

Women as Change Agent for Sustainable Development in the 21st Century in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated women as change agent for sustainable development in the 21st century Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study; why are women the change agent in the 21st century in Nigeria for sustainable development? What are the hindrances that negate their active participation in sustainable development in Nigeria? descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consists of 5.6 million women in South-East Nigeria. The sample size was 400 women. The sampling technique adopted was multi stage sampling and simple random sampling. Data collected were analyzed using mean. The findings of the study showed that women in 21st century Nigeria are change agents for sustainable development because they possess characteristics such as community advocacy roles, promotion and grassroots mobilizations to achieve different change that could rob off on the socio-economic life of the people, contribution to the economy through business both at retail, wholesale and production level, care for the family, nurture and play a significant role in community building, mobilization skills, teaching skills, disciplinarian skills, disburser and manager of funds in the home, caregivers, educators, teacher, organizer, and home making. It was concluded among others that the role of women as agents of sustainable development seems to be more potent, effective and holds the possibilities of fostering a positive change that span the different areas for sustainable development. From the foregoing evidences, it is safe to deduce that through the use of women as agents for sustainable development, it is easier and gives a better result in the 21st century Nigeria that is battling with a lot of cultural, religious and political inclinations against women.

Key Words: Change, Sustainable Development and Women

INTRODUCTION

The importance of Education cannot be over emphasizes.. Education is defined as that force which plays a key role in shaping and changing populations into productive and creative workforces, tolerant communities, and socially-responsible citizens, and this is why government in every nation invests heavily in education as the pre-requisite for change (Bayley, 2022). Education is also conceptualized as the most important agency for learning social values, without which values will not be learnt. Education is the process through which knowledge is acquired, skills are developed, values, and traits are internalized through experiences(Kumar, 2015).It is the most important instrument for change. It brings about change in every ramifications.

Importantly, education is the most powerful weapon which one can use to change the world, improves the lives of others and leaves your community and world better than it is found. It is the education of humans, both men and women that empower them; therefore change is a product of education. Most importantly, one may not be able to conceptualize change properly without tracing its root to education which has been described as the driving force of change. Changes drive societal progress at all levels of human existence, improved standard of living, more equitable access to resources and the ability of the society to adapt to new

circumstances and challenges. Change is a concept which is closely knitted to education and without education, most change projects would not succeed as education prepares the people for a positive attitude towards change projects. In some other contexts, one can argue that various reforms in history were initiated in the social areas among the people, but due to lack of education, the reforms remain ineffective in practice. Change has therefore been discussed and conceptualized by different scholars. Change means to make something different from what it used to be, or to make a situation different from what the situation used to be before a change occurred (Dunfey, 2023). These changes occur over time, and have a lasting impact and long term consequences in the lives of the people and culture. However change could be positive or negative; a positive change is the type of change which results into a beneficial outcome which should be significant and measurable. Changes which are termed positive change must have a measurable and significant effect on the standard of living of the people and their socio-economic existence. On the other hand, a negative change is the type of change which leads to chaos, losses and does not achieve the result for which it is set out to achieve.

Positive Change is discussed as a pre-planned action which aims at transforming patterns of thought, behavior, relationships, institutions, and structure to generate beneficial outcomes for individuals, communities, organizations, society, and/or the environment beyond the benefits for the instigators of such transformations (Novar-Carzaro & Priede-Bergamini, 2021). The general outcome of a positive change tend to have a very profound effect on the people as it positively changes their fortunes as regards per capita income, health, education, social behavior and standard of living cum economic prosperity. More precisely in the 21st century Nigeria, where the need to meet the target of 2030 sustainable development goals has been on the front burner of government and non government action and discussion, positive change has been on the drive to meeting this development goals. Sustainable development gives a framework for positive change and one can never be separated from each other if that will be achieved in the 21st century Nigeria (Thomas, 2022).

Nonetheless, the aim of positive change is to achieve sustainable development. Sustainable development is explained as the organizing principle that aims to meet human needs at present without compromising the needs of the future (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2021). Though divided into human, social, economic and environmental, sustainable development seeks to improve the all round living conditions of people for whom it is designed and affect positively their economic, health, education, per capita income and other standard of living. However, and whichever way sustainable development is discussed, it is intertwined with sustainable development goals as both pursues the same goals which is to bring about a positive change in the life of the people.

