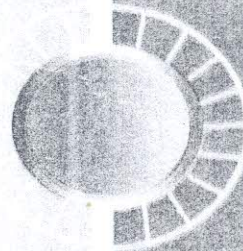


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## **Gender Issues in Globalization:**

### *An Overview of the Situation in Nigeria*

By

**Asamu, Festus Femi**

#### **Abstract**

*This paper views globalization from gender perspectives in relation to such issues as employment, access to basic education, access to qualitative and affordable health care services, economic empowerment and political participation. In all these issues, the inequality between men and women is obvious. Thus, the case is that of sieving the wheat from the shaft. Women get poorer with the shaft; while men get richer with the wheat. It means the socio-economic situation of women is miserable. Thus there is very little hope for them unless drastic measures and conscious national response is elicited to improve the plight of women from the impact of globalization.*

#### **Introduction**

The emergence of the concept of globalization in the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century marked yet another phase in the history of the international system. Indeed, the international system is characterized by an asymmetrically imbalance, socio-economic, and political relations, this manifesting in the dichotomization of the world into two diametrically opposed levels of development. The reference to the North-South relations in the history of international economic, and political relations infact, found credence exclusively in the manifestation of unequal relationships amongst countries. Such concept as, 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' derived their existence in the explanation of the levels of social formations in the religions of the world. (Croall, 1998).

Developed countries, otherwise referred to in the literature as countries of the North, are so defined by the reality of their socio-political and economic advancement, all-manifesting in their sustained creation of wealth. However, the history of the wealth of countries of the North will be hollow, and meaningless, without that portion which highlights the exploitation of the south by the North through various processes: - colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism and neo-imperialism. Enough attention has been paid in the literature to the mechanisms of each of these stages. But as varied as the explanations of these phases are, there is the general impression that each of the phases represents a systematic denigration of the south by the North in order to sustain the spate of development in the North. The ease with which each of these phases systematically flows into one another is suggestive of a deliberate design by the North with the intention of exploiting the south perpetually.

Globalization in this regard, is the successor of neo-imperialism for, rather than seeking mere external manipulations of the domestic economies of the south, by the North; globalizations of the south, by the North; globalization sought the integration of world economies, the removal of geographical impediments to trade, and indeed the abolition of indigenous restrictions to international trade, and finance, a mechanism that aids the perpetuity of inflow and outflow of international capital (Douglas, 1998). This shows that globalization had gone beyond global interconnectedness; it equally finds expression in the virtual extinction of the barriers to information technology. Globalization is viewed from gender perspective in relation to such issues as employment, access to basis education, access to qualitative and affordable health care services, economic empowerment, and political participation.

Furthermore; the female gender is further depressed down the ladder of development by entrenched socio-cultural and economic practices that view the female as being subordinate to males and therefore reward the female disproportionately. In the bid for globalization and liberalization, unemployment has risen, the percentage of the population living below poverty level has increased, real income per capita has fallen as a result of inflation and rising prices, while women have had to bear the increasing burden of child bearing and



rearing. Increasing proportions of the highly professionals are migrating from African countries towards the high income, greatly urbanized, and industrialized regions of the world.

These migrants are mostly males, this, leaving females behind to bear the brunt of the increasingly excruciating poverty in the countries of origin, a situation often referred to as feminization of poverty.

In Nigeria, government attempts at deregulation of the economy, precipitated its privatization of the key corporations, owned and controlled by government with the task of producing goods and services for the masses at subsidized rates. This has resulted to massive cut in employment, new job opportunities became scarce. Men constitute the bulk of the industrial work force. The sustenance of the family is largely from the income from this sector, while women supplement with earnings from petty trading and sales of farm products. The collapse of the industrial sector as a result of its inability to withstand international competition had led to massive retrenchment of industrial workers. This, no doubt, places an extra burden on women as their responsibilities of financing the home shifted from the man to the woman. The sustained increase in the responsibilities of women in Nigeria occasioned by globalization is not matched with corresponding increase in their income.

Therefore, there is need to challenge gender issues and all forms of gender discrimination that arises from globalization in order to promote equality, which is necessary for national development in Nigeria. It is within this context, that this paper examines gender issues in globalization using Nigeria as a case study. Apart from the introduction, the paper is organized into five major sections. The first section dwells on the conceptual explanation of globalization, and gender; while section two focuses on the theoretical framework. Section three discusses gender issues and globalization in Nigeria; while section four provides strategies for redressing the inherent problems of globalization on women; and the concluding remarks.

The information used for this paper is sourced from secondary data. These include data extracted from textbooks, journals, African development reports, National and international conventions, and publications relating to gender issues.

## **The Concept Of Globalization And Gender**

### **(i) Globalization**

In the 90's came the era of Globalization in the developing countries which in terms of definition is: "External opening, and increased role of markets domestically"; (Jomo, 2001). Everybody had a quest for market economy especially in the third world countries. To the developing world, this is a modern way of running an economy.

