

## **Contributions of Women to National Development: Example from Akwa Ibom State**

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**ABSTRACT** This paper is about the role and extent of women involvement in National Development process. It examines the contributions of women to National Development using example from the civil service. The study used Akwa Ibom State as the case study. Information on workers from level 07 and above was sourced from the state civil service commission, School boards and political party offices. A total population of 33,670 workers was used of which 19,941 (59.23%) were women in different administrative capacity. Research result shows that women dominate in teaching and nursing professions in the state and form more than 40% of workers in other professions. The future of the civil service especially education and health in the country seems to depend on women. However, by a contribution of factors women could contributions more to National Development if deliberate efforts are made to encourage them. Various programme options are therefore suggested

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

A gender study is in a jumble and women have come a long way. The concern for 'women in development' or 'women progress' and 'women participation' in national activities as par the men is not only a street slogan in Nigeria but a governmental struggle and popularised programme. Mivanyi (1996) listed programmes geared towards the upliftment of women by government and groups in Nigeria for participation to include:

- Establishment of government institutions to safeguard and facilitate the mobilisation and involvement of women in National, state and local government affairs;

- Emphasis in National policy of education (FRN 1981, 1989, etc.) on liberalising professions for both males and females;

- Government also encouraged through the media, the formation of voluntary organisations that would protect and mobilise women for participation in National Development.

To support this move by government, NGOs now exist whose major objectives are geared towards women upliftment, better and rightful survival. All these efforts seem to indicate that women were inactive or passive in National Development. This background to Women In Development was perpetrated through various cultural, legal and institutional arrangement and was anchored on the belief that women were subordi-

nate to the men. Consequently, Anikpo (2000) contended that various rights were denied them and their contributions to National Development were either stifled or ignored. Deliberating on this Eboh (1996) raised pertinent issues on the emancipation of both Nigerian woman and man in National Development without which women-folk will slow down the pace of National Advancement. This assertion is true and possible because Nigerian society is bifurcated into male and female with women outnumbering the men in some areas. If almost half of Nigerian from our censuses are women, and as Julius Nyerere boldly affirmed and questioned: a person does not walk very far or very fast on one leg, then the economic advancement of this country had depended on the contribution of women on all levels. Otherwise we would be working in the assumptions that only half of the people (male) participated in the development of this country. The contributions of women might have been low due to gender/societal manipulation but they contributed. This paper tries to assess the contributions of women to National Development in the perspectives of workforce or contributions/ share of responsibility aside traditional activities of farming, petty trading and household chores.

### **2. THE NIGERIAN CASE**

Various researchers (Agbola 1990, 1996; Okoro 1996; Mivanyi 1996; Ekong 2006) had re-

ported on the contributions of women in agriculture, community development and physical development. For instance, Ekong (2006) asserts that women are the real engine driving the economy of this country and are the keys to development and therefore crucial to the goal of sustainable development. In 1975, FAO reported that 70% of all the work in food processing and almost 100% of all domestic and households' chores are performed by women. This trend has not changed except that women now take additional burden of extra-domestic affairs. Agbola (1990) confirmed this assertion by concluding that women are the operators of the economy and constitute a major arm of the labour force, and that Nigerian women are dynamic, industrious and resourceful.

All these researches had looked at the contributions of women based on the cultural gender division of labour, which before the colonial era was restricted to farm, and household activities. But the contributions of women in National Development were beyond agriculture and household duties. Few works (Olurin 1996; Anikpo 2000; Agbola 1996) assessed their contributions beyond farm and household chores (subsistence) and noted that the narrow perception of women's duties may be attributed to the late arrival of women in the colonial system or administrative works. Elaborating on the late arrival of women to urban centres for the new patterns of work and gender division of labour, Anikpo (2000) listed two factors that may have facilitated the predominance of the men in the colonial work force- Firstly, the uncertainty of the new urban system which saw only the men (the accredited family bread winners) ventured out while women and children remained in the villages to look after the homes and farms. This earlier contact with the colonial work system put the men in an advantageous position to acquire all the relevant skills before some women. Secondly, there was the existing cultural belief that the responsibilities of the women do not extend beyond the houses, the farm and market. Women who ventured to project themselves beyond these sectors were suspected to have easy virtue tendencies and were despised in the communities. This fact also delayed the education of women or girl children, therefore, seeing them as not having the necessary skill, to function in the colonial urban system. At that stage what became known as modern and mechanisms for prop-

erty acquisition were completely dominated by men.

