

## **GENDER INEQUALITY, POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: LESSONS FROM THE RAPTI WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROJECT, NEPAL**

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### **Abstract**

There has been a growing incidence of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa over the last two decades. Historically, it is a fact that women have not been seen as equal partners in growth and development process. Poverty has a gender dimension since women and men experience and react differently to its impact. Within the framework of social exclusion theory, the paper argued that there cannot be genuine sustainable development aimed at poverty alleviation, without mainstreaming women in all development structures and processes. The study established among others, that a lot of efforts have been made in poverty alleviation in Nigeria through poverty alleviation programs. However, the reality on ground indicates that despite these interventions, there is geometrical increase in the number of the poor both in rural and urban Nigeria. Therefore, there is need to intensify efforts in poverty alleviation programs, especially as regards to beneficiaries participation in decision making and implementation, human resource training and development and legal framework. Nigeria can adopt the template of Rapti Women Empowerment Project in Nepal. Sustainable poverty alleviation strategies should engage and empower men and more of women as actors and beneficiaries. It concludes that unless there are genuine, realistic and workable interventions to address the ugly situation, poverty will remain a vicious circle that could be inherited from one generation to the other in communities, families and the nation at large.

**Keywords:** Gender, Heifer, Poverty, Sustainable Development, Women Empowerment.

### **Introduction**

Women all over the world were not seen as equal partners in any accomplishment that is development oriented. According to Fodeba (2010), this circumstance has made women the most vulnerable inhabitants in any community they happen to find themselves. It is an established fact

that more than 70 percent of the world's poor are women (Schuftan 2003). In most societies around the world, women are still not considered as equal partners to growth and economic development but mere homemakers. Gloomily to this gender inequity issue, is the so-called development agencies around the globe that have turned a blind eye for far too long in addressing this hydra headed issue. After examining the Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) of the 1995 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Baruah (2009) argued that "the Human Development Report has also succeeded in capturing not just some of the links between gender, poverty and sustainable development but also in highlighting significantly increasing female disadvantage of the developing world, most notably South Asia, North Africa and Sub Sahara Africa" over the last two decades.

Yet, many international development experts hardly address the issues relating to gender inequity and its corresponding implications on the rate of poverty and quest for sustainable development in the world. Indeed, the development policy geared towards poverty alleviation in most cases has neglected women as determining factor to overall poverty reduction approach. Poverty is a multidimensional social phenomenon that can be analytically divided into two main perspectives: human poverty which is the lack of human capabilities and income poverty, which is the lack of income necessary to satisfy basic need e.g. poor life expectancy, poor maternal health, illiteracy, poor nutritional levels, poor access to safe drinking water and perceptions of wellbeing (Igbokwe-Ibeto, Akhakpe & Oteh, 2012).

Gender inequality and discrimination has so degenerated to the extent that women are not allowed or given space to demonstrate their democratic God given rights (Fodeba, 2010:62). Women are for the most part underrepresented in decision making virtually in all sector of society. Very few women make up activists groups, a significantly low number are engaged in professional career or are, elected or served as appointed officials in government positions (Fatile, Akhakpe, Igbokwe-Ibeto & Oteh, 2012; Fodeba, 2010; Olojede, 2009). This is spite the fact that communalism is the norm in African societies.

Also, in develop nations such as the United States and Europe; women have to fight hard on a daily basis to participate in domestic policies geared towards gender equity. Their male counterpart has succeeded in eliminating completely the role of women's participation in political and economic development and also confined them to the role of a second fiddle. However, the success of Rapti women empowerment has proven that women like men can fully participate and succeed in any developmental project ever undertaking by them. The Rapti Women empowerment project in Nepal is a typical example in this regard. The Rapti Women Empowerment Project in Nepal has succeeded in proven a point related to poverty alleviation through Gender focus. This Heifer International sponsored project in Nepal supported 109 families with live stocks such as goats and breeding bucks. The project precisely focus to serve the impoverish society through Passing on the Gifts of livestock and training skills which is provided by Heifer International. The overall Project's aspired tirelessly towards gender justice; self help group management for its members, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS awareness (source, [www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org)). We shall later undertake a detail analysis of Rapti Women Empowerment Project as a case study with a view of drawing lessons for Nigeria.

