

**Women
and
Trade Unionism
in
Nigeria**

edited by

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PREFACE

One of the commemorative activities to mark ten years of the establishment of **Michael Imoudu Institute for Labour Studies, Ilorin** existence was a national workshop on a topical issue that is considered neglected in the theory and practice of trade unionism in Nigeria. This identified theme was the in-adequate participation of *women in trade unionism in Nigeria*. The workshop drew together professionals, academics, officials from both the private and public sectors, trade unions, women organisations, non-governmental organisations and the media at the Federal Secretariat, Jos on 19th and 20th April, 1994 to discuss the ways and means of:

- (i) creating awareness of the importance of trade unions to women, and
- (ii) encouraging greater women participation in the decision-making processes and administration of trade unions.

The workshop was substantially sponsored by *Friedrich Ebert Foundation*, Lagos. Even the papers put together in this published form would not have been possible without the additional grants from *Friedrich Ebert Foundation*. Worthy of mention in this regard is the co-operation and support received from the former Resident Representative of the Foundation, Peter Haussler, the current Resident Representative, Gerhard Wendler and Dr Dokun Jagun, Project Co-ordinator. Also important are the invaluable contributions of the resource-persons and participants at the workshop where the papers-turned-chapters were first presented, various sources of materials for the papers presented, co-operation of various employers and trade unions, the inspiring role of the Chairman of the erstwhile Interim Governing Council of the *Michael Imoudu Institute for Labour Studies*, Professor Tayo Fashoyin, and the professional touch of the publishers, *NPS Educational Publishers*.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the declaration of the years 1976-85 as the *United Nations Decade for Women*, considerable international attention has been focused on women. Although at our municipal level the degree of sophistication of that attention has been suspect due to political manipulations. At the levels of trade unions, this attention has been far more fitful. Indeed a cursory look at trade unions seems to suggest that the current level of women involvement in trade unionism is neither commensurate with the proportion of workers who are females nor does it possess the capability to ensure the optimal utilisation of the potential contributions of women. This situation is not peculiar to Nigeria and it is not just a new phenomenon. Yet, it is plausible to advocate that greater women involvement is desirable in trade unionism in Nigeria.

As mothers and wives, women do exert considerable impacts on the productivity of male workers. As workers in their own rights they can conveniently be likened to the Biblical *rejected stone* which has become the cornerstone of the house. By their sheer psychological, physiological and intellectual make up, they do perform more than mere complementary roles in the production process. From their current level of involvement, however, it is clear that their importance in the administration or, indeed, the government and politics of trade unions is being dwarfed. The need to evaluate the situation in the trade union movement in Nigeria with a view to redressing the imbalance between female and their male counterparts cannot be discountenanced indefinitely. This publication — the result of a national workshop on the theme **Women and Trade Unionism in Nigeria** jointly sponsored in April 1994 by *Michael Imoudu Institute for Labour Studies*, Ilorin and *Friedrich Ebert Foundation*, Lagos — is our contribution to meeting this need.

This book consists of eight chapters. Chapter one traces the origin and development of wage labour in Nigeria and brings

out clearly the historical and contextual factors that have resulted in the un-equal proportions of males and females in the wage labour force and, by projection, in the trade unions in Nigeria. A preview of women participation in the modern sector of the labour force and its implications for their involvement in trade unionism is discussed and exhausted in chapter two. In his own contribution in chapter three, Onaeko reviews the intricate relationship between women, employment and trade unionism in Nigeria in the historical, contemporary, legal and sociological contexts. He goes further to suggest ways and means of ensuring the effective participation of women in employment and trade unions. Chapter four examines the role of women in national development with a bias to economic development and points out ways and means of ensuring their optimal contributions to national development. In chapter five, Aremu discusses the structure of trade unions in Nigeria and raises the key issues that need to be resolved in order to ensure the effective participation of women in trade unions. Yawa reviews government policies in chapter six and relates these to the opportunities and rights of women in Nigeria's work setting. Chapter seven discusses the health and safety implications of the work place especially as they affect women workers. In the last chapter, Jolaosho-Komolafe discusses the problems of and prospects for the effective participation of women in trade unionism.

This book is of considerable didactic value to students of industrial relations, personnel management, women studies, labour economics, sociology, public administration and industrial medicine. Trade union officials, personnel officers and managers, officials of women organisations and labour educators will also find the book a very useful source of materials for their day-to-day activities.

Olusola Jeminiwa
F.B. Onaeko

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ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF WAGE LABOUR IN NIGERIA

Tony Oghorodi

Introduction

The development, pattern and tempo of trade unionism in any society are invariably shaped by a combination of social, political and economic forces in favour of or against the development of wage employment particularly at its incipient stages. The reason for this is simple. Wage labour is the *raison d'être* of trade unions and the relevance of Industrial Relations as a field of study and practice for that matter. It follows therefore, that a critical look at the origin and development of wage labour in Nigeria is, indeed, a befitting starting point for any discussion on women and trade unionism in the country.

The intention of this chapter is to relate the origin and development of wage labour in Nigeria to the involvement (non-involvement or late involvement) of women in the trade union movement. This is of particular interest, since the labour movement is widely recognised as one of the most powerful and effective organs for political expression, and to that extent a dependable vehicle for the protection and advancement of the economic interest and aspirations of the less privileged members/groups in the society. Understandably therefore, the degree of involvement of women in the labour movement should explain whether or not they have been appropriately

positioned to take due advantage of the opportunities existing therein. Again, there is no better way to appreciate the position of women in trade unionism than to trace the historical evolution of wage employment in the country. An appropriate diagnosis should reveal those forces which have contributed to the present status of women *vis-a-vis* trade unionism in the country.

Be that as it may, it is important to note, that the very development of wage employment in the country, cannot be extricated from the influences of the socio-cultural patterns to which the people (men and women) had been accustomed before the introduction of the rather novel form of self-sustenance. The implication of this is that, we are compelled to recapture the peculiar features of pre-wage employment society as a basis for understanding the tenor of wage labour in later years. We shall therefore begin a consideration of this topic against the backdrop of a typical subsistent African society.

Before the Emergence of Wage Labour

In a typical traditional setting, the family unit constitutes the nucleus of all productive enterprises. In accordance with the societal roles ascribed to males and females, children and parents, every member of the family contributed his or her quota to the collective benefit of all. Since the system was largely subsistent, all productive efforts (by direct labour) were channelled towards the provision of the essential needs of the family. Though there were instances where help or labour was contributed by other members of the village system, such assistance was received and reciprocated against the backdrop of the communal spirit of 'a brother's keeper'. In fact, to trade labour in return for a wage was quite an unusual practice.

Even when production had to be carried out for the purpose of exchange, the productive unit was still largely inward looking. Engagements in full-time agriculture, a craft, or

the cottage industry — like weaving or pottery, for commercial purposes — were carried out without recourse to paid employment for labourers. The point we are trying to establish here is that even though the typical subsistent society, at a stage in its development, gradually developed interest in commerce, the productive system was still basically built around the family unit, at least before the coming of the white-man.

Having established the important position of the family unit in the productive system of the traditional society, it is necessary to further explore the characteristic mode of the distribution of functions amongst individual members of the family. Typically, a family unit is made up of a man (who is the head of the family), two or three wives (since the culture was mostly polygamous), and a number of children. In the assignment of functions, the man, and perhaps other adult males in the family, go out to hunt for game, and occasionally visit the farms to assist in the preparation of the land and at harvest time. The wives, along with the children, carry out the bulk of the task in the farms.

The specialized allocation of functions within the family unit ensures the abundance of food, a high-spirit of oneness and intimacy, and the abhorrence of anything that would take anyone away from home (such as wage-employment). About this, Lord Lugard noted in 1918 that the requirements of the peasantry were few, and (especially in the Southern Provinces) the existence of an abundance of forest products which could be cultivated without much labour, meant that in normal circumstances of peace and security, the natives "would take up land for themselves or engage in trade and neither remain as slaves, nor seek wages for hire".

In any event, the coming of the white-man did not immediately necessitate a radical transformation of the more familiar mode of production. Indeed, after the abolition of slave trade and the return of trade and commerce under peaceful circumstances, European merchants in Nigeria, were

heavily dependent on the produce of peasant farmers. This contrasted sharply with the situation in other places, particularly in East Africa, where merchants hired natives to work in big plantations.

It is interesting to note that in spite of the great surge in the commercial activities of British merchants after the discovery in 1830, that, the River Niger entered the sea through what is now known as the Niger Delta, there were no known external pressures mounted on the natives to commercialize their labour. The only form of wage labour highly sought by the Europeans then, were natives who could provide directions for trade routes in the dense forest of the hinterland (Ubeku, 1983).

It was not until the 1900s when the Home Government realized the need to consolidate its control over the colonies by way of establishing an administrative presence, that the essence of wage on a grand and more permanent scale, was first formally contemplated.

Emergence of Wage Labour

The discovery of vast reserves of oil palm in the Niger Basin region, the flourishing trade in other cash produce (e.g., rubber, groundnut and cocoa) and the accessibility of the hinterland to the sea altogether attracted a beehive of commercial activities from several competing European firms, which ultimately drew the attention of the British home government. Following the Berlin Conference of 1885 where the lower Niger Basin was formally conceded to the British government, all commercial activities of rival companies in the area were brought under the control of the Chartered *Royal Niger Company* (RNC). Between 1886 and 1900 the RNC administered all trading activities including prospecting of any kind, in the entire region. However, the RNC operated a rather inconspicuous administrative machinery and did little to establish the essential infrastructural network necessary to

operate an administrative machinery.

The slow pace of development received a boost with the revocation in 1900, of the administrative charter granted the *Royal Niger Company*. At the same time, the colonial government named two separate administrations — The Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and The Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. Furthermore it took steps to establish an appropriate administrative machinery. Thus, in 1900 and the years afterwards, the Colonial Government was basically pre-occupied with the need to build roads, construct bridges and rail networks, open up sea ports, accelerate mining activities and the exploitation of rich cash produce of the entire region. The general mission was to open up the entire land mass for the easy exploitation of farm and mineral resources. To achieve this, the home government needed to embolden its administrative presence. Thus, alongside the above mentioned activities, the authorities undertook a systematic annexation and amalgamation of the regional protectorates and colonies and eventually formed the colony and protectorate of Nigeria in 1914.

The number, tempo and scale of ambitious projects embarked upon by the colonial government did un-settle the salient *mien* characteristic of the native community. To accomplish the various projects, the colonial authorities needed to engage local labour first, under the arrangement of paid employment, and when this failed, there was the resort to forced labour. Many experts in Nigerian industrial relations history have highlighted a number of reasons why the native population was quite un-responsive to the introduction of wage labour. Many of these reasons have their roots in the socio-cultural milieu of the native peasant farmer. Blessed with an abundance of good agricultural land, there was very little paid employment could offer to attract the native away from the lure of the farmland and the bliss provided by the closely knitted family system. About this point, Yesufu (1984) rightly

observed that:

the acceptance of paid employment often meant leaving one's home and what was largely a secured and familiar life, to travel long distance to some other place, to live and work in strange surroundings. The new types of job were undertaken under unfamiliar conditions and rigid discipline. To the villager, indeed, wage-earning employment usually connoted a degradation from the independent status of the farmer to that of a hireling (P. 15).

The obvious implication of the strong sentimental attachment the local farmer had for rural life, was the necessity to increase wage rates as an incentive to attract adequate local labour to work on the projects of the administration. The scarcity of local labour was indeed a serious burden for the colonial government. Documented account have it that in 1901, the Northern Nigerian Government complained that the "preposterous rates of pay which have been instituted for local labour of all kinds has become one of the two most serious disabilities facing the administration (Yesufu, 1984).

A closely related argument which has been canvassed to explain the initial resistance of the local worker to paid employment, was that the average rural dweller lived in a somewhat closed society with very few needs and desires which were adequately provided for from the proceeds of the farmland. Under these circumstances, there was very little need for money income, hence the reluctance to take on wage employment.

Another factor which did not promote an enthusiastic response to wage employment, at the early stages of colonial government, was the absence of roads and easy means of transportation. As already noted, the new jobs existed at sites and locations often times quite distant from the villages of potential workers. The absence of roads and ready means of transportation therefore, was a serious disincentive for those who would have been willing to experiment with paid employment. And, since there was the familiar alternative of the farmland, the decision as to how to earn a living was quite

an easy one in favour of farming.

The consequent scarcity of local labour prompted the colonial government to adopt some strategies aimed at overcoming the problem. Some of these, in addition to higher wage rates, were the recruitment of labour from other countries such as Sierra Leone and the then Gold Coast; the introduction of forced or compulsory but paid labour, the introduction of taxes to be settled by money payments, and the sensitization of the rural dweller to exotic tastes and desires. Overtime, the combination of these measures proved a powerful stimulus for the acceptance of wage employment. According to Yesufu, by 1918 the shortage of local labour had been largely overcome. And according to Lord Lugard the reason for this was to be found "in the quick appreciation by the African of the amenities of life which he can procure for cash, and his natural aptitude for work".

Other studies have, however, revealed other factors which accounted for the rapid development of wage employment, after the initial period of stiff resistance. The factors include the impact of the two world wars; the rapid infiltration of western civilization (or education) and the growing population of literate Nigerians; the sudden disdain for village life; preference for the regular (though inadequate) cash of paid employment to the uncertainties of farm harvests; the target income philosophy; and even the bandwagon effect.

The cumulative effect of the spontaneous and tremendous surge of interest in wage employment was that by the 1960s, the former scarcity of wage labour supply had metamorphosed into an almost permanent surplus. In the view of an expert the bogey of unemployment had reared its ugly head as a permanent feature of the Nigerian economy. By the 1980s and the early 90s we were already battling with the nightmarish situation of what Professor Danachi refers to as the "unemployment trap". There is, perhaps, no better way to appreciate the tragedy of this country's development history

than to observe that we are already in an era of "postgraduate unemployment".

Various factors have brought us to the present situation, but there is none so fundamental as the perversion of our traditional value systems and the degradation of our ancestral heritage by the white man and his western ways of life. The vast and fertile farmland of yore, still abundant in the villages, but nobody wants to till the land any longer. Everybody wants to go to school but the schools cannot produce graduates with relevant skills for rapid development. Government wants people to go back to the land, yet it concentrates the basic amenities of life in the urban centres. Indeed, the entire system suffers a complete dislocation and everything, and everybody is in complete disarray.

A thorough analysis of the present structure of wage employment in the country is almost impossible given the absence of up-to-date statistics. However, since the declared intention of this chapter is to relate the history of wage labour in Nigeria to Women and trade unionism, we shall now proceed to do just that.

Implication for Women and Trade Unionism

The saying that "the women is the head of the home front" is an increasingly popular aphorism used to emphasize, albeit contentiously, the jurisdiction of women in the society, particularly our native African society. The roles as ascribed to women, and the societal attitudes to and expectations from women, invariably translate into a job description of a home-keeper.

Apart from seeing to the personal welfare and health of every member of the family or household. The woman also has to work on the farm. She has to grow and harvest food crops for the upkeep of the family. In contrast to the societal roles of the woman, the man, by virtue of his distinct physiological constitution, is allocated the responsibility of venturing into the wild forest to hunt game, gather materials to build the family

abode, and providing protection from external aggression.

In short, the distinct job description of the man readily makes him a target for the kinds of job offered by the white-man at the beginning of colonial government. The government needed people to build roads, bridges, railway tracks, sea-ports, administrative offices and residential quarters, mine tin in Jos, coal in Enugu, cut down palm fruits from palm trees, and a host of other masculine activities. It follows logically, therefore, that a great majority of the earliest recruits into paid employment were able-bodied men. Women and children were left behind in the villages to carry on with peasant farming, from which the colonial government generated a lot of export revenue.

By implication therefore, the earliest trade unions which evolved from the major work centres, such as the railways, the coal mines, tin mines, and even the civil service, were formed around the male gender. This explains why the railway union was named the National Union of Railway Men, for example. Although, other explanations exist for the male dominance of trade unionism such as the argument that trade unions were a protest group, a genre of the nationalist movement and therefore required the courage of the combatant — a quality which women do not possess, whatever variant of explanations is offered for the male dominance of trade unionism in Nigeria, the selective exposure of men to industrial work and the general socio-political environment of colonial government constituted incontrovertible forces which entrenched male hegemony from the beginning.

Developments over the years have tended to consolidate the male monopoly of trade unionism in Nigeria. Apart from the national excuse often made by women regarding their inability to combine domestic responsibilities, paid employment and active trade unionism without making a mess of everything, there has been the perpetuation of discriminatory employment against women particularly in the

manufacturing and allied industry. Ironically, where opportunities exist for the women to seize the leadership role in their areas of occupational dominance such as, teaching, nursing and midwifery, typing and stenography, the stigmatisation of trade union activists and the negative stereotypes associated with the movement, have made many intelligent and capable ladies to shy away from any form of involvement.

There are other justifiable excuses why some women forbid active trade unionism in Nigeria. The gory travails and general professional hazards that are frequently visited on trade union leaders, have made many, both male and female, steer clear of any perceptible degree of involvement.