Sustainable Development Goals are those goals which 193 countries came together In September 2015, at the United Nations to adopt and commit to a long-term, comprehensive strategy to tackle the world's greatest challenges related to global sustainable development. The result was the SDGs, a list of 17 goals to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all by 2030. As outlined in their policy paper, the SDG are no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace Justice and strong institutions, and partnership for the goals (Sheila-Naah, 2023). The Sustainable Development Goals are important for effective social change because they all interconnect, incorporating social, economic and environmental sustainability, and is a global blueprint for dignity, peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future. Yet, it is important to point out that every society which aims to achieve development that is smart and sustainable must carry both genders along in their drive to achieve such goals not with standing the sentiment on women.

A woman is an adult female being on the surface with a whole lot of peculiarities in relation to a man.

Women has been described as a potent form of change agents because women bring unique perspectives, knowledge, and skills to sustainable development goals intervention (Eqan,2023). It has been also been observed that women are very essential for achieving a sustainable future, and also make major contribution in sustainable resource management. More so, women are at the forefront of community advocacy, promotion and grassroots mobilizations to achieve different change that could rob off on the socio-economic life of the people (United Nations Report, 2023).In the society, women play crucial role because they are the backbone of the families and are crucial to the growth and development of communities (Fawad,2023). Other roles of women include their contribution to the economy through business both at retail, wholesale and production level as more number of women is starting their own business than men; women apart from providing for their families for feeding, they also help to care for the family, nurture and play a significant roles in community building, mobilization skills, teaching skills , disciplinarian skills, disburser and manager of funds in the home, caregivers, educators, teacher, organizer, and home making (Fawad, 2023).Despite all their features, they seem not to be carried along in the development of the country.

It has been twenty-eight years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action received unanimous support at the United Nations to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of humanity (Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, 2023). In

Other sixty countries, they have made laws that allow women to participate in politics and have made mandatory percentage for appointment of women into government executive councils. Other continents has developed a network for the advancement of women cause; for instance in Europe, Women in Development Europe (WIDE) consists of gender specialists and human right activists whose work is grounded on women's right as the basis for the development of a more just and democratic world order.

In United Kingdom, women have made efforts which has resulted in the 5-5 policy which is women full time and effective participation in politics, and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and other areas of leadership in the United Kingdom (British Council Report,2023). In Northern Europe, Sweden is the only country to score above 90% on the women political power indicator which is share of women minister, Member of Parliament, and women in regional assemblies. Other member of European states such as Slovenia and France have made major strides in given women a voice in political participation and representation for women.

In Nigeria, the situation is not encouraging due to the poor and inactive participation of women in Nigeria politics, yet, there are other issues which have continued to drawback women role in development, and these include gender imbalance in some certain fields as regards payments and remunerations despite a woman and man having same job role, lack of access to education for the girl child, violence against women, and lack of health care. Despite these persistent issues which affect an average woman in Nigeria to meet developmental goals, there are other more serious ones which include all forms of gender discrimination which is a pervasive issue that affects women in areas of their lives, and this discrimination stem occur in the workplace, politics and social settings; Sexual Violence against women in the society is a recurring decimal and has continued to be a barrier to women empowerment and development, and the various kind of violence women experience in Nigeria include domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment, and rape which all have a long term physical and psychological effect on the women; lack of access to education is another serious problem that affect the average Nigerian woman negatively as women access to education has remained less accessible which cause them to contribute very little to societal growth; lack of access to health care is another recurring issue which results in poor health outcomes for women and limits their ability to contribute to society.

Women participation in national development as far as Nigeria is concerned has been negated by patriarchy, culture and religious inclinations which constitutes a problem for women participation in actions that could bring sustainable development projects (Oluymi,2021). It is reported that over 51% of women in Nigeria

take part in active election voting but they are still under-represented both in elective and appointment positions. Available data indicate that Nigeria women constitute little below 10% of elective and appointment positions. Available data shows that Nigeria is still grappling with attaining the 30% affirmative action of the Beijing Conference and the recommendations of the National Gender Policy of 35% of representation of women in Nigeria politics (National Bureau of Statistics,2023).In the political sphere, there has been cases of discrimination against women in the parliament of Nigeria senate; for example on the floor of the Nigeria senate, a male Senator threatened a female Senator that he would abuse and rape her- such cases abound in other chambers of the parliament were women voices were subdued and not allowed to make contributions. In terms of elective positions, women at the political parties are screened out from contesting primary elections in their parties on the ground of being a woman while the lucky ones that scale through the party primaries were rigged out at the general elections and were attacked with thugs. Thus, the need to examine the place of women as change agents in Nigeria in the 21st Century for sustainable Development can never be over emphasized.

Research Question

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. Why are women the change agent in the 21st century in Nigeria for sustainable development? This is to find out the features to distinguish women as change agents in 21st century Nigeria.
2. What are the hindrances that negate their active participation in sustainable development in Nigeria? This question seeks to find out the possible factors that impinge the role of women as agents for change in sustainable development.

