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Nigeria, Factor 15: Human Rights

Nigeria: Nigerian Women struggles in Agriculture
“The destiny of world civilization depends upon providing a decent standard of living for all mankind.”-Dr.Norman Borlaug

Nigeria has one of the largest populations and economies in Africa. Despite the economy's fast growing rate, Nigeria still has a large number of poverty stricken people (“Rural Poverty Portal”). Nigeria's economy is based predominately on agriculture where about 90% of the nation's source of food comes from small-scale farmers who farm on small plots of land. Instead of using irrigation systems, Nigerian farmers mostly depend on rainfall (“Rural Poverty Portal”). In fact, as of 2013, there are about 80-112 million farmers in Nigeria. Most of the farmers live in areas that don't have irrigation facilities so they only farm during the rainy season. However some farmers do have access to these irrigation facilities and can farm year-round.

For most families in Nigeria, agriculture is not only a source for food but also a source for income. Agriculture in Nigeria provides 70% of the population with employment (“Wikipedia”). Because of the difference between farms with irrigation facilities and those without, farmers have unequal income which contributes to the country's growing economic poverty rate. Poverty is mainly seen in the rural populations and the productivity of these rural areas is additionally affected by sicknesses (e.g. HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis etc.) that cause food shortages (“Rural Poverty Portal”).

Nigeria women make up between 60-80 % of the agriculture labor force, producing two-thirds of Nigeria's food crops (“Worldbank”). The women normally run the production, processing, and marketing of food, which makes them a huge asset to Nigeria's economy (“Rural Poverty Portal”). Yet women-headed households are more food insecure than men headed households. It is evident that gender inequality is prevalent in Nigeria as the nation has yet to identify women as a major contributor to their society as a whole. To address this issue, the Women in Agriculture (WIA) organization has given women voice when it comes to decision-making in local and national agricultural policy concerns. WIA's programming has improved women's productivity in agriculture (“Worldbank”). The opinion of women is needed because they are usually the heads of most rural poverty families. In recent decades men have been migrating to urban areas to find employment, and the number of households headed solely by women has grown substantially.

The equality between men and women is a major issue in not only Nigeria, but throughout the world. However, specifically in Nigeria, women are not given the same rights as men; for example, women do not have equal access to land, technology, education and health. That makes women more susceptible to poverty than men. Connected to the unequal status of women is the fact that 60% of Nigerian children are afflicted with malnutrition (IFPRI.org). Women's health is undermined by many factors such as not having access to health services, poor sanitation, and sufficient nutrition.

There's a need for organizations and or programs that educate women and give women the courage to speak up in patriarchal (male-dominant) societies. Programs like the Women Farmers Advancement Network (WFAN) give women in “under developed” countries the chance to speak up and share their thoughts with local and national authority. These types of programs are needed predominantly throughout northern Nigeria, so that the women of this nation know the fundamentals of agriculture and irrigation systems. With them having this knowledge the quality and quantity of food should increase substantially. Also having more women in politics would help with having the voice of women heard. Also the

economy rates would increase and Nigeria's poverty rate would possibly decrease due to the amount of women actually receiving profit from the market places and making change in governmental processes. Sarah Ochekepe, Minister of Water Resources, spoke on attaining food security in Nigeria by rehabilitating irrigation projects across all 36 states. She said:

For a start, we have already identified 57 irrigation projects across the country for investment by the Federal Government. These are critical facilities that we must pay attention to; certainly we cannot achieve food security without irrigation development. ("Nigerians Talk.com")

Many countries in Africa are known to have seasons of drought, which effects the growing seasons of crops and the herding of livestock. Droughts can't be controlled by man, so Nigeria will have to conform to having the whole nation on an irrigation system in order to keep a constant flow of water and hydrated crops throughout the country. Given the socioeconomic environment of Nigeria, the nation mainly has 3 types of irrigation; (1) labor-intensive diverted stream irrigation of rice, (2) supplementary irrigation of coarse grains and legumes using groundwater, and (3) dry season irrigation of vegetables (IFPRI). Because different areas of the country have different topographical considerations, Nigeria will have to peacefully figure out which regions can and should produce rice and vegetables. Nigerians (typically women) have to be educated on the type of irrigation and what works for different parts of the country; because due to the diversity of the land in Nigeria certain methods of irrigation are more productivity in certain areas than others (IFPRI).