From there and as the system (colonial) stabilised, the men who went to work first now brought in their wives and children into the urban centres. When it became difficult for the men alone to sustain the family it became imperative for the woman to earn some income. The port of call due to her lack of skills and education was the market- for trading while their husbands engaged in 'government work'. Women also dominated in nursing and teaching as the colonial occupations also followed systemic contradictions. Anikpo (2000) asserts that this came as a result of the uncertainty of some men occupation during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World Wars. Since women did not go to war and were not targets, it became necessary to train them to undertake these jobs in the absence of men. Today in Nigeria for example male nurses are endangered species. This also applied to teaching which except in the technical colleges and the universities male teachers are on minority.

The delayed incursion of women into other male dominated jobs such as management positions in the public and private sectors and lectureship position in University was as a result of socio-economic prejudices associated with university educated woman. The most obstructive of these being the strong belief that the educated woman could not make good housewives

After independence, there was a boom in education of women (Ake 1981), which was the catalyst needed for women to break into occupations that were hitherto monopolised by men. This era saw women into professional areas such as medicine, law, accountancy, engineering, power sharing and decision making, and their entrance into public service as men opted out into private sector between 1970 and 1980 during the civil war and the introduction of economic stabilisation measures by Murtala Mohammed in 1975 where many workers were retrenched.

### 3. THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The study on the contributions of women in National Development is based on the case study of Akwa Ibom State (AKS) (Fig. 1). AKS is one of the states in Nigeria created out of Cross River State in 1987. It is located between Cross River in the East, Abia State in the North, Rivers



It has a population of 3,920,208 by the 2006 provisional census figure. The state has 28% of the Nations population. Of this figure, women constitute 47.85% or 1,875,698. Two inferences can be made from this, that it will be sheer ignorance and bad planning not to include women in the planning and execution of developmental efforts. This also may assist debunk earlier theories of development which assumes that “man acting in development is male”. It has thirty-one Local government areas and it is divided into three senatorial districts.

The data set was obtained from secondary sources, mainly from the Civil Services Commi-

ssion, political Party offices, Journals and Library. Also, visit were made to other Extra-ministerial departments and parastatals whose profiles were not listed in the Commission's annual Reports. For the ministries, information was sourced from the eighteen while the extra - ministerial departments and Boards were sampled. Information collected was concentrated on workers from salary grade levels 07 and above consisting of officers, senior management staff, middle management staff and senior staff category. For the teachers only those with a minimum qualification of National Certificate of Education (NCE) were taken. This cadre of workers is assumed to be of management level that could be assigned responsibility of authority, for example, principal of a school or head of a department. These were supplemented with the information from interviews of the Directors of Planning, Research and Statistics in each ministry with a view to confirming their staff strength figure with the Commission report.

## 5. RESULTS

The results of the research are presented in three categories, according to the sources of information. While the first category reports the various attributes of civil service workers by educational attainment, number of years of service, gender and grade level, the other report on teachers and nurses. The last results summarises women in power sharing and decision making in the region.

### 5.1 Women Participation in National Development

The willingness, enthusiasm and ability of women to actively participate in Nation building is often conditioned by many factors which are mostly social and educational. While some of these might have been exogenously imposed because of unequal access to opportunities (Agbola 1996), these factors have become mutually reinforcing overtime and have limited the extent and effectiveness of women in development in the civil service.

According to the research result, personnel management in the state is based on professionalism for effective service delivery. Educational attainment and the number of years of in service, therefore, becomes the yardstick in

determining who served, promoted or given position of responsibility. Tables 1, 2 and 3 give information on staff strength, length of service distributions and educational attainment of workers in the state.

