonging to their diseased male relatives, women were subjugated in varying degrees depending on the society.

a) Pre-colonial Epoch (Prior 1900)

Women had a subordinate status in pre-colonial Nigeria. According to [2] stated that in pre-colonial Nigeria, the world was exclusively for men because most of the existing cultures gave premiums to males. Women had rights but in my opinion, all their rights were derived from men and eventually benefited the men. They first of all were properties of their fathers and whatever they owned or produced including children born out of wedlock though frowned at, belonged to their fathers. They had the right to be married and this was usually at a young age. When they got married and their dowry was paid to their fathers and his male relatives, their husbands took over the rights of protecting them and providing for them and ultimately, the right in Genetricem (rights over the productive services) and Uxorem (all children born to the wife irrespective of their biological father belongs to the husband) which meant that all the products from her including the children she bore belonged to her husband. To further degrade women, when the children they bore become great and are doing well the society praised the men but when the reverse was the case the blame went to the women for their failure of parental responsibility. While married, women had the right to lands for farming but not ownership to such lands because everything they owned belonged to their husbands. The products from farmlands were consumed at home by her family and the extra was sold in the market and whatever proceed from such economic venture belonged to her husband. She had the right to trading though she had to get her husband's consent to do that if not she could not exercise that right. Only few women in Nigeria's pre-historic era held leadership positions and this was possible because few societies allowed it. Women did not participate fully in decision making in most societies. This was mainly in the domain of men who were kings, elders in council, chiefs, advisers and so on. They (queens and women leaders) co-ruled with their husbands in the areas that concerned women and made contributions on other matters when it was sought. All other women could belong and participate in the activities of women. They could belong to the group of daughters born into their community and the group of wives married into her husband's community. These groups maintained unity among women; sanctioned erring women who fought, stole or obviously neglected their children and maltreated their husbands. They also intervened when a woman was extremely maltreated by her husband. They played a general role of peace and sanity maintenance.

There was no formal education before colonialism and so both men and women did not go to school instead they were engaged in skill acquisition and this was gendered. Boys learnt males' skills from their fathers such as hunting, tapping wine, building houses, fishing, wrestling and so on while girls learnt weaving, cooking, washing, pottery, fish drying, salt production, palm oil production and trading. Even on the farm which was the main source of livelihood, men had the responsibility of cutting down trees and grasses with machete and burning the bushes while women had to plant, weed and harvest products, work had been gendered ab initio.

Women were excluded from inheritance while properties were shared father to son(s) and in the absence of son(s), brothers, nephews, uncles and any other male relatives inherited the properties. Most women helped their husbands and fathers build empires and acquire properties or lands which they had no control or ownership over but for a few renowned ones. In the course of their husband or father's demise, they were left with almost nothing and then became exposed to poverty and hard life. If a woman had a son(s), then her lot may be better than a sonless woman. Female headed households were more exposed to hardship in this era since agriculture was the mainstay and access to large expanse of land was necessary for participation agricultural in activities. Women did not participate in certain ceremonies and social activities. The women in South Eastern Nigeria buy Kola nuts in the markets but are never allowed to take part in celebrating the breaking of the Kola nut. They were not allowed into certain areas like shrines and did not go near certain sacred places when they are menstruating. The Igbo communities of the South East for instance did not allow women to eat some parts of an animal such as the gizzard and anus which the men asked for first whenever such meals were ready. No woman dare claim ignorance of such exclusive right to men because if she made the mistake of eating such animal parts she committed an abomination. Every cock and Billy goat she reared belonged to her husband and she had no right to sell or decide when to slaughter them for family use without the approval of her husband. Though the woman of this era was happy, contented and fulfilled, these left her with a feeling of limitation and lack of freedom which she passed on to her daughters as a normal way of living during socialisation.