In Nigeria, poverty manifests itself in the forms of hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, lack of shelter and failure to access essential social services such as basic education, health, water and sanitation. According to Olojede (2009), majority of the Nigerian poor are women. Only few of them have access to educational opportunities due to the low value placed on the girl child, as compared to their male counterpart. In most parts of Nigeria, based on the traditional beliefs and practices, women have little or no ownership, access and control to family assets and resources, as compared to their male counterparts. In this circumstance of deprivation, women are more vulnerable to poverty. Although deprivation for women and men is bad, but for the former, it has a serious negative impact on the children because of the reduced performance in both reproductive and productive roles. In the Nigerian social context, children stand to benefit more directly when women are well endowed and empowered as most of the resources are used at the household level.

As already canvassed by some scholars, this paper will argue that there cannot be genuine sustainable development aimed at poverty alleviation, without mainstreaming women in all development structures and processes. The way forward in addressing the issue of gender inequality and poverty alleviation in Nigeria is by empowering the women. Women's empowerments will contribute to the wellbeing of human developments and yield dividend for the entire family and community at large which can in turn improve the overall sustainable development of the country.

### **Methodology**

The paper adopts the methodology of documentary analysis of current literature which enhances critical and contextual analysis of nature and character of gender issues and poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria and its correlates with sustainable development.. The issue of gender inequality, poverty alleviation and sustainable development is of serious concern to both the people and government and has therefore attracted a plethora of public commentary. The paper which is theoretical in nature draws its argument basically from secondary data which include journal publications, textbooks and internet sources. To improve on the reliability and validity of the paper, multiple secondary sources were used to minimize errors.

In analyzing the issues raised, the paper is structured into four sections. Aside introduction, section one examined conceptual and theoretical issues relevant to the paper. Section two x-rayed the poverty profile in Nigeria. Section three chronicled an overview of Rapti Women Empowerment Project in Nepal. Section four draw lessons for Nigeria and then concluding remarks

### **Gender, Poverty & Sustainable Development: Conceptual & Theoretical Underpinnings**

In social and management sciences research, it is customary to begin an academic investigation by combing the conceptual and theoretical terrains of the subject matter of analysis by analyzing the views of various scholars and authors as well as the way in which one's research is integrated into the body of existing theories and research. Though, consensus may not be achieved on the validity or otherwise of such enterprise. Nonetheless, it is an exercise worth pursuing if only to

sketch the parameters of the subject matter. This is rightly supported by Babbie and Mouton (2001) who argued that “we specify why we use particularly terms for the purpose of facilitating their contextual operationalization and comprehension.” It is along this line of thought that we undertake this endeavor.

The world over, every society has a set of accepted norms to which male and female are expected to conform with. Men and women are expected to play their feminist and masculinity roles and capacities which vary from one society to another. These socially and culturally determined differences are what constitute gender. Gender refers to the social differences and relations between men and women that are learned, changeable over time, and have wide variation between both within and, between cultures (see Channar, 2010:5). These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization process. They are context and time specific. Gender as a concept is different from sex. While sex refers to the biological/physiological differences between a male and a female, gender refers to the roles, responsibilities, opportunities, privileges and expectations ascribed to males and females by the society/culture. This implies that the society determines these roles and expects men and women, boys and girls to behave in specified ways. In other words, what the society expects the man to be, the role he should play at home, in the market, office, government and so on is different from the roles the woman is expected to play. Gender looks at the status of women in comparison to that of men.

Making a case about inequality from health related standpoint, Smith (2001) argued that some approaches or policies has not be effectively implemented due to the assertion that “women are not often decision makers on fertility issues, since unequal gender relations in the household enable men to control women’s sexuality and fertility”. For example, in developing countries, women for the most part of their life can hardly be part of a decision-making because they are women. This among others is responsible for the poor and deplorable conditions women continue to contend with. Unless and until this inequality seized to be the reality, poverty will continue to be the prevalent challenge of developing and emerging societies. According to Argawal (1997), there are still much more imbalances in the distribution and access to private property between men and women which is even making women more dependence upon their male counterpart.

