

## POVERTY REDUCTION PROGRAMMES AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA: A QUESTIONING THEORY OF DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract

National development requires a major re-ordering of human society. The socio-political and economic status of any nation is as important as the lives of individuals within the nation. To this end, there is the need to keep the economy stable and rich at all times. This to say the least is responsibility of all citizens – male and female, young and old. Poverty reduction is a microcosmic strand out of the many divergent means of achieving development in Nigeria. In Nigeria and many African countries, women carry a disproportionately high burden of material deprivation, lack of or inadequate education, and marginalization with little or no opportunity to influence the political, economic and social processes that control their lives. Hence they are trapped in a cycle of poverty. This paper examines the issue of poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria and how they are being used to achieve national development neglecting the empowerment of female gender – an asset which Nigeria has in abundance. The theoretical framework that we have adopted in support of women empowerment is Liberal Feminism. On the issue of poverty reduction, we anchored our analysis on the social exclusion theory of poverty. This is because this theory refers to processes in which individuals or entire communities of people are systematically blocked from rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of society and which are keys to social integration. The outcome of social exclusion is that affected individuals or communities are prevented from participating fully in the economic, social and political life of the society in which they live. We found that stereotypes, prejudices, lack of finance and confidence to risk business ventures, skepticism, mistrust and perceived lack of suitability for leadership roles, as major challenges that discouraged women empowerment and emancipation. From our analysis and findings, we conclude that a focus on human resources development is one of the fastest and most effective means of reducing poverty and achieving national growth and development. We recommend the review and abolition of customary laws that are biased against women.

**Keywords:** National Development, Poverty Reduction Programmes, Women Empowerment and Social Exclusion Theory of Poverty

### Introduction

Poverty is a social problem in which a country is faced with cultural, social, political, economic and environmental deprivations. In other words, it is a state of involuntary deprivation to which a person, household, community or nation can be subjected. In recent times, scholars have pointed out

that there are reinforcing vicious circles that keep families, regions and countries poor and unable to contribute to national growth (Perry et al., 2006; Okoye and Onyukwu, 2007). In developing countries, poverty level has been on the increase. In Nigeria, for example, the situation has worsened since the late 1990s and can be best described as “inflammable”. As

Nnamani (2003) puts it poverty in Nigeria has reached an alarming level and has been rising steadily not exponentially. Aware of the grave consequences of poverty, successive Nigerian governments have designed and implemented numerous policies to tackle the scourge.

However, every effort towards this direction has not yielded the expected results. Some believe that bad governance, gender stereotyping, corruption, low productivity, unemployment, debt-burden and conflicts are associated to failure of poverty eradication. Others attributed the high level of poverty to macro-economic distortion, globalization, high population growth rate and poor human resources development. It is generally believed that acute poverty can be reduced or eradicated through effective policy measure and empowerment of female gender. This is the target of this paper.

The paper raises some fundamental questions concerning the impact of policy and its sustenance to poverty alleviation. We equally analyze the issue of women empowerment in Nigeria where women carry a disproportionately high burden of material deprivation, lack of or inadequate education, and marginalization with little or no opportunity to influence the political, economic and social processes that control their lives– an asset which Nigeria has in abundance. We looked at the various policy measures adopted by the past governments in Nigeria that were directed to poverty alleviation and the extent they have impacted on the provision of social services.

## Conceptual and Theoretical Issues Poverty in Nigeria

Extreme poverty and hunger are major problem that Nigerian government has not been able to solve. Past governments between 1972 and now have mounted at least eight projects that were meant to alleviate poverty. Billions of naira was spent on these projects yet Nigerians have remained poor and hungry. The international fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (2007) noted that “Despite its plentiful resources and oil wealth, poverty is widespread in Nigeria even though it is the most populous country in Africa and the eight in the world with a population of over 140 million people by 2006 census. With a nominal GDP of \$207.11 billion and per capita income of \$1,401 it has the second largest economy in Africa (Salami, 2011).

However, there is no universally accepted definition of poverty. At same time, there is always the difficulty in deciding where to draw the line between the “poor” and the “non poor”. From the World Bank Report (2002), poverty is the inability to attain a minimum standard of living. The report constructed some indices based on a minimum level of consumption in order to show the practical aspect of poverty. These include lack of access to resources, lack of education and skills, poor health, malnutrition, lack of political freedom and voice, lack of shelter, poor access to water and sanitation, vulnerability to shocks, violence and crime, political discrimination and marginalization.