The governments in the developing world believe that it is more elegant to globalize which means simply opening up the economy, and penetrating the international markets (Morley, 2001). The expectation of this strategy was to increase competitiveness, promote export, and, increase growth. But with the present situation in Africa, little has been achieved (Loto, 2004).

The concept of globalization is multidimensional, and multi disciplinary", as it encapsulates all facets of the society. As Douglas Kellner, 1998 puts it, globalization is necessarily interdisciplinary and it describes the ways in which global economic, political, and social forces are rapidly penetrating the earth in the creation of a new world market, new transnational, political arrangement, and a new global culture.

Globalization goes beyond global interconnectedness; it equally funds expression in the virtual extinction of the barriers to information technology, as well as the increasing erosion of the constraints. This is perhaps why Malcom (1995), defines globalization as a social process in which constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede, and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding.

Similarly, Kingston (2001) depicted the idea of globalization as a process of 'corporate infiltration' of every area of life, a process of exclusion, homogenization, environmental destruction, and even 'death'. He thus, shares the view of Douglas that, globalization is expected to touch all the spheres of life of a nation. Ihonvbere (2002) perceives globalization as structured or characterized by new ideas, new strategies, speed, technology, new mechanisms for penetrating foreign markets, higher volumes of movement of goods, and skills, and shrinking of distances. He also observes that, today's globalization seeks to bring all together in one global economic, social, and political structure based on capitalist values, and liberal democracy.

Globalization today means "global governance". It involves conscious efforts by the government of the industrialized countries to govern the world, using such multi-lateral agencies as the World Trade Organisation



(WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Group of Eight (G 8), and the United Nations Security Council.

## **(ii) Gender**

While sex is biological; male and female; gender is social by defining, the roles played by male and female within each society. It has been noted that there is hardly any society where men and women occupy equal social status. This is because each individual sex has specific roles to perform, and there are varying ways of awarding merit to these roles. Gender, therefore looks at the status of women in comparison to men (Mason, 1984).

However, most cultures tend to assign higher values to the roles played by males than those played by females. Overtime, the tendency has been to assume that males (men and boys) are superior and that the females (women and girls) are subordinate. In some societies, this discrimination against the female is exhibited even before the child is born through sex preference for the male child, which may be shown in the deliberate termination of female fetuses by the expectant mothers, (Awopegba, 2004).

Sometimes, female babies are deliberately starved in order to provide adequate nourishment for baby boys in cases of food security. Discrimination against the females in access to education, and labour force participation has been documented in many societies (Oyekanmi, 2005). Also, within the marital unions, the tendency has been to regard women as possessions of the men and the former can be treated without regard for their fundamental human rights. This assumption of inferiority of women has been predicated on the argument; men/husband go out of the house in order to work, and then earn income with which to provide for their family needs, while women do household chores corollary, it was assumed that work outside the home was more valuable than housework, and procreation.

Patriarchal attitudes and the gender bias that underpin women's insubordination represent hidden obstacles to social and economic development. (Cain, et al 1979). Most terms and definitions of gender inequality focus on three basic dimensions, namely: inequality in prestige, in equality in power, and inequality are not static within any given society.

Considering the current tempo of the global efforts at increasing the quality and quantity of women's involvement in high-visibility positions in both private and public sector of the world's economies a critical examination of mid-life career challenges that they face are important. The common career challenges faced by women especially in mid-life include: societies bias, sex stereotyping, asserting individualism, work-family conflict, power relationship, and challenging tussle (Oladimeji, 2004).

## **Theoretical Framework**

The concept of gender issues and globalization can be explained, and understood using Karl Marx stratification theory. Karl Marx (1818 - 1883), social stratification theory divided the society into two classes, namely the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat. The males can be referred to as the bourgeoisie, the haves, and physically strong, while the females can be categorized with the proletariat, the oppressed, the have not, and the physically weak. In this situation, the economy tends to contribute towards improving the quality of man's life. In a similar vein, Marshall, (1920 - 1972) recognized the importance of the economy in the society by observing that, it is the economic forces that determines a man's character, his thoughts, ideas, values and association with other people.

Moreover, in gender division, Marxist theory contends that sexual division of labour as a social vehicle invested by men to assure themselves of privileges, prestige, and power in their relationship with females have succeeded in denying females those resources they need to succeed in the larger world. Contributing to the above, Mavorn (2002) observes that class society was believed to have merged with the industrial capitalization that encouraged private property, and the monogamous family, and the subjugation of women by men. With this situation, globalization can be said to belong to the latter category.

Globalization has also contributed to social stratification, and inequality in the society through the income distribution process. It has also contributed to women societal problems by either compounding the existing ones, or creating new ones.