METHOD

This section outlined and discussed the methodology for this study. Methodology means “a set of principles or technicalities which a scientific study follows to yield reliable results” (Adepoju, 2003, p.47). It is a series of systematic steps followed by an empirical research with the view to optimizing precision on one hand and minimizing error on the other

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consist Nigerian women with a total of 50,000,000 according to statistics from National Bureau of Statistics (2022). The sample size was 400 .the sample size for various population ranges as worked out by Israel (2006) which states that for a population of up to 1000,000, that 384 sample size is perfect at 95% confidence level; The 384 sample size is thus approximated to 400 based on the maxim as held by Nwokoye (2018).

Simple random sampling technique were adopted to select 16 states from 36 states in Nigeria , and the selected states are Anambra , Imo, Enugu, Cross River, Edo, Rivers, Kogi, Kwara, Kano, Katsina, Gombe, Taraba, Adamawa, Jigawa, Delta and Bauchi States respectively. In the selected 16 states, simple random sampling technique was used to select 25 women at the State Secretariat for the study.

The researcher’s instrument of data collection is a structured questionnaire which comprised of two parts. Part A of the questionnaire contained the demographic variables while the part B consists of questions pertaining to the research questions. The questionnaire was validated by three experts; to make sure the questionnaires is valid to elicit the expected data.

To establish the reliability of the instrument, trial testing method was used on 50 women of Ghana outside the study area. The reliability test was calculated using the Cronbach Alpha for each of the sub sections. At the end of the analysis, the scores obtained were 0.80 for why are women change agent in 21st century Nigeria and 0.81 for factors that negates women roles as change agents in 21st century Nigeria.

From the test results, it indicated a high reliability of the instrument. The part A and B of the instrument has a four point response mode which is Strongly Agreed (SA=4), Agree (A=3), Disagree (D=2), Strongly Disagree (SD). The questionnaires were administered to the respondents through the help of 10 trained research assistants who were paired for each of the 10 faculties. Administration of the questionnaire was done during the first semester 2022/2023 academic session. All copies of the questionnaire distributed were collected back because of the physical administration of the questionnaires. Mean was used to analyze the data, and the four points response mode used, informed the use of mean 2.50 as the cut off point for decision. The decision rule was that mean scores of items 2.50 and above were regarded as positives while mean score below 2.50 were regarded as negative.

RESULTS

Research Question One:

Why are women the change agent in the 21st century Nigeria?

The answer to this is presented in table 1

S/N	Items	\bar{x}	Dec
1	Women are change agent in 21 st century Nigeria because they are mobilizers?	2.69	Agreed
2	Women are change agent in 21 st century Nigeria because they are disciplinarians?	3.0	Agreed
3	Women are change agent in 21 st century Nigeria because they are educators?	3.10	Agreed
4	Women are change agent in 21 st century Nigeria because they are caregivers	3.20	Agreed
5	Women are change agent in 21 st century Nigeria because they are community builders?	2.81	Agreed
6	Women are change agent in 21 st century Nigeria because they possess teaching skills	2.90	Agreed
7	Women are change agent in 21 st century Nigeria to because they are home makers?	3.0	Agreed
8	Women are change agent in 21 st century Nigeria because they are community advocates?	2.75	Agreed
9	Women are change agent in 21 st century Nigeria because they are contributors to the economy?	3.12	Agreed
10	Women are change agent in 21 st century Nigeria because they are listeners?	2.78	Agreed
Total Cluster		29.3/10 2.93	Agreed

Data in table 1 showed that respondents affirmed positively to the items with a mean score above 2.5. Stated clearly, the cluster mean of 2.93 indicates that respondents agreed to the fact that women are change agents

in the 21st century Nigeria because of the following features women took care of the family, nurture and play a significant roles in community building, mobilization skills, teaching skills , disciplinarian skills, disburser and manager of funds in the home, caregivers, educators, teacher, organizer, and home makers.

Research Question2: What are the hindrances that negate their active participation in sustainable development in Nigeria?

Table2: The following are the effects of women as agents of SDG in 21st century.

