The Historical Development of Women Career in Corporate Sector in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, the dominant international view has been that housekeeping and childcare are the primary functions of the woman because nurturing and childcare are viewed as feminine traits. Thus, any other work place is not the concern area of women and that career and professional advancement is deemed unimportant to them Eun, (2011). Historically, women entered workforce during the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, while men took off to serve the Army. With the passage of time, with decreases in job security and wages for males which have negatively impacted the ability of the sole breadwinner family model, there was increase pressure for women to work outside the home in a dual-earner family model (Setsuya, 2013). In Nigeria, involvement of women career in corporate sector gained momentum in the latter half of the 1980s as Omu & Makinwa (1987) argued, Women’s involvement became more pronounced in 1995 as a result of the effective participation of Nigerian women in the international conference on women in Beijing, China. However, this article reviews the development of working women in various corporate sectors in Nigeria through the use of secondary sources data because in today’s world, companies and industries require women to control a majority of their activities, since women tend to bring higher efficiency, effectiveness and peculiarity to the work they engage in. Suggestions were made on how to encourage women career participation, because their convincing power skyrockets the corporate atmosphere and their participation are also of immense benefits to the family budget.

Keywords: Feminine Traits, Professional Advancement, Companies, Career

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, during the pre-colonial era women mainly contributed to the sustenance of the kin groups as at this period, suffice to mention that, the economy was at subsistence level basically and women were involved in its participation effectively. Similarly, Nigeria women substantially contributed to the production and distribution of goods and services apart from mainly being mothers, wives and being in charge of domestic sector. Far more importantly, women farmed alongside their husbands and children in the agricultural sectors as well as taking part in the production of palm oil and palm kernel. As Attoe (2012) observed, women in pre-colonial Nigeria participated in both long distance and local trade in different parts of the country and also involved fully in the procurement and sale of various food items as well as related commodities.

Significantly, Nigeria women at this period involved also in pottery making, weaving, food processing, traded with the aid of their children and sometimes these women supplied the means of sustenance for entire households. In addition women provided health care and spiritual services in the real sense of it; most traditional religions feature immortal females as
goddesses. During any religious activities, women provided songs, music and dances needed. Added to all these, women officiated as priestesses, diviners, healers, traditional birth attendant and often times as custodians of sanctuaries for gods and goddesses. Education this time around was functional, it enabled women to obtain a skill in order to earn a living as noted by Awe (1992) women in pre-colonial Nigeria were an integral of the political set up of their communities.

In the colonial period, it was a different ball game as the economic was an export oriented one and it undermined seriously the prestige of the traditional occupation of Nigerian women. Historically, many of the smaller markets hitherto dominated by women gradually disintegrated due to the emergence of expatriate firms such as Lever Brothers, United African Company (UAC) John Holt and host of others. It is instructive to note that, education this time around also was functional but only that the curricula emphasized religious instruction and clerical skills for boys and domestic sciences for girls. Put succinctly, technological and scientific based education was not encouraged. Thus the curricula for girls enabled them to become good house wives, rather than income earners.

It was not until the post- colonial period that Nigeria women began to play very active roles in diverse areas of the nation’s development especially in the corporate sector.

WOMEN’S CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN CORPORATE SECTOR IN NIGERIA

After the attainment of political independent, Nigerian women began to be involved in the burden of food production, contribution between 50 percent and 70 percent of Nigeria’s food requirements. Suffice to mention that while the situation in the public sector remained unsatisfactory, it was marked different from what had obtained during the pre-colonial and colonial times. By 1965 only 6.9 percent of the salaried workforces were women, by 1970, 8.7 percent of the total number of established staff in the Federal Civil Service were women. Ten years after, the percentage of women had risen to 12.6 percent.

Be that as it may, it is an established fact that women as a person is an agent of reproduction of life itself this therefore, places her in the position of the life blood of the entire humanity as expressed by Jekayinfa, (1999) she is a mother of the human race, as mothers and wives, women do exert considerable impact on the productivity of male worker Jeminiwa, (1995). Significantly, most of the women’s contribution had not been recognized until when the United Nations declared the decade for women (1976-1985) making it mandatory on governments to focus on issues of women as an integral component of national development. In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Invariably, subsequent conferences on women were held in Copenhagen, Denmark 1980, Nairobi in Kenya 1985 and Beijing in China 1995.

