

WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT, FOOD SECURITY AND ISLAMIC RELIGION: EXPLORATION OF GENDER OPPRESSION IN EASTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In Africa, women are considered as agent of development and custodian of culture and sources of organic food. Their roles in the countryside are invaluable when one examines their inputs in food availability, affordability, accessibility and quality against their male counterpart. Also worth noting is the mobility of males to urban areas where they look for unavailable paid jobs. This paper examines the roles of women in food security and how they lack basic resources to actualise their developmental roles in their communities due to cultural and religious reasons. Access to land and collateral to secure financial help from banks is almost unavailable. To this, they continue to practice farming at the subsistence level. We intend to examine what The Holy Quran says regarding women's rights in a changing world. In trying to examine this, the paper adopts green theory with some flavours of the feminist paradigm and secondary sources of data. A conclusion is drawn that Islamic religion empowers women more than what African culture dictates.

Keywords: Green theory, Food security, Gender discourse, Eastern Nigeria, Islamic religion

Introduction:

Women are known as the agent of food security. In the developed world, women participate not only in reproduction but also in the production, processing, distribution and marketing of food. This has been noted since the 1985 World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya where new research has highlighted the crucial role of women as farm managers and farm workers all over the world. Growing evidence shows that women contributes more to household food security and child nutrition than men (Agnes, et al., 1995). Likewise, in September 1995 there was Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China. This conference provided a milepost for assessing women's progress in food security. (Agnes et al, 1995). Earlier before the two conferences, the international initiatives and efforts had been developed in the 1975 World Conference on Women in Mexico. This conference immensely contributed to greater recognition of women's key participation in rural and other domains of development.

Women in developing countries, in particular, play significant roles in food value chain; but they play these roles despite enormous social, cultural, and economic constraints. In some parts of Africa, women are used as supporting labour by their father, brother or husband (Amusan, Akokuwebe and Odularu, 2021). And they are used majorly during the harvesting period. In Nigeria, the three major ethnic groups are Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo. Both Hausa and Yoruba followed the pattern discussed above. However, in Ibo land, women participate majorly in food production. It has been observed that Ibo men sometimes stay at home while their women are out for farming. Despite these concerted efforts of women in production in Ibo land, they could only practice subsistence farming because women are not yet allowed to inherit from their fathers' properties. Though recent Supreme court Judgement has challenged this tradition. The Supreme Court of Nigeria voided this tradition and custom because it is discriminatory and conflicts

with the provision of the constitution. The Supreme Court held that the practice conflicted with sections 42(1)(a) and (2) of the 1999 Constitution (Okoli et al., 2020, August 26).

Despite this injunction, the tradition remains intact and therefore women are still facing this challenge. This is because some dignitaries in Eastern Nigeria are applauding the judgement like Bishop Nwokolo, others like a prominent monarch in Nsukka and the grand patron of Enugu State Traditional Rulers Council, Igwe Simeon Osi Isido, opposed and condemned the judgement. He said, “the Supreme Court ruling cannot eliminate the custom and practice of the Ibos.” Itodo was of opinion that any attempt to implement such a law in Iboland would incite anarchy and scuffles among several societies (Okoli, et al., 2020). The implication of this is among others, a regard to custom and tradition over court judgment in many of the African systems and an indication of confusing plural legal system that is confusing and instrument in the hands of political leaders (Michaels, 2019; Swenson, 2018).

Meanwhile, in the Holy Quran, women are given a prescribed portion of inheritance like their men counterparts though, in some cases, half of what is given to men. This ratio is premised on the fact that men are expected to take up total domestic finance and that Islam has put women under the care of men whether as a daughter who should be taken care of by her parents or as a wife who should be under her husband with full responsibilities of her upkeep by her spouse. The Holy Quran avers that, “Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth” (Quran4 vs 34).

