

ECONOMIC WOMEN EMPOWERMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: REFUTING SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S IDEA OF THE "WOMAN AS OTHER" IN *LE DEUXIEME SEXE*

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Abstracts

Empowerment of women as the opportunity for women to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Women have been disempowered since creation owing to the fact that the society has long neglected the woman's identity and capacity. Using the method of critical analysis, this study discusses the economic empowerment of women against the background of their current status which may include, the role of women in western culture, economic and educational zone, hostilities, gains and disadvantages of empowering women, discriminating disengagement of women on the grounds of gender. This opinion forms a contrast to the belief of the nature of woman as a weak gender opined by Simone de Beauvoir in "*La Deuxième Sexe*" It is generally recommended that the role of women in national development is crucial to the sustainable development of any country; therefore, women should be engaged undoubtedly in effective and free participation of national affairs at all levels.

Keywords: African woman, Gender equity, Women empowerment, Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*.

Introduction

The evolution of women's condition according to the existentialist author Beauvoir, blames the society and motherhood as the key factor that weakened the recognition and vibrancy of the women folk. The term "boy" and girl is a destiny shaper which from birth defines an innocent new being unconscious of the distinctions surrounding her existence as a female gender. Beauvoir tried to define her gender satirically "I am a woman." Laying stressed emphasis on the common expression that comes with the birth of a new being "It's a Girl" and then "oh, it's a Boy!" this understanding of almost rejection of the female gender in the society is what sharpens the treatise of the subject. Beauvoir writes that motherhood has reserved in woman an animalistic condition and made it possible for men to dominate her and her subordinate nature, hence regarded motherhood as a threat to her integrity. Her mothers subordinate nature affected her understanding of

womanhood as a complete object of mediocre, who only accepts what she is being told, and worships the god-husband because marriage inadvertently proves the true value of a woman. Mme de Beauvoir's hope of independence and freedom from the woman's cage, however shabby, sort to be a nun then a respectable vocation open only to an ambitious girl. Love and romance diverted her attentions from her remarkably tenacious dreams and passion for eternity; unfortunately, she was trapped in her disbelief and ruffle by her so called love which later defined her resentment and complete distaste for being a woman continuously referring to her as the weaker gender who cares less about her freedom and sanity. She lost fate in womanhood and her subordination, because her life experiences forced her to believe that woman can never stand for herself, fight and search for love without domination.

Nature of Woman and the Idea of Development

Contrary to the societal representation and Beauvoir's understanding of her nature, a woman is powerfully created with superior structures. She is impeccably and uniquely made by her creator even though nature itself has presented her as the weaker sex, a feeble minded and emotional being, child bearer, man's better half, and home makers. Most feminist scholars have defined the nature of woman as second class gender who is being denied equal rights and respect functions in the society, alas; a substantial body of research in biology and the social sciences supporting their arguments scientifically proves that some sexual differences besides the obvious ones are innate rather than situational. Therefore, Instead of rejecting otherness as an imposed cultural construct, women, in their opinion, should cultivate it as a source of self knowledge, self discovery and gender understanding, and use it as the basis to critique patriarchal institutions. Many readers have also been alienated by Beauvoir's visceral horror of fertility, curse of reproduction of the male and female genders, and her utmost desire to homogenize the human race. The flare of Beauvoir's pursuit for gender equality has misconstrued the feminine structure and discouraged woman from considering equity as an option for gender recognition. In tone, statistics proves that woman is not totally neglected in the society; subtle considerations are deployed but deeper recognition is required. The gleaming qualities of the woman should be integrated into the system as a necessity for national development; hence, their importance should be given an opportunity to be sorted for and considered for manifestation in different spheres of life. Nigerian women are still relegated to the background as they lack the educational, economic and political power necessary to actualize their innate potentials, thus the argument that the full potentials of women are yet to emerge because they are not fully sensitized. The Ifedili's asserted his opinion thus:

Nigerian women are stalled by culture, which made them, vulnerable to effectively join the workforce and contribute to the economy and thus, national development. (Ifedili and Ifedili, 2012)

