

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN OTHER REGIONS AND THE AFRICA/ARAB SCENARIO BEING THE TEXT OF A PAPER PRESENTED BY UKWAKWE ABUGU, ESQ, SENIOR LECTURER, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC AND INTERNATIONAL, FACULTY OF LAW, UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA AT THE MEETING OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS IN AFRICA AND ARAB WORLD HELD IN ABUJA FROM 6TH - 7TH OCTOBER, 2009

Protocol

Introduction

Issues of gender equality are moving to the top of the global agenda but better understanding of women's contributions to society is essential to speed the shift from agenda to policy to practice. Too often, women and men live in different worlds – worlds that differ in access to education and work opportunities, and in health, personal security and leisure time.

How differences are these worlds? Anecdote and misperception abound, in large part because good information has been lacking. As a result, policy has been ill-informed, strategy unfounded and practice unquestioned. Fortunately, this is beginning to change. It is changing because advocates of women's interests have done much in the past 30 years to sharpen people's awareness of the importance of gender concerns. It is changing because the growing awareness has, by raising new questions and rephrasing old, greatly increased the demand for better statistics to inform and focus the debate. And it is

changing because women's contributions – and women's rights – have moved to the centre of social and economic change.

The International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, was a breakthrough. It established a new consensus on two fundamental points:

- Empowering women and improving their status are essential to realizing the full potential of economic, political and social development.
- Empowering women is an important end in itself. And as women acquire the same status, opportunities and social, economic and legal rights as men, as they acquire the right to reproductive health and the right to protection against gender-based violence, human well-being will be enhanced.

The International Conference on Population and Development drew together the many strands of thought and action initiated by two decades of women's conferences. It was also the culmination of an active effort by women's groups to lobby international forums for women's issues. At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, non-governmental organizations pushed for understanding the link between women's issues and sustainable development. At the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, women's rights were finally accepted as issues of international human rights.

At the Population Conference and later at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, the terms of discourse shifted. Not only were women on the agenda – women helped set the agenda. The empowerment of women was not merely the subject of special sessions about women’s issues. It was accepted as a crucial element in any strategy seeking to solve, economic and environmental problems.^{1a}

This meeting arguably is one of the multiplier effects of the several women conferences where efforts have been made to re-orientate our patriarchal psyche against the valuable contribution of women to humanity and in particular national development using measurable data, statistics and observable standards.

The topic of the study intends that it should be global, assessing the position in Africa and Arab regions side-by-side with other regions of the world in relation to women’s contribution to national development. In pursuing the objectives of this study we shall attempt an inquiry into the meaning and import of national development in its functional perspective before considering the relationship between women and national development. We shall also by way of retrospect set out some primordial prejudices that have affected the status of women, the world over, and that has from time immemorial plagued the advancement of women and their

consequent contribution to national development even up to today. In spite of the heavy burden of subservience, women all over the world have in history proved resilient in championing economic, political and leadership causes.

Women in advanced countries may have taken the lead in national development but there are some common trends that ran through all the regions among women. These trends are highlighted to show that if taken into consideration the contribution of women to national development would even be much higher than is usually recorded.

It is hoped that this attempt would agitate further and fuller discussion among participants on this all important and all embracing aspect of women's effort to better the lots of humankind.

3.0 A Note on National Development

The meaning of national development which term would largely engage our discourse is often taken for granted. For the avoidance of doubt we call in aid the short but very relevant definition that it is "the ability of a country to improve the social welfare of the people, e.g. by providing social amenities like good education, pipe borne water etc.¹" The driving force of this definition lies in the term "ability." Thus the more ably a country can meet the socio economic

¹ Wiki.answers.com/Q/what_is_national_development.

needs of her citizens the higher it is in the national development ladder.

A country in the lower rung of the ladder today may move up tomorrow if by juggling and harnessing its factors of production it can better and more ably afford good education and other social amenities including health care delivery to its citizens. This position agrees with the suggestion that “development” is a process, not a level. It is a path to achieve certain goals.²

Certainly, the path to achieve the goals of national development is economic development. Under the colouration of national development, economic development acquires a more functional meaning to include not only economic growth but ability to achieve structural changes to bring about structural transformation like appropriate policies, system of governance, markets, attitudinal changes etc. As Jose Matthew rightly put it “in this angle economic development is economic growth plus something.”³ Once the “something” is added to economic growth both of them aggregates to national development. National (economic) development involves improvements in a variety of indicators such as literacy rates, life expectancy, and poverty rates.