Considering the role play by women in the Eastern part of Nigeria, the position of tradition towards their inheritance, the position of the Supreme Court on women inheritance in Ibo land, and divergent strands of stakeholders in the region worth academic curiosity. The kernel of this paper is to interrogate measures worth putting in place to address the perceived confusing the sanctity of plural legal system in the Nigerian situation with particular focus on inheritance, food security and land issues. In other words, this paper examines the roles of women in food security and how they lack basic resources to actualise their developmental roles in their communities due to cultural reasons. They do not have access to land and collateral to secure financial help from banks and this makes them continue to

practice farming at the subsistence level. We intend to compare this to what The Holy Quran says regarding women's rights in a changing world. In trying to examine this, this paper adopts green theory with some flavours of the feminist paradigm focussing on secondary sources of data. The green theory speaks of sustainable development, unlike liberal theory. Though it is the core of climate change mitigation and adaptation; it has attributes of feminist theory. After this introduction, the next part of this paper discusses the theoretical framework followed by discourse on women in food production, distribution and marketing. The next part of the paper discusses Islamic religion and women roles in the family and food production. The last part consists of the conclusion and recommendations.

Theoretical framework:

The green theory is one of the critical theory traditions, which challenge the existing relationship between and among people and their environment. It challenges existing socio-political and economic structures. The theory is of environmentalism and addresses political ecology; it equally challenge the mainstream liberal economic and political paradigms. According to Goodin (1992), the distinguishing characteristic of the green theory is its priority given to the ecosystem above human immediate desires. It emphasizes green morality. This means that human material development should be pursued without jeopardizing non-human nature. Green theorists are the advocate of restricting human traditional liberty of which put humans before nature. Rather, nature is now expected to be put before man. That is why this theory is criticized to be an eco-centric and almighty advocate of long-term ecological values and neglect of short-term human interest (Hugh, 2018).

Another aspect of the theory relates to the climate change perspective. This perspective sees the existing nation-state structure as a bye product of a human conspiracy against nature. The political groups called states to exploit nature for short term human interest at the experience of long-term ecosystem relevance. Though the liberalists hardly believe in anthropocentric causes of climate variability, there is no contention on the injustice done to next generation by the present unsustainable exploitation of resources; taking into cognisance the implication of destroying eco-system for industrial financial benefit now. It, therefore, proffers eco-

centric theory as a solution and justifies it with ethical reasons of preventing eco-system for future generations (Amusan, 2009; Amusan and Olutola, 2017).

Two words are antithetic to one another in the discourse of green theory. The word, eco-centrism means ecological based view and the word, anthropocentrism also means human-based view. That is why eco-centric is more of nature anthropocentric is more of human. The green theory, therefore, is eco-centric because it gives preference to nature. This does not mean that green theorists are against human interest but seeing beyond immediate environmental benefits. It is argued by the proponents of the green theory that man's interest is even better protected when protecting the eco-system because human beings can only be alive and healthy only in a good ecological nature. This theory has also rejected drawing a line of a dichotomy between domestic and international politics because nations' international boundaries were never drawn to coincide with eco-systems (Tayyar and Fatih, 2019). Therefore, issue of sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states may not hold when green theory comes to table. For example, both water and air pollution have tendencies to cross several international boundaries and climate change is not restricted to a nation boundary rather it cuts across many nations and even, in some cases, continents. In simple logic, man's population is ecologically interrelated. Thus, green theory's stand as regards climate change is to properly understand dynamism in transboundary and environmental matters and to jettison self-interest and state centrism. Though green theory challenges the state-centric approach to international relations as realist theorists argue but green theory also acknowledges that small communities are likely to be able to control ecological challenges with direct implications on global environment. Therefore, the nation-state system is not antithetic to green theory but collaborative with one another (Hugh, 2018; Tayyar and Fatih, 2019).

