

Obiaruku Women and Economic Development

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Abstract: *In spite of the enormous contributions of women in general and those of Obiaruku in particular to economic development, little or nothing significant appears/exists in the literature on them in appreciation. Patriarchy is basically responsible for the backdrop. Obiaruku women's extensive involvement in entrepreneurial ventures and technical skills acquisition is one area the women contrite to economic development. Constrained by patriarchy, these women's contribution to economic development is neglected, limited and played down on. This study appraises the contributions of Obiaruku women to economic development in Obiaruku and Delta in particular and Nigeria at large. The study reveals that these women have greatly contributed to the economy through their enormous role in agriculture, trade and entrepreneurial ventures. It is also discovered that their contributions are grossly neglected and undermined by many, owing to gender stereotype perspectives and factors. They face gender issues, poverty, illiteracy and rural underdevelopment challenges. This study calls for a change of attitude towards women as well as their contributions to economic development and the society at large. It also calls for more objective scholarly works on these women and their other contemporaries. It concludes that save for the challenges that militate against these women, their contributions to economic development would have been much more than what currently obtains. The survey method is employed. Oral/telephone interviews, (non-)participant observation and intuition constitute the primary sources, while library print materials form the secondary data sources. Content text-guide analysis and qualitative approach are employed accordingly.*

Keywords: Women; Obiaruku; Economy; Development; Entrepreneurship; Agriculture

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the place of Nigerian women in general was neglected until recently. The Obiaruku women's place in economic development is still neglected, undermined and not (poorly) studied, despite their enormous contributions to it through their extensive engagement in entrepreneurial, agricultural and mercantile ventures. The Obiaruku women are those of Obiaruku, Ukwani, Delta State, South, Nigeria. There exists barely little or nothing at all on these women in the literature till date. This is a manifestation of the relegating and prejudicing perspectives accorded them over the years. Their scholars have also paid little or no attention to their role in the society. This means that the Obiaruku scholars, including this writer, are yet to do what they ought to in bringing these women, with their appreciable deeds, to limelight. This work is thus an eye-opener to many as well as a starting point for this scholar of Obiaruku origin. Ochelle (2014:5) gives credence to the foregoing thus:

The study of the place of Nigerian women in history is perhaps the most neglected theme in its past. The need to study the place of women has been made valid and necessary not by the present day problems faced by women in these societies but also by the lip service paid to the need for women to get into the realm of the social, political, economic and cultural development of Nigeria.

The Obiaruku women are very industrious, entrepreneurial, TVE-driven, artistic, homely, cultural, religious and sociable. First, they are very industrious on the farm (in agriculture) and in trade (commerce). They do not only assist men in farming but also farm by themselves. Like the industrious Urhobo women, most of them are more hard-working than their men. They run the home, fend for the family; fulfil their care economy role like serving and satisfying their husbands, train their children through schools and acquaint their children with informal education. Some of them have lazy or less hand-working husbands. In carrying out these roles, which also constitute their role in or contribution to economic development in the state and Nigeria at large, these women encounter various challenges that adversely affect them as well as the extent of their contribution to the economy.

It has been established that bulk of rural women in particular are significantly contributing to their national economies, but they are the poorest of poor, illiterate, ignorant, disease-ridden, occupying low social, economic and political status (UN, 2008:1; Ochelle, 2014:2). The role of women, especially in the rural areas, was until recently regarded as secondary in the socio-economic development of Nigeria. Women, therefore, tended to be ignored

(Ihimodu, 1996:1). But the contrast is that there abounds legion evidence to the immense contributions of women to development across nations of the world. Both oral and written facts attest to African women's high population in the economy of the continent as well its culture, social, arts, technology, enterprises, etc., and growth and development. As noted by Ochelle (2009:2) and Robert (2015:3), besides carrying out their domestic chores like food production, firewood collection and provision of household water, reproduction and parenting (motherhood), women contribute significantly to the workforce in agriculture and informal sectors. They constitute one-fourth of developing nations' industrial labor force but still carry the main burden of childcare (parenting) and household chores.

Since women's emancipation and development, particularly the rural women, remain a mirage or a mere lip-service and paper crusade/discourse, these women are among the poorest of the poor in rural areas of Africa (Nigeria most). They suffer the feminization of poverty, institutional anomalies of the state, on one hand, and those of the Nigerian nation, on the other. They are impoverished and incapacitated. Even at this point in time, these women are still left to crude farming system cum the use of crude implements, which affect their efficiency in agriculture and thus reduce their level of productivity. Most of them are not educated, as they have been (are) denied basic formal education, following the mentality that they would be married out to other families. They are poorly educated on technical and vocational edition (TVE), though they are used to entrepreneurial ventures, which they engage in for livelihood. Several other constraints abound. This study rises against these issues and for the imperative of scholarly appreciating them to enhance betterment in their contribution to economic development, bring the knowledge about these women cum their role to limelight, and present the lessons to be learnt by other women, and the government, scholars and other authorities that owe these women some obligations.