² Jose Matthew: “Meaning of Development” posted on IndiaStudyChannel.com on 04 Feb., 2008.

³ Ibid

Gross Domestic Production (GDP) which is the aggregate value-added by the economic activity within a country's borders⁴ and which is a measure of economic growth does not take into account important aspects such as leisure time, environmental quality, freedom or social justice. But these are critical indices of national development.

4.0 Women and National Development

In the traditional setting where data are lacking in measuring the contribution of women to national development, very little attention is given to the immense role of women in the society. However researches have shown that in matters that matter in societal development and well being the crucial role of women is even the *raison d'etre* for the so called high-profile contribution of men to economy, education, politics, social services and the likes. Hajo Sani has cleverly summarized the role of women in national development in Africa as in other part of the world into a tripod of values - production, reproduction and communal activities.⁵ This tripod concept of women's role in national development is further expounded in the following words:

“Our women work as mothers, wives, doing domestic chores, as breadwinners, doing farming and traveling, and they see to the nursing of their children against the backdrop of polygamous

⁴ Economic development, from wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

⁵ Women and National Development: The way forward (Ibadan, Spectrum Books Limited) 2001, p. 17.

settings. The issue is no longer whether they contribute to the nation's development efforts, rather, it is now how effective and efficient their contributions are.⁶

Obviously, the degree of women's contribution to national development is directly proportional to the advancement of women in the country in question in terms of education, freedom and equality, gender parity and equity, employment opportunity, availability and access to healthcare, etc. Accordingly, the 1994 world surveys on the role of women in development states categorically that "where women have advanced, economic growth has usually been steady; where women have been restricted, there has been stagnation."⁷

The varying degree of advancement of women among the various regions of the world including Africa and Arab countries critically account for differences in the indices of national development in the various regions.

Even despots like Saddam Hussein, Former President of Iraq realized that the fortune of every state in national development depends on the advancement of women. According to him:

"The complete emancipation of women from the ties which held them back in the past, during the ages of despotism and ignorance, is a basic aim of the Party and the Revolution.

⁶ Mariam Babangida (1990 p. 7) cited in Sani, *ibid.* pp. 17-18.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Women make up one half of the society. Our society will remain backward and in chains unless its women are liberated and educated....”⁸

It is curious that even from time immemorial, local clichés have developed to drum home the link between national development and advancement of women such as “Educate a woman and educate a nation.” Yet successive generations of world leaders have only been yielding reluctantly to issues or matters that would enhance the advancement of women.

It would not be wrong to conclude that the world would have conquered the mars if a conspiracy of tradition, culture, region, superstition and other prejudices including patriarchal stereotypes had not held women down for so long. Perhaps an historical excursion into the primordial miasma of the lots of women would awaken the self-defeatist world to the contraptions against women that have held it down for so long.

5.0 Brief History of Women Subjugation

As far back as several centuries before Christ, Aristotle one of the most famous philosophers that has shaped the conscience of humankind, described women as defective or incomplete men, and as quasi monsters. This derogatory description of women permeated the psyche of other philosophers and great thinkers that it was

⁸ Al-Ali, N.S., Iraq Women (London, Zedbooks, 2007) cited in wikipedia, the free encuclopedia.

reflected in Freud's 19th century psychoanalytical theories about female sexuality. Females, he maintained, were mere matter; males were spirit and mind, pregnant women were merely vessels or passive incubators for the embryos formed from the male seed alone. He regarded women as unfit for freedom or political action, passive by nature and subject to the rule of their husbands.⁹

The Western tradition is entirely patriarchal. The Jewish religion solely accounts for this. The ripple effect of this was that the West was exporting its patriarchal heritage as part of their colonial policies and thus sowed its seed in many parts of the world. Sani articulated this view in the following words:

The analysis reveals that women in the pre-colonial period were not powerless. They participated fully through different avenues in decision making in their societies. However, the situation changed with the coming of colonialism and its ideology of domestication of women. Colonialism suppressed the traditional system in which men and women shared economic, political and social responsibilities. Men were incorporated into the colonial system to the detriment of women. By 1950 when women were enfranchised (in Nigeria), men had become more powerful politically than they had been in the pre-colonial era. We also observe that it was only in the Second Republic, 1979 –

⁹ Greenspan, K., *The Timetable of Women's History: A chronology of the Most Important People and Events in Women's History* (New York, Simon & Schuster) 1994 p. 20-21

*1983, that Nigerian women began to mark a new era in their political relevance.*¹⁰