The legal system inherited from the colonial era placed many obstacles on the way of women’s self- advancement and participation in corporate sector Dadirep (1995). This partly could have accounted for low level of women’s education in post-colonial Nigeria. According to the population reference bureau, in 1981 only 6 percent of adult Nigerian women were literate. By 1979, 72.9 percent of urban girls and 80.08 percent of rural girls were not attending school. Further afield, University admission figures also reflect a low percentage of female entries in the new era. Successive post- colonial government have encouraged female education and expanded educational facilities for girls.

It should be noted that, the role of women in Nigeria’s post 1960 corporate sector has not been reflected sufficiently. However, in Southern Nigeria, politically women already had the
franchise. Thus in 1960, Mrs. Wuraola Esan from Western Nigeria became the first female member of the Federal Parliament. In year 1961, Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo contested election in Aba Urban North constituency under the National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) platform and won, becoming a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly until 1966. Mrs. Janet N. Mokelu and Mrs. Ekpo A. Young also contested election, after winning she became members of the Eastern House of Assembly.

Similarly, in the Second Republic (1973-1983) a few Nigerian women won election into the House of Representatives of the national level. Some of these women were Mrs. J.C Eze of the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP). Mrs. V.O Nnaji also of NPP and Mrs. Abiola Babatope of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) within this same period, there are two female appointed Federal Ministers like Chief (Mrs.) Janet Akinrinade who was Minister for Internal Affairs and Mrs. Adenike Ebun Oyagbola Minister for National Planning. Mrs. Francesca Yetunde Emmanuel was the only female permanent secretary (first in the Federal Ministry of Establishment and later Federal Ministry of Health). Some people have identified some areas of women’s career involvement in corporate sector in Nigeria, Mabogunje (1991) areas such as education, health, economy, culture politics, agriculture, enhanced environment, quality and peaceful co-existence. For instance, Nigerian women activity involved in agricultural sector, in a study of women’s participation in agricultural production in Northern Nigeria’s rural areas.

Ogungbile & Olukosi (1999) noted that, women were active participants because about 90 percent of them had farming as their occupation (both arable and pastoral). The general patrilineal system of inheritance enabled most women in Northern Nigeria have access to land through their husbands who acquired it through inheritance. In this part of the country, women who had farming of their own had half the sizes of the men’s farm. They planted the same type of crops like the man. Another notable field where Nigerian women had excelled career wise on corporate sector is trading especially in the bulking, transportation, exchange and distribution of food stuff. In the Southern parts of the country, period markets are held every fourth, fifth or eight day where food stuff from farm is bought by rural women and sold to urban women, to a very large extent, so regular and efficient has this process been that most urban Nigerians are not even aware of how food stuff ends up in their kitchens. The same efficiency characterizes women’s participation in the trade in imported food items and beverages. Far more importantly, Nigerian women have been prominent in the processing and public preparation of food items generally in various crafts and cottage industries as well as in the provision of various services such as hair dressing, laundry and most of others which could be categorized as informal sector.

In the modern sector however, Nigerian women could be seen picking up career at all levels in offices, banks, social services, nursing, radio, television and the professions (teaching, engineering, environmental design, pharmacy and medicine). This trend resulted from women’s secondary schools, teacher colleges and in the 1980s women holding approximately one fifth of University places.

Prior to the 1970s, the informal sector was not considered as a separate sector, their activities were classified variously as traditional crafts and petty trade in the subsistence sector or as small scale industries within the formal sector or corporate sectors and treated as such (Nwaka, 2005). The non-corporate sector or informal sector is part of an economy that is not taxed, monitored by any form of government or included in any gross national product (GNP) unlike the formal economy. Fapohunda (2012) contends that, in developing countries, some 60% of the potential working populations earn their living in the non-corporate sector.
The sector is the only way to earn a living for people who are self-employed outside the formal economy and not on anyone’s pay roll.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article explains the development of career women in corporate sector in Nigeria the constraints of women in the sector and how employment opportunity are often denied women because of family responsibility and the general phenomenon of relegating women to childcare only borne out of social and cultural barriers.

Undoubtedly, too many Nigerian women largely live in poverty, lacking access to basic education, decent nutrition, adequate health and social services which the development process ought to provide. However, the increasing visibility of women is partly an outcome of social and political movements that have championed women’s rights. It is worthy of note to identify with women’s contribution to the political economy through feminist scholars input.

Therefore, it is recommended that more employment opportunities should be made available to women both in formal and informal sectors. It is to be understood that a career woman is a woman who pursues a career to make a living for personal advancement instead of being a housewife without cogent occupation. Women’s involvement in the corporate sector should be increased, it is imperative to address this issue because of the high labor absorption capacity of the informal sector and the need to increase the level of stimulation of employment opportunities for women since more than before women generally are under pressure to contribute to household income.
REFERENCES


