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The Place of Women in Environmental Management and Sustainability in Nigeria

Rola kobiet w zarządzaniu środowiskowym oraz w zrównoważonym rozwoju w Nigerii

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Abstract: In this essay, we contend that the relationship between human society and physical environment is not gender neutral, as men and women are treated inequitably. There exists an inequitable binary structure between the two polar values, as human society often exploits and degrades the environment, and women are undermined in various occasions. The role of women is undermined in environmental management and monitoring. Our strategy in dealing with this issue of negligence would be to expose the misconception that women have little or nothing to contribute in environmental management beside biological reproductive roles, and activities such as cooking, washing, fetching firewood and nursing of children. We will also show the negative impacts of these forcefully assigned female duties on the climate, and how this leads to pollution, which in turn, obstructs the biospheres (plant and animal species). Using the principle of complementarity, the paper insists on the need to eradicate all socio-culturally perceived superlative attributes of distinction between human society and environment or masculinity and femininity. The paper calls for mainstreaming of gender perspective, expansion of women's opportunities and participation in environmental management, at all levels, for environmental sustainability.

Keywords: environmental management, sustainability, pollution, women inclusion, complementarity

Streszczenie: Niniejszy artykuł przyjmuje założenie, że związek między społeczeństwem a środowiskiem fizycznym nie jest neutralny pod względem płci, jako że mężczyźni i kobiety są traktowani niejednakowo. Mamy tu do czynienia z niesprawiedliwą strukturą binarną rozciągniętą pomiędzy dwoma skrajnymi wartościami, wynikającą z tego, że społeczeństwo często wyzyskuje i degradowuje środowisko, a z kolei pozycja kobiet jest pod wieloma względami niedoceniana. Rola kobiet w zarządzaniu i monitorowaniu środowiska jest na ogół podważana. Proponowany przez nas sposób zaradzenia tej sytuacji polegałby na zdemaskowaniu błędnego przekonania, że kobiety niezmiennie mają niewielki lub wręcz żaden wpływ na stan środowiska i jego zarządzanie, a ich rola sprowadza się jedynie do biologicznie uwarunkowanych zadań związanych z reprodukcją i ograniczonych do takich czynności jak gotowanie, zmywanie, zbieranie drewna na opał i karmienie dzieci. Artykuł ukazuje negatywny wpływ takiego właśnie postrzegania roli kobiet w społeczeństwie na klimat, zanieczyszczenie środowiska i, w konsekwencji, zaburzenie funkcjonowania biosfery (gatunków roślin i zwierząt). Stosując zasadę komplementarności, artykuł kładzie nacisk na potrzebę wykorzystania społecznie i kulturowo ugruntowanego podejścia do kwestii zależności społeczeństwa od środowiska oraz męskich i żeńskich ról społecznych. Niniejszy artykuł

nawołuje do włączenia perspektywy płci do głównego nurtu polityki środowiskowej, poszerzenia możliwości kobiet w tym zakresie i zwiększenia ich udziału w działaniu na rzecz zarządzania środowiskowego na wszystkich jego poziomach.

Słowa kluczowe: zarządzanie środowiskowe, zrównoważony rozwój, zanieczyszczenia, włączenie kobiet, komplementarność

Introduction

The claim by environmental scholars that the relationship between human society and physical environment is gender neutral, affecting both women and men in the same way is revisited and proven to be wrong. This assertion is based on a consideration of the dichotomy or diametrical relationship often experienced between men and women in environmental management. The differentiated socio-cultural construction of men and women's roles means that the linkages between people and the physical environment impact the sexes differently (OSCE 2009). As men and women have different roles in the family, community and work-force, they are likely to have different personal attitudes, priorities and power over resources when it comes to environmental protection or management. Men and women also interact differently with the environment, which provides them with different opportunities to protect it (Collier and Rosaldo 1981). This, notwithstanding, in most households in Nigeria, women are not given the opportunity to explore beyond house chores, washing of clothes, cooking, nursing babies and fetching of firewood. Due to their often-restricted access to public positions and political participation, decisions about water and waste management systems in the community are often taken by men, who do not necessarily take into account the views and needs of the female household managers. This is the case, irrespective of the fact that management of households' waste is more of women's responsibility than that of men. This, notwithstanding, as the removal of waste is usually the unpaid work of women, the said work is taken away from them by their male