It is along this line of thought that Argawal (1997) made a strong and persuasive argument to buttress her claim. To Argawal (1997) “women are also systematically disadvantaged in the labor market, with fewer employment opportunities, lesser occupational mobility, lower levels of training, and lower payments for the same or similar work, compared with men”. This also highlights the fact that there is still much work to be done for a flourishing growth. Like men, women should be equally counted and recognize as partners in development. Unless and until this reality is noted, the road to sustainable development will continue to be rigid and a mirage.

In Nigerian society for example, gender is one of the organizing principles and patriarchal values predetermine the social value of gender. This sexual division of labor places women in reproductive roles in the private sphere and men in the productive role as breadwinners in the public sphere. However, the advocacy for equality for all regardless of race, ethnicity, income,

and religious belief has come to justify the issue of gender equality as a human right issue. If poverty is about deprivation of basic necessity to human life such as, not being able to send your child to school, lack of shelter, hungry, then it is the most dehumanizing way of human life. Yet, actions to achieve greater gender equity often meet resistance, because it is more likely to mean changes in the position of men. Arguably, this has been a central theme of the 'gender and development' agenda'' (Johnson, 2005). This decisive and on-going dialogue is true for the most part of the world including the United States Fodeba (2010).

It is therefore imperative to note that poverty alleviation can hardly be achieved without women's full inclusion, engagement and contribution in growth and developments agenda. This culminates with gender friendly and responsive policies' formulation and implementation based on the ideal that poverty alleviation that could engender sustainable growth and development should engage both men and women.

There is no consensus on the definition of poverty. Poverty is difficult to define as an elephant is to the blind man. Yet, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) defined poverty as interlinked forms of deprivation in the economic, human, political, socio-cultural and protective spheres (OECD, 2010). Although, there is no standard in poverty, however, Igbokwe-Ibeto, Akhakpe & Oteh (2012), have painted a graphic picture of the characteristics of the poor to include:

*No house to live in; no water to drink; no access to education; no land to cultivate some crops; no fresh air to breed; no food to eat; and even if they have food, it will be tasteless and monotonous. The house they live in are uninhabitable, no fire to warm themselves; and where they have warm, it must come from smoking fire. If they get air at all, it will be polluted i.e. either too hot or too cool. Where they are able to get land, it will be unproductive.*

They went further to argue that poverty is a cruel kind of hell and one cannot understand how cruel that hell is, merely by gazing upon poverty as an object. An analysis of arguments made by scholars and development agencies suggest that gender inequality has been and will always be a human right issue that needs to be advanced. Despite these developments and an extensive literature on women in poverty as well as the discourses on gender inequality and poverty alleviation that have moved from welfare, anti-poverty and efficiency approaches to emphasizes on empowerment, human rights and human capabilities, there is still concern that the inter-linkages between gender inequality and poverty have not undergone comprehensive and rigorous investigation and analysis (Baruah, 2009)

The manifestation of poverty as stipulated in the United Nations Beijing Platform for Action and Declaration (1995) includes lack of income and productive resources, as a result of which there is poor livelihood; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increasing morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environment and social discrimination as well as exclusion.

The marginalization and exclusion of women has been identified as a major constraint in poverty reduction in Africa. For example, majority of the African poor are women. This could be traced to the traditional beliefs and practices; women have had less or no ownership, access and control to family assets and resources compared to their male counterparts. Only few of them have access to educational opportunities due to the low value placed on the girl child compared to the boy. In these circumstances of deprivation, they are more vulnerable to poverty. The role of women in poverty reduction and creation of wealth that can engender sustainable development cannot be over emphasized. This is important, considering the existing gender inequality in access to education, job opportunities, health services and control of resources in the country. This brings us to the vexed issue of sustainable development.

Development is viewed as "multi-dimensional", referring to positive changes which affect the majority and which lie in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres of societal life. According to Chukwuemeka (2013), development refers to man's progressive qualitative and continued improvement of human labour. To Igbokwe-Ibeto (2003), development is needed not only to enable citizens have higher standards of living and material advancement, but to achieve socio-economic and political transformation as well as attain technological feats over the environment. Development involves a departure from the past to the new situation, which is reflected in the economic, social, educational and political aspects of a nation that must be sustained.