Now what was the Jewish conception of women that has so infested the world with patriarchalism? The ancient Judaism placed women in clearly subordinate position. Rabbinical literature refers to women as social and religious inferiors to men, their functions were to maintain the home, abide by Jewish law, and instruct the children in the Jewish tradition. Men made up the membership of the covenant community, symbolized by the rite of circumcision. Women sat separately from men in the synagogue, forbidden to read aloud or hold public positions, and prohibited from the Torah and Talmud. As justification, Hebrew scholars pointed to the creation myth in Genesis, wherein Eve's disobedience of God in eating from the tree of knowledge branded women as the source of sin and death in the world.¹¹

The tradition of Jewish segregation against women was even apparent in the relatively modern French conception of the role of women and girls as different from that of men. "The duties of women were implicit in the principle of sexual difference: women were destined 'by nature and vocation' for motherhood. Sexual differences were also the basis for the rules of behaviour to which girls were

¹⁰ Sani, op. cit. p. xiv.

¹¹ Greenspan, op. cit. p. 22.

expected to conform and for the skills they were expected to conform....”¹²

In the pre-Islamic Arabia, there is no consensus among writers on the extent of subjugation of women. However, it is certain that in some tribes women enjoyed no rights whatsoever and were treated no better than a commodity or chattels, effectively property. There were also patterns of homicidal abuse of women and girls, including instances of killing female infants considered to be a liability. In his book *Infanticide: Comparative and Evolutionary Perspectives*, Glenn Hausfater details how Qais Bin Assem, a leader of the Tamim tribe killed every daughter he had for fear of their capture (and his disgrace) in the inter-tribal wars that dominated Arabian society at that time. According to some scholars, during times of famine, especially, poorer families were likely to kill a daughter, regarding her as a burden on a starving family.¹³

The Quran¹⁴ citing one of the pre-Islamic Arabian stories stated:

“When news is brought to one of them, of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief. With shame he hides himself from his people, because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain it (his face) (sufferance and)

¹² Eck, H., “French Women under Vichy” in *A History of Women in the West* edited by Dubes, G. and Perrot, M. (Cambridge, The Becknap Press of Harvard University Press) 1994, p. 198.

¹³ Women in the Arab World, wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

¹⁴ Quran 16:58-59.

contempt, or bury it in the dust? Ah! What an evil (choice) to decide on!"

Even though Islam has outlawed these heinous traditions among Muslim Arabs, the practice may have only changed a little over the years.

Among the Ibos of South-Eastern Nigeria, till today some cultures still regard women as property subject to devolve upon the demise of the husband on the Okpara (first son). Also some communities practice Nrachi Nwanyi, the practice of keeping one female child unmarried so as to bear male children to her father who happens not to have any male issue from his marriage. Even though the Court of Appeal in the year 2000¹⁵ declared it repugnant to natural justice equity and good conscience, the practice has persisted.

The above represents in the main the general background to the subjugation of women the world over and in particular among Africa and Arab countries. As a result, all women from all regions operate from the background of a common denominator of disadvantage in matters of national development. And this explains the justification for several women liberation struggle culminating in several world conferences on women. So much has been achieved in reversing the deep seated prejudices and practices but much more still needs to be

¹⁵ *Mojekwu v. Ejikeme* (2000) 5 NWLR 403

done. The bottom line is that in the struggle to free themselves from the shackles, women in the developed regions, Latin America and the Caribbean, and some part of Asia and Pacific have been luckier in the gradual break-away. This accounts for their higher contribution to national development of their regions and the consequent better and higher development of the regions than Africa and the Arab world.

6.0 Comparative Analysis of the contribution of Africa and Arab Women to National Development viz-a-viz Women of other Regions of the World

From time immemorial women by their nature and upbringing have been physically, culturally and legally disposed to utilizing their ability to influence, control and contribute to policies that affect their lives and that of the society where they live. In this regard women cannot be said to be strange bed fellow with economic, political, social and other facets of development in human society. Rather, they have exhibit robust determination and achieved results in conditions where men would ordinarily have wavered. In attempting this apparently global analysis, we propose to consider the issues under economy, politics and business, education and social services.

6.1 Economy

The economic contribution of women in the national development of Africa, Arab and other regions of the world is visible in the area of agriculture, industry and service sectors.