In other words, this study appraises the contributions of Obiaruku women of Delta State to economic development, in entrepreneurship, self-assertion and to societal well – being as well as growth. It examines the extent of their contribution to economic development and the challenging factors that limit the supposed extent of their contributions. It explores the place of and how the women contribute to TVE and entrepreneurship for uneven development. It blames the government, Obiaruku scholars and other authorities for the unresolved problems of these women, since they have failed the women in their responsibilities. These aims/objectives are guided by these posers:

- i. To what extent do Obiaruku women contribute to economic development?
- ii. To what extent are these women cum their contributions recognised and appreciated?
- iii. What are the prospects and challenges of these women in contributing to economic development?
- iv. How do these women contribute to economic development?

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to the Wikipedia, an economy or economic system consists of the production, distribution, or trade and consumption of limited foods and services by different agents in a given geographical location. The economic agents can be individuals, businesses, organizations or governments. This applies to our case under study, where Obiaruku women are vibrant economic agents who actively participate in and immensely contribute to the production, distribution and consumption of the limited human resources– foods and services– in Obiaruku, Delta State and beyond. A given economy is the result of a set of processes that involves its culture, virtues, education, technological advancement, evolution, history , social organization, political structure and legal system as well as its geography, natural resources endowment and ecology as main factors. These factors give context, content and set the conditions and parameters in which an economy functions (Ochelle, 2014:14).

Musa (2014:101) notes that economic growth is a long term process of sustainable rise in the capacity of a nation to supply increasingly diverse economic goods and services to its growing population. It is conventionally measured by the increase in Gross Domestic Production (GDP) of the country. Lipsey and Crystal (1999) define economic growth as an increase in potential total output of a country over a long period of time. Since the total outputs of Nigeria Gross Domestic Product constitute its economic growth and the Obiaruku women play an enviable role (contribution) to the GDP, thus their place in Nigerian economy cannot be over-emphasized.

Ako (2003) observes that growth entails quantitative increase and precipitate development, and development implies a qualitative change in structure. Economic development is said to have occurred when per capital income is risen and the distribution of income is improved, with better administration, education, hospital, means of communication and transportation, technique of production and quality of life in general (Adu, 2004:123). The

implication of the human factor in defining development emphasizes that the target need not be on machines or institutions but on people.

The concept of development, as it is currently, began in 1986 with the Brunthaid Commission that encapsulated the concept of development to include economic, environmental, cultural, social, and health as well as political needs (Brunthaid, 2003). In recent times, development currently, therefore, one cannot avoid, concerns with socio-cultural and political issues and must focus on goals, ideas and ends as well as economic means (Ako, 2003).

Entrepreneurship is a contemporary economic concept that describes small and medium scale enterprises and skills acquisition, aimed at profit-making, self-reliance, economic boost, poverty alleviation, job creation, commercial transformation and socio-economic/national growth and development (Dibie, Besong and Robert (2015:1-2). Entrepreneurship is mostly associated with the concepts of innovation and creativity and it generally involves the identification and exploitation of business opportunities culminating into an enterprise or business firm (Hisrich, Peters & Shepherd, 2006). It is regarded as a key ingredient required to harness human and material resources towards the achievement of growth and development of any nation (Mohanty, 2009). Thus, entrepreneurship is generally considered as a power drive of any economy, particularly because the recent global economic downturn has necessitated most developing nations of the world to consider entrepreneurship, precisely small and medium scale enterprises as the positive option for economic re-engineering and building (Lambing and Kuehl, 2007).

Agriculture is often defined simply as the cultivation of crops and the rearing of animals for man use. It involves crop and livestock production, fishery, forestry and wild-life conservation, whereby the Obiaruku women engage in all of these except wild conservation.