In terms of water scarcity, all countries in Africa deal with this problem and countries like Nigeria put millions of dollars into systems to sanitize water for consumption. Due to the fact that the nation is filled with rivers and streams with fresh water, Nigeria should be the last place where people are worried about getting clean water. However, there is a water problem in Nigeria and this affects not only the people but also the crops. Since the rainy season is shorter than the drought season farmers have to harvest during heavy rainfall and even floods (which at times destroy crops and lowers the quantity of certain crops). In order to solve this water problem, women can be educated and agriculturally trained just like the men. Have women receive the same rights and training as men have, especially if most of the men are becoming urbanized. The women who are left in the rural areas need to know how to use different methods of farming in order to make a constant living. For Nigeria to grow not only in the economy, but also as nation, women need to be given more roles in society in terms of decision-making when it comes to agricultural issues.

Organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will help benefit women in Nigeria by teaching them different farming techniques, and hands on works (learning how to mix crops). Outreach education like UNDP can help Nigerian women to begin to make decisions like, "what type of irrigation to use" on their land without having a man look over every move they make. With these kinds of programs more and more women will continue to find their voice and be able to be less dependent on others, and become more dependent on themselves. The UNDP program has already benefited 50,000 Nigerians (65% women), and helped decrease the poverty rate (UNDP).

The UNDP is one of many programs that help people to become educated in agriculture. Thus such programs could possibly evolve into making it a requirement for the citizenry to independently own land. In a few years, technology could possibly improve teaching techniques so that it will be more efficient for people to gather a large sum of knowledge. The more information women learn, the more efficient their farming could be.

I would suggest that the government could give about \$100,000 (USD) or more towards the education of agricultural Nigerian women in rural families. This funding would go towards the teaching of farming to girls at a young age so that the knowledge could be passed through the generations. With the education of

women, Nigeria will be making huge progress in beginning the road to equality for its population. Additional organizations like the United Nations could help with the lawmaking for women to have the right to own/control land, and to be able to have the same job opportunities as men.

With the UN's help Nigeria could be one of the first countries in Africa to have equal rights for women and men. Many countries in the world still have issue with the treatment of women and the social/political equality of men and women. This has been the norm for centuries, and now is the time to stop having men as the superior gender in the world. We now live in a time period where anyone could be anything if they stand for it. So if the women of Nigeria want to have their say in politics, economics, and social decisions, they have to be willing to sacrifice to learn their resources and their rights.

In order for there to be equality in Nigeria the government has to be willing to see that women are assets to the economy. For there to be a change in Nigerian society, the local citizens also need to see that having women in the marketplace and farming in the field, give men more freedom to go into the cities and find other jobs. It's obvious that Nigeria is a male dominated country, and it may be difficult for the government to allow women to have more of a role in governmental decision, due to cultural and traditional views of women. In order to overcome this barrier of inequality Nigeria's government has to come to the point where men and women have equal amount of power in the government and in everyday local society. My question is; how can we as American citizens relate to issues that are culturally and historically based and how can those issues be resolved without violence? We as a nation have to pick and choose our battles; we tend to want to help other countries improve their governments and/or economies, but in truth, we need to get our economy straight before we can focus on possibly being an example for. In conclusion, poverty in Nigeria will only be reduced if the government allows for women to be educated and if the women embrace the opportunities that become available to them. In the next five to ten years Nigeria as a nation should be to the point where men and women have progressed towards equal pay, irrigation system use nationwide, and women owning land. For a country to develop the people have to be willing to accept change and embrace knowledge.

I believe that women's rights have to be the first thing on the list for Nigeria to become the nation of its full capacity. There are organizations that are starting to make waves in the move towards equal rights for men and women in Nigeria, not just in theory based on the country's constitution, but also in practice, in everyday personal and civic life. The Women's Consortium of Nigeria is one such organization which seeks to address issues that concern Nigerian women such as agriculture, food sustainability, political empowerment and more (womenconsortiumofnigeria.org). The consortium is clear: "Women's Issues are National Issues" (womenconsortiumofnigeria.org). This generation of Nigerians has to be willing to conform and pass that spirit onto future generations. Just as former Nigerian president, General Muhammadu Buhari once said: "This generation of Nigerians and indeed the future generations have no country other than Nigeria; we shall stay and salvage it together!"

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