**Table 1: Distribution of staff by gender in the state**

| Sector             | Male              | Female            | Total |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------|
| Teaching           | 4378<br>(30.9%)   | 9810<br>(69.1%)   | 14188 |
| Nursing            | 802<br>(17.43%)   | 3798<br>(82.6%)   | 4600  |
| Technical Colleges | 666<br>(67.1 %)   | 327<br>(32.9%)    | 993   |
| Ministries**       | 7883<br>(56.8%)   | 6006<br>(43.2%)   | 13889 |
| Total              | 13,729<br>(40.8%) | 19,941<br>(59.2%) | 33670 |

Source: Field Survey 2007

\*\* Ministries include all Ministries, office of the governor and extra Ministerial Departments

Table 1 shows the total number of staff in the Civil service, Hospitals, Secondary schools and Technical colleges in the state. Out of 33,670 senior staff in the civil Service, 19,941 (59.2%) are women while men accounted to 13,729 (40.8%) only. The percentage of women in the employ of government is higher than the men. The Table

**Table 2: Educational attainment in Akwa Ibom state civil service**

| S. No. | Ministries                             | University graduates |     | Graduates of other Inst. |      | Non graduates |      | Total |      |
|--------|----------------------------------------|----------------------|-----|--------------------------|------|---------------|------|-------|------|
|        |                                        | M                    | F   | M                        | F    | M             | F    | M     | F    |
| 1      | Agriculture                            | 137                  | 39  | 127                      | 80   | 385           | 229  | 649   | 348  |
| 2      | Commerce & Industry                    | 30                   | 23  | 109                      | 49   | 62            | 44   | 201   | 116  |
| 3      | Culture & Tourism                      | 12                   | 7   | 9                        | 16   | 18            | 20   | 39    | 43   |
| 4      | Economic Dev.t                         | 25                   | 20  | 31                       | 42   | 31            | 16   | 87    | 78   |
| 5      | Education                              | 59                   | 60  | 30                       | 32   | 19            | 53   | 180   | 145  |
| 6      | Environment & Mineral Resources        | 11                   | 15  | 22                       | 31   | 66            | 36   | 99    | 82   |
| 7      | Finance                                | 59                   | 18  | 123                      | 128  | 203           | 154  | 385   | 300  |
| 8      | Health                                 | 59                   | 90  | 72                       | 230  | 195           | 220  | 326   | 540  |
| 9      | Information & Ethical Re-orientation   | 46                   | 19  | 59                       | 34   | 111           | 48   | 216   | 101  |
| 10     | Justice                                | 52                   | 38  | 39                       | 38   | 39            | 43   | 130   | 119  |
| 11     | Lands & Housing                        | 56                   | 10  | 117                      | 52   | 410           | 200  | 583   | 262  |
| 12     | Local Government & Chieftaincy Affairs | 29                   | 11  | 22                       | 12   | 24            | 35   | 75    | 58   |
| 13     | Rural Development                      | 18                   | 16  | 22                       | 16   | 58            | 31   | 98    | 53   |
| 14     | Science & Tech                         | 22                   | 5   | 15                       | 11   | 33            | 23   | 70    | 39   |
| 15     | Special Duty                           | 6                    | -   | 6                        | 7    | 8             | 3    | 20    | 10   |
| 16     | Women Affairs & Social Welfare         | 6                    | 12  | 16                       | 16   | 58            | 36   | 78    | 64   |
| 17     | Works & Transport                      | 39                   | 4   | 60                       | 51   | 513           | 70   | 612   | 125  |
| 18     | Youth & Sports                         | 23                   | 10  | 38                       | 38   | 148           | 72   | 209   | 120  |
| 19     | Office of the governor                 | 73                   | 56  | 160                      | 179  | 590           | 219  | 732   | 443  |
| 20     | Extra Ministerial Dept                 | 448                  | 220 | 847                      | 1764 | 1703          | 970  | 3094  | 2960 |
| Total  |                                        | 1210                 | 663 | 1924                     | 2826 | 4744          | 2522 | 7883  | 6006 |

Source: Civil Service commission Annual Report 2006

also shows that women dominate in health (Nursing) and education (teaching) sectors. For instance, out of 14,188 teachers (those with National Certificate of Education (N.C.E.) and above) 9,810 (69.1%) are women. In the Health sector out of the 4,600 numbers of qualified nurses, 3,798 (82.6%) are women. This is consistent with earlier researchers who asserted that male nurses in the health sector are truly endangered species.