counterparts, as soon as it is slightly mechanized. That is, women are quick to be jettisoned as soon as the use of instruments like carts or delivery tricycles are introduced, or the job becomes payable. Following this discriminatory arrangement, men are placed higher than women, as women are only taken to be responsible for household works and bringing up children (Rico 1998). We argue that women's role in society is multifaceted, in the sense that it is not restricted to the duties that help nourish domestic and social life, but also in the flourishing of public life. Women have contributed to fishing, farming and so many other local scale productions linked to the environment, which undeniably contribute to the livelihoods of their families and communities. With these, it is obvious that women are part of practices that help in development. In spite of these roles, women in contemporary Africa, particularly Nigeria, are economically deprived in the different aspects of the economy over the centuries (Egaga and Aderibigbe 2015; Dankelman 1985). This is the reason they hardly join politics or considered among decision makers, in dealing with the issues that affect the environment.

Furthermore, women are hierarchically subordinated to men in decision making. This incessant subordination they suffer is the cause of the environmental destruction taking place in the rural and urban areas (Mabawonku 2001; Shiva 1998; Sawalhah 2012). In trying to survive, women engage in menial jobs that in turn lead to air, water and land pollution, such as bush burning, deforestation, flooding, soil erosion and indiscriminate waste disposal especially in the urban areas. These activities of women affect health, agriculture, minerals, food,

housing and bio-organisms especially in relation to people, animals and other living things. More so, in many African countries, education of women has remained at a much lower level than that of men. Lack of education has subjugated women especially in the rural areas to the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. This has also prevented them from knowledge and understanding of the environment in which they live. This lack of knowledge has made them vulnerable tool for environmental pollution and degradation (Smith 1971; Mba 1995). Their access to quality education and acquisition of knowledge on environmental sustainability could reduce this environmental degradation, create opportunities for women and increase their potentials beyond the traditional household tasks, for local, national and global development. Though, this paper presents how women have been undermined and subjugated by their men counterparts, it insists that women and men are not homogeneous entities. They are of different personalities and identities and cannot be said to be equal. This is why equity is preached here rather than equality, as there are variegated roles performed by men that cannot be carried out by women and vice versa. This is due to formal and informal constraints: rules and norms that shape the behaviour of actors in society and gender relations and identities. Division of labour – the tasks and responsibilities that men and women are expected to fulfil in private and public arenas, also attest to the claim under discussion. It is on this note that the paper proposes complementarity as a principle to demonstrate that men and women may have different identities but are complementarily related.

It is lack of gender equity, which complementarity as a method professes that brings about the glaring obstacle in achieving a more sustainable society that guarantee socio-environmental justice, fragile ecosystem recovery and environmental protection. The first section of this paper will deal with the issues of gender, climate change

and environmental problems. Here, it will be stated that the environmental problems we are faced with today in Nigeria, and by extension Africa can be attributed to climatic factors and women exclusivity in environmental management and control. The second section will establish the need for gender-based environmental interconnection and equity. At this point, equity-based argument will be made instead of the usual equality-based argument. This position is founded on the assumption that men and women are not homogeneous in nature and have different job duties to accomplish in view of sustaining, protecting and enriching the environment. Thirdly, a proposal will be made for a complementary understanding of the environment in relation to gender (male and female). This will go a long way in the repositioning and retraining of our mind-views to avoid the discriminative and elitist mindset, which states that men are better and safer in environmental policy, decision making and sustainability.