3. OBIARUKU IN BRIEF

Obiaruku, 5°51'N 6°09'E, an area of 2,016 square kilometres, is the Headquarters/Capital of Ukwani Local Government Area (LGA) of Delta State, South-South, Nigeria. It is one of the major homelands of the Ukwani speaking (Akashiada) people. The Okpala-Ukwu of Obiaruku is the oldest male in the town (Amaize, 2005:1). The Ukwani LGA was carved out of the then Ndokwa West LGA on 4th December, 1996. The LGA comprises nine clans: Akoku, Amai, Ebedei, Eziokpor, Ezionum, Obiaruku, Umuebu, Umukwata and Umutu. Together they make up the ten wards of the LGA, with a population of about 103,000 (NPC, 1991). The people practice gerontocracy, were the oldest man is installed the traditional ruler, designated Okpala-Uku. The people are a mono linguistic group, the Ukwuani, an Igbo dialect of the Delta fraction (The Wikipedia, 2017).

The population of Obiaruku, as at 2005 was 68,710, with 33,090 males and 35,620 females. The town has 16,205 households and the population density of 168 (The Wikipedia, 2017). The name, Obiaruku, is derived from two Ukwani terms 'Obi' and 'Aluku', which got corrupted as 'aruku'. In Ukwani language, Obi could mean a number of things, including the heart, the center, the point, the main, a settlement or a hamlet, while Aluku is the name of a tree that was predominant in the area now known as Obiaruku. The tree, which produces a large crown, provided some kind of canopy/shed under which the initial settlers rested. Thus, the name means the settlement/settlers under aluku trees (oral sources).

Obiaruku is principally a cosmopolitan town, with the two major migrant groups: Okuzu and Umuebu people, tracing their origin to Umuebu, an older community south-west of Obiaruku. Oral history has it that the Okuzu people migrated in masse from Umuebu to the north-eastern banks of River Ethiope, at a place called Obi-Ubo within what is called Obiaruku today. And, Morka, an Umuebu hunter arrived the same River Ethiope at a more westerly position, which was called Obi-Ofingo at some later time and settled his family on the bank of the river. It is imperative to note that there is an ageing controversy on which of the two groups arrived the area now known as Obiaruku first, and the point at which the two settlements became amalgamated to become Obiaruku. However, it is important to note that the common ancestral festival 'the Ikenge' festival celebrated throughout the town was always initiated by Okuzu, as the elder of the community after which all other quarters, as they are known, would join the celebration. This thus makes it clear to allude to the view that Okuzu came first, and their cordial relationship as the same people from Umuebe would definitely be why they unanimously amalgamated, which to them was needles of any dating; after all, then they were used to oral traditions or had no writing system yet.

Other member communities of the town, considered the latter settlers include the Umuedede (now known as Umu-Ogwezi who are believed to be migrants from Aboh town, a more southly community on the creeks of the

River Niger), the Umusume people (made up of a mix of migrants from different communities including Ezhiokpor, Umukwata, Ezhionum, etc.), and the Obi-Ugbe people (who are principally from Ezhiokpor). Over the years, migrants from neighboring Urhobo communities, far away Yoruba communities, Igbo communities and nomadic Hausa/Fulani people have settled in the town too till date.

Until very recently, there were five major quarters and one smaller entity – ‘sub quarter’ – in Obiaruku. These were, from the west of the town to the east, Ogbe-Obiaruku, Ogbe-uku consisting of Umuedede or Umu-Ogwezi, Okuzu, Obi-Ugbe, Umusume and the smaller entity, which is often described as Obi-Jehovah or Obi-Edike with a very mixed population. This configuration of the town has changed considerably over the years with some of the quarters changing names and even splitting up into a number of quarters mostly for political reasons (Obiaruku, The Wikipedia, 2017).

4. PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Studies have revealed that women represent 60% of the world’s population, with 70% in developing nations like Nigerian, constituting two-fifth of the active population in agriculture. As UNDP (1997:9) puts it, ‘Generally, women constitute half of the world’s population and have contributed significantly to the well-being of the human race.’ Women in virtually all parts of Nigeria have been contributing to the society in numerous ways since the pre-colonial era. The Obiaruku women were/are not left out. They play an indispensable role of enhancing agriculture, rural development, improving food security, eradicating rural poverty, job creation, entrepreneurship pursuit, growth and development, self-assertion/reliance (economic independence), education sponsorship, etc. (see Ihimodu, 1996:2; Ochelle, 2014:3).