The emergence of 21st century likened with sufficient evidence scientifically has proven women as capable of improving the economic standard of a country. Woman are wrongly perceived to be naturally weak, they neither have limited contractual capacity nor lower intelligence quotient than their male counterpart, and as such do not they lack the expertise to flourish in business. This is proven in the takeaway from the most recent [State of Women-Owned Businesses Report](#), commissioned by American Express. The ninth annual report, which is based on US Census Bureau data and adjusted by Gross Domestic Product data, found that women-owned businesses continue to trend above all businesses. According to the report, women-owned businesses now represent 42% of all businesses; they employed 9.4 million workers and generated revenue of \$1.9tn. Women, on average, started 1,817 new businesses a day in the US between 2018 and 2019, a rate incomparable to last year; therefore, improvement is acknowledged. Nigeria is not left out in the today's women reformation and integration for development, the women succeeded hysterically different spheres of life, in business, religion, politics, education, Health, Sports and other professions. Hence, Olaleye's call for women's status redefinition and the need to integrate them into development process of a nation other than restrict them to in house maintenance chores as home servicers. He argues thus:

They have made an indelible mark in their efforts to conquer the limitations of the past which have sought to place them permanently in the kitchen and bedroom. (Olaleye, 2008).

Women recognition in the society is encouraged today; unfortunately, majority of Nigerian women are yet to be fully mobilized and empowered to contribute to national development. National development is a very comprehensive and holistic invention which includes different aspects of an individual's life as well as the nations. It is a process of reconstruction and development in various dimensions of an individual and nation's growth; in this regard, women and national development works concurrently as it is for the evolution of both systems. National development recreates the woman as a citizen force who in turn improves the nations stock of physical and human resources. National development cannot be discussed without an understanding of the concept of development. Development as a concept has been defined from different author's perspective and dimension as social, economic, political and cultural. A multitude of meanings attached to the idea makes it complex, contested, ambiguous, and elusive. However, in the simplest terms, development can be defined as bringing about social change that allows people to achieve their human potential. An important point to emphasis is that development is a political term which has a range of meanings that depend on the context in which the term is used, and it may also be used to reflect and

Onebunne and Ezeaka Economic Women Empowerment for Sustainable Development in Africa... justify a variety of different agendas held by different people or organisations. Okemakinde defined development as *a positive change in socio-economic and political conditions or situations of the society*. (Okemakinde, 2014). In his opinion, the socio-economic and political stability of a country determines its progress and growth, sanity is lost when the national economical state is in mishap. He define proper evolution of a Nation with its state and condition owing it interchanging relationship; everyone and everything, income and expenditure is dependent on the national economy and leadership. Sid synonymously defines development as: A process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components. (Sid, 2018). The purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population, and the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. Development is visible and useful, not necessarily immediately, and includes an aspect of quality change and the creation of conditions for a continuation of that change.

Holistic Approach to Economic Empowerment of Women

Different researchers have carried out numerous studies on the history and status of women in African nations, scholars continue to research and currently focus is on the evolution of women's status throughout the history of Africa and findings show efforts are being made to sensitive women, although not commendable as a lot is being neglected and much interest is pulled towards the male folk. Therefore, significant empowerment of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important; in addition, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. Both gender participation and partnership in the productive and reproductive life is recommended, including shared responsibilities for the child's upbringing and development as well as household maintenance and management. In most parts of the world, women are still facing threats to their lives, health and well-being as a result of being overburdened with work irrespective of their reduced strength and social influence. In most regions of the world, women receive less formal education than men, and at the same time, women's own knowledge, abilities and coping mechanisms often go unrecognized. These societies were women are still neglected and their capabilities yet to be explored still lag behind economically, socially, politically and otherwise, complimentary to say that the success of a nation is inter related with the existence of a woman figure in its system. The power relations that impede women's attainment of healthy and fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public, the women folk deserves to be lifted from the darkness which nature and the society has long subjected them to, hence to call for subjective women empowerment which will contribute significantly to the sustainable development of nation. The woman should not be relinquished to a gender debased figure that is only identified as a

child bearer and home manager, rather should be empowered for self, family and national benefit.

Empowerment has been defined in so many ways and by so many authors and researchers; it could be seen as a process that creates power in individuals over their own lives, society, and in their communities. People are empowered when they are able to access the opportunities available to them without limitations and restrictions such as in education, profession and lifestyle. Olomukoro views empowerment as human potentials and capabilities in relations with other social groups. He emphasized on the meaning of empowerment thus:

A greater understanding of social, economic and political process, enhanced competence to analyze and solve problems of day-to-day living, expansion of manual skills, greater control over economic resources, restoration of human dignity, self-respect and equality. Olomukoro (2012)

However, when addressing women's empowerment, it is been referred to as accepting and allowing women who are outside the decision-making process into it. This puts a strong emphasis on participation in political structures and formal decision-making as well as the economic sphere. Financial independence and empowerment of women have been established as successful strategy to address poverty around the world. Blumberg views economic women empowerment as a "magic potion" that boosts both gender equality and the wealth and well-being of nations.