1. Women, Climate Change and Environmental Problems

It is evident that climate change has impacted differently on different demographics in Nigeria. The impacts of climate change have made vulnerable groups especially women, children, farmers, youths, the disabled and elderly persons to face higher risks and greater burdens as they hardly fend for themselves and families. These climate change-related environmental problems such as erosion, flood, desertification, pollution, drought, heat waves have caused stress on natural resources (land, water, forests) and livelihoods. Limited participation of women in decision-making processes and labour markets deepen inequalities and often prevent them from fully contributing to climate-related planning, policy-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (Federal Ministry of Environment 2020). Although the paper agrees with the Federal Ministry of Environment that something needs to be done to carry

women along in policy or decision making and implementation, it disagrees with its cry of inequality. Hence, it is difficult if not impossible for two different entities to be equal or to be treated equally. It is in this backdrop, that the paper emphasis on equity and complementarity, where women will be treated fairly, complementarily and justly, in recognition of their capabilities, in the environmental management and development.

By implication, women should not only be victims, as they are also agents of change and have unique knowledge and capabilities (United Nations Population Fund 2018). Seeing women always as those with little or no knowledge of the environment is the reason for the environmental problems and climatic issues that affect the Nigerian economy. With this in mind, the problem of climate change that we battle with today can be averted or addressed through the inclusion of women in the policies and leadership of the environment. It is obvious that the debate about gender equality and inequality is gradually fading away, as the recent argument is on the gender mainstreaming, ensuring that both men and women's needs are reflected in policy formulation and implementation. In spite of the efforts on this, there exist disparities between men and women, especially in the socio-economic and socio-political sphere. The National Bureau of Statistics explains it as follows:

“The National Bureau of Statistics in 2018 records 59.3% literacy level for women as opposed to 70.9% literacy level for men. Again, women employees in civil service were recorded at 38.16% as opposed to men employees 68.84% in 2016. The same is reflected in the political sphere where men constitute 94.71% of the National Parliament, from 1999 – 2015” (National Bureau for Statistics 2018).

All these attests to the alarming imbalance between men and women representation in the social, political and economic sphere. From the statistics above, it is obvious that women are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change in Nigeria. Hence, they

are barely represented in parliament/politics and often excluded in legislations. To correct these anomalies, women are to be integrated in policy process design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – with a view to promoting equity and fairness between women and men. This position will be elaborated in the next chapter.

2. Women, Environmental Interconnection and Equity

The gender and climatic issues that exist in Nigeria today are due to the disconnection between the male and female sexes, in dealing and managing the issues of the environment. There have been elements of bifurcation and in-equitability in running the affairs of the environment. Women have been sidelined in decision making and implementation of environmental policies and evaluation. This polarized mentality has distorted the expected relationship that ought to exist between Gender and the environment (Amole 1998; Gass 1987; Das 1988). The ingenuity of women is equally treated with levity. Meanwhile, if recognized and appropriated, it can help in achieving both regional and national objectives and strategies. If women are incorporated, they have the potential and skills for policy formulation and development. This is substantiated following the great women of the world and Africa and Nigeria in particular, who have paid the price in one way or the other, for environmental and socio-economic advancements.

Chilokwu (2007), corroborates this, as he avers that “the history of women's socio – economic contribution is felt everywhere in our various environment. The contributions of Mao Vijaye Kami Paudit 1953, Ceylon 1960, Indira Ghandi of India, Golda Meir, who was the Prime minister of Israel in 1969, Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1980 to 1990, Mary Moodley and Winnie Mandela, Margaret Ekpo, Queen Amina of Zaria and Dr Ngozi Okonjo – Iweala, attest to the above submission. With the contributions of these

calibres of women of the world, Africa and Nigeria, women can effectively, as caretakers of the environment, promote peace for environmental and economic development. On this stand point, this article calls for gender-based interconnection and equity, as a way of eliminating all socio-culturally perceived attributes of distinction that empowers men and neglects women in dealing with the issues of the environment, for economic advancement of the world. When this proposed gender-based interconnection and equity is upheld, the relationship that should bind men and women together, especially in the issue of environment, which has been neglected on different occasions, will be restored. Here, the natural law of division of labour will be respected and men and women complementing each other in formulating policies and carrying out their environmental responsibilities diligently. This may trigger some questions like – What happens to individuals' identities during this complementation? Who becomes in charge or in control in the proposed complementary relationship? To answer these questions, it is important to note that no identity is lost in complementation. Complementation is a quality of complementing others and being completable. Variables can complement, but the best form of complementation is between opposites. It is a question of one being fulfilled or completed by the presence of others and nothing more.