According to Simmons (1975:140), the economic survey of Nigeria for 1959, recorded a total female labor force of 10,539 for Nigeria that year and indicated that 1,327 of these women were in processing and manufacturing industries. Obviously, female participation was substantially higher than these estimates. Yet as development proceeds, women are clearly affected. For a number of years, rural women in Nigeria have received some attention from such development organizations as World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), UNICEF, etc. But projects sponsored by these bodies have frequently reflected a Western perception of women’s needs and aspirations, viewing women as farmers, wives, housekeepers, cooks and bearers of children. Donor agencies have directed funds toward maternal and child health clinics, family planning programmers, and have home economics projects. Yet, information has long been available showing that West African women play significant roles as farmers, traders and entrepreneurs in their own right, and that these roles are of central importance to the women, their families and the economies of their societies (Simmons, 1975:141). And, there is no gainsaying the fact that the Obiaruku women are among these West African women, who, of course, are not left out in these roles.

Then and now, women play(ed) pivotal role in food and livestock production (agriculture), local arts and technology, trade, mining, manufacture, craft and what have you. Nigerian communities are mostly agrarian. The pre-colonial Nigerian women are reported to have taken active part in all these sectors and the economy, contributing to nation-building, economic growth, development and sustenance. As observed by Abraham (2012:234), the pre-colonial Nigerian economy was basically at a subsistence level and Nigerian participated effectively in this economy. Besides being mothers and wives and taking care of the domestic sphere, which, to us, constitute home and care economies, women contributed to the production and distribution of goods and services. Women engaged in agriculture and cultivated the portions of land allocated to them, produced and processed palm oil, palm and kernel oil, and also participated in trade especially local trade and were fully involved in the procurement and sales of various food items and related commodities (Abraham, 2012:234; Effah-Attuo, 2002). Scholars have noted with dismay:

The fact of women’s participation in agriculture... has had to be proved in almost every country. In Nigeria with increasing data being made available, this should change, and women’s role in agriculture development be perceived for what it is, vital to the process of improving productivity and living conditions (Charthon, 1984).

The Obiarukwu women did all the aforementioned and still do them across ages. In the present days, much more population is involved in entrepreneurial ventures than those still immersed in agriculture. This does not however negate the fact that (almost) all of them, who are home-based venture into subsistence farming. Even those who work in offices still farm to support their earnings and reduce their rate of buying.

The activities of women in agro-forestry and soil conservation provide major support to food and livestock production, and promote economic development and sustenance (Osuala, 1991:70; Yecho, 2012:172). The Obiaruku women are likewise in Delta State. Their involvement in activities in agriculture and entrepreneurship provide major support to food production and promote uneven economic development and sustenance. In her study on 'The role of women in pre-colonial Igala economy', Abraham (2012:233) aptly observes,

Tradition places women at such a low social pedestal that it is often wrongly assumed that they are weak and incapable of contributing to [the] development of society. This stereotype against women explains their marginal role in the socio-political and economic affairs of Nigeria today. Though the situation has greatly improved when compared with what obtained in the past, it is not in any way enough to regard the phenomenon as obliterated.

The above lends credence to what obtains in the case of Obiaruku women, whose enormous contribution to economic development are often times neglected, undermined and underrepresented in the literature. The stereotyping perception of the women that results to the gross negligence, undermining and underrepresentation of these women in socio-political, cultural, economic, agricultural and educational sectors/deeds, has a lot of grave implications to development in various regards. The stereotype causes the underutilization of the human resources and potentials of women, which in turn affects societal development.

It has been observed that for any society to attain development, it must utilise both the human and natural resources. The human resource contributes the ultimate basis for the wealth of nation. While capital and natural resources are passive factors of production, human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit the natural resources to ensure national development (Abraham, 2012:233; Harbison, 1998:2). The foregoing highlights the implication of under-utilizing the human resources and potentials of women, such as the Obiaruku women. It also highlights the prospects of the effective utilization of these human resources and potentials. Arguing for women's contributions to the economies of nations and their development potentials, Ochelle (2009:2) maintains,

If the economic contribution of rural women is properly evaluated it could be seen that they provide about half the family income. In view of these facts, we assume that societal transformation in the developing economies in general and in most parts of Africa cannot take place without the rural women playing a predominant role. This contribution has not been fully appreciated hitherto.

The above is apt and lends credence to the case of Obiaruku women under study. The place of the Obiaruku women in economy and the society at large is yet to be well situated and properly evaluated. This is like what obtains in the case of the women of many other parts of Nigeria. For example, describing the case of the Bekwarra women of Upper Cross River, Robert (2015:1-2) observes,

The Bekwarra woman, like most of her contemporaries of some other cultures, in almost all spheres, has a significant place in societal phenomena but only for gender-based allied forces against her across ages... The enormous contribution of this woman to her society seems to gain little or no recognition, especially formal, since she is a mere woman, a weaker vessel and so on, as women in general are narrowly and fallaciously perceived by classical and sexist men, whose orientation is shaped by the functionalist gender theory based on bio-sociological role and status of men and women.