Similarly, the United Nations Human Development (UNHD) has introduced the use of such other indices

such as life expectancy, infant mortality rate, primary school enrolment ratio and number of persons per physician to measure poverty in a country (UNDP HDI:2002). Aluko (1995) refers to poverty as a lack of command over basic consumption needs. There is an inadequate level of consumption such as rise to insufficient food, clothing and shelter. He notes that the conventional notion depicts poverty as a condition in which people are below a specific minimum income level and are unable to provide or satisfy the basic necessities of life needed for an acceptable standard of living. The explanation, however, failed to provide the graphic picture of those who are poor, how to change their conditions and what to do.

Shaffer (2001) opined that the concept of poverty has undergone four changes over the past decade. First, there has been a shift from a physiological model of deprivation to a social model of deprivation. The social model is about incorporating issues of political and economic rights and social justice into the anti-poverty programmatic framework. Second, there has been renewed emphasis placed on the concept of vulnerability and its relationship to poverty. Third, the concept of inequality and its relationship to poverty has re-emerged as a central concern. Fourth, the idea that poverty should be conceptualized as the violation of basic human rights has been painstakingly argued by UN system agencies.

To Brinkerhoff and Crosby (2002), they believe that meaningful onslaught against poverty must be focused these dimensions in order to be seen and

complete. Efforts and resources needed to attempt to address the physiological needs of citizens alone is prodigious enough, not to talk of waging an all – inclusive campaign against poverty, which shows that the socio-economic problems that policies address cannot be solved by governments acting on their own, nor are they exclusive domain of one sector.

Sachs (2005), as well as Nweze and Ojowu (2002) opined that poverty can be categorized into three namely absolute poverty, relative poverty and subjective poverty. Absolute or subsistence poverty deals with basic human needs measured by resources required to maintain physical efficiency (Haralambos and Heald, 1980; Kuper and Kuper, 1996). Here, individuals, families or groups who are said to be in absolute poverty are unable to afford the resources particularly the real income to obtain the types of diets needed to enjoy some fixed minimum standard of living determined by a given society. This minimum standard of living considers some amount of goods and services essential and those who are unable to obtain them are said to be poor. Such goods and services include food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, potable water, sanitation and education. People considered to be in absolute poverty are determined through a yardstick known as poverty line. The poverty line which is based on the level of income or consumption of individuals, households or groups in a given society as Balogun, (1999) puts it, provides a threshold whereby those whose income falls below are said to be poor and those whose income is above are non-poor. The poverty line used by the World Bank for

international comparison is one dollar (\$1) per person per day (Kankwenda et al, 2000; Sachs, 2005; Ali- Akpajiak and Pyke 2003). Those below the poverty line are grouped into two, namely, the poor and core or extremely poor giving rise to two poverty lines (upper poverty line and lower poverty line). While those whose income falls below the upper poverty line but above the lower poverty line are categorized as poor, those whose income falls below the lower poverty line are categorized as the core or extremely poor. The consequences faced by those who live in absolute poverty include disease, poor feeding, inadequate education, low life expectancy, squalor as well as physical and mental retardation.

Relative poverty is a situation where an individual's or a household's income is less than the average income of the population in the society being considered. This means that the individual or household has goods and services which are lower than those of other persons or households in the country, state, community or society (Schiller, 1976; Oladunni, 1999; Kuper and Kuper, 1996). This implies that those who are in relative poverty have their resources far lower than those possessed by average individuals or households to the extent that, they are, in effect excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities. This definition is dynamic as it is based upon comparison with some measure (s) of prevailing living standards which in addition to varying from place to place must be related to the needs and demands of a changing society. The concept of subjective poverty which is "expressed in a range of non-material and intangible

qualities" (Nweze, et al 2002:2), is based on respondents' perception of their standard of living. This feeling of whether one is poor or not depends on individuals/societies' psychology.

The various concepts of poverty discussed above reveal that absolute poverty deals with those who find it difficult to live a meaningful decent life due to financial constraint. This implies that they are poor because they lack the financial resources needed for them to obtain the basic necessities of life. Relative poverty has to do with a situation where a household or a person compares itself or himself/herself with another household or person. This means that even if the household or person is able to meet its/ his basic necessities of life, the household or individual could still be comparatively poor. Since subjective poverty is concerned with the feelings of individuals, even those who are able to acquire basic necessities of life and much more might be categorized as poor depending on the yardstick being used.