The result of the above factors put together is that there has been a clearly perceptible degree of the non-involvement of women in trade union activities. Unfortunately, this situation compounds the plight of women in paid employment, because proxy representation of the interest of women can never reflect their true aspirations and expectations. It is not surprising, therefore, that rather than participate in active trade unionism, women have preferred to invent some other remote associations to advance and protect their interest in the society. Thus, we have *Women In Nigeria (WIN)*, *Nigerian Council of Women Societies (NCWS)*; *National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL)*, etc. AJAWDS

Although, one is tempted to reason that women would register a stronger presence in trade unionism as the society becomes more sophisticated, and the emancipated movement for the full expression and respect for human rights (of all shades) become a more familiar way of our social life, the present footprints on the sands of time would not allow us to reach such a conclusion with any real sense of conviction. This is because the realities of today's society is characterized by a very severe unemployment problem which has tended to promote harsh hostilities for female workers. Whether this

discriminatory attitude would be the very stimulant for female activism or mark the eventual eclipse of formal employment for women, is a difficult guess to make.

Conclusion

In summary, one would like to emphasize that the socio-cultural traditions of the native African, the hostile environment of paid employment at its incipience, and the sex-discriminatory jobs of the early periods, were factors which militated against the early admission of women into wage employment. The late and limited employment of women partly account for the ineffective involvement of women in trade unionism. Together with the unattractive stereotypes associated with trade unionism, and the herculean task of combining family, employment, and trade unionism, women have been seemingly deprived of appropriate representation in trade unionism. Unfortunately, the present distress in the economy could complicate issues by the tendency to accentuate sex discrimination in wage employment. These are some of the challenges that women may have to contend with in the 1990s, and beyond.

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A PREVIEW OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN THE MODERN SECTOR OF THE LABOUR FORCE

Dadirep, M.E. (Mrs)

Introduction

This chapter takes a look at women's participation in the modern sector of the labour force in Nigeria, in the bid to contribute to the socio-economic and political development of the nation. Since women form half of the population of the country, it becomes imperative to recognize their roles and contributions to nation building.

The entry of women into the modern sector in spite of oppositions from all angles has helped the country in attaining many goals, providing goods and services to its citizenry and a great help in meeting family needs. For the woman, involvement in the modern sector improves her dignity, prestige, status and gives a form of security and an opportunity to use her talents and abilities for the development of the nation. Even though society has for long ignored the contributions of women to national development, it cannot deny the fact that without them Nigeria may advance but feebly. Research findings have shown that women are still as capable as they were in the traditional African society, where they were part and parcel of their community's programmes and progress. Then, society was 'liberal' and allowed women to cultivate, trade, acquire and own wealth and property. Not only were they allowed to own property, but to enroll in the

military service of their communities. Since they owned wealth and property, they had economic and political power recognized and commended by the society of their day. Examples abound to prove this fact.

In the traditional Ghanaian society for instance, women had great economic and socio-political powers, thus the queen's mother was a king maker and custodian of the royal stool. In the same vein among the Igbo of Nigeria, women had economic power to the extent of marrying wives and having children of their own. In Hausa's history, Queen Amina is remembered for leading many successful military expeditions to defend, expand and consolidate Zaria as the strongest Hausa State in the 16th century. Also among the Yorubas, Moremi of Ile-Ife's patriotism led to the sacrifice of her son to ensure that the town was victorious in battle. Madam Tinubu's memory is that of a fearless woman who fought in resistance to colonialism, and is still highly respected by many. Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti will continue to be remembered for campaigning against the imposition of tax on the Egba women of her culture.

The above women were able to offer selfless service to their communities because the indigenous cultures of the day recognized, appreciated and admired women as achievers and contributors to development. Therefore it, rather than inhibit, encouraged women in the pursuit of their ambitions outside the home. Thus, both men and women made equal contributions to the development of their communities with neither the man nor women feeling superior or inferior as the case may be. Moreso, as both saw their roles as highly complementary.

Colonialism and Women's Participation in the Modern Sector

Nigeria's association with the British as its colonizers has left an indelible mark on the social-cultural attitudes and patterns of behaviour of its citizens. As regards women, Nigerian men

could be said to have carefully selected and interpreted a model that relegates women to the kitchen thus destroying the indigenous courage and capabilities displayed by their great grand mothers in service to their communities.

The 18th and 19th century England was characterised by its strong belief in the subservient nature of women to men. Deborah Powel (1977:66) observes that the 'natural' position of women was ascribed to two factors: the Physical constitution of the woman and the Divine providence as regards women. The naturalistic movement of the period re-emphasised the fact that the physiology of women naturally made them timid, feeble and unable to think because they had 'smaller' brains than men. In view of this, women naturally need the protection of a man with power and the brains. In addition to that, they held unto the belief that by divine providence the man is the head of the family and the woman is obliged as a perfect wife to be subservient to him forgetting that God's creation of a woman from Adams rib symbolises the need for the man and woman to work together for the progress of their family and community at large.

Incidentally, the *Bible* contains the story of outstanding women of no mean repute like *Deborah* who led a successful military expedition to protect Israel (see the book of Judges). In the book of *Esther* another woman named *Esther* risked her life and comfort to save her people from destruction. These two factors helped in domesticating the European woman and making the "Lady" whose responsibility was to keep and make the home environment conducive for her family. As a result of these and the introduction of the cash economy, the European woman had to stay at home. The nuclear family, a product of the transition from the medieval (pre-industrial) to the modern (industrial) world altered the European women's role — changing the character of domestic work, while at the same time undermining its primacy so that by the end of the 1600s the domestic establishment had lost its economic

importance, diminishing the socio-economic and political power of women, and finding a place for their intellect in the kitchen.

Coming from a background where the woman's place was in the kitchen, the colonial masters and administrators thought it strange to find the African woman involved in substantive economic and political activities outside the home (Kitchen). Consequently, it became necessary to domesticate, tame and teach her to be a 'lady' by confining her ambitions to the home. Napkin and Bay (1976) opined that the concept of ambition within the confines of the home was "transferred verbatim to the African woman, whose virtues it became their willingness to an inferiority status *vis-a-vis* men." They also finally posit that even when women were brought into the labour force in 1940, they were admonished to seek fulfillment in domestic activities and abandon ambitions outside the home.' It was against this background that the British administrators jailed all the husbands of those women who organized the 'Aba riot of 1929'. Buchi Emecheta (in an article on education in the United States) notes that the women were praised by their husbands to the extent that they became legendary figures. According to her, 'they received admiration and not rebuke, and in desperation the British administrators jailed all the men whose wives took active part in the war, in a vain attempt to show the world that men were behind it all.' They could not acknowledge that women, especially 'black barbaric' women could ever organise such a thing, at a time when their own women were still wrapped in cotton wool and kept so busy being ladies.

Therefore, while the European woman lost her economic and political power during the industrial revolution, her African counterpart helplessly saw hers destroyed during the colonial era. The 'freedom' she once had was taken away from her. Not only were her power and freedom destroyed, but she was placed in a dilemma as her husband who had become the

sole breadwinner of the family was taken away to work in the mines and factories. This left her with more responsibilities than obtained in traditional Africa. For example, the Berom woman in particular and other ethnic groups on the Plateau in Nigeria have learnt to be breadwinners by doing the farming themselves, trading and working to meet family needs, thus defeating the concept of the 'victorian lady'. With the men working in the mines, factories and the city, women migrated into the urban areas in search of jobs to sustain their families. These and many other factors brought women into the labour force in Nigeria and other African countries.

Women Participation in the Labour Force

The participation of women in the formal labour force dates back to the industrial revolution, when women and children were brought into the industries as workers. The industrialists found in this category of people cheap labour and an easier group of workers to dismiss at the slightest opportunity. Thus, it became profitable to employ women and children to do menial jobs which men would hesitate to perform.

With education, women were finally allowed into the modern sector in the forties, but were employed in the secondary sector which consists of service-oriented occupations. The primary sector was a preserve of men requiring individual creativity, ability to initiate and endure hardship in the process of performing the necessary functions. It also offers better job, security, remuneration and higher status 'befitting' men. This has resulted in the segregation of professional women into predominantly female occupations — teaching, social works, library, nursing and midwifery, and home economics (Gwong Kachollom Ja, 1991).

In Nigeria, many factors are responsible for the participation of women in the modern sector. These researchers have discovered to include the following:

- (1) Migration
- (2) Education
- (3) The insecurity of marriage
- (4) The availability of the labour market
- (5) Recognition of women's roles in development.

Migration

The introduction of the cash economy by slave trade and colonialism took the men away from the rural areas to the urban, leaving women with greater responsibilities than obtained in the traditional setting. According to Maria-Rosa Cutrufelli (1983) the 60s witnessed the migration of women to the urban areas where the educated found employment. As for the un-educated, who either followed their husbands or came on their own, they engaged in trading which improved their economic positions. It is interesting to note that the migration of women to the urban areas was met with strong resistance by 'men' who felt their monopoly of the scarce positions threatened (Christie Obbe, 1980). They advanced several reasons for opposing female migration, the first being that women may become swollen-headed and disregard the religious injunctions of the day.

A second reason was the fear that their traditional roles as wives and mothers as related to the preservation of the family would suffer in the process. By 1966/67, the resistance not withstanding, women formed 65:60 as against 95:60 per cent men employed in the urban cities.

Education

Education is the most important contributory factor to the participation of Nigerian women in the modern sector. Education has given women the opportunity to be professionals in various fields of human endeavour thus contributing their own quota to national development. The doors to education was flung open to all women in the

seventies with the introduction of the *Free Universal Primary Education* and the introduction of *Federal Government Colleges* for girls.

The Insecurity of Marriage

Fapohunda (1978) opines that many women work to support their relations on whom they could fall back in times of difficulty in marriage. She also believes that some women work to ensure a source of income in the event of death, separation, divorce or polygamy. A more obvious reason would be to provide clothings and other necessities of life for their children and themselves.

The Availability of the Labour Market

The oil boom of the seventies provided more employment for Nigerians, thus bringing in more women into the labour force. On the contrary the late eighties and nineties have witnessed gross un-employment making it difficult for even University graduates to secure jobs.

The Recognition of Women's Role in Development

The essential role women play in the development of the world can no longer be ignored by any reasonable and progressive country. Buttressing the importance of women in the life of any nation. A.K. Hottel *et al* (1968) rightly observed that:

the role of women in a community is a most important one and no nation can afford to ignore it. Women are as vital to a nation's progress as its minerals, its rivers and agriculture... treated with respect, they present a great powerful force which can be used to benefit and progress the nation.
(Altea Khottel and R. Frost 1968:7)

It was in recognition of women's contribution to national and international development that the *United Nations* declared 1976-85 as the *United Nations Decade for Women*. By this declaration, it proposed that all efforts will be made to ensure equality, development and peace. Incidentally, the *Sex*

Discrimination Act of 1975 had prepared the way for the *Decade of Women* by proscribing discrimination on grounds of sex in virtually all spheres of human endeavour, with particular reference to employment and education. Accordingly, the Act stipulates that "There is discrimination where a woman or man, on the grounds of that person's sex is treated less favourably than a member of the other sex would be treated; there is indirect discrimination where a requirement or condition is applied with which a considerably smaller proportion of one sex as compared with the other can comply, and where the requirement or condition is not justifiable irrespective of sex, and where the person to whom it is applied thereby suffers a detriment".

Following this Act, Great Britain and other European countries have established an *Equal Opportunities Commission* (EOC) to check against any form of discrimination; thereby, promote equality of opportunity in employment for both men and women irrespective of their marital status or race. In Nigeria like elsewhere in the world, women have had to struggle to gain access to education, to be recognized and to be employed in the modern sector. It has taken over thirty years of a world wide constant advocacy and pressure for women to join in hitherto male, masculine and male-dominated professions like engineering, medicine, architecture, law, aviation, management, administration, politics, the academics, accounting etc. Not only have women joined the professions in the modern sector but have performed well even as leaders in their respective fields. Yet, the functions of their professions are done in conjunction with their family and household responsibilities and communal obligations.

In Africa, various governments have recognized the contributions of women to nation building through the labour force, by instituting government sponsored programmes for women with the aim of encouraging and ensuring their effective participation in all spheres of its socio-economic, and

political activities. For example, the Ghanaian government sanctioned a special programme of conscientization for its women known as the *31st December Women Movement of Ghana*. The major objective being:

..... a call to protect our dear motherland.... threatened with economic collapse and social disintegration.... a call for the emancipation of womanhood from the shackles that have prevented women contributing their full quota to nation building (31st December Women Movement Brochure, 1990:2).

In like manner the Nigerian government in 1988 established a *Commission for Women* with branches in the thirty states of the federation. The Commission has among other aims and objectives: to encourage, educate and thereby, mobilize women to develop themselves in various skills and organize projects to improve their socio-economic and political conditions and by and large their contributions to the development of their country. The impact of the Commission is felt in the rural areas through the *Better Life Programme*. There is no doubt, that the world-wide recognition of women has increased and improved their participation in the modern sector.

The Location of Women in the Modern Society

Studies have shown that women are into all the male dominated professions in Nigeria. The only major observation is that they are highly under-represented for various reasons as we shall see later in this chapter.

A survey carried out by the *Nigeria National Manpower Board* identified eight types of employers in the country:

- (1) The federal government (civil service) where women form about 17 per cent of total employment;
- (2) Federal government (corporation) with about 11.2 per cent female employment;
- (3) State government (civil service) have the female percentage of 19.5 of the over all employment;
- (4) State government (corporations) — 15.8 per cent female employment;

- (5) Local government — 13 per cent female employment;
 - (6) Voluntary agencies have the highest female percentage of 28.1 as compared to the other sectors;
 - (7) Joint ownership with government, is 6.1 per cent female;
 - (8) Private enterprise — 7.4. per cent female;
 - (9) Others 16.5 per cent female.
- (Source: *National Manpower Board, Survey Report 1984*)

The above report reveals the fact that:

- (a) the federal and state governments employ more women than other employers;
- (b) the voluntary agencies highest of 28.1 per cent re-echoes the segregation of women into the secondary sector of the labour force;
- (c) women form only a minute percentage of the labour force in Nigeria. Therefore they are taken in the various employments and as tokens anywhere they are bound to find problems.

Women in the Professions

The professions in this chapter refer to those occupations and vocations which by their nature require advanced and specialized training. They also, by necessity observe certain special professional etiquettes. Another important feature of the professions is the absence of un-necessary bureaucratic control as found in the civil service. The conditions of service and high remunerations make room for individual advancement and growth in the profession. The professions referred to here include the following: medicine, law, architecture, management, administration, army, navy, airforce, accounting and the academics, etc.

-- This chapter would be incomplete if we fail to discuss at least the position of women in one of the above professions. For this purpose, we shall discuss the academics which requires special training and a continuous study to remain and progress within the system. It makes a good example because

the higher institutions provide the training for all the other professions.

Women in the Academics

The role of women in the Universities cannot be understood outside the historical and socio-economic development of higher institutions in the world. The historical tradition of Universities is rooted in the European medieval higher institutions of Oxford and Cambridge in the United Kingdom. Here teaching and research was regarded as a masculine profession suitable for bachelors only. At that time, knowledge was regarded as a prerogative of men rather than a human necessity. Thus, women were not accepted as students at both institutions. Even though, the *Royal Commission of 1850* made it possible for spinsters to study at Oxford, they had to have separate colleges where they were taught all branches of female knowledge. Since women education was seen as a favour and not a right, they were not allowed to sit for the same examination with boys, and refused any form of certificate or diploma.

Arthur Sidgwick, apparently unhappy with the way women were treated, wrote in the Times of February 6, 1896, that "Mr Gardener talks of women students as honoured guests at Oxford, it is not my idea of honouring a guest to make her do all the work and refuse her due recognition and rewards." So imprecise was the position of women at Oxford that the Punch carried a cartoon which vividly described it as follows:

Minerva finding her way blocked by a college Don of the old clerical type saying suavely "very sorry Miss Minerva, but perhaps you are not aware that this is a monastic establishment" (Brittain, V. 1960:108)

Today women are accepted and employed as students and academics respectively but the male syndrome seems to remain as the universities which have maintained their conservative

procedures make it difficult for many women to join the profession.

Expectations of the Profession

Academics are expected to carry out the following functions:

- (1) lecturing/teaching;
- (2) research;
- (3) community services;
- (4) attend conferences/seminars;
- (5) writing;
- (6) publishing;
- (7) training (those who come as graduate assistants must continue studying until they get their doctorate degrees).

A woman who finds herself in this profession begins at a disadvantage because she is a female and the procedures of the University suit only men. As such she must work really hard to prove her competence. Worse still, she bears the responsibilities of home and family care, so that 'sleep and leisure are sacrificed' (UNESCO 1991:2). Whether she likes it or not, she must be a super woman to teach, research, study, write and publish. And publish she must or perish. In the final analysis she works twice that of the man to contribute to the development of her nation. The *United Nations* report on women confirm that:

Women work as much as 13 hours on the average, more each week especially in Africa. (UNESCO Publication, 1991:15)

Yet these extra 13 hours are spent on household work which is unpaid and adds nothing to the woman's status. The combination of household responsibilities and the demands of the academics pose a serious challenge for the woman, especially when her status as a member of the community is determined and related to her economic contribution through the job outside the home — academics.

In spite of these difficulties Nigerian women have dared to join the profession and have excelled to its highest echelons.

The country has had two female vice-chancellors and one deputy vice-chancellor. There are between two-three female professors in most of the federal Universities especially, in the first generation category. The second generation Universities also have female professors, for example University of Jos has two full fledged professors, four readers and seven senior lecturers. But as we descend further to the lower echelons the number increases. On the whole, women form only 14 per cent of the total academic staff. In the University of Lagos they also form only 14 per cent of the Academic Staff population. Even in Britain and the United States of America women form only a minute per cent of the academics. In Britain they make up only 13.9 per cent, and 24.3 per cent in the U.S. (Sutherland 1985 and Simeone 1987).