Despite all the limitations of women in this era, women's participation in community life especially at the public realm contributed immensely to societal growth and development. The role of women in political organization

as noted by [3, p. 40] may be defined in terms of their participation, direct or indirect in the activities of government. A few women founded cities, led migrations and even conquered kingdoms. For instance, in the Yoruba system of government, the Iyalode, a title of the leader of women groups, was a member of the council of state down to 1914. In the same vein, Queen Amina of Kastina was a powerful woman famous for her many conquests. Observably, pre-colonial governments or administrations encouraged women political participation by deliberately creating positions to be held by women so that they could be involved in the life of the society [3, p. 38].

In Southern Nigeria, women ruled jointly with their men. The arrival of the colonial government however suppressed the participation and involvement of women in power and decision-making [2]. In the Eastern part, women played heroic roles and fought for the protection of their fellow women. While in Yoruba speaking areas especially in the then Oyo Empire women had no political inhibition; women were rather highly honoured and respected. In the Northern part, women played prominent roles in the political affairs of the society before the advent of Islam and colonization by the British [4, p. 6-8]. Women were thus seen as instrument of social cohesion and mobilization in the pre-colonial days.

b) Colonialism and Gender Inequality (1900-1960)

The perception of gender during the colonial era obviously marginalised the women and privileged men. Since cultural imperialism viewed Eurocentric religion, ideas and morals as innately superior to those of the natives, the resultant changes brought about by this imperial summation were, of course, noticeable in relations between both sexes in the continent [5, p. 69]. She further stated that, imperialism visibly enabled the imposition of rigid binaries about everything, including gender perceptions, on our collective consciousness; which the Christian and Muslim religious texts effectively reinforced. Colonialism thus systematically dislocated women's status from the public realm and confined it to the private realm. Various colonial policies that disenfranchised women such as the policy that stipulated the possession of 100 Pounds in order to be eligible to stand for elections and the one that disqualified women from voting, all put women in a form of 'bondage', dispossession, devaluation and disempowerment. It puts women in a position of inequality in terms of political rights [3].

The patriarchal ideology of the pre-colonial society combined with the colonial mentality to suppress women thereby creating a new form of patriarchy. With the arrival of the British colonialists, so many changes took place in the Nigerian culture. These changes affected the informal system of education, system of politics and economy. These changes further limited some of the rights enjoyed by women in the pre-colonial epoch.

The British introduced the western methods of education by establishing schools which initially admitted only boy children. This was to enable them train clerical staff, interpreters and other people to serve their other needs. When eventually girls could go to school, they were taught domestic courses such as cooking, needle work, home management, laundry and so on. These were aimed at giving them good morals to run their home fronts thereby keeping the men who actually worked outside the home front stable to their duties. Gaidzwanwa affirms this by asserting that domestic education as enshrined in the ideology of 'housewifcation' which was a social engineering initiative designed to create 'suitable' wives for indigenous colonial employees further disempowered women socially and economically [6]. For Meena, the exclusively male, bureaucratic apparatus did away altogether with pre-colonial system; which clearly permitted women some level of political and economic participation [7]. Consequently, the exclusion of women from sectors of formal labour to informal labour which was unpaid for, has served as a foundation for women's marginalization in the present day's society.

Politically, in this era women faced a lot of oppression, they lost powers they had during the pre-colonial days. In reaction to this, they decided to form pressure groups to fight the injustice and oppression meted out on them by the colonial administration and their traditional heads. Examples of such revolutions were the Aba women's riot of 1929 (in which over 50 women lost their lives and over 50 were wounded, with over 25,000 women participating in the two (2) months riot) [8]; Abeokuta Market Women's riot of 1946 and the Egba Market Women's Campaign of 1948. Various notable women such as Mrs Olufumilayo Ransome Kuti, Nwanyereuwa, Ikonna, Mwanndia, Nwugo and Madam Mary Okezie lead the women's protests aforementioned. This shows that women activism and political struggles have their history.