In collaboration with green theory is ecofeminist theory. This theory based its main thrust on gender consciousness by drawing the relationship between man and his environment (MacGregor, 2006; Mies and Shiva, 2014). The term ecofeminist was traced to Françoise d'Eaubonne (Warren) with a notion that green theory should be traced to the roles of women in clean environment in a sustainable manner. It calls for equality of gender, but not from neo-liberal school of level plain perspective that further breeds

unequal relationship. With this approach, there is a room for collectivism and cooperation among people without gender discrimination or dominance of one gender on another (Merchant, 2005). In recent times, ecofeminism has had numerous branches though, with varying approaches and analyses, this includes liberal ecofeminism and spiritual/cultural ecofeminism etc (Merchant, 2005). Ecofeminist analysis establishes a connection between women and culture, political economy, literature, religion and iconography. The theory argues that there is a relationship between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women in society. This linkage is substantiated with the fact that humans dominate nature and see nature as their property, which they can treat as they wish. The same attitude and mindset are being displayed by men against women as they also see women as natural endowments given to men. With these notions, according to the ecofeminists, women are seeing as the personal property of men. Consequently, ecofeminism contends that this idea must be rebuffed while both women and nature should be respected (Adams, 2007)

Many scholars have seen a natural linkage between the ecosystem crusade and the feminist struggle (Mies and Shiva, 2014; True, 2013 and 2018). Ecofeminists argue that green politics should start from women's experience who share with nature a common subjugation at the hand of a male-dominated developmental revolution. It is equally believed, in line with an edited book Greta Gaard (1993), that women share a basic feature of the natural world, which is the ability to bringing up and nourishing things. Hence, failure of the prevailing current of thought, male-dominated green thinking, to incorporate women's experience of caring and raising is seen as a causative factor for the failure of the green movement. In the absence of a positive integration between feminism and green thinking, green politics is in danger of reverting to or never leaving, a manful position reflecting the values of a patriarchal society (Mary, 2007).

Drawing from the two theories above, the first theory, green theory, fundamentally criticizes the existing socio-political and economic structures and is more of ecocentrism as against anthropocentrism; so the same is ecofeminist theory radically challenges masculine-centric culture rather than integration of females into green struggle. Arguably, development in the eastern part of Nigeria seems to

be hindered due to cultural rites that prevent women from inheritance as ecofeminists argue that women are culturally seeing in Eastern Nigeria as property who could not own property. The theories explain the correlation between women's cultural denial of inheritance in the East and challenges of food security.

Women in Food production, distribution and marketing

Food security is seen by scholars as a recurrent thing so it was predicted by World Bank that by 2050, the demand for food will upsurge by 70 per cent while annual investment will need a projected amount of \$80 billion to meet up with growing demand (Maram, 2018). In most of the United Nations global climate summit, the consequences of climate change on food production are being discoursed with little or no references to the role of the producers of food, who are predominantly women. Rural women are the backbone of food production and play a key role in ensuring food security (Joseph, 2015; Maram, 2018). UN Women Statistic has shown that 60 per cent of agrarian workers are women in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. This is followed by 30 per cent in the rest of Asia and the Pacific/North Africa put together and only 20 per cent in the Middle East (UN Women, 2017). Thus, the roles of women in Sub-Sahara Africa in respect to food production, distribution and marketing cannot be overemphasized especially in Eastern Nigeria (Duruji, Azuh, Oviasogie, and Ajayi, 2021).

Women in the East majorly participate in the production of organic food. The report has shown that women were majorly found in the production of food crops like maize, rice, cassava, yam and palm oil while they were infrequently in the production of agricultural export crops such as cocoa, cotton and groundnuts (Adekanye, 1984). The women in the region as the case of some other parts of the country are hardly allowed to long lease farm nor inheritance to land (Amusan and Olutola, 2017). The women in the East, who were farmers assumed most farm processes themselves, including the harder ones such as land clearing and land preparation for planting. They make use of supplementary family and hired labour on some occasions (Adekanye, 1984). Right from the pre-colonial period, women were more participative in the production of organic food, fishing and weaving than men. While their male counterparts were also often found in cash crop production, blacksmith,

political activities, hunting and provision of security to the community. The post-colonial era similarly witnesses different ball games entirely since men who are supposed to produce food move from rural villages to urban cities in search of white-collar jobs which is, unfortunately, not available. This scenario turns women to remain the source of organic food in the region.