### **Gender Issues And Globalization In Nigeria**

Globalization is viewed from gender perspective in relation to such issues as employment, access to basic education, access to qualitative and affordable health services, economic empowerment, and political participation. Indeed, the central thesis in globalization is the removal of geographic impediments to trade. Emphasis is placed on indiscriminate trade liberalization, and the liberalization of a nation's financial sector. Protection as a tool for galvanizing indigenous development is discouraged. This logically exposes fledgling domestic industries to competition of the more sophisticated and technologically driven industries of the developed countries. The effect is the complete stifling of local enterprises thus, facilitating unimpeded access of the industrialized countries to local markets of the third world. This invariably leads to the devastation of local industries, particularly small and medium size enterprises that provide the bulk of national employment.

In Nigeria, government attempts at deregulation of the economy precipitated its privatization of the key corporations, hitherto owned, and controlled by government with the task of producing goods and services for the masses at subsidized rates. This has resulted in massive cut in employment levels while new job opportunities became scarce. The collapse of the industrial sector as a result of its inability to withstand international competition had led to the massive retrenchment of industrial workers. This, no doubt, places an extra burden on women as the responsibility of financing the home shifted from the man to the woman. The sustained increase in the responsibilities of women in Nigerian occasioned by globalization is not matched with corresponding increase in their income, (Osunikanmi, 2000).

Related to the foregoing is the increased impoverishment caused by globalization which has more effects on women. It is estimated that 70% of Nigerians currently live below the poverty line of approximately 26 dollars per month per person, while 70% of these are females (Human Development Report, 2005). The reality is that majority of Nigerian women are found in small scale enterprises like petty trading, food production; they engage in craft-making, weaving of cloth, animal husbandry and planting, transportation and commercialization of agricultural produce; (Awopegba, 2005).

In the formal sector of the Nigerian economy, women's access to employment is more difficult due to some ill-conceived societal biases. In an African Development Report (2005), the assertion was made that being a woman in it is a supplementary obstacle to finding objective jobs. As technologies are integrated, and products are differentiated, more job cuts occur with adverse effects on women. The few number of women in this sector is increasingly losing their senses of job security. The African Development Report (2005), graphically illustrated the adverse decline in Nigerian women labour force which stood at 29.7% in 1990, reduced to 28.0% in 2000, and 14.3% in 2004.

In the educational sector, inequality between men and women is obvious. Discrimination against women in education is a common practice in many parts of Nigeria, particularly the northern parts. Many of those who attempt to go to school are usually given out for marriage even before the end of their primary education, while their male counterparts continue to attain higher levels of education. This attitude to women education due to inequality is most inimical to the development of the families, and the basic social structure in the society.

The consequences of globalization have serious impact on Nigeria women's access to qualitative, and affordable health services, and facilities. Unfortunately, the drastic reduction in their income prevent them access to privately provided qualitative health service, which are fee based, and in fact expensive in Nigeria, girls tend to be more under-nourished than boys of the same age, and are taken for medical treatment and vaccinations less frequently, especially in there is a fee for the service, (ECA, 1999).

Another contributing factor to girls' poor health and nutritional status is the heavy workload, and poor feeding habits they are subjected to. Rural girls are generally faced with the obligation to help their mothers in the household chores cleaning up, etc. This implies heavy and long working hours for the girls. Hard work and inappropriate diet tell on girls' health, and place them at disadvantage compared to boys. Finally, when girls become teenagers, they are exposed to gender specific reproductive health problems like early pregnancy due to early marriages, abortion, sexual exploitation, and commercial, abortion, sexual exploitation, and commercial sex are consequences of STD, and HIV/AIDS in Nigeria.

Another important trend in the issue of gender and globalization is the growing presence, and powers of transnational companies especially in the old sector have severely diminished the economic and social needs of its citizens. Again, by their operation, they often do incalculable damage not only to the domestic economy but the ecosystem as well. In Nigeria, majority of the women depend solely on the ecosystem, for survival, as they



engage in such activities as farming, and fishing. Unfortunately, the activities of the transnational companies, especially oil companies as shell and chevron have continued to degrade the ecosystem, this inhibiting women's access to land and waters. This has stripped the vast number of Nigerian women of their means of livelihood. This is more common in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. This also accounts for the recent incessant crisis on the region. The deregulation of such activities like the oil exploration have placed extra burden on women in their roles as home keepers, and care givers to their children (Awoopegba, 2006).

In governance, the problem of gender is equally obvious. Globalization also presupposes political liberalization or democractization of regimes. It espouses political liberalization and equal participation of citizens. In Nigeria, the fact remains that the economic disempowerment of women consequent upon globalization has negative impact on political participation by Nigerian women. Fewer women are available to run for elective political offices as a result of their economic disempowerment brought about by trade liberalization, and economic deregulation. The vast majority of Nigerian women now refrain from political participation because their economic incapacitation makes it impossible for them to get involved in the expensive enterprise of political campaign, mobilization, and electoral contests.