Going by these figures we could say that women are under-represented in the academic profession like other male-dominated occupations. The *National Manpower Board Survey of 1984* confirms that only a small proportion of the work force in Nigeria is female. Most educated women prefer to work in the public sector in health and education fields. In the field of education women are more in number in the first and second levels of the educational system. They see the academic profession of the tertiary level as a demanding job which they cannot cope with effectively. In a research on academic women in the University of Ghana, Legon and Oxford University in Britain, it was discovered that those women with younger children find it more difficult to cope than the spinsters and women with grown up children—elderly women. The latter category have more publications and participate in research and conferences more often than the younger women with younger children who need attention. Like all other male-dominated professions, women lack role models and mentors to encourage and pull them along the ladder of the profession.

In view of all the above, we may wish to conclude that women do participate in the modern sector but because of the high rate of under-representation they form only tokens within their profession. Tokenism does prevent them from existing as individuals in their own rights to the representation of the gender with detrimental consequences. We could also say that the effect of home and family responsibilities on the careers of professional men and women is that the career progress of women is affected to a greater extent than men. According to Dorsey *et al.*, (1989) these responsibilities limit the time women have available for professional reading, writing and publication. It is indeed difficult to have two jobs — housewife and a profession—but Nigerian women have proven that they are capable of combining both. There is no doubt that women are active participants in the modern sector in Nigeria. It is hoped that as the economic conditions push harder, couples with professional female partners will have fewer children to look after and have time for their career development. It is also hoped that the labour force will ensure that women housework is recognized as an important reproductive contribution to national development and the bed-rock of same.

In the mean time we wish to suggest that women within child-bearing age of 21—40 be given a special child-care allowance to assist them in employing helpers to take care of their children. The *Nigerian Labour Congress* should prevail on government to shift the resumption time for workers from 7.30 and 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. This will help mothers make adequate plans for their families before leaving for the office. Since the labour union is a formidable force in the modern sector, it is necessary to look at women's involvement in trade unionism in Nigeria.

Women and Trade Unionism

Studies show that wherever women are found in the professions they are plagued by a common enemy of the

double-burden of the home and field. It is also true that many women have successfully sailed through to the highest echelons of their professions in spite of this enemy. The involvement of women in trade unionism is a third demanding job for females in Nigeria whether they are in the traditional or modern sector of the labour force. Battling with two equally demanding and energy-sapping professions is enough trouble for women to think of adding a third, which is not only time and energy-consuming but touches on their individual safety and job security. It also has a bearing on their marriage security as was the case in 1929 when the husbands of the *Aba riot* activities were jailed for their wives roles in the 'war'. It would require a special research to determine how many husbands today would willingly go to jail for their wives' involvement in trade unionism and political activities. Buchi Emecheta (1985) has rightly observed that both the white and black man may be intrigued by the woman who can hold her own reasonable argument and logic — but would not let his wife do it.

In spite of these, women have shown keen interest in trade unionism. But just as they are clustered in the lower cadre of the professions because of the masculine procedures, so is their participation limited by male-dominance in trade unionism. The few women found in the decision-making category of the labour union leadership are only a token representing women in the dormant posts. For example, in most male-dominated unions they serve as treasurers and can be easily marginalized when important decisions are taken. More so, as a minute minority, they can never have an input in a democratic situation. Since women are supposed to be seen, not heard, in most cases, they are back-benchers for fear of stigmatization by the obtainable socialization process. It is also true that the constraints of their multiple roles prevent them from being members of informal male-networks where issues and decisions are discussed and taken respectively.

If women were fully involved in trade unionism at the leadership level and actually had a say in decision-making, then the conditions of service in the professions of the modern sector should have changed to favour them. Unfortunately, this is not the case as women still pay more tax than their male counterparts. They still do not have the right to employers accommodation when married; and where a woman is in the same employment with her husband she forfeits her housing allowance. This act is supported by the argument that, by living with her husband she is automatically in government accommodation. She is also denied children allowance and yet she bears the major responsibility of caring for the child. Yet if the allowance is given to both men and women it is for their own good as co-labourers in the home and field. There is, therefore, a need for the trade unions in Nigeria to re-address and review women's participation by ensuring that their interests are fully represented and taken care of. We believe that there are still many of the *Queen Amina*, *Tinubu*, *Moremi*, who can take leadership roles and lead the trade union of Nigeria to greater heights of success for the development of our dear country.

In conclusion, we wish to commend the government's effort in creating the *National Commission for Women* to improve the conditions of women in both the rural and urban areas. However, we wish to also caution that unless the commission works hard at making sure women are fully integrated into the social, economic and political activities as individuals with the talents and capabilities of serving this great nation, it might only help in limiting and isolating them to women affairs.

In the same manner, trade unions must discourage the formation of female chapters which only help to isolate women to looking at gender issues, instead, they must ensure that the rules and regulations favour active female participation in their unions' activities. It must also, show in principle and practice that women are partners in progress at home and in the

professions. The welfare of a woman assists the welfare of her family without which, neither the man nor the woman may advance socially, economically, politically and technologically. If the business of trade unionism in Nigeria is the welfare of members then the participation and well-being of its females must be of paramount importance to this welfare.

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3

WOMEN, EMPLOYMENT AND TRADE UNIONISM IN NIGERIA

Onaeko, F.B.

Introduction

In the traditional Nigerian society, women were to a large extent limited to domestic activities, such as taking care of children, the aged, the sick and other domestic chores. In this regard, Ifaturoti (1985) saw the women's role in the traditional socio-cultural set-up as the care of their husbands, children and relations. Women were also involved in farming and community/social activities. The contributions of women in the traditional set-up were often not well documented and valued. This is no gain-saying the fact that women made tremendous contributions to the social, cultural and economic development of their respective communities.

The idea of wage employment was foreign to the system that Africans were used to. People hated the idea of working for somebody else for wages. In fact, it was considered as taboo and equated with slavery. The colonial government found it very difficult to recruit the manual labour (mostly males) needed for physical development like construction of roads and railway lines as well as for simple jobs like those of cooks, messengers and gardeners in the then colonial service especially in the early days of colonial rule. In fact, they resorted to forced labour. Invariably, wage employment was embraced in Nigeria from about the early part of the 1900s,

when factors outside the control of the indigenes came into play. These factors include the imposition of taxes on able-bodied men which had to be paid in cash, the experience of ex-service men who returned after the two World Wars, the material things which paid employment in the colonial service brought for the pioneer 'forced labour', recruits, and the declining earnings from agriculture for those left behind in the rural areas.

Initially, women were totally left out of the colonial employment as most of the works available required physical strength and migration from the familiar environment of the indigenes. In the later years when there were more openings in the colonial service, limited educational capacity of women built over several decades of bias in favour of the education of men at the expense of women counted against many women. There were also the problems of early marriage, limited exposure of women and heavy domestic/marital responsibilities which made it practically impossible for women to have time for paid employment. One important factor that helped greatly in changing the *status-quo* then was the role of missionaries and mission schools especially in the southern part of Nigeria which led to the education of women and invariably their employment.

Women employment and membership in trade unions over-time brought to the lime-light the thorny issues of equal pay for equal work for both sexes, equal opportunities in terms of career roles and development, and provision of such facilities as are essential for effective participation of women in the labour force such as creches or day care centres for working mothers (Olajumoke, 1990).

Even though substantial progress has been made in the proportion of women in the labour force and their distribution over a wide area of economic activities, women employment up till very recently was limited to the lower segments of the labour market and what has been described as *secondary market*

and where this was not the case, it was limited to few jobs like teaching, secretarial and hospitality works.

In recent times however, women have moved into traditionally male employment areas and much more importantly, to some leadership and managerial positions. Examples are in banking, law, engineering, armed forces and police, technical and vocational works. Women have maintained their lead and preponderance in such occupations as nursing, teaching and secretarial works, in spite of male incursions into these areas. A number of factors are attributive to this development. These include changes in attitude of parents through the role of missionaries and mission schools; emphasis of some regional governments on education and social development; economic and industrialization process which stimulated growth even in remote areas and improved income of people in their communities.

In much more specific terms, the estimate of the labour force in 1966 was put at 28.81 million of which those in wage employment constituted about 5.2 per cent. In 1975, wage employment accounted for 7.8 per cent of all gainfully employed of about 29.91 million workers out of which those in wage employment were 2.8 million. Recent estimates put the labour force as at 1982 at 55.7 million workers and out of these, twenty-eight million were women (Okoronkwo, 1985). Therefore, with specific reference to the proportion of women in wage employment, there has been a dramatic and continuing growth. However, up-to-date and reliable statistical data are still difficult to come by in Nigeria, even today.

Forms of Women Employment and Role in Trade Unions

Women's works all over the world take different forms and are shaped not only by the exigencies of the social and cultural milieu in which they are performed. They are today regulated by forces of the market enterprise, that is, capitalism and mode of technology as employers put up concerted strategies to

control not only women's work (including its pace, mode, quantity and quality), but their lives, through export free zones, part-time works and home-working.

In Nigeria, women's employment has revolved around full-time work, part-time work, informal work and self employment. A larger proportion of women work in the public sector than private sector while the greater majority are in occupations or jobs in the informal sector. This shows that a lot of them are in jobs which are not unionised or which are difficult to unionise. For instance, Yinusa (1990) observed that:

out of the 56.5 per cent of women in the labour force, 51.6 per cent were involved in wholesale and retail trading and are therefore not unionised while about 40 per cent were involved in community and personal services.

According to Olajumoke (1983) although women constitute about 50 per cent of the population and 15 per cent of the total work force, only 2.5 per cent of them participate actively in unions. She observed that women have not been elected to the *Nigerian Labour Congress* (NLC) executive, have not gone beyond Assistant General Secretaries in industrial unions and until recently the women's department at the *Nigerian Labour Congress* was headed by a male.

In a study of the Nigerian Tobacco Company (NTC) Zaria conducted by Yinusa (1982), she discovered that nine out of twenty-two women employed in the organization did not know that they belonged to a Union, while one out of twenty-two was not sure whether she did, in spite of having worked in the company for the past three years. In another study, Yinusa (1990) observed that:

women generally have low level of trade union meeting attendance especially when it is outside working hours. Since attendance of meeting is another measure of trade union commitment, women have not presented a positive image at all. They are also often less willing to make voluntary sacrifices for the survival of the union.

Yinusa in the study, however blamed the low level of commitment of women on a number of complex and

inter-related factors, notably, the socialisation process (cultural values and norms), preference of parents for educating boys, hostile attitude of men to their wives' involvement in trade unions dominated by men and the hazardous nature of trade union work in developing countries (Yinusa, 1990).

In-depth study into women labour history is of recent origin and is predicated on the new feminist scholarship in history and social sciences. Hitherto, women have been perceived as less militant, less easily organised and less active in unions than similarly situated men. For example, Sayless and Strauss (1967) assert that:

women present major problems to the union. Not only hard to organise but, once organised they are less likely to participate (Quoted in Milkman 1990).

The emerging feminist scholarship has sought to re-construct women's labour history and their many struggles in the work place. Women cannot be blamed solely for their low commitment to unionism. For example, it has been documented that male union activists demonstrate a pattern of hostility towards women participation in union activities. In addition, a number of broader social and cultural factors combine to discourage women from being activists or leaders (Milkman, 1990- Yinusa 1990).

In Nigeria, until very recently, women 'workers' issues in the social, economic and political realms have hardly been addressed in academic or policy making circles. In particular, issues pertaining to women in employment and trade unions have not been well articulated. In spite of the favourable disposition of the government and a number of enlightened employers of recent to issues of concern to women in the legal, social, economic and political realms by way of action-oriented policies, there are still a lot of areas in which women suffer at work what men may or may not suffer.

Today, discriminations are experienced by women in almost all the key areas of personnel management, that is,

recruitment, training and development, promotion, transfer, reward and discipline, welfare and health provisions as well as collective bargaining issues and contents. This discrimination often is not expressed by way of written statement of policy but much more in forms of customs and practices of the industry concerned and the values of the wider society. In this regard, Oyekekanmi (1985) observed that:

employment opportunities are the same for men and women in terms of job opportunities in Nigeria, as there are no written laws that certain jobs should be reserved for males to the detriment of the females. In practice, there are special provisions as pointed out earlier, which affect women as a special groups. These include maternity leave benefits, medical care, application of tax laws, and welfare facilities like housing and overseas training.

Women working night hours in the factories without adequate provision for their transport back home still abound and are exposed to dangers of armed robbery, rape and other forms of abuse.

In the legal terminology and work ethics, women workers are subsumed under the construct *worker* traditionally perceived a male. Male-centred sexist terms like man, manpower (planning), and chairman are very much in vogue, while respective sex-free or gender-neutral equivalents like human, human resource (planning) and chairperson are yet to be adopted. Even though there have been occasional seminar and conference reports focusing on women's needs in the work-place and society, in-depth study by way of research and book publication remains negligible. This situation is pathetic if we take cognisance of the fact that women workers constitute more than 20 per cent of the workers in wage employment. Hopefully, the present study will seek to redress the present situation and contribute to the reconstruction of women's role in employment and much more importantly, in trade unions.

Reasons for Low Participation of Women in Trade Unionism

Various attempts to explain the reasons for low participation of women in union activities can be located within the structural and cultural perspectives.

Structural Perspective

This explains men's domination of trade unions in terms of gender inequality in the larger society, usually governed by patriarchy. Thus, women's relegation within the unions is critical for maintaining the patriarchal order in the larger society which restricts women to the home and poorly paid jobs. According to Milkman (1990), women's poor economic condition impairs their ability to participate effectively within the unions. Heidi Hartman argued that:

men's ability to organize in labour unions... appears to be key in their ability to maintain job segregation and the domestic division of labour.

Finally, within this perspective, Cockburn (1983) in her study of London printers believed that trade unions are 'male power bases' that struggle to 'assure patriarchal advantage' (Quoted in Milkman 1990)

Cultural Perspective

The cultural perspective goes beyond material gains of men over women and encompasses the cultural factors which hamper female effectiveness in unions. Unions have been perceived largely as part of male culture and not the place for the expression of women's interests. Milkman observed that:

even where women are union members, the union is often culturally alien to them. Not only are union meetings typically held in bars and at night, so that women must compromise their respectability if they are to attend, but the entire discourse of

unionism is built on image of masculinity. For example, many trade union leaders and practitioners believe that women cannot undergo the hard life which union works entail like imprisonment, harassment, detention, etc.

Yinusa (1990) believed that:

most cultural values backed up by some religious injunctions uphold the invisibility of women in the public domain: decent women, they claim, should not come out and talk or relate with people especially males who are outside their family group.

The two perspectives above are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as we can see, but they help greatly to throw light on the problem under study.

Other explanations of low participation of women in union leadership and activities blamed it on lack of available positions. For example, Milkman (1990) argued that those already in leadership (usually men) seldom relinquish their position. To her, 'the number of vacancies narrows as membership, and with it the size of the organization stabilize.'

Kanter (1990) identified a number of factors as being responsible for women's unequal opportunity and unequal treatment in public service systems. These are the problem of blocked opportunity which occurs whenever 'women are concentrated in low opportunity and low mobility jobs with few prospects for advancement and few open pathways out and up; the problem of powerlessness which results whenever the formal and informal structures in place in the organization seek to undermine the decisions and authority of women in leadership position, and the problem of number imbalance which stems from the sex ratio in the organization. Kanter observed that 'in any job category or performance area where men outnumber women, so that women are virtually alone among all-male peers, the problem of "tokenism" arises and these women operate at a disadvantage in the organization'

Furthermore, attempts to integrate or champion women's interests through the creation of women's wing or bureau have

not been successful. When women's wings or bureaux are established, the presumably unintended effect is usually to marginalize women leaders and exclude them from the centres of union power. In contrast, women who were able to rise through the union hierarchy as men and without being perceived as specialists in women affairs seem to be taken more seriously (Milkman 1990). In this regard, Olajumoke (1990) observed that:

though there are state women wings of the NLC, neither its chairperson nor the secretary belongs to any of *Nigerian Labour Congress* national leading organs.

Low participation of women in trade unions in the Nigerian context constitutes a problem because of the following reasons: women workers constitute an important and increasing segment of the labour force and wage employment; women workers' interests which cover production, reproduction and distribution issues cannot be effectively handled by men (at least not as women); current enlightened thoughts of the state, urban and rural elites as well as those of the international community favour women emancipation and empowerment and non-participation in the effective leadership of the union by women will not be beneficial to the women, union and society in general. This view is predicated on the fact that unions constitute one of the most organized agents of enduring social change; and of institutions through which vital production, reproduction and distribution decisions of the society are shaped. Therefore, continued low participation of women in the activities and leadership of trade unions will continue to be retrogressive for social change and development at all levels.

Suggestions for more Effective Participation of Women in Employment and Trade Unionism

At this point, it is necessary to suggest a number of factors that are capable of improving the participation of women in

employment, trade unionism and broader social, economic and political development of this country.

First, there is a need for improvement in the existing child rearing and socialization process which tends to encourage sexual division of labour, and reinforce the foundation and structure of the patriarchal order of the society. In other words, there should not be overt tendencies to train girls for the 'soft house' jobs, while boys are trained for 'hard or non-domestic' jobs. It is regrettable today that in spite of the percentage of women in paid employment, that is, about fifteen (15) per cent, only two and half (2.5) per cent are involved in trade unionism. Union jobs are still seen largely as 'male' jobs, rather than as means for improving the lot of workers whether they are men or women. In bringing up girls, the need for assertive training aimed at building their assertive or 'aggressive' capacity cannot be over-stressed. Young boys need to be educated in such areas of house works as house keeping, cookery and laundry.