Personnel management in Akwa Ibom State civil service like others in the country is based on professionalism for effective service delivery. Educational attainment, therefore, is the yardstick in determining who serves, promoted or given position of responsibility. Table 2 on educational attainment distribution shows that in 2006 out of 13,889 civil servants a total of 1,873 (13.47%) and 4,750 (34.27%) are graduate of University and Polytechnics respectively. Women accounted for 663 and 2826 in that category. For non-graduates, of the 7,266, women accounted for only 2,522 (34.7%). This shows the quality of women in the employment of government in the state. In administrative positions, we were reliably informed that women are in the fore fronts. For instance, the current Head of Service the Chief Judge and Auditor General are women besides the other three permanent secretaries appointed on merits like their male counterparts.

Table 3 shows the length of service of the staff by gender. From the Table, Ministry of Health has the highest number of staff who have served 21 years and above. Out of 604 staff, 433 (71.7%) are women while 171 (28.3%) are men. This is consistent with the fact that health sector (Nursing) was the first occupation women were trained during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World Wars. The table also shows that in all ministries with a total manpower of 13,889, female gender had a total of 6,006 (43.2%) while the male are 7,883 (56.8%). The overall figure also shows consistency with the fact that women are really contributing to the development of the country. Out of 7,949 staff that served 21 years and above, 4,331 (54.5%) are men while women are 3,618 (45.5%).

## 6. COMMENTS AND CONCLUSION

Quite contrary to popularly held belief the study has demonstrated that women form the nucleus of the state civil service economy. They form 59.23% of the total workforce of salary grade level 7 and above and are in various capacities of responsibilities. For instance, the state civil service has four female permanent secretaries and many directors and heads of units appointed on merit.

The women are also visibly seen in the social network activities at all levels of the economy, irrespective of the level of educational attainments

**Table 3: Length of service distribution in the civil service**

| S. No. | Ministry                          | 01-10 |      | 11-20 |     | 21-30 |      | 31-34 |     | Total |      |
|--------|-----------------------------------|-------|------|-------|-----|-------|------|-------|-----|-------|------|
|        |                                   | M     | F    | M     | F   | M     | F    | M     | F   | M     | F    |
| 1      | Agriculture                       | 241   | 165  | 57    | 21  | 206   | 115  | 145   | 47  | 649   | 348  |
| 2      | Commerce & Industry               | 38    | 41   | 51    | 27  | 76    | 35   | 36    | 12  | 201   | 116  |
| 3      | Culture & Tourism                 | 12    | 17   | 11    | 6   | 10    | 15   | 6     | 5   | 39    | 43   |
| 4      | Economic Dev.t                    | 29    | 30   | 15    | 12  | 31    | 29   | 12    | 7   | 87    | 78   |
| 5      | Education                         | 21    | 27   | 32    | 34  | 100   | 65   | 27    | 19  | 180   | 145  |
| 6      | Env. & Mineral Resources          | 42    | 47   | 17    | 10  | 6     | 17   | 34    | 8   | 99    | 82   |
| 7      | Finance                           | 73    | 62   | 78    | 44  | 189   | 164  | 45    | 30  | 385   | 300  |
| 8      | Health                            | 86    | 67   | 69    | 40  | 139   | 358  | 32    | 75  | 326   | 540  |
| 9      | Infor & Ethical Re-orientation    | 30    | 12   | 25    | 22  | 128   | 50   | 33    | 17  | 216   | 101  |
| 10     | Justice                           | 38    | 24   | 40    | 34  | 41    | 41   | 11    | 20  | 130   | 119  |
| 11     | Lands & Housing                   | 257   | 184  | 42    | 7   | 189   | 49   | 101   | 22  | 583   | 262  |
| 12     | Local Gov't & Chieftaincy Affairs | 25    | 24   | 8     | 6   | 29    | 24   | 13    | 4   | 75    | 58   |
| 13     | Rural Development                 | 33    | 29   | 11    | 7   | 40    | 15   | 14    | 2   | 98    | 53   |
| 14     | Science & Tech                    | 40    | 18   | 14    | 6   | 13    | 11   | 3     | 4   | 70    | 39   |
| 15     | Special Duty                      | 5     | 5    | 2     | 1   | 12    | 2    | 1     | 2   | 20    | 10   |
| 16     | Women Affairs & Soc. Welfare      | 15    | 17   | 16    | 9   | 36    | 28   | 11    | 10  | 78    | 64   |
| 17     | Works & Transport                 | 88    | 11   | 21    | 13  | 370   | 89   | 133   | 12  | 612   | 125  |
| 18     | Youth & Sports                    | 79    | 36   | 65    | 44  | 42    | 33   | 23    | 7   | 209   | 120  |
| 19     | Office of the governor            | 146   | 89   | 94    | 79  | 378   | 223  | 90    | 52  | 732   | 533  |
| 20     | Extra-Ministerial depts           | 1034  | 697  | 557   | 359 | 1213  | 1670 | 318   | 229 | 3094  | 2870 |
| Total  |                                   | 2332  | 1602 | 1225  | 781 | 3248  | 3033 | 1083  | 585 | 7883  | 6006 |