The economic situation of Nigerian women got worse during the colonial era. This was because they were peasant farmers with no access to credit and mostly had no education as education was male centred and structured to teach women to be better home managers rather than to be employed outside the home. Banks could not make capitals accessible to women groups due to the nature of their agricultural activities. Men were taught modern methods of farming while women continued with the old method. Colonialists were more interested in cash crops which happened to be under the men's control. As a result of this, the gap between men and women's labour productivity widened [2]. The Victorian idea of male bread winner and female dependent which came with

colonialism made women face untold hardship. In this era, women were also taxed unlike in the pre-colonial era and this was one of the main reasons that led to the aforementioned women's protests. From the little they managed to get for sustenance they were asked to pay tax. Feminisation of poverty therefore gained a solid foundation during this era.

c) Post Colonialism and Gender Inequality (1960 till date)

The feat gained by women in the development of pre-colonial Nigeria was dislodged by the introduction of colonialism which was laced with exploitations that disempowered women from participating in decision making. The political culture that has emerged from the colonial orientation has been particularly patriarchal. It reflects gender inequalities in men and women's roles, and levels of access to state power, resources and institutions [5, p. 71].

The post colonial era which marked the end of colonial rule heightened the pursuance of fundamental human rights which includes the rights of women. [9] opines that human rights have a corollary duty imposed on the society to ensure their protection. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) adequately provides for the protection of the rights of all citizens irrespective of their gender [10].

The constitution reigns supreme above every other law in Nigeria and it provides that the state social order is founded on the ideals of freedom, equality and justice. Section 14 of the Nigerian Constitution states that, sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom the government, through this Constitution, derives all its powers and authority. Furthermore, it states that the participation by the people in their government shall be ensured in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. Section 42 of the 1999 Constitution outlaws the discrimination of persons based on ethnicity, place of origin, sex, religion and political orientation.

Based on these empowerments and rights, women in the post colonial Nigeria are willing to exercise the rights they have but the social structure from the pre-colonial to colonial epochs continue to systematically prevent them. Prejudices and stereotypes maintained after colonialism such as wife chastisement (physical) which is enshrined in the Penal Code of Nigeria and discrepancy in punitive measures such as in the case of Indecent assault on a woman which attracts the punishment of 2years imprisonment while the same offence on a man attracts 3years.

The Nigerian constitution provides that all Nigerians irrespective of their gender or any other categorization shall not be discriminated against when it comes to employment and remuneration. All Nigerians are entitled to equal employment opportunities so long as they are qualified and equal pay for equal work. This is the legal provision, but in practice, women in the resent era are still discriminated against when it comes to employment and emolument. Employers prefer male employees except for jobs stereotyped as female jobs such as teaching, nursing, reception, secretarial and so on. These jobs usually attract lower wages. This preference is as a result of the perception that men are more dogged, have more hours to put in on the job without much family and domestic interferences, require no maternity leaves and on fewer occasions require excuse duties.

In the area of education, the post colonial era gives a room for equal educational opportunities at all levels for both male and female citizens alike. This opportunity had been enjoyed more by the males than the females until the recent past when the gap increasingly narrowed down. [11] supports this view by stating that more boys than girls were enrolled in 1991, a difference of 138,000, by 1998 the difference was only 69,400. The combined gross enrolment for primary, secondary and tertiary schools for female was 57% compared to 71% for males in 2002 [12, p. 126-127]. Although men still access education more in Nigeria, there is equal opportunity for both genders to acquire education. The major hindrances to women now become societal beliefs and culture, male child syndrome which has to do with gender perception, child marriage and so on. [12] further states that "Women in Nigeria are harder-hit than men by poverty due to the nonchalant emphasis placed on female education, and the prevalence of early marriage which tend to further impoverish the womenfolk, and subject them to statutory discrimination".

There also exists glass ceiling in the current Nigerian labour market. In addition to the gender wage gap and segregation which [13, p. 73] confirms that in Nigeria, married women earn 68.3% as much as married men while women who have never married earn 74.6% of their unmarried male counterparts' earnings and [14] observes that between 1985 and 2008, inequality in Nigeria worsened from 0.43 to 0.49, placing the country among those with the highest inequality levels in the world, glass ceiling which is an invisible barrier prevents women in Nigeria from ascending to the top of their chosen careers and professions and prevents them from gaining equality with men in the labour market.