A related issue to the above, is the need for a fair sharing of marital or domestic 'burden' which women almost exclusively bear. Many working mothers today combine heavy domestic works with occupational works. The two roles most times are conflicting, rather than complementary and these often result in lukewarm attitude of women towards issues of social justice, equal opportunities and fairness in employment and trade unionism. In addition to a fair distribution of domestic responsibilities among husbands and wives, there is also an urgent need for the government and employers to provide for creches and day-care centres for working mothers as is often the case in developed countries. Other issues coming under this factor are the need for family planning education geared towards 'small family size' norm, the need for the provision of basic amenities like transport, housing, electricity, schools and health care facilities to reduce stress which women face in our communities and cities.

Encouragement of the democratic process in the trade unions is also relevant. The needs of women workers have been systematically neglected over time because of the oligarchical and un-democratic structure of many unions. The mode of campaign and electioneering into unions' elective positions still makes it very difficult for non-assertive women to seek for election and succeed. Unions are still seen as 'male power bases' even where majority of the membership of such unions are women. Therefore, it is very important for a department of women affairs to be created within the trade unions to handle some critical issues largely peculiar to the women workers, instead of the attempt to set up women's wing (essentially outside the trade union structure) which may be used to further marginalize and exclude women from the real power bases.

In addition, greater emphasis should be placed on training and education especially in the area of technical and workers education for both men and women. School curricula at secondary and tertiary institutions should be enlarged to accommodate courses in issues of employment and trade unionism. A lot of bias which men and even women have against women participation in trade unions can be removed through proper education and knowledge about what trade unionism is all about. However, attempts must be made to improve the overall capacity of the practitioners (in government, trade unions and industry) to deliver the goods. Current practice in which security operatives and police officers are used against practitioners in industrial relations can not lead to a higher interest in trade unionism on the part of women.

The need for the removal of existing legal limitations in our laws cannot be over-stressed. Some of the protective legislations for example, those on night work and underground work in-advertently encourage employers' bias against women who may be at an occupational disadvantage to their male

counterparts. Instead of keeping women from dangerous' works as the intention of *Section 54(3) of Labour Decree of 1974*, shows, government should provide facilities, training, equipment, security and every other thing that is required for women to do their works effectively.

Furthermore, political education and mobilization should be intensified. At the societal level, women are still not adequately represented in the national scheme of things due to structural and cultural factors as well as complacency of some of the women themselves. A related issue to the above is the need for women groups to work much more closely in concert with the civil and democratic groups on issues of social justice, human rights and rule of law.

Finally, the informal sector and the un-organised sectors in which the majority of women are now located need examination and greater attention to improve the income and employment levels especially in the rural areas. In addition, acceleration of social and economic development is necessary as many of the traditional beliefs and attitudes or inertia may not change except under conditions of rapid economic development. In other words, economic expansion needs to be encouraged to create more opportunities for women in employment and trade unionism.

Conclusion

In this chapter, attempts have been made to examine the role of women in historical as well as position in the modern contexts. Women participation in employment and trade unionism remains low and is worrisome.

Up-till the present time, women workers' interests which cover production, reproduction and distributional issues have not been well discussed and articulated. Women still face peculiar problems in the work context, but paradoxically their participation in unions remains negligible. It has to be recognized that continued low participation of women in employment and in the activities and leadership of trade

unions will continue to be retrogressive for social change and development. However, if greater attention is paid to the suggestions made in this chapter, there should be an upsurge in women interest in trade unions and their contribution will be enduring to the unions and society in general.

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4

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Olusola Jeminiwa

Introduction

Gender issues are not new. However, 1975 became a major milestone in international attention on women issues. In addition to being declared the *International Women's Year*, the world conference held in Mexico that year started the debate on the status of women. This was followed by the declaration of the years, 1976-85, as the *United Nations Decade for Women*. These developments led to a sharper international focus on gender issues and among others, acted as catalysts in the process of integrating women into the mainstream of development. The perception of the issues involved had a profound impact at all levels of decision-making—international, national, local. This chapter will focus on the national level with local illustrations. A framework for our discussion will follow this brief introduction. Thereafter women's role in development will be illustrated. This illustration will be appraised before we conclude.

National Development and Gender Issues

Development means different things to different people. Mabogunje (1980) identifies them to be economic growth, modernisation, distributive justice, socio-economic transfor-

mation and spatial re-organisation. However, there is agreement that development is multifaceted and involves improved living conditions that are sustainable. These views are strongly influenced by models of development that are derived essentially from the experience of and writers from western industrialised countries. For a long time, these views remained largely unchallenged in stressing the inviolability of capital intensive and labour extensive technology, centralised planning methodology for less developed countries (LDCs), internal causes of under-development within the socio-physical fabric of LDCs and saw external influences as positive in breaking the vicious cycle of under-development. This was through the impact of ideas, indiscriminate importation of technology, encouraging savings and investment and opening up of the national markets to western products. These views stressed material prosperity as the ultimate objective of development efforts and as Rogers (1976) put it, development was

a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system to produce higher per capita incomes and levels of living through more modern production methods and improved social organisations.

Because of this "materialistic face" of development thought, the various aspects of "human face" paled into insignificance just as labour was equated with capital as a factor of production. This partial view led to 'solutions' as industrialization for urban development and equating agricultural development with rural development (Hunter 1976). Experience with operationalising these views have led to growth without development, quantification of development indices, monetising development, rural poverty, urban squalor and in-appropriate technology. Others are, further marginalisation of vulnerable groups and areas and the concomitant tripling up of benefits of development and the so called neo-colonialism accompanied with loss of self-reliance

(Chenery *et al.*, 1974). These are at the global macro-level and they have led to a major questioning of accepted concepts of development. Factors like the value of the population's input into the development process, high degree of income and resources' distribution *vis-a-vis* high per capita income as the objectives of development, provision of basic infrastructural facilities for the people's social needs in addition to the materialistic requirements for purely economic production, social relations required for the satisfactory psychological build-up of the individual in the community and access to resources for individual contribution to societal wealth have now become important issues in development thought. Indeed Rogers (1980) believes that development should mean "a widely participatory process of social change in society intended to bring about both social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining control over their environment" In spite of this global awareness of the plight of the disadvantaged it has not been reflected in effective programmes for the eradication of under development.

A notable phenomenon however is that there is a serious gap in the disaggregation and characterisation of the disadvantaged groups in the development process. One of the groups that has suffered most from this neglect in academic discourses is women in the development process.

Women predominate among the poor in the world today and they are more in the rural areas. The annual incomes of millions of the poor throughout the world have declined so sharply in recent years that they have fallen below poverty line. And in the last two decades or so their (the poor) number has risen by 50 per cent to over 550 million (Morelli, 1992). This is a rate that is higher than the natural population growth. Rural women are getting poorer and further marginalised both in the utilisation of available resources and access to development resources. Although male chauvinists may be

right in saying that both men and women are affected by poverty, it is clear to the most simplistic analyst that women are far more disadvantaged and more vulnerable. Majority of African women still work for between 14-18 hours per day and produce between 50-80 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa's food, fetch water, gather firewood and care for their families (UNDP, 1990). In Nigeria, women form over half of the rural population and it is estimated that 80 per cent of rural labour force is provided by women (Ijere, 1991). Another estimate by the UNDP claims that about one-third of all African households are headed by women. In terms of sectoral allocation agriculture appears to be the occupation of 70.3 per cent of Nigerian rural women and 98 per cent of Rwandan rural women (UNDP, 1980). Yet it is known that agriculture has the largest chunk of the poor. For women, the poverty is compounded by the fact that only 8 per cent of women hold title to the land they work on (UNFPA, 1992). In the education sector, women also fare worse than men. For example, 46.3 per cent of females worldwide were illiterate in 1990 while that of male was 28.5 per cent at the same time. In sub-Saharan Africa, 70 per cent of females were considered illiterate (UNFPA, 1993). In Nigeria, the percentage is 67 per cent. Education brings benefits to the educated in the forms of access to information and markets and more economic and political influence. Education can make women gain more autonomy in the home and greater control over resources as a prelude to having more say in family decisions. Education is required for skills' acquisition and consequently to increase the competitiveness of women. Low education therefore generally limits the upward mobility of and marketability of women. Generally too, high labour turn-over (due to marriage, husbands' transfers, etc.) prevents women from establishing themselves or from obtaining long-term benefits from employment. In most countries of Africa, women workers are concentrated in the informal and un-organised sectors of the

economy. Trade union activities in organising workers therein are very insignificant (Date-Bah, 1993). Another major area of disadvantage is exploitation and abuse based on sex e.g., rape, abduction, harassment, physical violence, etc. One of the most vulnerable groups are refugees. Global refugee population is estimated to be about 75 per cent females and between 60-80 per cent of refugee households are headed by women (Overhagen, 1989).

The data enumerated so far are mere tips of the iceberg and seem to suggest that whenever the disease of gender blindness is hopefully cured, more gruesome revelations will be made about the disadvantaged state of women. More importantly it suggests that the current definition of development does not adequately address the afflictions of women — a large percentage of the population to benefit from development efforts.

It therefore raises the issue of women participation in the development process. If development is about people and there are evidences that a group of those people are disadvantaged it has implications about their level and degree of participation. With specific reference to women, most commentators simply identify females in different professions and jump to conclusions about female participation. Again this approach hardly gives appropriate clues to reality. A useful tool has however been provided by Arnstein (1969) in her popular 'Ladder of citizen participation'. She identifies various rungs of participation from 'informing' through various degrees of tokenism to full "citizen control". Are women merely informed of national development issues? Are they consulted? Is there any institutional mechanism for identifying and incorporating their needs into national development programmes? Or are they in full control of their situations? Full control by women of the whole gamut of national development may be the ideal of feminists and female chauvinists but that will lead to the marginalisation of the male population. National development

is about human beings — the enablement of blooming of the creative capabilities, irrespective of sex, not only to identify resources but to utilise them for socio-economic transformation. As a process development enhances the personality to be creative, organised, foresighted and disciplined enough to transform the socio-economic milieu. Consequently the 'materialistic face' of national development thought provides only a partial view. Development starts with people, irrespective of sex, and addresses issues of their orientation, organisation, values, self-reliance, self-esteem and discipline and proceeds to the production and utilisation of material endowments for improved and sustainable quality of life.

Women and Development in Nigeria: Illustrations

Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1991) identify the eight cardinal elements of sustainable development as they affect women as "education, health, culture, politics, economy, agriculture, enhanced environmental quality and peaceful co-existence." In this chapter, we will cite illustrations from what is initiated by the women themselves and what is initiated by the government.

(1) Traditional Agriculture

In a study of women's participation in agricultural production in Northern Nigeria's rural areas, Ogunbile, Olukosi and Ahmed (1991) found that women were active participants in the process. About 90 per cent of the women interviewed had farming as their main occupation (both arable and pastoral) including those in purdah. Because of the general patrilineal system of inheritance, most of the women had access to land through their husbands who acquired it through inheritance. Although most farm work was done by hired labour by women in purdah, the major tools were the same as those of men. There is also an indication that

many women on the field worked as labourers and not as owner-farmers. Farm sizes for women who had farms of their own were about half the sizes of the men's farms. However the type of crops planted were the same as those planted by men. Women were hardly physically involved in land preparation and moulding but they were involved in fertilizer application, planting, thinning, weeding and harvesting. In some other parts of the country (e.g., states in the south-east), however, women are involved in land preparation and moulding. An analysis of women's time budget shows that they worked for an average of 13.5 hours in a day and they were involved in cooking, fetching water and firewood, clearing house, preparing food for sale, child care and processing farm products for sale in addition to work on the farms. Their main constraints were lack of adequate storage facilities, lack of credit facilities to acquire processing machines, preferential treatment given to men in the available tractor hiring service, natural environment, purdah system and in-adequate access to agricultural inputs.

It is obvious that women actively participate and in some cases even have full control in their contribution to agricultural development. They are not passive observers in traditional agricultural production. And although there are traces of division of labour based on sex, the functions of women could not possibly be dispensed with if maximum production is to be attained.

(2) Better Life Programme for Rural Dwellers in Kwara State

The *Better Life Programme* was launched on 18 September, 1987 with the following general objectives, (Okoye & Ijere, 1991):

- (a) to encourage and stimulate the rural women in

particular and the rural populace in general towards improving their standards of living, their families and environment;

- (b) to inculcate the spirit of self development particularly of the rural women in the areas of education, business and recreation; and,
- (c) to create greater awareness among the populace about the plight of women.

The specific objectives were:

- (i) to raise the social consciousness of women about their rights, as well as their social, political and economic responsibilities;
- (ii) to bring women together and closer for better understanding and resolution of their problems through collective action;
- (iii) to mobilise women for concrete activities towards achieving specific objectives; including seeking leadership roles in all spheres of national life;
- (iv) to stimulate and motivate women in rural areas towards achieving a better and higher standard of life as well as to sensitise the general populace to the plight of rural women;
- (v) to educate women in simple hygiene, family planning and on the importance of child care;
- (vi) to enlighten women in rural areas on opportunities and facilities available to them at their local government areas;
- (vii) to improve and enrich family life; and,
- (viii) to encourage and institutionalise recreation.

Unlike the illustration from traditional agriculture, the *Better Life Programme* was sponsored by the government with all its attendant circumstantial and congenital constraints. In spite of these, some specific achievements can be attributable to the

programme. In the old Kwara State, for example, the following were identifiable achievements between 1987 and 1990:

- (1) 462 trainees graduated from Community Development Skill Improvement Centres. These centres were located in the then 14 local governments. Some of the graduates were absorbed in the primary education scheme as Home Economics teachers. Some established their own trades and businesses and actually took on other women as apprentices. Some became food vendors in schools while others preferred to hawk confectionaries. These centres became so popular that even some highly placed civil servants requested for placement in them as apprentices;
- (2) 73 women co-operative societies were registered. These societies were for all aspects of multipurpose co-operative endeavours namely farming, weaving, fish smoking, gari processing, thrift and credit, etc;
- (3) the sum of ₦140,000.00 was distributed as the first batch of interest-free loans to 28 projects and more loans were being processed for farm implements and inputs;
- (4) deep involvement in:
 - (i) production of black soap,
 - (ii) operation of motherless babies' homes,
 - (iii) organisation of literacy classes,
 - (iv) preservation of perishable food items,
 - (v) promotion of EPI/ORT activities;
 - (vi) promotion of sanitation programmes, and
 - (vii) distribution of farm inputs.

An Appraisal and Way Forward

Although the cost-effectiveness of the activities of the *Better Life Programme* may be questioned, it is plausible to suggest that some of the excesses are traceable to the programme's circumstantial and congenital constraints and reaction to women's disadvantaged status. This status derives from factors like:

- (1) limited access to wage employment and credit facilities;
- (2) legal and social status of women;
- (3) traditional customs;
- (4) long-held stereotypes;
- (5) illiteracy which largely leads to communication gap in the sense that most women (especially rural) do not understand the language of political and global economic business;
- (6) home making distractions;
- (7) generations of marginalisation; and,
- (8) institutionalisation of discrimination based on sex in the production process.

There is overwhelming evidence, however, that in spite of the imposed constraints on women, they are a most formidable productive force and a store of incredibly substantial human resources which are required for national development. They can dictate the pace and direction of the economy and society. Their sheer numerical strength is enough to jolt cynics. Although some authors claim that women's vital contributions in household and national economies are statistically invisible, it is clear that it is our tool for measuring these contributions by women that is faulty. Their role and potentialities can in no way be discounted simply because our instruments for measurement are faulty or inadequate. The current role of women in national development is considerable but the potential is far more considerable. In order to identify and tap these resources so as to ensure optimal performance in national development efforts by women, concerted efforts must be made for holistic development of women along the following lines:

- (a) ensure major policy interventions to bring women's social status and economic opportunities at par with those of men;
- (b) shift emphasis in regional development efforts to the provision of infrastructures and location of productive

ventures in hitherto marginalised areas;

- (c) identification and removal of all appearances of discrimination based on sex (religious, cultural, traditional, etc.);
- (d) merit should be given its rightful place in all activities, plan design and programme implementation. This is the way to enhance the spirit of healthy competition and, consequently, optimal contribution to national development;
- (e) special child care security/allowance should be put in place because a properly brought up child is an asset to the society and not the mother alone;
- (f) massive adult literacy education whose contents go beyond imparting only literacy skills should be embarked upon. The scheme should include psychology lessons in self-esteem, business education and acquisition of managerial skills in order to make women aware of business opportunities and their limitations. This should be accompanied by ensuring access to the highest level of education to women just as men;
- (g) concerted efforts have to be made by women themselves to be heard, seen and involved in all ventures, including political ones because the best advocates for women emancipation must be women themselves;
- (h) credit facilities that are commensurate with their proportion of the population should be made easily accessible to women;
- (i) the purdah system is found to be socially acceptable to those who practise it. In consonance with the necessity for maximum contribution to national development, cottage economic activities that are socially acceptable and economically viable should be identified and concerted efforts should be made to integrate such activities into the system;

- (j) women development programmes should not be handled in an *ad hoc* manner. Their economic development raises overall standard of living substantially. Therefore all plans for the achievement of the objective should be meticulously designed and faithfully executed;
- (k) all efforts should be made to stimulate the enthusiasm of women to participate actively in all activities and programmes designed for them. Enthusiasm is the driving force behind participation. Many seemingly good programmes have failed woefully because the intended or flaunted beneficiaries were not enthusiastic to participate in them;
- (l) there should be well designed programmes for the constant training and re-training of all those involved in women's activities;
- (m) institutions of higher learning should design and run courses up to postgraduate level in women studies;
- (n) the challenge of organising women workers in the un-organised and informal sectors of the economy should be taken up with all seriousness by labour unions and their partners.