Women equally do well in the distribution and marketing of food. Their role in transporting food to both retailers and consumers are so enormous (Oloba and Amusan, 2020). Joseph (2015) corroborates this argument that right from the pre-colonial period, the role of Ibo women in the traditional Ibo economy is spectacular and fantabulous. In some cases, only women engage in the distribution and marketing of some food items. For instance, after the production of salt, women were the major distributors and sales agents although there were no laws barring men from engaging in the salt trading business. Though there was a general notion that salt was basically a kitchen and should be majorly controlled by women. However, this is not enough reason for men to abandon salt trading for women. A visit to the Uburu market, which is a popular market for trading salt is a good example (Joseph, 2015). On far distance trading and distribution Ibo women also participate keenly. Joseph (2015) submits that men only became active in both local and long-distance trading after colonialism. Before that time (colonial era), it was women who were majorly in the business in every part of Ibo land apart from Onisha and riverine areas.

However, despite the massive participation of women in agricultural activities in the East, they were unable to engage in large scale farming but only subsistence farming. This is because they have little or no access to land due to cultural dictates. Ibo's culture does not allow women to inheritance. Therefore, they could only grow yam, cassava, cocoyam, maize, vegetable okra, pepper, melon, etc in lower quantities, but of high quality due to the organic nature of their farming system and lack of access to agribusiness multinational companies (AMCs) inputs. In support of these, because it is not in large quantity, they also keep animals like goats (ewu), sheep (aturu), and chicken for food and exchange in the market; they also into hunting for snail and fish at lower quantity as well. It is not surprising that with the number of women in production, distribution and marketing, majority of these women are still poor due to the subsistence nature of farming culture limit them into. Despite

their roles as food providers in the land, women remain most vulnerable to hunger and victims of food insecurity in the region. Poverty is a by-product of women's subsistence farming instead of mechanized one while this challenge is also unconnected with social and cultural discrimination, which deny women from land possession. It is a known fact that for large-scale farm produce, one needs a very large land that women in the East are constrained by tradition to possess. Another area where culture has been affecting large scale production and development is the inaccessibility to loans because they do not have landed property to present as collateral in financial institutions where they may lend money from to embark on mechanised farming.

Closely related to the above challenges is that the rural women who participate in food value chain are yet to be fully appreciated (Ogbonna, and Okoroafor, n.d.). In most cases, women are exempted from training as their roles in production, processing and distribution are underrated. Lack of resources could be traced to the fact that women are not empowered like their male counterparts. Government farmers' policy for empowerment does not mostly include women. This could be because men are in charge of those programmes or women's roles in food value chain are not recognized by the anchor of the programme or even both. If women are recognized and are empowered by both tradition and government, maybe the story about women poverty in the region would be different. Scholars have summarized these challenges to be universal gender preconceptions, which may exist in the form of (a) feelings, traditions and posture that restrict women frequently to the domestic domain, (b) women's home and fiscal assignments that enforce serious time encumbrance on them and (c) traditions, rule and regulation that obstruct women's accession to capital, manufacture inputs, engagement, didactic, or health care (Baba, Zain, Idris, and Sanni, 2015; Paula, 2019). One may, therefore, be of a view that Ibo women are trying in production, distribution and marketing of organic food and these efforts have a positive impact on sustainable development of the East with emphasis on Goal 2 and by extension, Goal 1. However, this development would have been more appreciable if women are adequately empowered by removing the cultural bottleneck that discriminates against them in inheritance and access to other variables of farming. Having discussed the plights of Igbo women in food security, it is now the turn of this paper to examine what is the position of Islamic

religion in relation with women and food security. The next section discussed Quranic declaration on inheritance and how women could inherit properties from parents and husband.

Islamic religion and women roles in the family and food security

Islamic religion does not discriminate between men and women in many things, rather it gives equal roles and chances to both sexes. For instance, concerning God, males and females are equal. Quran says, "Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has Faith, verily, to him will We give a new Life, a life that is good and pure and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions" (Q16 vs 97). So, the same is acquiring knowledge, female are enjoined as their male counterpart to acquire knowledge without any limitation. Prophet of Islam says, "Seeking knowledge is compulsory (fard) on every Muslim. (irrespective of whether he is a male or a female)." (Ibn Majah). Several issues are like that including inheritance.