Economic development has and will continue to transform the agricultural sector in many developing countries. The process includes greater commercialization, urbanization and integration into the global economy. These trends and changes bring with them challenges and opportunities, some with a distinct gender dimension. In turn, food supply chains become increasingly vertically integrated, linking input suppliers, producers, processors, distributors and retailers. Since they have been and are actively involved in all these ventures, then their role in economic development cannot be over-emphasized.

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded by the Gender and Development (GAD) model, which is a development of and as well an adaption of the earlier theories. GAD sprang from the Women in Development (WID) Model and has variations and similarities with it (Adu, 2004:125). The aim of this theory (GAD) is to inculcate the concept of 'gender participation', as different from women participation that connotes the contribution of both genders on an equal ground to development initiatives. Reacting to the views of Talcott Person and Robert Bales, functionalist theorists, Ityaryar (1993:11) contends that in countries where the conservative perspective largely governs, women are less likely to occupy important positions in public services, politics and the economy. Development policies affecting

women, which are framed from this perspective, tend to emphasize some issues like child bearing, family planning, agriculture, food, population control, child abuse and prostitution. This highlights the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society.

Further, besides the GAD model, this paper is anchored on both the liberal feminism and modernization feminism. The latter rejects the bio-sociological roles of men and women across cultures and rather maintains that gender roles are culturally determined. These theorists argue that since gender roles are determined by culture, they can be changed by the people. They then call for a change from the old traditional values that are patriarchal to those that are favorable to women and development (Idyorough, 2005:31). We share this position and advocate same for Obiaruku women. Ityavar (1993:14) has cited Thomas Emeagwali to have summarized the major concern of modernization feminists viz:

Once women are offered elective posts, exposed to formal education in large number, given easier access to credit facilities, exposed to technical innovations and the fundamentals of entrepreneurship, organized into co-operative, and made the beneficiaries of progressive land reform, the fundamental problems could have been resolved.

Liberal feminism holds that the gender inequality in society is a product of patriarchal and sexist patterning of division of labour. Gender equality can be produced by transforming the division of labour through the re-patterning of key institutions – law, work, farming, education and media (Ritzer, 2000:454). Again, we share and adopt the standpoint of these theorists, as we advocate transformed and re-patterned aspects of Obiaruku culture, including the key institutions that will guarantee the Obiaruku women's self-assertion, participation in vital socio-political roles as well as wide recognition and appreciation by all and sundry.

6. OBIARUKU WOMEN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

As women of an agrarian society, Obiaruku women greatly contribute to the society in the agriculture sector. They are great farmers. They farm crops of various kinds. That is, they are producers and suppliers of labour, food crops and livestock. They are also processors of agricultural produce and aquatic products, marketers of peasant farm surplus and transporters of farm supplies and products between the farm and the home. They do these besides their domestic chores, which they do in the male preponderant and hostile and discriminating environment in all phases. There are over 65% of the Obiarukwu women in the rural area, the home-based, while over 75% are based in towns and cities across Delta State and Nigeria at large. This rural population thus represents the two-fifth of the active population of women in agriculture. Also, the agro-forestry and soil conservation activities of these women, like their contemporaries of other parts of Nigeria, provide major support to food production and promote the sustenance of the ecosystem (see Osuala, 1991:70).

Of course the value of the contribution of these women and their contemporaries is most appreciated when one reckons with the fact that agriculture remains the most significant of all the existent enterprises in Nigeria, and women are reported to be the backbone of subsistence agriculture. In most cases, the farming process is begun by women, as they weed (clear) and burn the grass for the ground to be ready for tilling by men. In Obiarukwu, thick busy areas (land portions) are usually cleared by men, while the other are cleared by women who want to cultivate, after which their husbands and/or children till the soil and they plant crops. In a few cases, women also till the soil by themselves and still do the planting, weeding and harvesting all alone or with some support of their husbands and/or children. Women whose husbands are lazy or based in town do all these alone, though sometimes they give out part of the rigorous work to men for paid services, which may be charged per ridge/hip, certain land measurement and thereabout or by the whole portion of land to clear, till, plant, weed and/or harvest. Widows suffer this single-hand situation most.