Conclusion

Women, though very strong numerically, are constrained by centuries of playing marginal roles in what are considered when computing national development. The final result, therefore, does not accurately reflect the reality of the tremendous actual and potential roles of women. However, evidences abound, both in the so-called traditional economy and the modern industrial sector, that women's contributions are not only grossly under-estimated but that its proper valuation may reveal that it is the cornerstone of national development. Some constraints to the full participation of women have been identified and some suggestions towards their holistic development have been proposed. Development

and empowerment for full participation do not come on a platter of gold. All those involved in women development must be committed to productive actions and in a consistent manner. Women and men form the two sides of the same coin and they are inseparably interwoven in the national development milieu. Unequal treatment and enablement will be at great peril to both.

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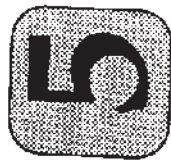
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TRADE UNION STRUCTURE IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN PARTICIPATION

Issa Aremu

Introduction

Trade Union: What is it?

There are many definitions of trade unions just as there are more than one perspective of a trade union-purpose. The *International Labour Organization* (ILO) for instance, sees a trade union as:

an organisation of employees usually associated beyond the confines of one enterprise, established for protecting or improving through collective action, the economic and social status of its members.

This definition is said to be rather restrictive in the sense that trade union responsibilities are limited to the work place and union members alone. That trade unions have restricted membership is however nothing novel. Hyman (1971) has argued that 'the very name: trade union implies sectionalism: the inward-looking unity of those with a common craft or skill'.

There are those who share a legal notion of a trade union. According to the *British Trade Union Act of 1913* for instance, a trade union is seen as:

any combination, temporary or permanent, under the constitution of which the principal objectives are: the regulation of the relations between workmen and workmen, masters and workmen, or masters and masters, or the imposing of restrictive conditions on the conduct of any trade union or business.

The implication of this law and order view of trade union is that trade unions' functions are statutorily defined. Often, the statutorily defined duties of the unions are confined to the regulation of the 'terms and conditions of employment of workers' alone. The legal definition of trade unions historically arose out of the need to check and control the specter of revolution and discontentment within the workers' movement in Britain. Trade unions were thus accorded legal status and definitions such that 'they would not fall under the denomination of disaffected persons, by which their activities may be diverted to improper and mischievous ends' (Harrod, 1987). The limitation of a legal notion of trade union lies in the fact that it is static; trade union's functions are confined to only 'terms of employment'. Also precisely because trade unions are 'status' or 'rule' bound, this notion is subservient to the interests of the establishment in general and employers in particular.

Another definition of trade union is offered by Sidney and Beatrice Webb (1920). Trade union, they contend, is a: continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working life.

This notion of unionism recognises the dynamic nature of the movement, that is, as a continuous association. Also trade union purpose transcends 'terms of employment' to include 'conditions of working life'.

The institutionalists on their part see a trade union as a bargaining actor. Thus trade unions are defined as:

institutional representative of workers' interests both within the labour market and in wider society, and they accentuate the collective rather than the individual power resources of employees (Beauregard, 1985).

The radical school of thought offers decidedly 'political' definitions of trade union. Trade unions are seen as the:

'conveyor belts' of the workers' desire to put an end to 'wage slavery' and radically transform the society (Hyman, 1971; Annunzio, 1980).

However, for the radicals, this notion of trade union holds only before 'the revolution'. After the revolution, radicals redefined trade unions' purpose to meet their expectations. Thus after 1905, Lenin's definition of trade union goes thus:

an organisation designed to draw in and to train, in fact, a school of administration, a school of economic management, a school of communism.

It can therefore be seen that many definitions of trade unions abound. For the purpose of this chapter however, it is desirable to see a trade union as a:

continuing, permanent and democratic organization created and run by the workers with the view of protecting themselves at work, improve working conditions and seek better working life in the society in general through collective bargaining (I.U.F.A.W.A., 1985)

The usefulness of this definition is that it makes us to also appreciate what is not a trade union. For instance, professional or employee associations which only organise social or recreational activities, or certify members with a view of maintaining professional standards, are not trade unions. Only trade unions engage in collective bargaining resulting in collective agreement and only trade unions are expected to hold periodic elections and allow for full participation of all members in the conduct of their affairs.

In Nigeria, trade union objectives are as follows:

- (1) unionisation of workers;
- (2) regulation of relation between workers and employers and between the workmen and workmen;
- (3) establishment and maintenance of just and proper hours of work, rates or pay, and conditions of service;
- (4) encouragement and maintenance of a high standard of production in the establishments;
- (5) advancement of the education and training of the worker;
- (6) provision of benefits and other assistance to the members as provided in the Constitution;
- (7) encouragement of the participation of workers in an

- (8) undertaking; industry and at national level; protection and advancement of the socio economic and cultural interests of the community, and
- (9) such other objects as lawful and are not inconsistent with the spirit and practice of trade unionism.

It is clear from the above objectives that trade unions are formed mainly to protect workers at work through collective bargaining as well as serve as a means of expression for the workers views on the problems of the society.

Why Trade Union?

The interest of the employers is to get the best from the workers in the process of making profit for the enterprise. Most employers would naturally pursue their goal with the cheapest means available including cheaper labour. Many, if not all employers would even employ inhuman methods such as child labour, corporal punishment (witness 'frog-jumping' of workers for lateness by military administrators!) and even imprisonment (witness NEPA 11) to ensure labour compliance and objective of production. Without constant checks, employers may not even promote workers, for as long as the work lasts. Employers would prefer summary dismissal, fines, and wage deductions. On the other hand, workers are interested in decent wages and benefits for the labour and services rendered. Precisely because of this basic opposition or conflict in interests, workers have seen the need to come together to present a common front against the employers. The natural front is the trade union. It has been observed that trade union organization 'is the most obvious foundation for workers' action'. Individual workers may very well act alone in resistance against the employers' domination. Indeed individually, workers may engage in work-sabotage, goods' theft, malingering and absenteeism as plausible ways to check

the indifference of management. But these are short-lived methods of resistance. For one, individual workers are haunted almost permanently by the prospect of termination when caught in the act of 'sabotage'. Only through collective actions represented by a trade union will workers no longer become powerless. With trade unions, workers prove an equal partner to employers. They recover their dignity and above all they may exchange their labour for a 'fair wage'.

Nigerian Experience

Wage labour dates back to colonial times. Before the advent of European rule, traditional economy relied on either family or communal labour. Since there were no distinct employers with distinct interests as identified above, in this subsistence economy, 'workers' in the modern sense and indeed trade unions were non-existent. Colonialists assaulted and dismantled this old order and in place erected an economic system which 'became synonymous with 'collision, conflict, and class struggle'. Colonialism required wage labour in public works, infrastructure construction such as railways and administration. Early trade unions thus emerged mainly in the colonial service sector. The first generation of trade unions include *Nigeria Civil Service Union* (NCSU) (1912), the *Nigerian Union of Teachers* (NUT) (1931) and *Nigerian Union of Railwaymen* (NUR) (1932). The unions came into existence with the main objective of ameliorating the deplorable working conditions during the colonial rule.

Since the emergence of the first generation trade unions, thousands of trade unions have been formed in Nigeria. Today, Nigeria has a system of industrial unionism. This system means that trade unions are established along industrial line: that is every 'junior' grade of workers in an industry belongs to the same trade union. There are forty-one (41) industrial unions (see appendix A) and all are affiliated to a single centre: *Nigeria Labour Congress* (NLC), which came into being in 1978.

Trade Union Structure

The modern dictionary of sociology defines structure as 'the underlying and relatively stable relationship among elements, parts or patterns in a unified or organised whole'. A structure can be formal or informal. A formal structure is seen as that part or a social group that is defined by explicitly stated rules and expectations. The constitution of a typical industrial union explains its formal structure. Seven levels of formal union structure are discernible:

The Branch Executive

The bedrock of union administration is the *Branch Executive Committee*, comprising of a Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and six elected shop stewards. The committee offers leadership at the local level. A branch often carries the name of the factory or establishment. It meets daily as a routine to solve the problems of workers. Workers' problems are local in nature or peculiar to the branch.

Zonal Council

For effective co-ordination, most unions maintain *Zonal Council* structure. A zone comprises of a manageable number of branches. It meets periodically and often has an elected Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer.

Central Working Committee

A vital organ of the union's national government is the *Central Working Committee* (CWC). It meets more than once in a year as the situation demands. Its powers include appointment and discipline of officers, the latter subject to the approval of the delegates conference. In the case of emergency, it also has the power to administer any crisis area and can also dissolve either a *branch* or *zonal council*. A typical *Union Constitution* does not spell out the agenda of the CWC, but record of its proceedings

It does not state CWC of ASCLD

indicates that it discusses the workers' welfare and organizational problems. It is attended by all elected national officers, General Secretary and his assistants.

National Administrative Council

The *National Administrative Council* runs the day-to-day affairs of the Union. Principal members of the *National Administrative Council* (NAC) of a typical trade union include the following:

- (i) President;
- (ii) Deputy/Vice President (Many unions have more than one DP and VP);
- (iii) General Secretary;
- (iv) Assistant General Secretary;
(Many unions have more than one AGS) assigned to each department;
- (v) Treasurer;
- (vi) Zonal Chairmen.

National Executive Committee (NEC)

The main pre-occupation of the *National Executive Committee* (NEC) is to run the affairs of the union in between the triennial national delegates' conference. It meets every twelve (12) months as decided by the CWC unless there is an emergency. Presided over by the President or his Deputy, the NEC is next to the delegates' conference in the exercise of power. It carries out the decision of the conference and issues directives for proper governance and administration of the union affairs. The NEC often appoints the General Secretary, Deputy General Secretaries and Assistant General Secretaries. It sets up departments such as education/research and committees on women and youth affairs. NEC membership includes national officers, zonal chairmen and two other representatives elected from within the Council, the General Secretary and his subordinates.

National Delegates Conference

The *National Delegates' Conference* is the supreme decision platform. It holds every three years (triennial) or every two years (biennial) as the constitution stipulates and it is attended by branch delegates, national officers and the secretaries. Delegation may be proportional; a branch of 100 to 500 members may have a delegate while every additional 500 members confer an additional delegate. Most unions' constitutions stress the business of the conference as to include the consideration and determination of internal questions of policy affecting the union. The union funds are accordingly disbursed between all these levels of union government.

Negotiating Structure

Another important level of the union structure is its *Negotiating Structure*. Unions pursue the cardinal objective of improving members' welfare through collective bargaining and negotiation. Thus the negotiating team of a union occupies an important position in the union. A typical union's *negotiating council* is made up of elected and appointed national officers led by the President and the General Secretary. It is often an unusually large team that cuts across the branch, zone and national levels of the union. This allows for spread and participation. The council signs collective agreements with the employers' association on those areas as wages and salaries, overtime payments, hours of work, annual leave and leave allowances in general, housing and transport, gratuity, medical facilities, etc. The composition of the negotiating structure is dynamic as some members may be replaced during new negotiations.

The National Labour Centre: Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC)

The present trade union structure is a feature of the existing system of industrial unionism which came into being in 1978.

This formal structure is typical and common to the forty-one (41) industrial unions.

The NLC is a federation of autonomous unions. Aptly described as a *union of unions* (Fashoyin 1985), the NLC is at the head of the trade union structure. Its objectives are similar to that of the industrial unions, the only difference being that the NLC constituency covers all unionised junior workers in the country. NLC is affiliated to only two bodies, namely: *Organisation of African Trade Union* (OATUU) and the *Commonwealth Trade Union Congress* (CTUC). Patterns of relationship in the *Nigeria Labour Congress* (NLC) also reflect different levels of structure of union discussed above. There are however few additions, viz:

State Congress

To meet the responsibilities of its members nationwide, NLC maintains structures at the state and local government levels. The State/Local Government Congresses are made up of state/local affiliate unions.

Functional Departments

The constitutions of most industrial unions vest the powers to create specialised departments or committees in the *central working committees*. However, the Constitution of the NLC is more explicit about the imperative and establishment of some departments. These departments include Education and Research, International Affairs, Co-operative and Social Welfare, Legal and Women Affairs. For instance, the Department of Women Affairs of the NLC is expected to:

- (i) ensure equal pay for work of equal value;
- (ii) ensure non-discrimination on job opportunities based on sex;
- (iii) give strict observance to *International Labour Organisation* (ILO) convention on women labour;

- (iv) procure relevant vocational training facilities for women, and
- (v) encourage active participation of women in trade union activities (NLC Constitution).

The Importance of Trade Union Structure

Understanding trade union structure is very important in industrial relations studies. This is because the structure of trade unions determines the following:

1. How decisions of the organization are made;
2. How members are represented in the decision-making bodies;
3. How the membership is mobilised to confront problems;
4. The extent to which women are represented in the decision-making organs, and
5. The degree of the openness or exclusiveness of the movement.

It is therefore clear that in understanding trade union structure, one comes to appreciate the principles which underline the pattern of union government and the criteria for participation by either male or female members.

The Unions' Structure and Women Participation

The increasing recognition of the role of women in trade union movement arises out of an understanding that the working class is sexually or gender differentiated. This means that just as workers are divided based on their state of origin or age, they are also divided into male and female.

The high point of this understanding is that women workers face specific problems at workplaces. These problems include *maternity, (unequal pay, sexual harassment, double burden of domestic work and wage labour*. Rather than submerge women workers under the broad category of workers, thus making their identity 'invisible', it is argued that we should necessarily have a measured or underlined notion of female labour.

We are therefore called to reject the monolithic view of the working class. New critical writings have emerged which show that women have been economically, socially and ideologically oppressed by men. They point to the sexual division of labour in the household in particular, where women undertake activities which are indispensable to the production and reproduction of labour. These activities often not considered as work but 'duties' of women, include children-care, nursing the sick, food production and preparation. These tasks are labour-intensive, repetitive, time-consuming but not paid for or recognized. The multiple identities of women as mothers, workers and wives, promoted through socialisation in childhood, made feminists to argue that female labour needs not be submerged within the category of 'labour' but studied for what it is: women work.

For instance in some useful policy-oriented researches, they have called for a specific recognition of female labour in *Gross National Income Accounting* (Chhachhi and Pittin 1991).

Vital Statistics, Token Representation

Women's share in world employment is said to be substantially on the increase. An estimated 41 per cent of women are in the official labour force. But world-wide, women still earn 30-40 per cent less than men. Although the concept of equal pay for equal value is widely shared, in practice however, women are usually denied the opportunity to earn overtime payments, and high-pay. Women are mostly found in the service sector, part-time, temporary and casual employment where labour practices are precarious and less covered by labour legislation (ITGLWF, 1994).

The figures published by the *National Population Commission* in 1982 estimated the country's total population at 88.78 million. Out of these, 57 million people were engaged in the labour force while 28 millions (about 50 per cent) of this figure

were females (Fashoyin, Oyekanmi and Fapohunda 1985). The recent population census curiously indicated that women numbered less than men in Nigeria. The total number of females according to 1991 census is 43,969,970 representing 49.68 per cent of the total population. The paucity of data does not allow us to presently ascertain the percentage of female employment. There is however, no doubt that female labour is mostly concentrated in the informal sector, where the working hours are seemingly flexible and incomes may not be as predictable and high.

In the formal sector, data of gender composition of the labour force in the Federal Civil Service point to an increasing number of female workers. In 1987, a total number of 32,526 were employed. This number increased to 36,067 in 1989 (FOS, 1989).

With the above vital statistics, showing women as a significant labour force, one would have expected an active involvement of women in trade union affairs. The world-wide trade union profile however shows that vital statistics have not conferred an advantage on women.

With specific reference to the trade union movement, the rate at which women are joining the unions is far below their members in the work-force. Most unions are not seriously addressing the issues of women's inequality and low participation. They remain grossly under-represented in the leadership positions of the union.

Trade Unions: Macho Outlook

According to the recent report by the ITGLWF, while there are differences between unions and countries, the picture remains the same: women are 'grossly under-represented in the decision making structures of the unions. Few or no women are Presidents or General Secretaries or even deputies of their unions. In 1992, for instance, only two of the 95 Chief Executives of AFL-CIO were women. One (1) out of the

twenty-three (23) Presidents of Swedish Labour Centre was a woman. Canadian CUPE had as many as nine (9) women on the twenty-seat executive in the same year.

The statistics from *International Labour Movement* is also typical. In 1991 in the ICFTU, only one woman served as Vice President out of fourteen Vice Presidents.

At the local level, women tend to be more represented. But the report also shows that the representation falls short of the 'core areas of union activity', namely, bargaining structure or administrative structure which normally lead 'to career advancement in the union'. Women are found mostly in 'particular types of positions' which reinforce their traditional 'supportive, caring roles'; women's committees, welfare and social affairs and not grievance, health and safety committees, education and research.

Nigeria: Not an Exception

Evidences in Nigeria also point to the assertion that women are marginally represented in the union's structures. For one, relative low female employment (though on the increase) in the formal sector means that a limited number of women can join the trade unions. Women workers are traditionally found in nursing and teaching. In both the *Nigeria Union of Teachers* (NUT) and *National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives* (NANM) women tend to predominate as members. It is instructive to note that such sectors as textiles traditionally associated with 'feminine' labour is male-dominated in Nigeria. The biggest textile mill in the country, *United Nigerian Textiles Plc.*, Kaduna employs only 30 females out of 6,000 workers. The implication of this low female employment is palpably clear; while women constitute about 15 per cent of the total labour force only 2.5 per cent of them participate in trade unions (Olajumoke, 1985).