The essence of the explanation is helpful in contrasting the poor and non-poor in a particular society. In fact, there is a common thread in all these varieties of poverty. They points out that poverty is a general condition of deprivation and that consigns its victims to the level of their societies.

According to Zupi (2007), poverty has been seen as a dynamic process rather than a static phenomenon, one that captures the various forms of deprivation in well-being. It implies an observable disadvantage in relation to the local community or the wider society or

nation to which a deprived individual, family, household or group belongs. The concept of poverty is also linked to distribution in terms of economic distance that is inequality. However, he argues that distribution alone cannot identify the ability to achieve a decent level of living. Distribution must be regarded as an important correlated but different concept to poverty. As a general rule, a better distribution will be more pro-poor but opposed the view that poverty and inequality are correlated. Castel (1996) defines poverty as a static or dynamic concept. The definition of poverty as a cycle projects its dynamic nature and its linkage to marginalization and social exclusion.

However, after decades of social policies and poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria, none of the programmes or policies has ever considered the issue of marginalization of the women which is a major problem that heightens the scourge of poverty in the country. As Procacci (2007:5) puts it, marginalization puts poverty further apart from the whole of society. As far as poverty is concerned, the fundamental right to a minimum of resources for not starving is not enough for organizing a social response to its increase. Social exclusion confirms a dual society and appears more as a symptom of a social fracture than as a solution against it.

Thus, under the Millennium Development Goals, today's development strategies try to put under question the reverse link between growth and inequality by tackling poverty under multiple dimensions. This inevitably demands that not only extreme

poverty is neither targeted, nor individual trajectories, but rather that multiple processes producing poverty within society are also tackled.

In his analysis, Sen (1992), in theorizing poverty implies the idea that poverty is not a natural phenomenon within a larger frame of inequality problems; rather it can be eliminated if people are enabled to become autonomous from needs. No real development is possible if basic needs are unmet and larger and larger strata of the population are kept in a condition of dependency. Rejecting the idea of poverty as a natural object, and its inevitability in human societies helps to orient our questioning towards concrete social practices treating poverty, their transformations and their effects.

Manning (2007) maintain that rapid and sustained poverty reduction requires 'pro-poor growth', that is a pace and pattern of growth that enhances the ability of poor women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth. In essence, growth should be broad based across sectors and regions and inclusive of the large part of the workforce that poor men and women make up. Also, policies for sustaining growth such as those aiming at strengthening institutional capacity, promoting democratic and effective governance should increase poor people's incentives, opportunities and capabilities for employment so they can participate in and benefit from growth.

#### Women Disempowerment and Poverty in Nigeria

Since 1945, so many treaties and legal instruments have been drafted at the

international regional as well as at national levels specifically to deal with issues of concern to women in a bid to advance their status in various societies of the world. The dominant feature of these standards is the effort to promote equality between different groups in the enjoyment of human rights and to ensure that no particular group is accorded less favourable treatment than the other (Ogbaji, 2012). The principle can also be found in such international documents as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR -1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR-1966) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR-1966) which together make up the International Bill of Rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls for equal rights in marriage. It stipulates that marriage “shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses”. It also calls for equal pay for equal work and for the protection of motherhood (U.N. 1948). The Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the right to work, free choice of employment; fair wages, form and join unions, social security, adequate standards of living, freedom from hunger, health and education. (U.N.1948). States that have ratified the Covenant acknowledge their responsibility to promote better living conditions for their people. The Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognizes the right of every human person to life, liberty and security of person. It prohibits the use of the death sentence on pregnant women, provides for equality between men and

women during marriage and at its dissolution and for the right to participate in public life without discrimination. It finally declares that equality before the law and the principle of non-discrimination are enforceable rights (UN. 1948:6-5).

In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), also known as the 'Women Convention' was adopted by the General Assembly. This is the most comprehensive and prominent international instrument embracing the special concerns of women. The convention has been described as an International Bill of Rights for Women and a framework for the participation of women in the development process in order to alleviate poverty.