S/N	Items	\bar{x}	Dec
1	Cultural Factors negates women as agent of positive change in 21 st century Nigeria	3.5	Agreed
2	Religious Factors negates women as agent of positive change in 21 st century Nigeria	3.0	Agreed
3	Marginalization negates women as agent of positive change in 21 st century Nigeria	3.1	Agreed
4	Inequality negates women as agent of positive change in 21 st century Nigeria	2.87	Agreed
5	Lack of Political Participation negates women as agent of positive change in 21 st century Nigeria	2.6	Agreed
6	Lack of Education negate women as agent of positive change in 21 st century Nigeria	2.56	Agreed
7	Stigmatization negate women as agent of positive change in 21 st century Nigeria	2.71	Agreed
8	Sexual Violence against women Factors negate women as agent of positive change in 21 st century Nigeria?	3.0	Agreed
Cluster		23.34/8 2.93	Agreed

Data in table 2 shows that respondents affirmed that there are numerous factors that negate women participation as change agents in sustainable development. The cluster mean of 2.93 indicates that respondents agreed to the fact that women participation as change agents for sustainable development is negated by cultural, religious factors; lack of political participation, segregation, sexual violence, limited access to education and inequality of all kinds.

DISCUSSION

The finding of the study came against the backdrop of the research questions, collected and analyzed quantitative data which was obtained through the use of the structured questionnaire. From the analysis which was presented in a descriptive table, the following findings were made;

Women are change agents for sustainable development goals in 21st century Nigeria because of their peculiarities and distinct characteristics which stand them out and these features include community advocacy roles, promotion and grassroots mobilizations to achieve different change that could rob off on the socio-economic life of the people , contribution to the economy through business both at retail, wholesale and production level, care for the family, nurture and play a significant roles in community building, mobilization skills, teaching skills , disciplinarian skills, disburser and manager of funds in the home,

caregivers, educators, teacher, organizer, and home making. To support this findings, Ogueri, Nze and Ibhafidon (2022) in their study on women education and sustainable development found that education empower women to a great extent and thus, women empowerment aids sustainable development and other kind of positive developments. Also, another study by Kumar (2013) also found that women education, gender equality, and reduced gender based violence and total support plays a very significant role in increasing the chances of achieving sustainable development. Similarly, Batool, Imran and Rehman (2022), concurred that the study identified areas of sustainable development where women has become a change agent to include women and husband education, access to and control over economic resources, guarantee of property rights, economic independence, enhanced decision-making capacity; a supportive environment. The study also identified the importance of NGO for women empowerment and in achieving sustainable development goals. Another study by Lyndsay (2013) also supports that women as change agents are effective and helps boost the self esteem and self confidence of women in the society.

Furthermore in line with the second research question, it was revealed that there are several factors that negates women strive to act as change agents in 21st century Nigeria. The findings specifically indicates that inequality, gender imbalance, marginalization, lack of education, disproportionate economic empowerment, religious inclinations, cultural barriers and other factors has continued to negate women as change agents in Nigeria. Studies such as that of Chaudhary and Dutt (2022) found that segregation of spheres delineating gender roles for men and women reinforces notions of leadership and contributes significantly to the factors that negate women roles as change agents in sustainable development. Another study by Kongolo (2009) identifies factors that limit women as change agents in a male dominated sphere to include high late of illiteracy, poverty, segregation and marginalization of women, influence of cultural and religious values, lack of government assistance, and lack of information.

CONCLUSIONS

From the study it is clear that the role of women in the drive as change agents towards achieving goals of sustainable development goals can never be over emphasized as existing data from the present and previous studies concurs that the role of women as agents of sustainable development seems to be more potent, effective and holds the possibilities of fostering a positive change that span the different areas of the sustainable development goals. Thus women make result oriented sustainable development goals in the 21st century Nigeria because of their peculiar characteristics such as community building, mobilization skills, teaching skills, disciplinarian skills, disburser and manager of funds in the home, caregivers, educators, teacher, organizer, and home making which makes it easier for them to achieve sustainable

Implications of the Study

The implication of this study points to the fact that if women are not placed at the helm of development as change agents, that the development will not be potent and will have little or no effect on the masses as it is only through their distinct characteristics that such development goals will be sustainable and have a measurable effect. More so, in a situation where men are at the helm in developmental projects, there is a very high possibility that womens voice will not be heard. and they will be marginalized and suppressed while the issue of violence against women will intensify. There will also be lopsided development. The potentials of the women will not be tapped as they remain sidelined.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need for government to prioritize the use of women as the key change agents in sustainable

development actions, sensitizations and programs since empirical evidence shows that they are effective change agents.

2. In a bid to achieve the goals of sustainable development, social welfare offices in countries and other concerned ministries adopt the policy paper of women group conferences sponsored by United Nations and other Non Governmental Organizations as it could be very potent and promising coming from women group.
3. A study of this nature is replicated using triangulation method to seek the view of the women folks through in depth interview in other to make a more rounded enquiry.
4. Government prioritize and develop programs that prepare women as change agents in the drive for sustainable development goals through trainings and retraining of women to get them ready to effect sustainable developments from the national level to the grassroots.

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