Of the present 14-member *National Executive Council* of the NLC, none is a woman. At the 1988 NLC Conference in Lagos,

only 10 out of 281 accredited delegates were women, three (3) of whom were drawn from the Nurses' Union. None of the General Secretaries or deputies is a woman. Indeed, the highest position (interestingly through appointment) held by a woman is Assistant General Secretary (Olajumoke, 1985). Thus at the national level, women remain 'invisible' in the union structure. The pattern of male dominance reproduces itself at most individual unions' branch structures.

Beyond the Structures

The 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees the right of freedom from discrimination either on account of tribe, religion or sex. According to the *Labour Act of 1974*, trade unions are open to all 'junior' workers who are not performing managerial functions (Ogunniyi, 1991). It is clear that the challenge before the women lies in how to realise constitutionally protected rights.

From the descriptions above, it will be clear that union structures are vertically integrated. The implication for women participation in union leadership is therefore clear. Unless they actively assert themselves at all levels of functions especially at the branch committees, being the 'bedrock' of union administration, women representation will persistently remain token and marginal. Overcoming structural constraints may however prove difficult because of other weighty factors, viz:

Limited Experience and Training

Some unions have evolved electoral guidelines which stress union experience and training. Many women lack these pre-requisites thus creating what has been described as *chicken and egg* situation.

Long and Unusual Hours

The responsibilities of trade unionists, either elected or appointed, involve long unusual hours and travelling which

female workers may not cope with. In addition, unionists employ alienating and unfamiliar jargons, rules and procedures, being the stock in trade of the management class, trade union is mandated to check.

Men Re-inforce Own Positions

The trade unions are still essentially male-dominated. Men who occupy the existing union structures are better placed to perpetuate same prejudices, values and stereotypes that discriminate against women. The centralized nature of unions' structures means that authority is unilinear, that is, flows top-down. He that occupies a vintage position in the union hierarchy may distribute resources such that women's cause may be promoted or even undermined as a whole.

'Old-Boy' Syndrome

Informal structures and relationships also assert considerable influence on the process of participation and representation in the trade unions. The 'old-boy' and 'town-boy' syndromes are in some instances entrenched. The fact is that most unions decisions take place at town-meetings, company clubs and bars and at odd hours that make it difficult for women to attend. Conversely, women workers devote non-working hours to different activities. Chhachhi and Pittin (1991) discovered that at the Electricity Meter Company (Nigeria) Limited, (EMCON), Zaria, religion 'plays an important part in women workers' lives: Bible classes, fellowship meetings, church organizing and of course, Sunday Services are foci of women's non-working hours'.

House-Wifization

Perhaps the most important factor is the burden of domestic work. The concept of *house wife* is deeply entrenched in Nigeria. Women devote a great deal of time to child-care and home-keeping generally.

Traditions and Stereotypes

Another barrier is shared tradition and stereotypes. Through childhood socialization, women have been unwittingly made to play subordinate role, 'under-value their abilities' and persons and believe that marriage is the ultimate while formal work is 'passing time'. Unionism has been treated to be a masculine preoccupation with the notorious images of arrests, imprisonment, strikes and even violence. Mrs Emily Oniwinde, ex-exco member of *National Union of Textile Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria* (NUTGTWN) said she enjoyed the support of her colleagues in the union, adding that she never experienced any form of discrimination at workplace. She however admitted also as much:

...the society has a general belief that a woman's place is in the home and that women are submissive and shy. My husband is in support of my trade union activities, except my in-laws who believe that it is a man's job (Elesho 1994).

Divisions and Lack of Solidarity

Marital status, religion and petty bickerings have denied women necessary cohesion and unity of purpose that is the hall mark of successful union leadership.

Strategies for Women Participation in Unions

Strategies that will encourage female involvement must aim at removing the identified barriers above. The suggested strategies are as follows:

Affirmative Policy

Trade unions in Nigeria must affirm a policy that will encourage positive actions on women participation. The policy must incorporate gender perspective and equality issues in the areas of union work: bargaining, research, education and information. In concrete terms, trade unions in Nigeria must adopt the ICFTU's and ILO's approach of setting a minimum 30 per cent female participation at all levels of their activities.

Union electoral guidelines must include 'female quota', however 'token' it is.

Commitment from the Leadership

The support of male-dominated union leadership is indispensable for women participation in trade unions' structure. Enlightened General Secretaries and Presidents can overcome prejudices of male colleagues to recruit female staff and devise different techniques to work with them for the union's growth. The case of NUTGWN which employs a significant number of graduate women in education/research as well as accounts departments is a worthy case.

Campaigning on Women Issues

It is a paradox that while most women workers are concerned with such issues as pay, health and safety which unions fight for, they are still less interested in trade union work. It is time trade unions focus on those issues that are specific to female members as well: maternity, child care at work and basic health care.

Education and Training

Traditions and old attitudes can change with enlightenment and education. Training must be targetted towards women no less than men, aimed at overcoming old prejudices. Techniques of training must emphasise participation, discussions and recommendations and not indoctrination.

Organizing the Un-organized

Given that women workers are concentrated in the 'informal sector', the challenge for unions lie in organizing a growing number of the informal sector's workers.

Solidarity, Networking and Promotion of Models of Success

Female workers will also have to overcome divisive issues at workplace and build a coherent front to pursue their interests within the union structures.

Where the men have evolved a shared value of 'brotherhood' through 'old-boy' network, female workers can promote the virtue of 'sisterhood' which stresses co-operation, unity and collective approach to the common problem of marginalization. The female workers and activists will also have to learn from the experiences and shortcomings of successful activists (male and female) world-wide. The goal is to build on their successes and improve on their shortcomings.

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6

GOVERNMENT POLICIES, EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN NIGERIA'S WORK SETTING

Yawa, P.M. (Mrs)

Introduction

"Women and trade unionism in Nigeria" is a relevant topic in contemporary Nigeria that should be given a concentrated focus in view of the drastic changes from time-to-time in the roles, status, and position of women world wide as the women are exposed to all kinds of prejudices socially, economically, politically, and educationally, in the working environment.

To do justice to this chapter, the topic will be treated under the following subheadings, viz:

- (1) Women in Historical Perspective;
- (2) Government Policies and Equal Opportunities for Women;
- (3) Women in Employment, and
- (4) Recommendations and Conclusions.

Women in Historical Perspective

Women are at the heart of development, as they control most of the non-money economy (subsistence agriculture, bearing and raising children, domestic labour, etc.) and play an important part in the money economy (trading, wage labour/ employment, etc.). Everywhere in the world, women have two jobs — around the home and outside. The most topical issue in international developmental programme is women.

The woman as a person is an agent of reproduction of life itself. This places her in the position of the life blood of the entire humanity; she is the first teacher, the sustainer and maintainer of the home, the peace-maker, the symbol of beauty and the major moulder of the character of the child. She is a mother: mother of the human race.

However, not until recently, most of these contributions by women had not been recognized, they could expect no support, their health suffer, their work suffer, their children suffer, their labour is not recorded as a national development effort and indeed development itself is held back because women by their nature are central to factors underlying changes in population and development. It should be noted here that women are very effective *agents* of change.

In 1888, a sympathizer of women stated thus:

I do not mean to exalt the intellect of women above men's, but I have heard many men speak on this subject, some of them the most eloquent to be found and I believe no man however gifted, with thought and speech can voice wrongs and present the demands of women with the skill and effect, with the power and authority of woman herself. We can neither speak for her, vote for her, nor act for her, nor be responsible for her. And the thing for men to do in the premises is just to get out of her way and give her the fullest opportunity to exercise all the powers inherent in her individual personality and allow her to do it as she herself shall select to exercise them. Her right to be and to do is as full, complete and perfect as the right of any man on earth — I say of her ... give her fair play and hands off.

This is a true statement about the individuality of the woman yet many women especially in developing countries have few choices in life outside marriage and child bearing. They have large families because that is expected of them; they are often treated differently and considered as the 'weaker sex', their rights as individuals are most often denied them because they are women. The society actually considers them 'second class' citizens who should not have a say in decisions affecting the family to which they are an integral part. As girls, they are

controlled by their fathers, and when they get married, this control is passed on to their husbands.

It is on record that women combine the double burden of work at home with work outside the home. They drop out of school earlier than their male counterparts; they learn less and consequently, earn less. They marry early and thus duplicate lives of their mothers and remain trapped in the vicious circle of poverty, hunger, disease and total deprivation of the basic necessities of life. This has been the universal phenomena until the *United Nations* declared the *Decade for Women* (1976-1985) making it mandatory on governments to focus on the issue of women as an integral component of national development.

Government Policies and Equal Opportunities for Women

After the declaration of the *Decade for Women* by the *United Nations*, the organ had through its member-countries taken several other decisions to facilitate *Human Resources Development* in the following areas:

- (1) the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- (2) the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies of 1985; and
- (3) the Abuja Declaration of 1989.

Within the *United Nations*, the following structures to facilitate the advancement of women have been put in place:

- (a) the Commission on the Status of Women;
- (b) the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women;
- (c) the Division for the Advancement of Women;
- (d) the *United Nations Development Fund for Women* (UNIFEM); and
- (e) the *International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women* (INSTRAW).

In Nigeria, it is gratifying to note the increasing consciousness of Government to the crucial roles women have to

play towards the development of the nation. Government's policy in implementing the *United Nations* resolutions culminated in the promulgation of *Decree 30 of December 1989* (amended 1992) establishing the *National Commission for Women*, a national co-ordinating machinery for women development programmes and the subsequent establishment of similar bodies at State and Local Government levels — *States Commissions for Women* and *Local Government Women Development Units*. The aims and objectives of the *National Commission for Women* as stipulated in *Part I Section 2 of the Decree* are to:

- (i) promote the welfare of women in general;
- (ii) carry out the aims and objectives of the *Better Life Programme for Rural Women* which include;
 - (a) stimulating and involving rural women towards achieving better living standards and sensitizing the rest of the Nigerian populace to the problems of women,
 - (b) educating rural women on simple hygiene, family planning, the importance of child care and increased literacy rates,
 - (c) mobilising women collectively in order to improve their general lot and ability to seek and achieve leadership roles in all spheres of society,
 - (d) raising consciousness about the rights of women, the availability of opportunities and families, their social, political and economic responsibilities,
 - (e) encouraging recreation and enriched family life, and
 - (f) inculcating the spirit of self development particularly in the fields of education, business, the arts, crafts and agriculture.
- (iii) promote the welfare of the child and initiate actions for the development of the child within the meaning of the *International Convention on the Rights of the Child*; and the *National Policy on the Rights of the Child*;
- (iv) promote the full utilization of women in the development of human resources and bring about

their acceptance as full participants in every phase of national development with equal rights and corresponding obligations;

- (v) promote responsible motherhood and the maternal health of women;
- (vi) stimulate actions to improve women's civic, political, cultural, social and economic education;
- (vii) support the work of non-governmental organizations and play a co-ordinating role between Government and Nigerian women organizations;
- (viii) encourage the sense and essence of co-operative societies and activities amongst women both in the urban and rural areas and stimulate in them creative entrepreneurship in the field of cottage and small scale industries;
- (ix) formulate and propagate moral values within the family unit and in the public generally and establish programmes with institutions and organizations to inculcate moral education in women and children, and
- (x) work towards total elimination of all social and cultural practices tending to discriminate against and de-humanize womanhood.

The functions of the *Commission for Women* as spelt out in Part II Section 6 of the *enabling Decree* are to:

- (1) formulate policies and programmes within the framework of *National Development Plans* aimed at enhancing the position and development of women in the social, economic and political context;
- (2) promote, develop and implement income generating and employment schemes through granting of loans, establishment of home and cottage industries and, in particular, the acquisition of skills for the improvement of arts, crafts, food processing and

such other vocational training of women within the context of their assessed needs and potentials;

- (3) monitor and liaise with appropriate Government ministries, departments, bodies and non-governmental organizations and International bodies, including *United Nations* organs on matters concerning women and development;
- (4) monitor and submit reports to the *National Council of Ministers* on;
 - (a) Women education and counselling,
 - (b) health of women and children, and
 - (c) existing legislation concerning the status reliance in women.
- (5) device ways and means of encouraging self-reliance in women;
- (6) co-ordinate, structure and monitor the activities of women voluntary organizations, grant appropriate aid to such women voluntary organizations and evaluate their performance;
- (7) conduct research and formulate plans aimed at improving the status of women and the attainment of policy objectives generally in relation to women, and
- (8) carry out all other functions as are conducive to the objectives of the *National Commission* as stipulated in *Section 2 of Decree 2*.

It is gladdening to note that this action by successive governments has resulted in a change in the life style of women both in the rural and urban areas. Although the global trend suggests that the situation of women has not improved since the beginning of this decade (1985-1995), the condition of women in Nigeria has improved remarkably. Women now own land, they have access to credit facilities, they also have access to education and vocational training. Rural women in particular have been sensitized to their roles and contributions to nation building. Women have also made meaningful use of

the few appointments they have had to decision-making positions.

Women in Work Setting (Employment)

It is quite evident that women increasingly share the bread winning role with men. In traditional society, this powerful labour force of the woman was much recognized. It was in recognition of the elaborate labour force of the woman that the man who could marry many wives was recognized. Women worked on the farms alongside their husbands. In addition, they had (and still have) their personal farms around their homes, the produce of which they used to meet their immediate private family needs. Generally, communal activities were carried out with the full participation of women. Women were not left out of the *gaya* farm system. In building, they fetch the water, carry the blocks and provide food for the men. Even in areas where customs prevent women from active participation in agricultural operations, they still engage in one form of income generating activity or the other within their homes — selling processed food, weaving, etc. The income realized from these is largely used to supplement the husbands' efforts in meeting family expenses and raising the standard of living. When one considers the routine household chores of the woman and the general communal duties they were (and are) expected to participate in, one would discover that the productivity of the woman was higher than that of the man.

In our modern society, more women have access to formal education and a sizeable proportion (roughly twenty-one per cent) are active participants in the urban labour force working either in the service sector or in industries. The post-independent Nigeria has witnessed an upsurge in the role and status of women. Successive governments have accorded women positive recognition by appointing/elevating them to posts which were thought to be the exclusive prerogative of men. Today there is no profession/occupation that any gender in the society can claim exclusive possession of. We have

women lawyers (with quite a number who have reached the post of justices), accountants, bankers, medical/veterinary doctors, architects, administrators, academicians, politicians, taxi drivers, photographers, journalists, unionists, etc. Our history is full of women who have made significant contributions to the development of their societies. We are aware of Queen Amina of Zazzau who stood like a lioness among her peers, male and female; Queen Kambasa of Bonny (Niger Delta) who out-manoeuvred her male contenders for the throne and ushered in prosperity for her people; Professor Grace Alele Williams, the Iron Lady among academicians; Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Egbaland who fought through Abeokuta women's union against the loss of traditional powers of women in the new political dispensation introduced by the colonialists; Bola Kuforiji Olubi just to mention a few.

However, despite the increasing consciousness about the discriminations and prejudices that women suffer in the society, many employers are yet to take in women. This is because such employers still believe that women do not work as hard as men and that they are more prone to absenteeism. Where the woman gets employed she is subjected to all kinds of discriminations, her promotion is delayed, she gets no housing allowance (if she is married) and no health and education benefits for members of her family; she must produce a letter from her husband (if she is married) before she is qualified for tax relief for her children. She is taxed more heavily than her male colleague. This is very ridiculous because these days women perform more of the family obligations than the men. All these practices only serve to demoralize the woman and thus prevent her from attaining self-actualization. An employee should never be prevented from contributing meaningfully to development simply on the basis of sex.

Recommendations and Conclusions

In line with the scope of presentation, one would like to confirm that the woman has been and still continues to be a

major factor in our national developmental efforts. It is unfortunate that in the past women played significant roles in the development of their families, communities and the general society yet their contributions were beclouded in the name of customs and traditions.

Considering the fact that the woman combines the double burden of work at home with work outside the home, she cannot be said to be the 'weaker sex' and these jobs must be recognized and recorded. Such duties like child birth should be considered a *national assignment* and the women given full support during the period of her maternity leave. The duration of such leave should be extended to enhance the breeding of a disciplined society.

All discriminatory practices in the work setting as mentioned in this chapter should be removed and the woman given a chance to realize her full potentials.

Nigeria like any country aspiring to attain growth and development can no longer remain indifferent to the issue of the contribution of its female work force because the secret is the active mobilization of all human resources (both men and women). Since we are already on the course of utilizing the great potentialities of the womenfolk, one would suggest that communities who still keep to the old customs and traditions of repressing women, are made, through legal instruments, to adopt a change of stand to enhance rapid growth and development.

How else does the nation expect to develop when half of its population (women) are either locked up, marginalized or discriminated against? Equal opportunities must be given to both men and women to develop their potentials, and the rights of all citizens as individuals irrespective of sex must be observed and respected in any work setting to enhance total development of the nation.

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7

HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE AT WORK AND IMPACT ON WOMEN WORKERS

M. Olabisi Araoye, (Mrs)

Introduction

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. Well-being is a dynamic state of mind which is characterized by reasonable harmony between a worker's abilities, needs and expectations, environmental demands and opportunities. The assessment of well-being is made by the individual herself based on her subjective feelings, although that assessment may be contrary to objective views. This implies that a person might have a feeling of well-being although by known diagnostic methods she might not be experiencing an ideal situation. A job that satisfies a worker might be hazardous but the worker could be ignorant or she has adopted a coping mechanism, which could be short-lived.