In the case where men do the clearing, the burning or parking of the grass is done by the women. Men do the tilling, while women do the planting, except in the case of yam. Vegetable and crops like maize, okra, cassava, potato, melon, etc. are often planted alone by women. Men help out sometimes in the planting of cassava and the like: while the men cut the cassava stems, the women plant them. Weeding, which is one of the most tedious farming activities, is done by women alone except in a few cases of some widowers or bachelors who do not employ the paid/free services of women. The harvest of crops is done by both men and women or either gender, but the transportation (conveyance) of the farm produce home is the sole responsibility of the women, except where the men decide to use wheel barrow, bicycles or automobile cycle to convey larger quantity at once home with the women.

Also food, processing, preservation and sales are done predominantly by women. For example, groundnut threshing and sunning are done by women with little or no support of the men but their children– girls and young boys. Cassava is peeled sliced/pieced and preserved by women. Cassava is processed in two basic ways. (i) It is peeled, sliced and either dried raw or after days of soaking for some fermentation to juice out some starch before being dried for cassava flour production. (ii) It is peeled, cut into pieces, soaked and washed after days of fermentation, and boiled and pounded for a swallow meal– akpu or fufu.

The classical Obiaruku women fully ventured in various entrepreneurial ventures besides agriculture (fishing inclusive), such as the manufacture and sales as well as wholesale buying and retailing of farm produce, produced in Obiarukwu and beyond. Then, they involved in the production and sales of pottery, sculptural, fabric, fashion and domestic products. They used to buy some fabric and fashion products from Warri, Agbor, Benin, Abraka, Eku and Ontisha. They also sold aquatic produce, though they used to buy the larger quantity from outside Obiarukwu. Today, the contemporary Obiaruku women have dropped some of the ventures for the popular contemporary ventures that women are more used to generally. Some are into petty trade, small scale enterprises and a few of them are medium scale entrepreneurs since they are constrained by various factors, including lack of capital. The number of Obiaruku women in agriculture– farming and livestock production– is still high. They farm various crops both of old and new times. Some of which they import to the area, Obiaruku. They also fish, though not like men and as their classical fellows did. They produce, process and sale banana, plantain, potato, yam, maize, guinea, corn locust beans, etc.

They run bars/ restaurants, in where they sell cooked food and drinks– palm wine, beer, run, ethanol (ogogoro), spirit (whisky, gin, etc.), wine and minerals or soft drinks. They also produce and sell vegetable, palm oil, palm kernel and kernel oil like their classical fellows. By these, they save hunger and starvation in the first place in Obiaruku and beyond and contribute to solving the problem of global food crisis. While they have dumped ventures like pottery, dyeing, weaving, sculpture (wood making) and local fabric, they still venture in firewood and charcoal production in minimal rates. They also buy and sell products of the sectors/enterprises that they had been long abandoned, such as modern clothes, make-up and artifacts.

Long before Johnston and Mellor (1961) identified what are today considered the fundamental economic contributions of agriculture to development, economists focused on how agriculture could best contribute to overall growth and modernization. Many of these earlier analysts (Rosenstein-Rodan, 1943; Lewis, 1954; Scitovsky, 1954; Hirschman, 1958; Jorgenson, 1961; Fei and Ranis, 1961) uphold agriculture for its many resource abundances and its ability to transfer surpluses to the more important industrial sector. By serving as the ‘handmaiden’ to the industrial sector, agriculture’s primary role in the transformation of a developing economy was seen as subordinate in the central strategy of accelerating the pace of industrialization. Small-holder production systems in rapidly growing areas are facing increasing pressure to commercialize, diversify and expand. Increasing scales of production are being observed particularly in the livestock sector, which attempts to supply rapidly growing markets for meat, milk and eggs. Small-scale producers face particular pressures as size and private health and safety standards set by large retailers and wholesale buyers become increasingly important (de Haen et al., 2003).

Over time, a traditional approach to development emerged that concentrates on agriculture’s important market-mediated linkages. Several core economic roles for agriculture formed this traditional approach: (1) provide labour for an urbanised industrial work force; (2) produce food for expanding populations with higher incomes; (3) supply savings for industrial investments; (4) enlarge markets for industrial output; (5) earn export earnings to pay for imported capital goods; and (6) produce primary materials for agro processing industries (Johnston and Mellor, 1961; Ranis et al 1990; Delgado et al., 1994; Timmer, 1995).