When it comes to political participation as stated above in this subsection, women are allowed by law to belong to any political group and vie for any political position including the highest seat which is the presidential.

Notwithstanding this legal opportunity, women do not often receive the support and mentoring they need to compete with men in politics. Cultural, religious and social restraints have served as bottlenecks to the Nigerian women. For instance, women who actively engage in politics are seen as wayward since political activities and meetings involve a lot movement from one place to another and most times lasts till late hours of the night. Others view such women as irresponsible mothers while many other colourations are given to the women's passion to actively participate in politics. Consequently, there still exists a low representation of women at all levels of governance in Nigeria. In 2011 general election for instance only 32 female contestants were elected to the National Assembly out of 469 members. For [15], In summary the barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria's historical trajectories are multifaceted combining cultural and traditional, marital, economic and religious factors all of which have debased the position of women in the scheme of power equation. This explains while specific laws on gender related issues such as violence against persons found it hard to see the light of the day. It is also noteworthy, that Nigeria has never produced a female president or governor. The only woman Virginia Ngozi Etiaba of Anambra State who served as governor did so for three (3) months from November 2006 to February 2007 when the governor whom she was deputising was impeached. She handed back power to him when a court of appeal nullified his impeachment. In 2015, Nigeria produced its first female elected governor in Taraba State after she was announced to have lost at the end of the election but was later declared winner by the Taraba State Gubernatorial Petition Tribunal in Abuja. The present day Nigerian society seems not to either believe that it is the right time for women to lead or do not have the confidence that women can serve as well as the men do or even better irrespective of the impeccable leadership prowess of women in other countries of the world such as Chancellor Angele Merkel of Germany, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, and many more. Currently, women are leaders of about 18 countries while four other countries appointed women to lead them as they reconstruct their political culture. Among such countries include Central African Republic who in spite of its political challenges appointed President Catherine Samba-Panza to lead it out of the present political tension. It is worthwhile to mention that the Nigerian economy and political institutions is not doing better than some of these countries.

CONCLUSION

Having reviewed the origin and chronology of feminisation of poverty in Nigeria from pre-colonial times to post-colonial, it can now be understood that apart from the traditional practices, societal structure (male dominated) and general societal perception held by even the women themselves, colonialism did Nigerian women a great disservice. All these have resulted in low participation of women at all levels. Nigerian women have actually faced a lot of obstacles to their liberation and emancipation which have de-emphasized the need for them to participate in the public sphere especially politics. These obstacles range from social to religious; from lack of equal educational opportunities to unequal employment opportunities. This explains why despite legal provisions of the present day Constitution; enlightenment programs and gender equality campaigns there still exists feminisation of poverty. These factors go beyond written laws, opportunities and privileges as they cannot implement themselves.

The Nigerian cultures have in no small way encouraged and sustained female susceptibility to poverty especially through disinheriting women and girls thereby reducing their economic activities and participation leading to their dependence. Women therefore need to rise up and acquire requisite knowledge and skills in other to be at par academically and economically with their male counterparts. By ensuring equality in practice not only by laws or huge programs and initiatives the struggles of the Nigerian women will yield the same fruits as those of the men and feminization of poverty will be dismantled.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• It is therefore recommended that the Nigerian society should move beyond principles and laws to practice. Gender education should be introduced into the school curriculum from primary to tertiary levels to inculcate healthy gender perception/relations and encourage mutual opportunities and respect among both genders.

• All laws, cultural and even religious practices which discriminate against women should be abolished and steeper sanctions should be set aside for persons or groups who flout the abolition.

• Since women constitute almost half of the population of the country, they should endeavour to support other women who dare to participate in politics for elective positions in other to change the position and plight of the average woman.

• Women and girls should be included in the distribution of inheritance to enable them have investments and access to credit with the aid of their lands for instance as collateral.

• The Nigerian woman should struggle to protect her right and make relentless effort to achieve all her dreams and ambitions as permitted by the law rather than lament and settle for less.

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