The Women's Convention has moved beyond earlier human rights instruments which in gender neutral terms require the equal treatment of men and women, to recognize the particular nature of discrimination against women and to demand for a redress of the situation of women. It identifies the urgent need to confront the socio-economic, cultural, political and religious causes of women's inequality by addressing itself to the prohibition of all forms and manifestations of discrimination against women in the public and private spheres, calling for appropriate measures to guarantee them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on the basis of equality with men.

Nevertheless, the Women's Convention remains a useful statement at principle accepted by the international

community and has made significant inroads in addressing the neglect of women's concerns in "mainstream" human rights instruments (Ogbaji, 2012). The same normative standard is also expressed in regional documents such as the Africa Charter of Human and People's Rights (1981) and at the National level, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (FRN, 1999).

The campaign for the advancement of women gathered momentum with the proclamation of 1975 as International Women's Year and the convening, that same year of the first major conference on the status of women. The conference which held in Mexico City, helped to mobilize women around the world, expanding the working relationship between the United Nations and Non-Governmental Organizations with the theme-Equality, Development and Peace, which became the basis for the organization's work for women thereafter (Ogbaji, 2012). The World Plan of Action for the implementation of the objectives of the International Women Year (IWY) set targets and proposed action at both national and international levels for the UN decade for women, 1976-1985 (Women's International Information and Communication Service, 1983).

A Second World conference was held in 1980 at Copenhagen, Denmark to review and appraise implementation of targets set in the World Plan of Action (WPA). In addition to the overall themes of the decade, the document focused especially on problems of employment, education and health. The Third Conference was held in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985 to review and appraise achievements over the Decade as a whole, and to draw up

guidelines for the future. Delegates at Nairobi adopted the Nairobi Forward-looking strategies (FLS) for the advancement of women to the year 2000. (Ogbaji, 2012).

Another landmark event in the efforts to achieve full equality for women was the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995 which set a new global agenda for achieving gender equality. It was the largest conference in the history of the United Nations with some 17,000 participants. The Conference unanimously adopted a new global blueprint for women's empowerment, spelt out in a five-year Platform for Action and a Beijing Declaration. The platform for Action affirms that women's human rights are inalienable, universal, indivisible and interdependent. It put forth the principle that rights for all must be defended and preserved (UN, 1995). The Beijing platform identified "12 critical areas" of action needed to empower women and to ensure their human right. These include Women and poverty, Education and training of women, Women and Health, Violence against women and Women and armed conflict. Other areas include Women and the economy, Women in power and decision-making, Institutional Mechanisms for the advancement of women and Human rights of women. Other areas are Women and the media, Women and the environment and the girl-child.

Following the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Commission on the status of Women (CSW) was mandated to regularly review the Platform for Action's Critical Areas of

concern and play a catalytic role in follow-up to the Conference. The "Beijing +5" review, entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for 21st Century", took place at the 23rd Special Session of the UN General Assembly on 5-10 June, 2000 in New York. Governments reaffirmed their commitment to the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In keeping to their promise, governments, NGOs at the national, regional and international levels and civil society organizations have continued to work towards the improvement of the rights of women. Despite the progress made; the objectives of the Convention largely remain to be achieved.

It is interesting to note that government at different times had tried to proffer some solutions to the problem of rights/emancipation of women especially on socio-political and economic grounds by introducing women-friendly poverty-alleviation programmes like Better Life for Rural Women Programme (BLFRWP), Family Support Programme (FSP), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Adult Education Programmes and many others. The paradox has been that despite these programmes, no dramatic changes have taken place to ameliorate the situation of women so that they can contribute in fighting against poverty in Nigeria.

#### Government Policies on Poverty

Successive governmental efforts at eradicating the endemic poverty in Nigeria date back to pre-independence era. During the period, the colonial administration drew up programmes and

strategies and laid out resources for the first two 10 year development plan 1946 - 1955. The policies were targeted at local processing of raw produce such as groundnuts, palm oil, hides and skin. At independence, the periods between 1962 - 1968, 1970 - 1974, 1975 - 1980 and 1981 - 1985 were designed by various governments to provide basic infrastructure, diversify the economy, reduce the level of unemployment, achieve dynamic self-sustaining growth and raise the living standard of people. Many of these programmes include operation feed the Nation (OFN) in 1977, Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE) in 1977, Green Revolution in 1980, etc. The OFN and Green Revolution were established to boost agricultural production and efficiency in the general performance of the agricultural sector. FCPE was set up to reduce mass illiteracy at the grassroots level. Most of the programmes made some laudable impacts by enhancing the quality of life of many people but were not antipoverty measures. In essence, government only showed concern for poverty reduction indirectly.