Sustainable development on the other hand is defined as that development that meets our present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UN General Assembly, 2005). The United Nations has identified three basic elements which should work together to ensure sustainable development. These are economic development, social development and environmental protection (UN General Assembly, 2005). Ayeni (2010) argues that these three components must be conceptualized together, planned together and implemented together to achieve the desired results.

There are several theoretical platforms through which the issues of gender inequality, poverty alleviation and sustainable development could be analyzed. These include conservative theory, the structural and Marxist model of political economy and the social exclusion theories. While other theories may be relevant in their right, we underpin the paper on the social exclusion theory. This is because of the advantages it present in analyzing the issues raised in the paper. The social exclusion theory is relevant and applicable to the paper because it enable us direct our search light on gender inequality and 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. According to Anyanwu (in Igbokwe-Ibeto, Akhakpe & Oteh., 2012), this approach is "people centered" as against "goods centered", it is characterized by three paradigms namely: solidarity, specialization and monopoly. The solidarity paradigm stresses moral integration and cultural boundary in which those who do not belong suffer exclusion.

The social exclusion 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 because of exclusion that prevents them from getting out of poverty (Igbokwe-Ibeto, Akhakpe & Oteh, 2012). It would appear that the National Economic Development Strategy (NEEDS) as well as formation of self-help projects by communities and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Nigeria are aimed at tackling poverty that results from the claims of this theory.

### **Poverty Profile in Nigeria**

Gender inequality and poverty are still pervasive in Nigeria. In fact, available statistics reveals that the gender inequality and poverty incidence in Nigeria has been on the increase since the 1980s. As reported by the UNDP (2010), between 1980 and 1996, the percentage of the income inequality and core poor rose from 6.2 percent to 29.3 percent, and declined to 22.0 percent in 2004. About 70 percent of the Nigerian population now lives in abject poverty. Gender inequality and poverty in the country has a geographical dimension. Gender inequality and poverty is higher in the northern region and the rural areas. Indeed, Nigeria has been classified as a poor nation; a situation which can be described as a bewildering paradox given the vast resource base of the country. For example, Bayelsa state with highest measure of welfare per capita has a poverty incidence of 2.6 percent between 1995 and 2006, as against the leading areas in Greater Accra Ghana with -2.4 percent, Douala Capital Littoral Cameroon with -10.9 percent and Baoteng South Africa with -19.0 percent (World Bank, 2009). The paradox as described by the World Bank is that the poverty level in Nigeria contradicts the country's immense wealth. Among other things, the country is enormously endowed with human, agricultural, petroleum, gas, and large untapped solid mineral resources.

In the quest to tackle this impediment to development, successive government in Nigeria came up with various poverty eradication programmes. For example, the implementation of three pilots integrated agricultural and rural development projects by early 1970s in Funtua, Gusau and Gombe but later spread to other states of the federation. These projects were mainly to stimulate increased food production and enhance the income of the rural population. This development approach gave birth to Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in 1976, Green Revolution in 1979, and later the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund. Over twenty four poverty eradication initiatives and programmes to combat the dreaded monster of poverty have been set up by federal government from 1970 to date. Prominent among them was National Accelerated Food Production Programmes (NAEFPP) introduced by the general Gowon's administration in 1973 because of the shortages of food stuff, after the civil war.

The objective of these programmes was to ensure self-sufficiency and self-reliance in food production by the agricultural sector. Government also came up with three other complementary institutions or project designed to make the fight against poverty function effectively. These institutions or projects include the Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB), Agriculture Development Project (ADP) in each state of the Federation and River Basin Development Authority (RBDA). ADP however, was a World Bank assisted project. National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) is among the latest programme. However, it appears that over the past 50 years, policies, strategies and programmes implemented aimed at poverty alleviation and sustainable development yielded little success, inequality and poverty is still

pervasive in the country. Inferential opinions have attributed the failures of the programmes as a result of lack of fit between the programmes and the intended beneficiaries (Igbokwe-Ibeto, Akhakpe & Oteh, 2012).