Islam divides duties at home between man and woman. Politically, it makes a man to be the president and his wife (vies) as vice president(s) in any family. Man is believed to be endowed natural leadership role in the family as he bears the burden of the process of marriage ranging from searching for who becomes spouse to the final process of accommodating his wife in his custody. Hence, he is found worthy to be the head of the family. While woman is also recognized as co-head who manages the affairs of the home both in the presence and absence of her husband. Prophet of Islam (S) says, "... Among my followers, again, the best of women are those who assist their husbands in their work and love them dearly for everything, save what is a transgression of Allah's laws" (Abdur Rahman, 2021). Thus, women are seen as partner in progress to their husband.

Financially, man is given maximum financial responsibility as head of the family as Quran 4 verse 34 quoted above rightly put it. In the verse, men are tagged as the "QAWWAMUN" that is, the protectors and the maintainers of women. This is due to the maintenance responsibility imposed on men by Allah. Also, "The Prophet of Allah (S) stated: Man is the guardian of his family and every guardian has responsibilities towards those under his guardianship" (Lawal and Hamza, 2015). The role of women is to support their husbands, but is

voluntary, not compulsory.

Recognition of women private property in Islam is premised on the principle of inheritance. This is because if women could not own property, then there is no need for them to inherit. Shortly before Islam, this was the culture of Arabs. They used to deny their females any access to property left by their deceased family members. However, at the advent of Islam, it recognizes women in inheritance as revealed to the Prophet. Quran says,

Allah instructs you as regards your children. For a male twice of what is given to a female from inheritance. In case the daughters are more than two they will share two-third of the property. But if the deceased left a daughter, her portion in half. Each of the parents of the deceased shall take one-sixth if the deceased left a child or children but if he left no child, his parent shall inherit him, the mother shall receive from the inheritance one-third. But if the deceased left brothers, then mother shall receive one-sixth. This sharing of property shall be after considering the deceased's will and debts. Your fathers and your children, no one knows who is closer to benefit one another. This is injunctions from Allah. Surely Allah is Ever-Knower and All-Wise (Quran Chapter 4 verse 11 and 12)

From the above verses, there is a difference between what males and females get from the inheritance, but this difference is never based on gender discrimination rather it is based on three conditions. To start with, the level of kinship to the dead determines the volumes of share the person receives. That is, irrespective of gender, the only degree of closeness determines the bulk of share. Thus, we can argue, the closer the relationship to the deceased, the larger the percentage of such individuals in inheritance (Dar al-Iftaa Al-Missriyyah, 2021). For instance, a daughter to the deceased receives half while the husband receives one fourth. This is the position of Sharia based on the assumption that the daughter is closer to the deceased than the husband and she receives greater. Secondly, the disparity sets in when there is a difference between the class of descent or generation of the beneficiaries. For example, grandchildren generally obtain more inheritance than grandparents since they are assumed to be facing future financial tasks and also assumed that others usually support grandparents in their financial responsibilities. Similarly, a grandchild who is a female receives a greater portion

of inheritance than her grandfather although he is male she receives such simply because of this principle.

The last one is financial responsibility, this is the only category that reflects differences according to gender; but this disparity is not done to inflict injustice on women (Dar al-Iftaa Al-Missriyyah, 2021). When a group of inheritors, such as the children of the deceased, are equal in the first two aforementioned factors, then their shares are affected by the third. The Holy Quran does not make this disparity between men and women a general rule, rather it is limited to this condition. Put differently, when individuals in a group of inheritors are equal in both their level of relation to the deceased and generation female inherit half as in the case of a son of a deceased who shall receive twice of what a daughter shall receive (Dar al-Iftaa Al-Missriyyah, 2021). The wisdom behind this is that male is given maximum financial responsibility as a father or a husband who should take care of his family members whereas his sister who receives half is taken care of by somebody such as her father or husband. Also, women are always at the mercy of men. This is reflected in compulsory traditionally financial responsibilities of payment of dowry whereas women are even the beneficiary of this rite. Men do not only engage in ongoing financial maintenance of the house but also support without any anticipation of reciprocation. They also gives financial support to their extended family as the situation may demand. All these are not duties of women unless she chooses to do so to attain reward (Dar al-Iftaa Al-Missriyyah, 2021).