Generally, while the role of women in small-scale livestock production is well recognized, much less has been documented about the engagement of women in intensive production and the market chains associated with large commercial enterprises. Demand for livestock products has grown much faster than the demand for crop staples during the past 40 years, fuelled by rising incomes, particularly in Asia and Latin America, and this trend is expected to continue. While pastoralist and small scale mixed farming systems continue to be important in meeting the needs of rural consumers, the demands of growing urban populations are increasingly supplied with meat, milk and eggs from intensive commercial systems. This has important implications for the engagement of women in the livestock sector because of the different roles, responsibilities and access to resources that are evident within different scales of production system and at different points on the production and marketing chain (Bravo-

Baumann, 2000; Tangka et al. 2000; Okali and Mims, 1998). Doing so in Obiaruku has the same, if not more positive implications, outcomes and prospects for these women

Information provided to FAO from 86 countries indicates that in 2008, 5.4 million women worked as fishers and fish farmers in the primary sector. This represents 12% of the total. In two major producing countries, China and India, women represented a share of 21% and 24%, respectively, of all fishers and fish farmers. Women have rarely engaged in commercial offshore and long distance capture fisheries because of the vigorous work involved but also because of women's domestic responsibilities and/or social norms. Women are more commonly occupied in subsistence and commercial fishing from small boats and canoes in coastal or inland waters. Women also contribute as entrepreneurs and provide labour before, during and after the catch in both artisanal and commercial fisheries. For example, in West Africa, the so called "Fish Mamas" play a major role. They usually own capital and are directly and vigorously involved in the coordination of the fisheries chain, from production to sale of fish.

It is estimated that 90% of fuel wood consumption takes place in households, 5% in the individual sector and the remaining 5% in the commercial sector (Siddiquei and Amjad, 1993). Poverty alleviation basically focuses on: (i) expanding employment opportunities, especially among women, and (ii) working towards that goal through policy action that takes into consideration macro-economic relationships and micro-economic allocation of resources, among other factors (Braun, 1995; Otitolaiye and Otitolaiye, 2014: 82). Therefore, firewood marketing constitutes a source of employment opportunities- entrepreneurship- for these rural women, from which they improve their standard of living, as they earn some income from it. As such, poverty is alleviated.

Firewood (fuelwood) is one of the main sources of energy in Nigeria and most other parts of Africa. It constitutes about 1/3 of the total fuel used for cooking and heating in rural areas. It incorporates charcoal production and sales which is patronized by most urban women, at least 1/2 of the total urban women population. Kella (1996) has stated that fuelwood trading business is generally small scale operations that remain open throughout the year. He finds out that 32% of fuelwood marketers are in urban areas, 52% in the villages while the remaining 16% are located along roadside. More so, retailers dominate the fuelwood market and constitute about 91% of the total. Almost 94% of the traders in urban areas are retailers, while 28% of the roadside traders are wholesalers.

Women entrepreneurs are described as a group of women who take initiatives to establish and effectively run or manage businesses (Mohanty, 2009). It is important to state that woman entrepreneurship is largely associated with small and medium enterprises consequent upon the fact that SMEs give women the opportunities to express their entrepreneurial talents hence their likelihood to be more involved in SMEs than their male counterparts (Tambunan, 2008). Findings and research presented by the International Labour Office as regards female entrepreneurship in developing economies, particularly in Africa, leads to substantial evidence that even women living under harsh and adverse conditions can still have notable economic impact by creating employment which most often than not is usually directed towards other women (OECD, 2004).

Research findings indicate that a sample of 118 women entrepreneurs interviewed in Zambia owned 114 firms providing 1013 persons with employment (ILO, 2003). Another research statistics with relevance to women entrepreneurship in Africa also indicate that a sample of 128 women entrepreneurs interviewed in Tanzania provided 752 persons with jobs (OECD, 2004; ILO, 2003b). In the same vein, 123 women entrepreneurs were interviewed in Ethiopia, these women owned firms that provided employment for 852 individuals. These research findings above strongly indicate that women entrepreneurs, particularly in developing countries, have the potentials and capacities to own, run, manage and expand their enterprises, thus facilitating job creation and economic development. Therefore the impact of women entrepreneurship cannot be overemphasised. Therefore, it is imperative to review obstacles impeding the development of women entrepreneurship targeted at fostering entrepreneurial activities particularly in Africa and other developing nations, as this paper does and insists on change in all these regards.

Entrepreneurship has been recognised by both developed and developing nations as an instrument for rapid and sustainable economic growth and development. It is considered as the engine of growth because it creates the needed manpower and skills for rapid growth, poverty reduction, empowerment creation, technical skills acquisition and income generation (Musa, 2014:99). Muktar (2013) has noted that entrepreneurship has been beneficial because the Nigerian private sector, comprising small and medium enterprises, provides diverse employment opportunities for 50% of the country's population. Obiaruku women are both entrepreneurs and artisans. And through their care economy role, they engage their youths in several enterprises (entrepreneurial ventures), such as tailoring (fashion), hair dressing (saloon), arts and crafts, beauty care, farming and agricultural enterprises, (fish production, food crop production, livestock, dairy farms, tree plantations, spices, etc.), wood and charcoal, trade and others.