6.1.1 Agriculture

The agricultural sector is by far the sector where African and Arab women have played a pivotal role in swelling the economy of their respective national economies. In Africa and in particular, sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture productive activities such as cultivating, sowing, planting, selling and buying of farm produce as well as harvesting are predominantly undertaken by women. They are also engaged in extensive food processing and storage. Empirical data reveal that “women are responsible for 70 per cent of food storage, 95 percent of food processing, 50 percent of animal husbandry and 60 per cent of agricultural marketing.”¹⁶

The trend of women’s participation in agricultural production by Arab women shows a significant disparity in favour of African women. A survey carried out by the United Nations for sex participation in agriculture in 1994 shows that the percentage of women labour force in agriculture outstrips that of men in Africa and few Arab world standing at 67 percent to 64 percent in Nigeria, 81 percent to 71 percent in Ethiopia, 69 percent to 22 percent in Iran. The survey further indicate that most Arab countries have more men work force in agriculture than women, e.g. 16 percent of women to 34 percent of men in Saudi Arabia, 1 percent of women to 11 percent of

¹⁶ Sani op. cit. pp. 19 and 21.

men in Jordan and 3 percent of women to 60 percent of men in Afghanistan.¹⁷ (See Appendix I)

The seclusion of women on grounds of religion and more importantly some die hard customs against women which resist the more liberal position of Islam against women account for this poor agricultural participation. As one writer observed in relation to Arabs:

*Women's economic position was strengthened by the Quran but local custom has weakened that position in its insistence that women must work within private sector of the world: the home or at least in some sphere related to home.*¹⁸

The percentage of women labour force in other regions in relation to agriculture falls far below their African counterparts. The same 1994 survey shows that only 2 percent of women in Canada, 1 per cent in Denmark and 2 per cent in Netherlands engage in agriculture related production.

In Africa, in spite of the dominance of women in agriculture, little or no credit is accorded them for their immense contribution. Due to unfounded cultural myths and prejudice it has been taken for granted that irrespective of women's long hours in farm, domestic

¹⁷ The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics, op. cit. p. 146 – 149.

¹⁸ Women in Arab World, op. cit.

chores etc. only men are capable of creating wealth. Thus among the Ibos of south-eastern Nigeria, a wife is referred to “Ori Aku” a rather derogatory word meaning “wealth consumer”. It is only in recent years of economic stress that men have started recognizing the role of women in wealth creation, thus changing from “Ori Aku” to “Okpata Aku” which means “wealth creator”.

6.1.2: Industrial Sector

Women in Africa and Arab world make significant contribution to the industrial sector of the economy, in developing countries to which both regions belong. The bulk of industrial activities are at very small scale and medium scale levels among rural women.

The small scale industries are the second largest employers of female labour force in most African countries. In Nigeria according to United Nations 1995 report 60 percent to 70 percent of women engage in small scale industry. Activities in this sector that attract women’s participation include cloth making, soap and detergent, food processing, shoe making, knitting, textile/tailoring¹⁹, among others.

Women in Arab region also dominate small scale industries as their African counterpart. And this has remained the position even from a

¹⁹ Sani, op. cit p. 22

distant past.²⁰ Understandably the result of their high seclusion is their monopoly or near monopoly of home based industries such as spinning, dyeing and textile and embroidery. Summing up the contribution of Arab women in this regard, submitted that:

“Muslim women ...held a monopoly over certain branches of textile industry, the largest and most specialized and market oriented industry at the time, in occupations, such as spinning, dyeing and embroidery.”²¹

In comparison with women in other world, African/Arab women show higher presence and contribution in rural, informal small scale industries, while women in the developed world have upper hand in representation and contribution in secondary and tertiary sector of industries by reason of their high industrialization.

6.1.3: Service Industry

In service industry the developed world maintain a common trend with the Arab region showing a general dominance of women work force. Africa's trend does not follow a regular or defined pattern. Thus while more men are involved in service industry in Mauritania, Liberia, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire and Botswana, there are more women in service industry in Nigeria, Namibia, Mauritius, Egypt and Algeria. In countries like Chad, Libya, Ethiopia and Eritrea, the

²⁰ About 7th Century A.D.