The only way to achieve this within the ambience of the topic of discussion is for the men to ensure that women are carried along-in view of the fact that to be is not to be alone but to be with others. This does not actually preach equality but equity and fairness knowing very well that it is difficult for two separate entities to be treated equally. Hence, their genetic makeup, backgrounds and job duties are not the same. But they can be justly and fairly treated in recognition of each one's skills and likely contributions to the environment. With this, none is said to be in control of the other in decision and policy making of the environment.

The next section will dwell more on the tenets of complementarity and its applicability in sustaining the environment.

3. Towards a Complementary Understanding of the Environment for Sustainability

The issues of gender, environment and environmental sustainability are topical. Hence, there is no neutrality or homogeneity in the relationship of human society and environment or men and women. To claim that the relationship between human nature and environment is gender neutral, affecting both women and men in the same way, is to simply question the existence of nature, which has, for long, created division of labour between the two sexes or among realities. Abiding by this law of nature attracts unity and averts the untold disaster, which going against law of nature attracts. "It is, therefore, pertinent that we adhere to the exploration of nature in conformity with the principles that will not in any way provoke nature" (Ezugwu 2022). Though, nature plays a vital role in the issue of environment, complementarity, equity, harmonization and solidarity, which the paper seeks, lie in our hands personally and collectively. To curb and if possible, eradicate these climatic and environmental problems, which have truncated our peace and discourages our economic growth, women must be allowed or given the required room to showcase their skills in environmental policies and deliberations (Odunjo et al. 2015). Put differently, women must be brought into organizations at high levels to ensure visibility and credibility, as sustainable environment and development can only be achieved through collaborative works and efforts of all the stakeholders, the women and the men, the young and old, communities, churches, mosques, academia, local government unions and civil society groups.

In line with the above view, Arizpe et al (1993), maintain that we must be democratic if we are to sustain our environment. According to them, being democratic will

help in bringing both men and women closer in policy making, as it concerns the environment and distribution of resources. In other words, all sections of society need to participate on an equitable basis, both in the decisions as to the direction of environmental policies and in the benefits of economic growth and development afterwards. This point is very essential to this research work, as it prioritizes complementary relationship that allows interaction between substance and accident, men and women, black and white, not really as equal realities, but as complementary realities that crave for harmony in achieving great tasks together. In view of this, it becomes unnecessary to elevate men above women, hence, “anything that exists serves a missing link of reality” (Asouzu 2011). And every human action is meant to gear towards the joy of being. Elevating the world immanent missing link to an absolute instance, denies the fact that the spice of being depends strictly on its limitation and integration. Having known this, the environmental problems which have formed the topic of discussion in the country can be addressed if the minds of men are retrained to see women as actors that can equally contribute to formulating policies and discharging of their environmental responsibilities.

Conclusion

This study has shown that women’s participation in environmental management in Nigeria is low and it is crucial to integrate them in environmental issues. This is a proof also that there is never a watertight relationship between human society and environment, as it pertains to men and women. Women’s skills are often undermined; hence women are treated with levity and unjustly in dealing with the issue of the environment. There is this belief that women have little or nothing to offer in the field of environment, as their job duties are basically farming, nursing of children, washing and cooking. This type of thought tends to forget that women are original

actors and caretakers of the environment. It is this kind of mentality that has deprived a good number of women the educational opportunities that would have inculcated in them the need to avoid environmental pollution, as it affects the condition of our health negatively.

Consequently, the paper had advocated for mainstreaming of gender-based interconnection and equity, as a way out of the polarized mindsets between women and men, in environmental development and pursuit. Here, it was stated categorically clear that equity is different from equality. As equity deals with justice and fairness, equality is about having the same identity, size, gift, skill and job duties. In all, it is believed that nature/God has made it in such a way that division of labour prevails in human relations and sexes. It is on this note that the paper insists on complementarity, where differences are put together, each struggling to survive and contribute for the betterment of the environment. When this, becomes the case, women and men will be allowed to perform their duties, and most importantly, engage in the environmental policy formulations and implementations, for environmental sustainability.

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