Females who try to succeed in politics discover that the hurdles they have to face whether based on cultural factors such as, tradition, state imposed legal restrictions and policies, are compounded by the obstacle of their birth that is gender discriminations in the over all societal-setting. The natural psychological and biological differences between the sexes as well as religious beliefs have greatly hindered the effective participation of females in politics. (Omode, 2002).

#### **Women and Globalization: Strategies for redressing the inherent problems**

Globalization, no doubt, has its own good intentions. However, the major exponents of the concept, that is the industrialized nations, have purposely and strategically channeled whatever may accrue from the global relations to their own benefit. Thus, the case is that of sieving the wheat from the shaft. The poor nations get poorer with the shaft, while the industrialized nations get richer with the wheat. Although this has been the oppressing, and enduring phenomenon, yet the avalanche of problems and the attendant impacts on Nigerian women suggest the need to explore strategies that could redress the problems so as to place Nigerian women in their socio-political and economic positions. There is no doubt that, any positive change in this direction will have corresponding effect on men, children, and the country as a whole.

Poverty remains the most potent factor militating against Nigerian women. This has resulted in serious limitations in their socio-political and economic relevance. It has made Nigerian women the beneficiary of the ills of globalization. A concreted effort at formulating and implementing reasonable and objective poverty alleviation measures is therefore a must. This is needed to galvanize Nigerian women from their economic and political enslavement. The present poverty alleviation measures of ex-president Olusegun Obasanjo fall short of a true, reasonable, and impact exercise. Their formulations are benefits of a useful research into the determination of the levels and severity of the problem of poverty as it affects women in Nigeria. It is necessary that the extent be determined, alternative courses of action examined, and the most suitable options chosen.

Deriving from the foregoing, government should encourage the woman in sustaining their effort in the informal sector by encouraging local productions, encourage the activities of cooperative societies, and make soft loans available to women through these societies. And to stem the degradation of the ecosystem, government should standardize the activities of all oil companies operating in Nigeria in line with internationally acceptable standard.

In the formal education, persistent erroneous beliefs and ideologies as well as financial predicament constrain the realization of girls' right to education. There is this, the need to work urgently on changing the mentalities that harbour these negative ideologies and the need for government at all levels to set aside special budgets for female education. Besides, every institution in the society must endeavour to bridge gender gap in education, and skills acquisition drive. With more of formal education, the effects of a number of cultural limitations will be minimized, and by extension, build the much needed bridges across gender disparity.

Furthermore, Nigerian government should take every appropriate step to ensure that national legislation provides an adequate framework for effective legal measures against cultural and social factors that promote gender divisions in the country. Therefore, there is need for the enactment of legislation to make it heinous offence to discriminate against women, to practice abusive early marriage, and other harmful practices, against



official discrimination, while appropriate mechanisms for effective enforcement of this legislation must be equally provided.

It is also important that the Nigerian government should domesticate the provisions of the international conventions on sex discrimination, being a signatory to it. Besides, relevant government functionaries should conduct gender analysis of development programmes and projects to ensure that they do not render women powerless. Development activities must be gender-sensitive. Both public and private sector employers should eliminate all forms of salary, and benefit inequalities based on sex differences.

It is equally necessary to expand the political landscape and, make it more flexible. As it is presently, it is skewed on favour of men, and puts women at a disadvantage. This has resulted in very few women holding political offices, this limiting the participation of women in serious national issues and policies. The encouragement and increase in women's access to political participation will certainly enable them to contribute meaningfully to national development. It is therefore expedient that an agenda for women empowerment be drawn, and incorporated into the national development plan. Corroborating this view Hassan-Iman (2006), calls for the full utilization of women in the development of human resources, and bringing about their acceptance in every phase of national, development, with equal rights, and corresponding obligation. She further pointed out that women should be encouraged to participate in national and local political activities by removing all socio-cultural and economic barriers that militate against their effective involvement in the development process.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In order for globalization to benefit any nation, it has to increase the welfare of all the people therein. The present situation where the females-half of the population are pauperized in Nigeria does not bear a good testimony to the supposed gains of globalization. It is axiomatic that women in Nigeria suffer more in the globalization process. Their socio-economic circumstances are miserable, and very little hope awaits them except a drastic and conscious national response is elicited. There is a great need for much research and documentation into the various gender issues arising from globalization. It is essential to mainstream the females into the economic and political spheres of the nation so that the lessons learnt, and the gains of globalization would be better spread in the society.

To remedy the problems of 'gender and globalization in Nigeria, certain measures and strategies were discussed. The adoption and implementation of these policies, measures will go a long way in improving gender issues in the Nigerian society thereby enhancing the task of national development.

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