²¹ Women in Arab World, op cit

percentage of men to women workforce in this area run neck-to-neck.²²

6.2 Politics and Business

Africa and Arab women have made varying contribution to the growth and advancement of good governance among their nations. A comparison with other more developed regions, however, shows a marked disparity in favour of the more developed regions. For instance, of nine countries where women were elected heads of state or Government in the 20th Century none was either African or Arab country. Also of 15 countries where women became Prime Ministers in the same period, none was either African or Arab country.²³ (See Appendix II)

Arab women which were formerly underrepresented in parliaments in Arab states are gaining more representations as Arab States liberalize their political system. In 2005, the International Parliamentary Union said that 6.5 percent of MPs in the Arab world were women, compared with 3.5 percent in 2000. In Tunisia, nearly 2.3 percent of members of parliament were women. However, the Arab country with the largest parliament, Egypt, had only around four per cent female representation in parliament.

²² The World's Women 1995 : Trends and statistics, op. cit pp.146-149

²³ Ibid, see p. 152, Chart 6.1

In 2006 women in the Gulf Cooperative Council states achieved a significant breakthrough in terms of participating in parliamentary election, but the success of female candidates varied across the region. In the United Arab Emirate (UAE), women stood for election for the first time in the country's history in that year. Although just one female candidate from Abu Dhabi was directly elected, the government appointed a further eight women to the 40 seat federal legislature, giving women a 22.5 percent share of the seats, far higher than the world average of 17.0 percent. In Kuwait, women participated in election for the first time, but none won seats. Bahrain elected its first and only MP in 2006.²⁴

Unlike their Arab counter part African women have been less successful in politics even though they have participated at community levels spanning from pre colonial, through to colonial and pre colonial era. In general, their representative at all levels of politics has been scanty compared to males. This is because the domain of public life has traditionally been associated with men. The role of women in politics viz-a-viz men has been variously described as insignificant and relegated to the footnotes²⁵ . Thus even though women have been appointed ministers, elected into the parliaments and even as a president in Africa ²⁶ their percentage shares of political office is far less than Arab nations' average. In Nigeria for instance,

²⁴ Women in Arab World, op-cit

²⁵ See (Olojede, 1990) and (Mba, 1997) cited in Sani, op-cit p. 115.

²⁶ President Ellen Serleaf Johnson of Liberia.

the result of Third Republic election in 1999 showed that out of 355 members of the House of Representatives only 12, representing 3.4 percent were women while only 3 out of 108 senators (2.8 percent) were women. The performances of women were in other lower levels of political office is even less cheering. For instance, out of 8, 800 local government councilors only 143 (1.6 percent) were women²⁷. Even though the recent 2007 general election has improved women participation, the difference in percentage representation is not significant.

The situation in Africa and Arab compare unfavorably with that of Western Europe. By 1918, one woman had held elective post in Great Britain, eight in 1923 and fourteen in 1929. As at 1994, Austria has 21 percent of its lower chamber or parliament as women Denmark, 33 percent, Finland 39 percent, Sweden 34 percent and Luxemburg 20 percent. Only two countries in Africa Seychelles and South Africa have 27 percent and 25 percent respectively. None of the countries in Arab region made at least 20 percent bench mark representation.²⁸

6.3 Professions

Professionals are veritable catalyst for national developments. Generally the contribution of Africa and Arab women in professions such as medicine, law, engineering, military service, architecture, journalism, teaching, accounting, nursing etc is a function of their

²⁷ Sani op. cit p. 101.

²⁸ The World's Women 1995: Trends and statistics, op. cit p. 155, chart 6.6.

advancement in education. Thus the role of African and Arab women in professional practice cannot be assessed without considering the impact and access of women to formal education.

Generally educational opportunity for women came very late as cultural practices ensured that young girls remain at home for domestic activities while the boys went to school. Even when girls started going to, they had to drop to enable boys continue whenever a choice had to be made as a result of lack of funds for formal education.

As Sani rightly concluded, in Nigeria, the male child is usually educated at the expense of the female child²⁹. Today most African girl child are still having the problem of financing their education.

In the United States compulsory education for males and females was introduced as early as 1920s. As a result both the boy and the girls were under pressure to be educated. As Cott remarked:

*Under pressure of compulsory schooling laws and the incentive of training for white-collar-employment, high school attendance zoomed up in the 1920s and 1930s reaching between 50 and 60 percent of teenagers among whom girls more than held their own.*³⁰

²⁹ Op. cit p. 101

³⁰ Cott, N.F, "The Modern Women of 1920s: American style" in Dubes and Perrot, op . cit p. 77

In spite of late exposure to formal education and the continued lack of free access as a result of economic stress and want of compulsory free education in Nigeria, women has made remarkable contribution in the professions. In 1936 Dr. Elizabeth Abimbola Awoniyi became the first woman medical doctor in Nigeria while Dr. Grace Guobadia became the first dentist. By 1975 women represented about 12.2 percent of registered medical practitioners in Nigeria.³¹ Today the percentage has increased and women medical doctor have been appointed into the highest medical position of the Chief Medical Directors of a Teaching Hospitals.