A Director-General of *World Health Organization* stated in his progress report on occupational health programme that "work, the key element to progress and achievement, is the human being's main identification with a productive life. It is a human objective as well as a means of earning a living. The continuous interaction between man and his physical and psychological working environment may influence his health either positively or negatively, and the production process itself is influenced by the worker's state of physical and mental

well-being. Work, when it is a well-adjusted and productive activity, can be an important factor in health promotion — an aspect that has not as yet been exploited to the advantage of the nation's health".

Workers spend a considerable proportion of their life time at work hence the work environment has a great impact on the worker's health. Working conditions not only cause specific occupational diseases but they play a much wider role among the many determinants of a worker's health. Work has an impact on health likewise health has an impact on work output. In order to promote productivity, the workers' health must be promoted and protected. The positive aspect of work can be demonstrated by looking at the health consequences of unemployment, which include depression, anxiety and increased morbidity.

Women and Work

Increasing proportions of women are entering the labour force in Africa. The rate of economic activity for women, which might be an under-estimation was 45-50 per cent. Women in Africa are very active as self-employed and family helpers in the agricultural and informal sectors. These informal sectors are usually not considered in occupational health and safety programmes and they are not covered by labour legislation. Records from West Africa show that more than two-thirds of the women in urban areas work in this informal sector. Estimates for the eighties showed that 76 per cent of the economically active women were engaged in agriculture while only 6 and 18 per cent respectively were in industry and the service sector; compared to corresponding percentages for men of 70, 14, 16. This reveals that the share of women in non-agricultural employment is relatively low compared to that of men. In 1975 when the *International women's year* was declared, the total number of economically active women in the world was 575 million. It was estimated that from 1985-2000

the annual increase in women entering the labour force would reach a level of 13 million per year. There are not many women in leadership and decision-making jobs. Women are left out when decisions relating to them including those concerning their health are taken. Nevertheless, since women work and they also spend a considerable proportion of their life time working, more so when complemented by their primary responsibilities in other areas such as household and childcare tasks, their health as related to work is an important issue for consideration.

Work and Health

Occupational disease is defined as a disease caused by certain well defined factors in the working environment. A health impairment said to be work related may result from multiple causation, the working environment having been one cause to a greater or lesser extent. Impact on women's health is of considerable importance especially in the area of maternity. The working environment can be divided into:

1. Physical
2. Chemical
3. Biological
4. Psychosocial

Physical Environment

Temperature

Extremes of temperature as experienced by cold room workers, workers in glass industry and steel mine could have adverse effects on health. When there is exposure to heat, the core temperature increases. The body reacts by diverting the excess temperature to the body surface, that is the skin; the heart rate increases and sweating occurs leading to loss of water and body salt. This regulatory mechanism has its limits. Excessive heat might eventually lead to heat cramp, heat exhaustion, heat stroke and finally death. Women react more markedly when

introduced initially to severe heat. Eventually the level of reaction in both men and women are equal though women take longer to reach physiological balance with the hot environment. Once a balance is reached, temperature and circulatory response of women and men are similar though women continue to sweat less due to fewer active sweat glands during heat exposure, even though the total number of sweat glands and their concentration per unit area of skin is greater in women. A period of one week has been recommended for new workers in an environment of extreme temperature to allow for acclimation, starting with workload of half capacity and gradually increase it to usual level. Cold tolerance is noticed by pregnant women although detailed observations of a scientific nature are lacking. Exposure to extreme cold leads to cold stress.

Noise and Vibration

Noise is associated with adverse human effects. Exposure could be from heavy machinery, disco music, etc. Effects include permanent or temporary hearing impairment, interference with speech communication, reduction in efficiency on certain tasks and it is a source of annoyance. There is evidence of cardiovascular reaction to noise and vibration. The incidence of hypertension in a study of women increased relative to the duration of work exposure to noise. Low frequency vibrations could lead to **resonance of internal** organs. It is also suggestive that noise could secondarily disturb uterine circulation sufficiently to bring detachment of the placenta, thus causing abortion. Menstrual anomalies were observed in women who operated motor vehicles as a result of noise and vibration. Other pregnancy effects include preterm delivery and increased rate of abnormal labours.

Ionizing Radiation

Exposure to Ionizing Radiation is an occupational hazard of health workers in X-ray departments — radiologists, radiographers, nurses and attendants. Others include dentists

and workers in certain industries and laboratories. Exposure from X-ray equipment is being monitored by the use of film badges. The effects of ionizing radiation include development of certain cancers—breast, thyroid and leukaemia. It also has genetic effects leading to congenital malformation of the newborn and abortions.

Non-ionizing Radiation

An example is the microwave. Microwave ovens are used in restaurants and in a few home kitchens. However, there is a deficiency of information on its biological effects.

Dusts

Certain dusts in the working environment could cause lung disorders e.g., dust from mines, cotton production, silica and hard metals.

Chemical Environment

Doctors, dentists, laboratory technicians, nurses and others are exposed to organic solvents, anaesthetic gases and sterilizing agents. Dry cleaners and Beauticians also work in a chemical environment. Not only is the health of future citizens endangered by exposure to industrial hazards but the combined action of occupational influences and the strain of pregnancy constitute considerable danger for women. Pregnant women are more easily fatigued by monotonous tasks such as unskilled machine operations. Fatigue lowers their resistance to intoxications.

Types of chemical exposure include metals, gases and solvents.

Metals

Hazards from a chemical environment include exposure to certain metals which could cross the placental barrier to the fetus.

Mercury — especially its vapour and/or dusts of inorganic

salts. Classic symptoms include fatigue, irritability, loss of memory, loss of confidence, depression, insomnia and tremors. Women may be exposed to inorganic compounds and elemental mercury as dentists or dental assistants, hospital and research laboratory workers, thermometer and Scientific-glassware workers, etc.

Lead — from batteries, plumbing materials, paint, petrol, etc. This leads to anaemia, nerve and brain problems (neuropathy and encephalopathy). It has been known to cause fetal mental developmental abnormalities.

Gases

Carbonmonoxide — from cigarette smoking, working in enclosed spaces where internal combustion engines are operating, etc. This combines more easily with blood than oxygen does. Hence it reduces the oxygen exchange from mother to the fetus. Carbonmonoxide that crosses the placenta can lead to fetal death.

Nicotine — obtained readily from tobacco smoking and leads to abortion, preterm delivery or fetal death.

Solvent

Placental transfer of organochlorinated hydrocarbons (e.g. DDT) has been reported. Some pesticides are also capable of crossing the placental barrier. Some of these chemicals are secreted into breast milk and it could affect the infant. An increase in the rate of abortions with or without a rise in congenital malformations has been reported following a variety of chemical exposure.

Biological Environment

Certain occupations expose workers to harmful biological agents. Hospital workers are exposed to infections from the patients and laboratory specimens. Infection could result by inhaling the agent, through accidental needle puncture, by ingestion or contact. Pregnant women have some more serious

risks in certain cases e.g., exposure to a rubella carrier. This infection during pregnancy has serious outcome in the newborn. Recently the risk of contacting *Human Immuno-deficiency Virus* (HIV) which causes *Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome* (AIDS) has been highlighted. A health worker could also transmit hospital infection to her children at home. Farmers are exposed to moulds, some of which could be harmful to the lungs. Butchers are also exposed to some infections from the animals they handle. Veterinary workers are exposed to infections from animals such as poultry and dogs.

Psychosocial Environment

Psychosocial factors are recognized to be critical in both the causation and the prevention of diseases and in the promotion of health. They are among the most important of those factors that influence the total health of a working population. The socio-cultural environment plays a role in determining the pattern of diseases and the frequency with which they are encountered. Religion and culture greatly influence human reactions and capacity to cope with occupational stress. A worker's socio-economic status contributes to his susceptibility to psychosocial disorders. Also economic conditions play a role in shaping psychological reaction and the capacity to cope with occupational stress. High unemployment rates and under-employment may motivate the acceptance of normally stressful types of employment. Many African workers migrate from the rural area with its quiet and close relationship, to the urban centres where life is impersonal. In the factory environment for example, work is standardized and is according to schedule. Adaptation process is required but this often fails because of either too much stress imposed by the type of work or personal susceptibility or both. Small factories where there are fewer competitive strangers or even crowded familyenterprises with close friends and relatives create very

different reactions from large industries where competition is with strangers. The predominance of small-scale industries in developing countries therefore provides a better psychosocial environment at work than in highly industrialized countries. Many employers in developing countries are known to maintain a tradition of close and friendly working relationship with their employees, particularly in the small establishments which in fact employ the bulk of the productive manpower. The reaction to various psychosocial situations shall be discussed as follows.

Circadian Rhythm

With industrialization, more people need to work shifts to cover twenty-four hours service. The most severe social and physiological stresses are likely to be associated with rotational work shift where workers change periodically from day to evening to night shifts. Human beings function less actively during the night and a considerably higher intensity in adaptive mechanisms is required to ensure a day-time level of activity. There is enough evidence to show that many physiological and metabolic functions show a 24-hour periodicity—endocrine system, cardiovascular, haematopoietic respiratory and autonomic nervous systems. They are intrinsic since they remain constant even when environmental conditions are radically changed. A disturbance in relationship of internal rhythms and external environment causes a disturbance in the relationship between each of the systems. The effects of rotational workshifts can be particularly debilitating on return to an original schedule. A night shift worker's body temperature rhythm for example takes about 5-6 days to fully adapt to the changing pattern of sleep and wakefulness. This means that before adaptation, night shift workers will be working at a time when their level of arousal is at its lowest and trying to sleep when they are biologically at their highest arousal level.

Permanent night workers and even those who follow a weekly rotating shift system all through their working lives eventually adapt more rapidly. The factors that affect adaptation include environmental such as light/dark changes, knowledge of clock time and the activity pattern of the society. One of the commonest complaints of shift workers is sleep disturbance. The afternoon shifts are more socially disruptive while the night shift may disturb marital relations. Studies of their morbidity pattern showed that there could be gastro-intestinal disturbances (less in women than men) due to eating patterns. Women often have more rheumatic and cardio-vascular or nervous complaints. Shift workers are more prone to accidents at work.

Stress

Stress results from incompatibility between an individual and her environment. It is a perceived threat. Certain aspects of the work environment are stressful:

- (1) in-adequate demands of a job in relation to the worker's ability e.g., lack of appropriate skill;
- (2) frustrated aspirations;
- (3) dissatisfaction with regard to valued goals;
- (4) work load;
- (5) repetitive and monotonous work;
- (6) strained interpersonal relationship;
- (7) role ambiguity, etc.

Many studies in developed countries have showed evidence of the influence of work overload, role ambiguity, under-utilization, job satisfaction, and low self-esteem as factors that appear to increase the risk of developing disease. The model that fits the situation most is that which suggests that health status is the result of a complex interaction of such variables as:

- (i) organisational system;
- (ii) personal systems;
- (iii) cognitive assessment;
- (iv) arousal, and
- (v) coping styles.

Any imbalance between an individual's real environment and his expectations of that environment may lead to inability to cope effectively, leading to psychological and/or somatic manifestations of distress.

Responses to Stress

Psychological

Stressful experiences at work may lead to several psychological and behavioural reactions. An initial alarm and shock state results in endocrine and physiological changes, followed by activation of coping strategies. A worker can cope with transitional periods of stress by either changing the situation for better where possible, physically avoiding the stressor where possible or controlling his response by mentally avoiding the situation by thought repression. Failure of the coping mechanism eventually leads to a range of psychological reactions including irritability, worry, tension, depression, lowered performance capacity, drug and alcohol abuse. Psychosomatic symptoms also develop—aches and pains, disturbed sleep, apprehension and anxiety. These could be of diverse origins but they are often indicated with objectively work-related stress. These could be associated with objectively measurable changes in the autonomic nervous system and hormonal function. If these persist, health impairment and a clinically definable disease state could result. Hence the need for early detection of these changes.

There is evidence from developed countries of sex differences in psychological ill health especially depression. Women who were young, poor and single parents and young

married ones with low-paying jobs had a higher incidence of depression. Working women were found in another study to be different from men and housewives by having more daily stress, more marital dissatisfaction, more ageing worries, more occupational mobility, more job and line of job changes. These studies suggest that the dual role of raising a family and employment, especially in a lower status occupation may put excessive demands on working women. Increased stress and anxiety have accompanied raising of children by working women which is suggestive of role conflict. Further evidence of difference in reaction to stress is a higher level of job tension which is found in women and a significantly more overall psychological and physical manifestations. The major differences were consequent to attempts to respond to the environment. Decisions about fertility are usually influenced by work perception.

Cardiovascular

There is evidence that workload, which is a psychosocial stress factor is a contributor to the development of hypertension in the particularly susceptible individual. Changes in systolic blood pressure due to variations in workload were noted among the hypertensive group compared to the normotensive.

Locomotor

Workers who are required to maintain the same posture while engaged in repetitive motor activity e.g., typists are exposed to some work stress that leads to muscular fatigue, stiffness and pain in the neck, back and forearms, coldness and increased pain in the hands, and headaches.

Factors Mediating response to stress

The nature of response to stress may be determined by many factors including personality, previous experience of similar or related situations and the context within which the stress is experienced. More specific experience with stressful situations

appears to result in an improved ability to cope. If the worker is provided with adequate information, it facilitates adaptive reactions to stress. Individuals have various coping mechanisms. Some are more critical than others. Some workers play down the situation. Personality differences also influence the impact of life stress on health. One useful fact is that individuals who think they have control over their situations cope better with mounting stress. Also people who have social support (access to other helpful individuals) cope better.

Prior Experience

Specific experience with stressful situations appears to result in an improved ability to cope. It provides knowledge of a situation and places the individual into a more predictable position where she can be aware of how her own behaviour will affect and be affected by a potentially stressful environment.

Information

The information about a situation could be a result of previous experience. It is also possible to provide people with information in order to facilitate adaptive reactions to stress. When a new employee is briefed about the work situation during an orientation she is more likely to cope better. However, there are variations in the amount and type of information that will be beneficial to individuals.

Individual Difference

Some people try to protect themselves from the full impact of the stresses by denying, playing down or emotionally detaching themselves from the situation. Others may become excessively critical of the situation. These reactions may be partly determined by the context of the stressor in the work

environment, but are more likely to arise from the underlying personality of the worker.

Perceived Control

Since situations which are perceived as stressful are ones which the individual feels he or she will have difficulty in coping with, it is expected that control or perceived control is an important factor.

Social Support

Support from co-workers or a boss at times of stress will mediate the responses. Support from a trade union is very important. Unions try to mediate by negotiating with employers.

Safety and Welfare at Work

After identifying hazards in the work environment, the hazards should be quantified and modified as applicable. The identification of hazards should be based on international standards. Quantification could be done by direct observation of workplace, checking the sickness absence register, carrying out a survey, etc. Safety activities in industries as recommended by the *International Labour Organisation* (ILO) include:

- (a) use of foremen in industries;
- (b) commitment of top management to and participation in safety at the plant level. This has been known to reduce accidents;
- (c) use of safety officers, safety committees and systematic safety inspection;
- (d) safety training;
- (e) accident record keeping as a preventive measure. When data is analysed the findings should be used to improve working conditions;
- (f) safety rules — the use of written safety rules leads to improved safety;

- (g) machine guarding reduces injury rate;
- (h) personal protective equipment, e.g., helmet, gloves, boots, etc., and,

- (i) house-keeping — a clean and orderly workplace contributes to safety.

For modification of the environment, alternative procedures could be used, the particular hazard e.g., noisy machine could be contained. The worker could limit exposure to the hazard by reducing the time of exposure. It is very essential that workers use the protective devices at their disposal e.g., heating suit, glasses, ear protector, cooling suit, etc. Health education is the most important component of these activities. This will generate the workers' awareness of issues relating to their health. The work place and workers should undergo continuous monitoring. Other preventive measures include:

- (i) Pre-placement examination;
- (ii) A periodic examination — occupational health physician and his team should test workers to identify early physical, psychological or psychosomatic disorder.

Specifically, protection of working women has a main focus on maternity. The first international standard — The *Maternity Protection Convention* — laid down the basic principles of a woman worker's right to maternity leave, cash benefits during absence from work, nursing breaks and more importantly the right to retain her job throughout pregnancy, confinement and child-bearing. This ILO instrument has since been reviewed, resulting in an increase in maternity cash benefits to be paid by social insurance or public funds up to 100 per cent of previous earnings and provision of facilities for nursing mothers. It took quite some time for maternity to be recognized in developed countries as a 'social function' and not a handicap in employment, hence working women should not be punished for it. Marital status and maternity should not act as obstacles to employment opportunities for women. Meeting the health needs of mother and child during pregnancy, childbirth and

early infancy is fundamental to the health of both and through them to the health and development of future generations. Investing in health is a *fundamental human right* hence governments have a responsibility for the health of their people which can be fulfilled by the provision of adequate health and social measures. Health promotion and protection for women and children is a direct entry point to improved social development, productivity and better quality of life. Improving the status of women and enhancing their role is an important goal in itself and will also influence family life positively.

The increased energy requirement in third trimester of pregnancy and first four months of lactation is to meet the demands of the growing child. Under favourable conditions, the working women could meet this requirement by increasing food intake. The mean weight gain by women engaged in heavy labour during pregnancy is less than that of women with similar food intake but less labour. Their babies' birth weight is also reduced. Good antenatal care would prevent many complications and illnesses of pregnancy and childbirth. Every woman therefore needs to be given time for pre-natal check-ups and treatment. After childbirth, a woman's body needs time to recuperate, rest and establish successful breastfeeding. Exclusive breastfeeding for four to six months is recommended. This is associated with better child survival and lower child morbidity. Ideally, maternity leave should extend until weaning is completed. Where this is not possible, facilities for childcare such as day care that is geographically close to the workplace and creches should be provided along with adequate breastfeeding breaks. It is recommended that the length of the nursing mother's duty should be shortened. In Nigeria nursing mothers close one hour earlier till their babies are six months of age.