7. CONCLUSION

As attested to by various related studies on women of other areas, this study has appraised, described and shown, at least in fair details, how Obiaruku women had/have been contributing enormously to the economic growth and development of Obiaruku and Delta in particular, and Nigeria's as a whole. They venture effectively and greatly into agriculture, local manufacture, modern fashion and design (tailoring), beauty and pageantry (make-up), hair dressing and salon, firewood production and sales as well as charcoal, bar/restaurant, fishing, external and internal trade and the like. It is however regrettable that the enormous contributions of these women to economic growth and development are often undermined, neglected and not studied and put forward in the literature.

The supposed extensive contributions of these women to the economy are cut short by various factors, such as patriarchy, crude farming methods and tools, lack of enabling environment and lack of land, as the population keeps rising and many rather use vast portions of the Obiaruku land for non-agricultural purposes. They lack infrastructure/basic social amenities, which affect them all-round in no little ways. For example, they lack good roads, portable water, etc. They lack good and sufficient public primary and secondary schools, healthcare, market, modern storage facilities that would have been preserving a lot of the produce and other perishable goods that are often lost. Bush-burning affects agricultural yield. Flood also challenges their contributions in the area of agriculture. A lot of their crops are annually lost to flood disasters, which adversely affects productivity.

The shortage and/or lack of agricultural implements and fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, etc. constitute another challenge to them in the area of agriculture. They are also constrained by patriarchal and cultural embargoes and other factors. These women battle with domestic economy on daily basis alongside farming, trading/business and/or public/civil service simultaneously, which adversely affect them in various ways. Instead of helping these women, most of their men leave all these loaded duties to them in the name of 'they are women and those are their duties/responsibilities'. Family issues, such as domestic violence, family crisis, alienation, polygamy, indolent husbands' lapses, etc. also militate against these women, who yet contribute enormously to the economy and other facets of Obiaruku, Delta and Nigeria.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends the following:

1. It is high time the contribution of Nigerian women in general and those of Obiaruku in particular be appreciated and given the deserved attention and studies. The Obiaruku scholars must rise to this challenge– underlying knowledge gap– if they want the gap filled and the contributions of their women brought to limelight in the literature. When they begin to write on these women and their contributions to the society in various sectors, it will positively impact on the women in no little ways, which would also rouse the attention and interest of scholars of other parts of Nigeria and the globe that would carry out further (comparative) studies on the Obiaruku women.
2. Obiaruku men should be reoriented towards assisting their women and contributing to the emancipation of these women. Collective and individual orientation would go along away in changing the mentality the men hold about the women, which affects the way they treat, interact and relate with the women. Such reorientation would change the attitude of not assisting women in domestic, farm and business activities conceived as women single gender-assigned duties. It would also address issues of domestic violence and alienation, among others.
3. Women should be encouraged and supported with capital, resources, infrastructure, basic amenities and agricultural implements, fertilizer and chemicals for disease control. It is the provision, sustenance and wide availability of these that would foster the effective productivity of these women in entrepreneurship, agriculture, economy, social and education. The availability of good roads and storage facilities means easy transportation of agricultural produce and trade commodities and the avoidance of the recurring spoilage/wastage that arises from lack of storage facilities. The provision of good schools and the insistence on girls' education, for instance, would reduce the high rate of out-of-school girls and women's illiteracy in the area.
4. With practical capital support (funding) by local, state and federal governments as well as other individuals and institutional donors, these women would do more than imagined (what currently obtains) in contributing to economic development. Small and medium scale women entrepreneurs should be given the needed assistance (aids) so as to contribute more to the economy. Financial, environmental, psychological, and sociological factors are elements that are able to either encourage or discourage women in

entrepreneurship. Hence, women entrepreneurial motivation is considered as an interaction between economic, social, psychological and environmental factors as well as a willingness on the part women to venture into entrepreneurial activity (Mansor, 2005; Moses, Olokundun and Akinbode 2014).

5. The feminisation of poverty should also be brought to an abrupt end in the area. Also, pragmatic and community-based relations development measures should be taken to develop the women and the area as supposed.
6. The women should be sensitised towards having interest in entrepreneurial and agricultural ventures rather than clustering in (petty) trade. Equal education opportunity for women in addition to the provision of schools and regular sensitisation would do those women a lot of good, which would raise their contribution to economic development.

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