In the legal profession women have made immense contribution resulting in many Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SAN), Justice of the High Court, and Court of Appeal. A woman now sits at the apex court, the Supreme Court of Nigeria.

In teaching and research, Nigeria women have achieved the highest appointment of Vice Chancellors of universities and even Director General of Nigeria Institute of International Affairs (NIIA).³²

³¹ Sani, *op. cit* p. 103

³² Prof. Grace Alele Williams was former Vice Chancellor of University of Benin, Late Prof. Jadesola Akande was Vice Chancellor of Lagos State University, while Prof. Joy Ogwu was the Director General of NIIA, Lagos.

So much contribution and progress have been made by African and Arab women in various professions but the disparity between them and the women in developed world still remains polls apart.

7.0 Other Yardsticks for Contribution of Women to National Development

In the sphere of national development we have demonstrated that the women of other region of the world have impacted more on their societies than Africa and Arab women. However, there are some common yardsticks among all the women the world over which tend to add to their contribution to national development. Some these yardsticks include:

7.1 Women's and Men's Work and Time Use

Whether in industry, service or agriculture women and men have different responsibilities and activities. For most women, family and work are constantly tied together. For most men, work mean an income producing job with fixed schedule outside the house.

Women often work more hours than men. Studies from the 1980s – 1990s mainly in developed regions show that women work at least two hours per week more than men in 13 countries, and often 5-10 hours per week more. Only in one country, the United States where

women reported to work fewer hours than men – about three hours per week more.³³

The daily time a man spends on work and household activities tends to be the same over his working life. On the other hand, a woman's working time fluctuate widely and at time extremely heavy as a result of combining paid work, household and child-care responsibilities. In this regard the confession of Mrs. Michelle Obama, the wife of U.S President, Barack Obama in her address at the Howard University in Washington D.C on 11th February, 2009 on the topic Home, Work, Community: the Roles of African American woman as Change Agents is very instructive. She said:

“ I am happy to be here because this issue is something that I have dealt with my whole life, trying to figure out how to juggle work-family balance in the process of getting an education. There isn't a day that goes by, particularly after having kids that I don't wonder or worry about whether I'm doing the right thing for myself, for my family, for my girls.”³⁴

If women could work more between 5 – 10 hours more than men in developed countries where women emancipation is much higher, it goes with that saying that they are Africa/Arab counterparts would surely work as high as 15-30 hours weekly more than their male counterparts.

³³ The World's women 1995: Trends and statistics, op. cit p. 105

³⁴ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

7.2 Life Expectancy

Women and men are living longer now with continuing significant gains are the last four decades in life expecting in almost every region. However, in most countries, women live longer than men for reason according to the United Nations “not well understood.”³⁵ The longest life expectancies for women are found in the developed regions – 75 years in Eastern Europe and 79 in Western Europe and the other developed regions. The lowest is found in sub-Saharan Africa where it is 54 years for women and 51 for men. Between 1990 and 1995 twenty countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia still have life expectancies for women and men below 50 years.³⁶

Life expectancies in favour of women mean that in national development of many countries women work more years after the death of their male age mates. This is especially in developing countries where the life expectancies are still low and women remain active labour force after their male age mates are gone. Thus, even where it is conceded that men contribute more than women to national development, the difference is made up by the longer years of work by women.

³⁵ The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics, op. cit p.65

³⁶ Ibid, Pp 65 and 68 Chart 3.6

8.0 Conclusion

I believe that the intention of the organizers of this Meeting in requesting for this study is to elicit a whirlwind comparison of African and Arab women with other regions of the world in the area of national development. Certainly an in depth consideration of such a global issue would require an extended date and time than is allotted for this Meeting. We have tried to show that the resilience of women the world over has made them to rise from a general stereotype of powerlessness and inferiority to take their proper place in national development. It shows that given equal opportunity to unleash their potentials, women would overtake men in actualizing the development agenda of any nation.

It must always be borne in mind that the level of development of any country is directly proportional to the advancement of its womenfolk. And this advancement can only be achieved when all the prejudices, stereotypes and politics of stagnation and subjugation of women give way to gender equity, social justice and equal opportunities for men and women in national issues, agenda and patrimony.

It has been a pleasure talking to such exalted August forum. Thanks for your patience and listening.