The United Nations Women amends the economic empowerment of women as being the capacity of women to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Women Economic women empowerment includes the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment is all about equipping and allowing women to make life-determining decisions through the economic problems in society. Women in developing countries are disempowered relative to their contemporaries in developed countries. High youth unemployment and early marriage and childbearing interact to limit human capital investment and enforce dependence on men. Economic empowerment of women, in particular recognizes being essential to the building of stronger and more stable societies. A woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions. Women's economic empowerment therefore, is seen today as the single most important factor contributing to equality between women and men.

Nonetheless, across the different Africa regions Women have stood up to take important roles in the socio-Economic development of their societies, the contribution made by African women in the provision of both financial and social facilities is equal. Abimbola affirms that increasing the number of women entrepreneurs involved in starting new businesses is critical for a country's long-term economic growth. In addition to their economic and income-generating activities; women assume multi-faceted roles in society such as breadwinner of a family, unpaid family worker, service providers in the communities and mother/care-taker of the family. In spite of their important contributions to socio-economic development women suffer from various constraints, which inhibit them from fully realizing their potential for development (UNDP, 2010). The male counterparts might not be able to adjust to women predefined roles and this makes women extraordinarily endowed with plural ability to improve the society. Africa has enormous unexploited potential, especially the potential of women. Specifically, it pointed out that women comprise one of Africa's hidden growth reserves, providing most of the region's labor, but their productivity is hampered by widespread inequality in education as well as unequal access to land and productive inputs (World Bank, 2000).

As women play an important part in agricultural production, their empowerment will impact the agricultural markets overall. As such, many development organizations have begun to integrate gender into their agricultural development projects. The UN foundation project on supporting women farmers seek to address the challenges that women farmers have been facing for years: Constraints in terms of cash, time restriction mostly due to household responsibilities and rights to land and other resources. Given these multiple and interconnected constraints, combined with the fact that gender inequality is often part of the socio-cultural norms, integrated approaches are needed to successfully promote women's empowerment.

Women all over the world allocate a substantial amount of time to activities that are not typically recorded as economic activities. Hence, female participation in labor markets tends to increase when the time-cost of unpaid care work is reduced, shared equally with men, and/or made more compatible with market work. Nevertheless, Rwanda, has the second-highest ratio of female entrepreneurs in Africa, behind Ghana with 44 per cent from World Bank review in 2008. However according to NISR 2005/2006 integrated household living condition survey, 60.2% of household under poverty line are female headed, 86.3% women (71.2% men) are engaged as laborers and other unskilled workers, only 14.8% of women earn cash money and it is generally agreed that 80% of agricultural share of GDP is contributed by women. However, given a bigger population projection of 10,117,029 from NISR review in 2008, the Rwandan government played a key role in the socio-economic development of women, because women can also perform better in entrepreneurship and development activities. Rwanda is world leader in promoting gender equity. Promotion of women's empowerment development constitutes a key strategy for private sector development, poverty reduction and

women's economic empowerment. Increasingly, government and private sector stakeholders, bilateral and multilateral agencies are trying to tap into the potential of women-led businesses as a means to economic growth and job creation. Moreover, almost all the projects pay attention to promoting women's enterprises specifically, about half the 50 projects offer access to credit loan while some business networks have a policy development component of encouraging women's business start-up initiative, and few include access to business premises. Duflo's opinion helps understand more the reason behind the collaborative investment and future expectation from the women's business support, it's clear that women tend to give back to the society if supported and encouraged than the men folk. Women are found to be more conservative and capital efficient raising more money and selling when they get a good offer than their male counterparts (Duflo, 2012).

Train a man, and train an individual; empower a woman, solve a nation's problem. Therefore, empowering a single woman in a country implies solving a specific problem in that economy because it will reduce the dependency rate on the men, increase the household income and its purchasing power as well as result to improved standard of living for the household members; most importantly, reduce brutal violence against women due to over dependency. This further leads to independent decision making regarding career, job selection, education, health, investment and rights. It is therefore inevitable that empowering women economically will no doubt lead to the country's development.