However, the programmes could not be sustained because of political will and commitment, policy instability and insufficient involvement of the poor people in these programmes (CBN Enugu Zone, 1998).

#### Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)

The conscious policy effort by government towards poverty alleviation began with the SAP. The period was bedeviled with economic crisis that



worsened the quality of life in Nigeria. The government through the assistance of the World Bank/IMF introduced SAP to check the crisis.

However, the implementation of the programme further worsened the living standard of many Nigerians especially the poor people. In quick reaction to tackle the crisis, the government designed and implemented many poverty alleviation programmes between 1986 and 1993 under the guided deregulation of the economy. The impact of these programmes on poverty alleviation recorded degree of success. Example, establishment of the Directorate of food, Road and Rural infrastructure (DFRRI) was not only a departure from the previous programmes but complementarily associated basic needs such as food, shelter, potable water, road construction etc. DFRRI could not achieve many of its objectives. In fact, it was over ambitious in scope, steeped in corruption, lack of standards for project harmonization and effective mechanisms for coordination among the three tiers of government (CBN Enugu Zone, 1998). National Directorate of Employment (NDE)

The NDE established on October 19, 1986 was meant to combat mass-unemployment and articulate policies aimed at promoting skill acquisition, self employment and labour intensive potentials. Its programme was not only on unemployment and vacancies but also engaged with designing employment programmes in the country. No doubt, NDE has trained more than two million unemployed and provided business

training for not less than 400,000 Nigerians (Oyemoni, 2003). The directorate however suffers from poor funding and as such could not cope with the needs of the ever increasing number of job applicants in Nigeria.

People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN)

The PBN was established in 1990 to encourage savings and provide credit facilities for the poor-people who could not ordinarily access such loans from the orthodox banking system. In a similar manner, Community Banks (CB) were set up to provide banking facilities for rural people and to support micro-enterprises in urban areas. The two banking schemes had some successes. Example, PBN disbursed up to N1.7 billion as in-house loans from funds derived from the Federal Government and N0.9 billion as loans from funds provided by the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP).

However, both the banking schemes had a high degree of problems. Their external audits recorded a huge loss of over 80 percent due to corruption and mismanagement. The audit reports also showed that some funds were trapped in distressed and liquidated banks (Oyemoni, 2003).

Family Support Programme (FSP)

It was established to provide health care delivery, child welfare, youth development and improved nutritional status to families in rural areas. In a similar objective, the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was set up to provide credit for agricultural

production and processing and small-scale industries through cooperative societies in rural and urban areas. These programmes were further designed to create employment opportunities at ward levels, encourage the design and manufacture of plants, machinery and equipment as well as provide opportunities for the training of village-based business operators. Although, both FSP and FEAP were designed to improve the quality of life of rural dwellers, they were bedeviled by several malpractices including the non supervision and monitoring of loans and projects by the participating banks. Also fabricators in connivance with the beneficiaries inflate cost of equipment and provision of substandard equipment as well as poor loan recovery.

#### Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP)

PAP was set up in 2000 to urgently create jobs for the unemployed in the face of increasing youth restiveness. The projects participates were to stimulate economic activities and improve the environment. The participants engaged in direct labour activities such as patching of potholes, vegetation control along high-ways, maintenance of public building and environmental sanitation (Oyemoni, 2003). The implementation of PAP generated public outcry and was accused of shoddiness and corruption. Subsequently, the government had to set up a panel committee headed by Prof. Abdullahi to review the programme. Problems identified with the programme included over centralization, over politicization, irregular payment, uncoordinated management as well as

high-level corruption (Oyemoni, 2003). Thereafter, the committee came up with the blueprint recommending National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). NAPEP was established in 2001 and involved all stakeholders in poverty eradication in Nigeria namely the federal, state and local governments, civil society organizations, research institutions, the organized private sector, women groups and concerned individuals (Okoye and Onyukwu, 2007). NAPEP aimed to address the aspects of absolute poverty and to eradicate them. The stakeholders recognized that certain fundamental reasons were responsible for the inadequacy of antipoverty measures over the years and they include the absence of a policy framework, inadequate involvement of stakeholders, poor implementation arrangements and lack of proper co-ordination. All of these seem to have received attention in designing NAPEP and to make it difference from all past efforts. The mandate is to monitor and coordinate all poverty eradication efforts in order to harmonize and ensure better delivery, maximum impact and effective utilization of available resources. Effort to eradicate poverty, the government arranged NAPEP into four schemes. These are Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructure Development (RIDS), Social Welfare Schemes (SOWESS) and the National Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS).