Depending on circumstances, it is acknowledged that there are cases when a woman is given half of the share of man in Sharia. There are other cases when a woman will be entitled to an equal share with man or cases when a woman will have access to a greater share than man; and there are cases when a woman would have a portion from the inheritance while a male has nothing. As in the two-case cited below by (Dar al-Iftaa Al-Missriyyah, 2021):

If a woman is dead and she left behind a sum of \$195,000,000 for inheritors: father, husband, daughter, mother, and daughter of a son. In this case, the son's daughter shall inherit one-sixth (\$26,000,000). However, if such a woman left behind a son instead of a daughter of a son, he will inherit nil because according to sharia, he is expected to inherit the remainder and nothing is left. (Case 1)

If a woman is dead and she left property worth \$84,000,000 for inheritors who are husband, a full sister, and a paternal sister. The paternal sister shall inherit one-sixth, (\$12,000,000). Meanwhile, if the person is a brother of his father, he will inherit nothing. This is because if the husband inherits half, and the full sister inherits half nothing would remain for him to inherit as a residuary in inheritance. (Case 2)

Of note is that women are expected to pay zakat (Compulsory annual payment from one's wealth) once they are up to prescribed measurement (Nisab). Part of the materials that Zakat is payable from is farm produce and extraction from the land like gold and silver (Sherliza, Raedah and Maslina, 2017). Thus, women will be unable to pay zakat from all these if she is not allowed by sharia to own and inherit landed properties. Also, zakat is paid from these properties irrespective of the age of the orphan once she owns the property through inheritance (Dar al-Iftaa Al-Missriyyah, June 2021). That is why the guardian of the little orphan is saddled with the responsibility of managing such properties till such orphan is matured.

It has been established from the discourse above that in Islam women are allowed to inherit and should also be noted that women are equally allowed to engage in the production, distribution and marketing of food in Islam. This is for the reason that Muslims are not completely immune from changes and development that are taking place in the world. For instance, globalization has increased international integration of market in the global capitalist economy; it has increased economic and job insecurity and thus the need for more than one breadwinner in a family; it has prompted the withdrawal of the state from service provision; it has often increased family hardship. Resultantly, the scenario has become a fundamental factor that has increased the role of women in Muslim societies in economic activities especially in the production, distribution and marketing of food (Priscilla, 2005).

Conclusion and recommendations

Most continents of the world have women as a source of development irrespective of the religion they practice. In Africa, women are considered as an agent of development and custodian of culture and sources of organic food. Their roles in the countryside are invaluable when one examines their responsibilities in food availability, accessibility,

affordability and quality as against their male counterpart. Also worth noting is the mobility of males to urban areas where they look for unavailable paid jobs. This paper has examined the roles of women on food security and how they lack basic resources to actualise their developmental roles in their communities due to cultural reasons; a culture that is antithetical to Islamic prescriptions. The major area where they are lacking is the unavailability of access to land and collateral to secure financial help from banks. To this, they continue to practice farming at the subsistence level, which cannot propel meaningful development. We have equally examined that The Holy Quran protects women's rights in this changing world and allows women to inherit from the property left behind by their deceased family members without any iota of gender discrimination.

This paper recommends that some African cultures should be reviewed especially those that put women on a stroke of bad luck that in-turn is affecting the lives of both genders. Women should be more accommodated in society and be empowered as men alone cannot provide for the needs of each family. The family economy is considered buoyant due to the contribution of women, the same applies to a nation's economy. Restriction of women to partake in economic activities of a nation due to cultural or religious considerations is affecting the economic development of African states as showcased in the Eastern part of Nigeria. Liberal Islamic stand on the principle of inheritance should be adhered to while it is recommended that Africans should jettison some African cultures that place women at a lower ebb. Finally, the Nigerian government should support Ibo women in their legal tussle against cultural discrimination on inheritance. Doing this would bring about a radical change in food production in Nigeria and will ensure food security in our country. On a final note, a conclusion is drawn that Islamic religion empowers women more than what African culture dictates.

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