There is still a decline in breastfeeding in developing countries although there has been a re-discovery in developed countries. Almost all Nigerian mothers initiate breastfeeding

but they do not breastfeed long enough and very few of them practice exclusive breastfeeding for the first four to six months of a baby's life. Mother's work has a negative impact on this practice. Other factors include job in-security, non-availability of family and social support, lack of knowledge of management of breastfeeding and promotion of breastmilk substitutes, among others.

Investment in the health of mothers and children is essential for sustaining economic and social productivity. The following is a result of analysis of 127 countries concerning maternity leave:

Average length of maternity leave was twelve to fourteen weeks. Sixty-nine of them had the latter, thirty-one had shorter durations while the rest had longer durations. It was noted that the problem with women especially those who were not members of any trade union was that they often did not take full advantage of maternity protection laws and regulations as they themselves were not aware of their rights. An examination of legal provisions of thirty-seven African countries revealed that dating from 1970s, thirty of them had adopted laws and regulations to protect women during pregnancy.

Qualifying Conditions

In two-thirds of the countries studied, women workers must have been 'continuously employed', usually for a period of six months to be entitled to maternity benefits. In Nigeria, the requirement is six months with the same employer. In places such as Burkina Faso, three months work with one or more employers is required while in Mauritius the requirement is at least twelve months with the same employer. In Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania and Togo among others, the criterion for entitlement is a specified period during which social insurance contributions must have been made.

Length of Leave

It ranges from twelve to fourteen weeks in most countries and six to eight weeks are to be taken after confinement. In the past in Nigeria it was six weeks before and six weeks after confinement but now there is some flexibility. In the Congo, where the period of maternity leave is fifteen weeks, nine are taken after confinement and in Ethiopia since 1975, legislation provides for pre-natal leave on presentation of medical certificate. The shortest is in Tunisia with a period of thirty days maternity leave. Some fifteen countries grant additional leave generally of three weeks in case of illness due to pregnancy or confinement e.g., from two weeks in Burundi and Ghana to six months in Egypt and Ethiopia.

Cash Benefits

In more than half of the countries of Africa, women workers remain on full pay during maternity leave. In about one-third, cash maternity benefits are borne entirely by social security, in seven others they are paid half by social insurance and half by the employer. In twelve others, the employer is required by law to pay all cash benefits. In Egypt and Tunisia, benefits vary from sixty-six to seventy-five per cent of wages while in ten countries it is only fifty per cent of wages. In Nigeria the employer pays at least fifty per cent of wages during maternity leave.

Prohibition of Dismissal

Most of the countries analysed have adopted laws and regulations prohibiting the dismissal of women workers during maternity leave. In Nigeria, dismissal is forbidden during additional maternity leave as well.

Nursing Breaks

The legislation in about thirty countries requires employers to grant nursing breaks. The duration was not indicated in most cases but others specified two- and half-hour break. Hence nursing mothers in Nigeria close one hour earlier.

In summary, family, community and formal social support measures to working women including maternity legislation, will complement other health activities for achieving the noble goal of improved health for mothers and children and society as a whole. The economics of maternity protection legislation have to be weighed against the economic costs of maternal, infant and child morbidity and mortality. They must be seen in relation to the cost to society of impaired or interrupted working performance of the labour force and to the financial and human cost of curative medical services, including treatment and rehabilitation.

Family Responsibilities

A woman has to balance two jobs — as a working mother who has to arrange for the care of her children during working hours and take on the "second shift" at home on return from work. The type of child care depends on prevalent family systems, social and income class and community patterns of behaviour and national policies. With industrialization/urbanization, the extended family system is being phased out. This means there are no *aunties* and *grannies* to assist the working mother with her children. This calls for the establishment of well equipped and regulated day care centres. Other social support measures such as provision of maternity leave and breastfeeding breaks should continue to be provided to facilitate women's economic and family roles. Some countries give opportunities for part-time work during extended child-rearing period. Mothers are given paid sick-leave for their children's healthcare. In all, the principle of non-dismissal is guaranteed and also the right to return to the same or similar work with equivalent remuneration and other rights.

Conclusion

The proportion of women in the labour force is increasing, therefore it is necessary to take cognizance of their peculiar situation especially with regard to maternity and differential response to the work environment. The women in the informal sector should not be left out of health promotive and protective measures at work. All activities relating to health promotion and protection at work should consider women's needs and interests a priority. Protecting women's health is protecting the nation's health.

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8

PROBLEMS OF AND PROSPECTS FOR EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN TRADE UNIONISM

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Introduction

Issues arising from the participation of women in trade unionism could be better appreciated and, in fact illuminated if we are a bit historical and theoretical. Only few researches have been conducted to answer the questions posed by this area of labour studies. Yet, the answer to the emerging questions are practical ones ultimately.

The problems relating to the unimpressive presence of women in labour organisations again bring into focus the specificity of female gender constraints in a general social situation. Paradoxically, the riddle to be resolved is why should there be special protective efforts for a gender in organisations known to have been established primarily to protect interests of male and female members of the working class. These organisations are the trade unions. Beyond trade unions, women are roughly put as half of Nigerian labour force. In a factory study on women's participation in a PEREWU's branch, the Electric Meter Company (Nig) Ltd., in Zaria, Reene Pittin (1984) observed that

women workers often find themselves alienated from their male co-workers, while the men fail altogether to understand women's reluctance to become involved with or participate actively in what women see as organisations catering for male interests, such as, the union.

To buttress this argument, Pittin borrowed D. Elson' and T. Pearson's (1981) general assessment of women's participation as follows

... workers' organisations have failed to recognise and build into their structure the specificity of gender. (This) failure means that in practice they have tended to represent male workers. In addition, the specific problems that concern women as a subordinated gender are often problems which (are) not easy for conventional forms of trade unions to tackle".

The problem of low participation in unionism by women has been with trade unions since its early days. For example, the intriguing experience of American female workers in the 19th century could be instructive to Nigerian women in the labour movement. As a defensive mechanism to the hostility and discrimination by male workers, the female workers had to form in 1841, the *Female Labour Reform Association* to fight a gender-specific cause. It was meant to strengthen female hands at the bargaining table. A similar battle for relevance and survival was fought in male-dominated unions by British, French and Italian workers.

Capturing the mood in the industrial world in the early days in trade unionism, Rowbotham (1974) put it this way:

Male trade unionists had two choices. They could either try to integrate women into their unions or they could try to keep them out of skilled work. Throughout the nineteenth century male workers resisted the idea of women working, on the grounds that their place was at home and they had no business to be taking jobs from men. But ironically capitalism was structured on the fact of women and children working.

The contemporary situation of women in the unions has its roots in the overall placement of women by society. To search for the origin of the problem, one may have to go back to her position in the family where her job as wife takes precedence over the tempestuous life of a union activist.

As Rowbotham described the situation in the 19th century trade unionism in the West while drawing a continuum to the modern times, "the real difficulty then, and now, in convincing

male trade unionists that they have a common struggle with women workers, is that as long as you look at effects rather than causes it makes sense for the men to suspect women. The general subordination of women and the role of women in the family, along with their sexual situation, meant, and means, that they are liable to play a passive reactionary role at work. However, male suspicion will serve only to reinforce the likelihood of this".

Analysts of the trade unions will have to confront the fundamental basis of the problem in order to brighten prospects of women participation in trade unions. Now, what is the practical situation? There is the wrong impression that trade unionism is about table banging and some degree of rascality. This is one of the reasons why women especially those within the age brackets of 25-40 years do not participate in trade union activities. Women of this age grade would rather not be active in trade unionism because it might scare away suitors who are mostly conservative and would not need a wife who is assertive and combative. It has also been observed that women of this age group, though more in the factories and offices as professionals, would rather concentrate on career prospects instead of 'confronting their employers through trade union activities'. This factor has become so important that most women in Nigeria, would rather succumb to sexual harassment than tackle their employment problems through the trade union machinery. Surprisingly, marriage is a very crucial variable which has been identified as an obstacle to effective participation of women in trade union activities.

My observation in the last nine years of labour reporting has shown that women of child-bearing age are not so involved in trade union activities. This sometimes is not due to lack of interest but to matrimonial demands such as the need to care for the family especially children. Because working life especially in the cities has become so tasking with scarcity of house-holds, women would rather spend their spare time

attending to the care of the home, busy themselves with managing the home effectively in the face of inflation with attending union meetings.

However, in the last few years, there has been an improvement. For instance, during the *International Labour Organisation/Nigeria Labour Congress* seminar for women in trade unionism held in Kano in 1989 in which I was a participant, one or two pregnant women from the Northern parts of the country (where women are usually not allowed to be exposed) attended. When the second part of the seminar was held in Ibadan, one of the comrades from one of the local government areas in Adamawa State attended the course with her baby who was barely four months old. The most interesting part of her story was that her husband accompanied her to Ibadan all the way from Adamawa just to ensure that she and the baby arrived Ibadan in Western Nigeria safely. Talk of encouragement, here is a perfect example. But the question is, how many Nigerian men even in the Southern part of the country would give such an encouragement? As a result, women who are active in trade union activities in Nigeria are either, widows, divorcees or those who are above child-bearing age.

Their low productivity is another factor. A higher percentage of working class women are not as productive as their male counterparts and this has nothing to do with child-bearing. What you find is that ladies are usually the 'late-comers' in the office. They are the ones who will spend official time making phone-calls, trading to augment income and over-spending their lunch period. A combination of all these puts her at the mercy of her boss who in most cases is a male. Since she can easily be threatened with termination of appointment, she must do something extra to appease her boss and that certainly is not being an active trade unionist.

Trade union bureaucrats seem to have an attitude which is based on moderating the activities of women in trade

unionism. For instance, since 1989 when the ILO initiated a workshop to encourage women participation in trade union activities, participants have called for financial support for the women's wing of the NLC but to date, there is no single women's wing that is funded regularly by the NLC either at the state or national level. Although, the establishment of the women wing pre-dates the 1989 seminar, it was after it that comrades like Stella Peters of Benue State, Hadjia Azumi Bebeji, Amina Abubakar of Kano State, Comrade Sanni of Oyo State, to mention a few returned to their states to launch vocal women's wings.

For us in the *Nigerian Union of Journalists* (NUJ), we resolved to form the *National Association of Women Journalists* (NAWOJ). NAWOJ was established to enhance our professional status and also to encourage women in the trade union activities of the NUJ. Unfortunately, the latter part of its objective has failed. To date, only the *National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institution Employees* (NUBIFIE) has amended its constitution to include a female representative at its National Executive level. It is also in NUBIFIE that a female career trade unionist has risen to the post of Acting General Secretary in the person of Comrade Cecy Olajumoke. She was however, not confirmed general secretary not for incompetence but for the intra-union squabbles which rocked the union.

Interestingly, while appreciating the problems almost a decade ago, Mrs Olajumoke expressed the "hope that before the year 2000 A.D., a woman will eventually be elected to the office of the President of *Nigeria Labour Congress*". The decision of the 1991 Delegates Conference of *Nigeria Labour Congress* in Kano on the establishment of a Women's Affairs Department at the secretariat is yet to be implemented. Mention should also be made of Comrades like Amoke Palmer of the *Civil Service Technical Workers Union*, Mrs Rebecca Kariyere Oliseh of the *Shop and Distributive Trade Union* and Glory Kilanko of the *Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities* who played significant

roles in the life of the Lagos State Women's Wing. But the *Academic Staff Union of Universities* (ASUU) stands-out as one union in which women have led not women's wing of their trade unions but have been elected chairman or secretaries of their domestic units. Names like, Dr Bene Madunagu, of University of Calabar (UNICAL), Prof (Mrs) Sowumi of University of Ibadan, Late Comrade Ingrid Essien-Obot of UNICAL have played prominent roles as leaders of their unions. Perhaps one can attribute this development to the academic terrain of ASUU in which there is no room for glaring discrimination on the basis of sex. Sadly, I have not come across any record in which a woman has been National President of any of the industrial unions approved by Government in 1977. Not even unions like the *Nigeria Union of Teachers*, *National Association of Civil Service Typists*, *Stenographers and Allied Staff* that are women-dominated.

However, a labour ministry official, Mrs Agnes Okoronkwo has defended women in trade unions against charges of passivity. 'My contention is that both branch and national levels should nominate and elect women into important posts. At the unions' delegates conferences at which national officers are elected, the practice is normally for the star posts to be slated among the incumbent officers. Why can not the union carve out some posts for women in the national executive? Are women actually encouraged by their men folk to compete with them? At the delegates conferences of the industrial unions you can count on finger tips the number of women delegates. A question I have always asked is where are women? Nobody has been able to give a satisfactory answer''.

Prospects

To contemplate a future for women in trade unionism, one has to retrospect again into the history of women struggle in Nigeria. Although searching through labour history, heroes abound while heroines are still few, the basis of inspiration is not lacking.

Reflecting on the general lot of women in Nigeria, Pittin (1985) posited a collective approach "Nigerian women have a history of organising against their oppression, and more and more women are becoming aware of the extent and the depth of their subordination. The personal response to the myriad manifestation of women's oppression must be discarded altogether, it has never been satisfactory. To work effectively, we must work together." The way forward is for women union activists to organise themselves into a force that male trade unionists cannot ignore. For, as Mustapha (1985) observed, the point must be made, however, that all personal and social freedoms in history have had to be fought for. Past generations have paid dearly for quite a number of rights which we take for granted today. If the democratic and personal rights of our women folk are to be advanced, and those few they now have protected from erosion, then they must show a willingness and sacrifice." This general advice for women has a particular application to the point at issue. The onus of improving female participation in trade unionism is on women.

Let us now look at how bright the prospects for women in the labour movement are with a few cases. For instance, The Medical and Health Workers Union at the last delegates conference of the NLC held in Abuja moved a motion for the establishment of a women commission for working-class women. The motion which was unanimously adopted recommended that the National women commission "shall be composed of all elected chairpersons of State women's committee and selected national officers of affiliated unions provided that all members of the national commission and state committees are active and due paying members of affiliated unions and represent their unions on such bodies". It also recommended that the NEC of Congress in consultation with the national women's commission should evolve programmes of activities for working women aimed at addressing their problems. This prospect is on paper but the

working-class women need to put collective pressure on the Congress to make the commission take-off. Perhaps a rally on May-Day by all the state women chapters will do the magic since memos to the Congress have not received any positive response.

Another major spur of participation in trade unionism is education. The worker becomes aware of her duties to employers and the obligations of the employers to her. So, with her knowledge of collective bargaining and trade dispute procedure, she cannot be denied her rights by employers. By being active in union activities, it would be difficult for trade union bureaucrats to shove affairs peculiar to the feminine gender aside. As mentioned earlier, women could take up challenging jobs with trade unions as there are career prospects in this regard. But the woman must be prepared to put in more than her male counter-part in order to register her impact. Though identified as one of the factors which hinder effective participation, the family life can be improved through participation in trade unionism. For instance, through trade union pressure from women, it could be made compulsory for employers to bear maternity expenses of women up to a maximum of four children. Women can also through the unions demand the formation of co-operative societies with twenty or more women. This will help the women purchase food items at cheaper rates and concentrate more at work. The present system of taxation which makes the women pay more than the men can also be abolished if women agitate for it through the trade unions. There is also the prospect of urging employers who fail to provide day-care centres to pay women house-help allowance. This may sound absurd but it is necessary to stabilise women at work.

A woman who is well organised can manage her family life, trade union activity and her profession in such a way that she will become a pride to her employers. With this, she would be given the opportunity to make progress in her profession. The

truth is that most employers appreciate active women more than the complacent worker.

Trade unionism in itself is politics. A woman who is successful in her trade union activities can as well be successful in politics either at the local, state or national level. For instance, Hadjia Azumi Bebeji after the 1989 ILO/NLC confab in Kano, became the chairperson NLC Women's Wing, after which she became NUBIFIE's first woman representative. When the Babangida regime lifted the ban on politics, she (with the support of the NLC) became a governorship aspirant in Kano State under the Social Democratic Party. She later decamped to the *National Republican Convention* which later won the governorship seat. She was made Kano State Commissioner for Health. So between 1989 when the ILO/NLC held the workshop to mobilise women workers and 1991 when the governors were elected, she had registered her foot prints in the politics of Kano State. We all can move to greater heights through effective participation in trade union activities.

Marriage as a factor is often viewed with great sensitivity. But it is true that a woman who is active in trade unionism needs a man who is socially concerned. He need not be a trade unionist. This is very important because it is the basis for emotional stability which is the under-lining factor to one's success in life. Comrades of the feminine gender need to share their lives with men who trust them, have confidence in the ability of their spouses and above all share their aspirations in life. It does seem that women's participation could be improved by promoting gender solidarity among women. The focus of such unity of purpose would be to pay particular attention to matters that are specifically relevant to women. Here lies the essence of female presence in the labour movement. Studies would have to be directed in this area. A leaf could be borrowed from the American experience where a study has shown that one of the challenges of labour policies

between now and the year 2000 is "reconciling the needs of women, work and families". Such should be the pre-occupation of female members of trade unions.

In summary, the process of advancing trade union organisation would be incomplete without a specific provision for women interests deriving from their gender.

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