Accordingly, the structure and process of NAPEP are dynamic with varied windows for engaging a diverse array of stakeholder interests. In fact,

without these interests (Monitors, investors, farmers, researchers, coordinators financial experts etc), the NAPEP machinery would collapse. The question is given its structure, good intentions and enunciation of measures towards poverty reduction, can NAPEP be able to assist Nigeria meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which is reducing poverty to half by the year 2015? Evidently, the NAPEP blueprint has properly addressed the problems that hindered the previous initiatives, but it is not sufficient conditions for poverty reduction and to meet the MDGs. NAPEP has some lacuna that already devalues the programme delivery. The way forward is to identify some of the problems that have not been sufficiently covered in the blueprint.

#### Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that we have adopted in this study is Liberal Feminism. Mary Wollstonecraft is a founding mother of feminism in her most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Some of the torchbearers of liberal feminism were Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Harriet Tubman, John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor and Eleanor Roosevelt. Liberal Feminism is a syncretism of two major ideas: Liberalism and Feminism. The basic tenets of Liberal feminism are equality, justice, freedom and liberty. These values are not fundamentally different from the values of Liberalism; rather Liberal Feminism goes a step further to use a pro-active approach. The pro-active approach of Liberal Feminism ensures that these values of

Liberalism are actually enthroned and defended in contemporary society regardless of sex and within both the public and private spheres.

Liberalism generically prefers to judge the extent of social justice from the perspective of the individual rather than the society. This is largely determined by the extent of freedom allowed the individual in order to demonstrate his particular virtues and capabilities. Liberalism in general terms believes in and makes for a good society. Bryson (1972) asserts that Liberalism sees a good society as one which promotes the basic values of individual dignity, equality, autonomy and self-fulfillment. It accepts the ideal of creating a society which maximizes the individual autonomy and in which all individuals have an equal opportunity to pursue their own interests as they perceive them. It recognizes the worth and dignity of every individual, justice and liberty which are upheld by the associated legal system and ascribes rights to persons on the basis of their capacity to reason.

Others examined the relationship in the family and to some extent fell back on arguments of social convenience and men's superior strength to justify the continued subordination of women. While they saw men as independent and rational individuals capable of perceiving and pursuing their own self-interest, men were seen as weak creatures, unable to reason, and must be bound tightly to the family and therefore had no political rights. In real terms, liberal rationality condones discrimination by reason. This is a serious shortcoming because man is a social being and is made up not only by the intellectual aspects of his being, but also important are

his physical, emotional and spiritual aspects. Moreover, the ingredients for reasoning are socially determined and women already sequestered to the domestic sphere cannot be expected to display reasoning prowess in the public sphere. Consequently, liberalism in its generic form is incapable of supporting our analytical lasers especially as it pertains to this research on women discrimination and empowerment.

Liberalism per se treats women as part and parcel of citizens of a particular country and there is no special attention to the unique rights of women, in other words, sex is not a significant factor in liberal theory. However, it is a fact that in the larger society there is not one block of citizens, there are certain forms of discrimination based on religion, race and sex amongst others. Consequently, Liberal Feminists argue pointedly for the recognition of the status, rights and privileges of women who by the very fact of their gender are exposed to inherent discriminatory practices in the society (Ogbaji, 2012).

The over-bearing index in this matter is that women are confined to the private sphere. In this private sphere, they are looked upon as accessories to men in the public sphere. Thus they are not exposed to the cross currents of leadership, education, employment, entrepreneurship and even religion. This non-exposure of women to the public sphere is looked upon superficially as being protective of women-the weaker sex. But under the guise of this protectionism, is a total disregard of the rights and feelings of women as an important segment of society. This has placed women in disadvantage when seeking for any position of relevance in the public sphere.

Consequently there is a clear tilt in the balance on the scale of rights, privileges, hopes and aspirations in favour of men (Ogbaji, 2012).