Since the antidote of the Nigerian government towards poverty alleviation where applied have failed to yield the desired result. The researchers seek to examine the Rapti Women Empowerment Project in Nepal that have succeeded in proven a point related to poverty alleviation and sustainable development through gender focus with the aim of drawing lessons for Nigeria.

### **An Overview of Rapti Women Empowerment Project**

Rapti Women Empowerment Project in Nepal is a gender focused poverty alleviation programme sponsored by Heifer International. Heifer International is a non-profit organization with headquarters in Little Rock, Arkansas. It is committed to ending hunger and poverty and caring for the earth. Based on that conviction, they have supported a group of women in Nepal and elsewhere around the world making them self-reliance. From Heifer International's standpoint on poverty alleviation, it is with a profound belief that gender equity is being seen as a social justice and human rights issue that directly leads to ending world's poverty. As earlier mentioned, we will be considerably using the work of Heifer in Nepal as a case study for the purpose of this paper. In a culture such as Nepal engulfed with a way of life full of intimidation by gender inequity, variations and inequalities at every level, this has always been the day in day out norms.

Over the years, history has shown that gender inequity is not just critical to women folk alone, but it is also aiding and abetting a system of injustice that has proven unfavorable to the development of human society as a whole. Nepal is among one of the numerous countries of the world that Heifer International has effectively and positively worked relentlessly to end poverty. Nepal share a common border with China and India, the country is the 115th largest world economy making it evident that poverty remains a huge challenge in the nation (Fodeba, 2010). With a population of approximately 28 million, agriculture provide work for up to 76 percent of Nepalese nationals in the country.

It is against this backdrop that full participation of beneficiaries irrespective of their gender should be encouraged to participate in their individual communities to accomplish sustainable development in Nigeria. As one of the twelve cornerstones of Heifer International's fundamental core values, Gender and Family Focus encourages both women and men to share resources and decision making as well as the benefits of animal rearing and training to attain a common and sustainable livelihood. For every long time, women are not seen as equal partners in development. Such barriers regrettably continue to exist even in the most developed nations around the world. The unequal distribution of the world's resources in our views should not have a place in this enlightened world of ours. This Heifer sponsored project in Nepal and elsewhere has made profound arguments that confirm the eradication of poverty within a society through women's engagement and empowerment.

An analysis of our argument draws attention to the fact that women's engagement and empowerments contribute to the health and productivity of the entire families and communities and can also improve developments prospects that could engender sustainable livelihood. As the saying goes "practice makes perfect", it has always been and still remains true for Heifer, that development at human, community and national level cannot effectively take place without efficient learning, training and practices of the people. The distribution of livestock and trainings to beneficiaries has allowed Heifer to transform the lives of many impoverished communities most of whom are women.

Yet, to make sure that the voices of deprived women are heard, Heifer International has made the full participation of everyone in decision making a priority irrespective of gender. Heifer International strongly believes that recognizing the harmful effects of global and national policies on the poor in general and poor women in particular, it is crucial to ending gender inequality, poverty and hunger. How can this be achieved has remained a puzzle in people's mind. For Heifer International in retrospect, the way to get this done is by empowering women and sensitizing the men. Heifer also realizes and absolutely acknowledges the fact that the persistent inequality cannot be eliminated in a short period of time but rather overtime. Commitment, hard work and a pragmatic strategy are needed for both to meet at the empowering and sensitization level on the scale. Genuine development efforts in Nigeria and elsewhere will not be successful as long as the scale is not balance. Many developments oriented Non-Governmental Organizations have fail to achieve their desired objectives in ending world's poverty because of being in constant denial of this reality.