Source: Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 2006

(Enoidem 1996). Such social networks facilitate the act of power sharing and decision making. For example, market women have formed themselves into a pressure group - Market Women Association - that influences political, economic and cultural decisions. They participate in electioneering campaigns especially in the last elections through links with the grassroots and rural women. This was possible because of the horizontal and vertical linkages brought about during most of their business activities such as regular trading with the rural food producers and urban market.

Politically, the state has had credible women representatives both at the legislative, and the executive and as activists. Names featuring prominently include those of Late Chief Margaret Ekpo who championed the 1929 women riot, Chief Atim Atakpo, Obong Rita Akpan, two former Secretaries to the State Government- Obonganwan Mary Obot and Obonganwan Grace Ekong to mention a few who have retired from active service. Most of them are now think tank of government developmental programmes and policies. Just like women have produced a speaker to the Federal House of Representatives, the state has also witnessed increased involvement of women in politics having women elected into both the National and the State assemblies. At the local government level the story is the same. It is not out of place to mention here that a woman has risen to the prestigious position of Accountant General of the state performing creditably like what is happening at the Federal level.

Women have proved very capable of effective representation over the years. The implications, therefore, are enormous and the challenges for policy rethinking very urgent. A cursory look at the offices and secretariat buildings and environment depicts male dominated sights. Even with enormous number of women in the secretariat the planners and the architects of such edifices did not incorporate the female gender needs. For example, the rest rooms are not given feminine touches of at least providing a full size mirror or a lobby in case she desires to hang on and remake herself. Also special provisions for the physically challenged persons are not made. These, therefore, call for a conscious involvement of women and handicapped in any development planning project of government for an all round development

Notwithstanding the points already outlined and in view of the fundamental role of women in

National development, there is a need to vigorously pursue the following suggested programmes.

Education of the womenfolk: especially the rural women. Provision of basic education to the women and especially junior staff in government employ should also be given in -service training. This will provide a multiplier effect to the education of youths in the state.

Encouragement of the formation of more women agricultural and business cooperatives. This will lead to the economic empowerment of the rural woman and encouraging social network activities.

Through the public/private partnership, the life enhancement agency should partner with rural women agricultural cooperatives for the establishment of small-scale processing industries such as cassava grinding etc. This will increase the productive capacity of the women and provide employment opportunities for them.

Professional bodies should be encouraged to carry out enlightenment campaigns in secondary schools to emphasize the involvement of the girls in choice of subjects.

Political parties should pursue a vigorous enlightenment campaigns on the involvement of women in politics and bring out modalities on mainstreaming them for elective positions.

It is wise for the government to embark on mass mobilization of men to be trained in nursing and teaching professions.

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