This is a problem however because men would naturally resist efforts by women to achieve political equality. But this problem is surmountable for we have seen many concessions made to women in Europe, United States and even in some parts of Africa where reforms in family, employment and educational provisions as well as for suffrage have gradually been met even though the citadels of power are jealously guarded by men (Lovenduski, 1986; Iweriebo 1992). The United Nations has been at the forefront of these achievements for women the world over. In sum, the ultimate goal of Liberal Feminism is to incorporate women fully into the mainstream of contemporary society. They seek to eliminate sex-biased discrimination in all areas of life and to guarantee women equal opportunities with men to define and pursue their interests.

#### The Social Exclusion Theory of Poverty

The social exclusion theory is predicated on poverty resulting from people who are excluded from effective participation in a society's activities due to segregation. This theory which was officially adopted in a World Summit which took place in Copenhagen in 1995 holds that certain people within the society become more vulnerable to poverty because of discrimination. This approach which has been described as "people centred" as against "goods centred" is characterized by three paradigms namely: solidarity,

specialization and monopoly (Anyanwu, 1997). The solidarity paradigm stresses moral integration and cultural boundary in which those who do not belong suffer exclusion. Specialization paradigm emphasizes the interdependence of specialized spheres of the society in terms of exchange of goods and services. Here, the conduct of individuals depends on interests and capabilities such that the social structure is based on a specific form of division of labour which determines the extent of individual interaction. In the monopoly paradigm, different interest groups based on class, status and political power exert control over available resources. By so doing, they create inequality and form monopoly groups who tend to perpetuate power and privileges through social closure and labour market segregation thereby enforcing exclusion. This means the poor are not the problem but rather, the inaccessibility of realistic opportunities as a result of exclusion that prevents them from getting out of poverty. Nigeria's advocacy and promotion of community based poverty alleviation programmes emphasized by the nation's National Economic Development Strategy (NEEDS) as well as formation of self-help projects by communities and NGOs are aimed at tackling poverty that results from the claim of this theory.

#### Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examines the issue of poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria and how they are being used to achieve national development neglecting the empowerment of female gender – an asset which Nigeria has in abundance. Experience has shown that the past

poverty alleviation programmes were unable to involve the beneficiaries in their planning and implementation. The commendable feature of NAPEP is the involvement of beneficiaries in the identification of projects and programmes. Ironically, it is a situation where though the beneficiaries had their capacity enhanced, they were not sufficiently empowered to become masters of their own through lucrative engagements. If this persists, the advantage of such partnership may be lost and thereby discouraging potential beneficiaries. In essence, the poor not only should be involved in the design and implementation of any programme meant for them but should be empowered financially and material wise. This is an urgent task because an increasing poverty level poses a direct challenge to the nation's economic stability and development.

We recommend that there is need for the leaders to radically depart from the culture of corruption and mismanagement and commit themselves to good governance. In essence, EFCC and ICPC along with other anti-graft agencies should be strengthened and made truly independence. There should be a clear government policy on food, women empowerment, clothing and housing in dealing with poverty alleviation. Agricultural products should be subsidized with low interest rate to farmers. The present interest rate is too high and thus anti-poverty alleviation. There is need to restructure the prevailing socio-political and economic environment that is not conducive to sustainable development. The mono-economy should be replaced with diversified economy to give room for massive employment and social amenities. Public policy has a central role to play in

the fight against poverty. Thus, government policies and implementation should be people-oriented and deep rooted. This would avoid misplacement of priorities in the development schemes. As such, any future poverty alleviation programme should have serious and identifiable efforts at empowering the beneficiaries especially women.

Government should improve more on human resources development. The successive governments have not done much in raising the human resources development index hence the rising poverty rate in the country. Perceptible indices have indicated that many Nigerians are poor and about half of the population goes to bed hungry every night. Corruption and mismanagement have always stood in the way to frustrate all government efforts at confronting poverty. This is because of the absence of institutional mechanisms to regulate the behaviour of those in authority hence room for looting and exploiting the nation's wealth into their private purse. The belief is that they are above the law. Moreso, the government still treats poverty and corruption as separate rather than integral components of the same strategy. Additionally, all the policies and programme of poverty alleviation in the country have been quite beatific on paper and hardly people-oriented and deep-rooted. The present NAPEP has failed to produce the desired results because of the inactivity of strengthening the programme and lack of identifiable efforts at empowering the beneficiaries.

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