As an organization that believes in people's ability to change their own lives and to create a better future, Heifer promotes and supports "sharing and caring" among people, which is fundamental to equity, or fairness. Heifer also sees itself as a launch pad in this all-significant process, and not as a contributor of answers or as a problem solver at all cost. Heifer has succeeded in alleviating poverty, hunger and social injustice through helping communities taking the driver seat in development (source, [www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org)). Gender inequity is a social injustice issue for the most part as the 1948 United Nations declaration on human rights states:

*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Women's engagement and empowerments, coupled with full participation are human right's issue and for that reason's deserves to be given desired attention if gender equality and poverty alleviation that could usher sustainable development will become a reality.*

However, how to get women suffering from poverty and social discrimination out of it still remains a mystery. According to Fadeba (2010), 70 percent of the world's poor are women and for that reason social women network and activist groups are tirelessly calling and craving for a concerted effort and a caring strategy to put an end to this injustice so that men and women can have equal share in economic and social development process. Empowering poor illiterate women by giving them not only the capital resources but training in the Asian nation of Nepal has helped to bridge this gender inequity gap between women and men. Giving them just the

animal without the proper and high-quality training hasn't been sustainable. It is as a result of the above that the Rapti Women Empowerment Project in Nepal makes sure that development goal is attain by providing project's members/beneficiaries the necessary training skills.

Today, many Nepalese women as a result of Heifer's partnership in sustainable development have been able to create group savings funds through their monthly contributions and other savings clubs approach. Each member contributes a specific amount as agreed by the terms and agreements of the project. These funds have enhanced their ability of giving loans to each other and to be able to purchase additional livestock. To a larger extent, and as a result of this rapid growth and developments paradigm, most families, due to women's full participation have been able to send their children to school and have become self-reliance. The testimony of Sharada, a beneficiary of Heifer International from one of the local community in Nepal is a typical example. Before Heifer, even though Sharada worked hard every day, she still could not earn enough to pay for her house rent or her children's education. But later joined a local Heifer women's group and her circumstances began to turn around for good immediately. With the gift of a pair of goats and training in their care, along with training in values based literacy, gardening, and gender equity, Sharada was able to increase her family's income. In fact, Sharada is now a successful farmer in her community and earns enough income to send her children to school. She has even bought her very own home. Many thanks to Heifer's cornerstone of Passing on the gift, with this success, Sharada has already shared her success with another member of the community group with the gift of offspring from her goats (source, [www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org)). This among many is the testimony given by women whom have been empowered by one of Heifer's core value of gender focus.

### **Lessons for Nigeria**

There are a number of lessons that Nigeria in particular and Africa in general can learn from the success story of Rapti Women Empowerment Project. Given the importance of men and women participation in national development for poverty alleviation as discussed above, and the fact that Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations Beijing Platform Action and other United Nations Declarations on fundamental human rights, there is need for a national framework to guide the inclusion of women in the processes of policy formulation and implementation. The template would serve as a guide to gender responsive mobilization and resources utilization for genuine and effective empowerment and engagement of women in all spheres of life. The framework should emphasis key strategies for sustainable development and poverty alleviation through gender focus in all social, economic and political areas especially human resource training and development, agriculture, rural development, physical infrastructure, health, HIV/AIDS, education, industry, trade and public safety.

Nigeria portrays a medley of culture that makes it difficult to find an overarching generalization on one particular culture. There are positive aspects of the different African culture that inform the core values of its societies. The foundations of African traditional values are humanistic and communitarian. Africans place great emphasis on community, human welfare, and on what philosophers describe as "personhood" (Igbokwe-Ibeto, Ewuim & Agbodike, 2015). In the fight against poverty, Nigeria should inculcate the spirit of communitarianism. Communitarianism

fosters a strong sense of community and a spirit of collectiveness. It emphasizes the fact that individuals are interdependent and subscribe to the same communal values. The notion that individuals must always seek communal, rather than individual good encourages people to be each other's keeper as shown by Sharada the Nepalese who woman extended her success with other community members.

Nigeria should be self advised that the old development paradigm in Nigeria and countries in Africa, is gradually giving way for a new paradigm that hinges on empowerment of the people to make choices and carryout bottom-top approach to development. As Ake (2000) puts it, such development paradigm aims at:

*Making the people the end and means of development by this approach, development ceases to be what the government and international development agencies do for the ordinary people, but what the ordinary people do for themselves. It becomes their possession, their hired experience, not a received experience. In so far as they posses development and become its end, the content of development can be potentials, their progressive empowerment and self-realization.*

It is this people-centric approach that can bring about genuine poverty alleviation and sustainable socio-economic development. This will encourage "local commitment and acknowledged benefit to pay the price of continuation of project activities" (Olawoye, 2008).

The political culture in Nigeria has for many years been in the negative. Some of these elements in our political culture include: intolerance, violent conflict, ethnicity, religious fanaticism, etc. However, the situation is gradually changing and patience is required for leadership to begin to harvest the vast potentials in the land to enable them pursue sustainable development. Therefore, rather than seek to c-opt CBOs or undermine their activities and actions, government should aim at tapping from their closeness to the people as exemplified by Heifer International to promote its developmental efforts particularly at the grassroot levels.

The micro and small enterprise sub-sector is absolutely critical to the country's economic development. Micro and small-scale entrepreneurs run by women contribute significantly to job creation, training opportunities for poor families and national development in Nigeria. However, women in the informal sector face various constraints in the country, which include socio-cultural and financial challenges. The government should allocate resources for the expansion of the informal sector and encourage the establishment of women friendly financial institutions where women can assess soft loans. This can be achieved through the adoption and maintains of micro-economic policies that address specific needs and concerns for poor women entrepreneurs and increase funding for their respective activities. The need to review some laws and policies inhibiting women's ownership of properties, access to credit facilities and participation in small enterprises should be carried out as a matter of urgent national importance.

In the struggle for political independence, notable Nigerian women such as Fumilayo Ranson Kutu, Hajia Gambo Sawaba among other played crucial roles. However, it is quite unfortunate

and surprising that African women are now in a sorry state of abject poverty and social discrimination as result of exclusion occasioned by societal culture and traditions. Women should be trained, engaged and empowered because it is said that when you train a woman, you train a nation and you empower a women, you empower the entire family. As is often the case in Nigeria, empowering poor illiterate women by giving them the capital resources without adequate training can not helped in bridging gender inequity gap between women and men. Giving them just the capital without the proper and high-quality training hasn't been sustainable. That is why Sub-Saharan Africa should make sure that the development goal is attain by providing project's members/beneficiaries the necessary training skills

In addition, the national budget is an important economic policy instrument of the Nigeria government because through the budget, the state has the potential to meet the needs of the poorest, most of who are women. Sine the allocation of resources in the national budget reflects the government's priorities, as such it is recommended that the resources' allocation processes and structures be gender sensitive so that issues of poverty alleviation and gender equity are observed and that existing inequalities and social exclusion are not perpetuated.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Arguably, the case of Rapti Women Empowerment Project, Nepal in this paper did make an explicit argument for a bottom up approach to development and poverty alleviation in Nigeria. It is obvious to point out that the Heifer International concept of gender equity did address the aforementioned problem of poverty alleviation. It displayed a case to substantiate the argument that engaging and empowering women and sensitizing men will not only stimulate rapid economic growth and sustainable developments, but can also contribute to sustainable livelihood of the entire community. Both men and women can see themselves as partners with equal responsibilities towards not only their families but also the entire community especially in Africa where communalism is the norm. The way out to gender inequality is to make certain that women are engaged and empowered by presenting them with equal opportunities that will provide them equal access to policy making, employment in both public and private sectors, health care and housing.

It is also imperatives to put in place legal framework that will protect women from unfair gender discrimination. Overall, the paper has established the fact that gender imbalance has a direct impact on the quality of life of the human being in general. However, women as a gender has carried most of the burden related to poverty. All the aforementioned clearly give a clear picture to the way forward in eradicating poverty and gender inequality. It is an overall attempt geared towards the need to see women and men as equal partners to personal human development and not just as homemakers without any economic input to the well being of their family.

We conclude by commenting that gender equity is in the process of being achieved. For instance, the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan appointed a number of women in key positions hitherto an exclusive preserve of men. Certainly, some amount of credit should be given to those development agencies, civil society organizations and policy makers that have fought so hard to make the voiceless people to be heard. Many poverty alleviation professionals

have succeeded at least in moving this deep-rooted systemic discrimination against women from the ground floor an issue that is worth debating at national and international foray.

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