The "women for women international" (WfWI) working with marginalized women in communities impacted by conflict and war through a holistic program comes up with the assertion that economic empowerment is so much more than earning an income. It is being connected to financial institutions such as banks, having the knowledge and skills required for sustainable saving and access to credit, cash and capital to become entrepreneurs. Women's economic empowerment is ensuring that women have the opportunity to fully contribute to the economy of their families, communities, and nations as well as receive fair payment and attribution for doing so. Perhaps most critically, economic empowerment requires decision-making rights that are realized. As we know from evaluations of micro-finance, having earnings, savings and access to credit is not enough, women also have to be able to decide what to do with that money. And they should have a choice not only in how they spend it, but also how they earn it. We are at a pivotal moment around the world. As more women have the chance to see education and take part in the formal labor force, we are able to see the incredible impact of women's economic empowerment. A [recent research by McKinsey Global Institute](#) estimates that an additional 28 trillion dollars could be added to the global annual GDP if women played an equal role in the economy; that's a 26% increase. Research today is proving what WfWI has known since its inception in 1993, that stronger women build stronger economies and stronger nations. However, women's economic empowerment is important simply for its sake too, women have the right to earn an income with dignity and lift themselves

out of poverty, this is especially important because around the world, women are satirically the face of poverty. To end this assertion, we call for the need and rise in global investment in women's potential and capabilities. A woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions; this is therefore seen today as the single most important factor contributing to equity between women and men. It is fundamentally a human right and social justice issue. Economics of women empowerment entails the process of change that gives them greater freedom of choice and action on economic issues. A process of economic empowerment for women is contingent upon available resources and whether women have the skills to use them, access to economic opportunities and control over economic benefits that can be used to achieve positive change.

Overview of Socio-Economic Status of Women

It is estimated that women comprise more than half of the global population, however, the portion of their input to economic activity, growth, and welfare is significantly lower than their potentials, with resultant severe macro-economic consequences. There is a global discrimination against women in almost all fields of the labor market. Hence, there is need for an improvement on the opportunities given to women in employment, especially as they form the majority of unpaid care work force. Thus, it is essential for the development agencies and principals to give it higher priority, by increased acknowledgment as well as evaluating the contribution of these aspects of female labor to Flourishing economic on education, the females are still disadvantaged in getting equal opportunities. Although there has been improvement at the primary level to bring them at par with the males, the same cannot be adduced to the secondary level, whereby the status quo remains in most developing countries. Nevertheless, there is a strong argument urging the financial institutions to make special provisions for women, especially as they have made tremendous progress and proved their worth in start-up businesses and markets. Studies from UNDP report in 2004 has shown that 38 percent of all registered small firms worldwide are either owned or managed by women; For example, in 2004, women held 47 per cent of small businesses and accounted for 70 per cent of start-up businesses in Canada. Likewise, businesses owned by women in the United States have grown at a higher rate than all firms in the country making \$1 trillion in sales, and engaging over 7 million employees. Similarly, women own one-third of small businesses in China and 17 per cent of these firms engage more than 1000 workers. Women are a viable source of economic growth. Further Statistics in 2014 showed that women make up to 31-38 percent of the world's workforce, and spend close to USD20 trillion as global consumers; the figure was estimated to go up to USD28 trillion by 2014. Regardless of evidence showing that women have an excellent repayment rate and save more than men, their access to financial services remains insignificant when compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, studies have shown that increased women's earnings translate directly into better health, nutrition and education for

their family. Women also buy on average 4.5 products compared with men's 2.3 product consumption. This overview explains that women are greater in number than the opposite sex; therefore, they stand a chance of taking global decisions that can affect negatively or neutralize negative situations globally. Unfortunately, nature and political dynamism overtime has restricted women to second class citizens which in turn they accepted unconsciously and tagged their personality, existence and nature therein.

Direct Factors affecting the Economic Women Empowerment

Education and skills development: most communities today still live within the assertion that standard education is a man's right, while the women are supposed to be trained to take care of their future families. This limits and denies a good number of women quality education and reduces the chances of potential impact they would have made in the society and nations economy.

Norms limiting women to discriminatory labor: most cultures some jobs for the men and some for the women; this gender discrimination reserves the best and high earning jobs for the men, leaving degrading and subjective duties that are often without rewards for the women who are regarded as irrelevant.

Unpaid care and work burdens: women are often relegated to providing services in the homes as child care, home management, family chef, home teacher and other motherhood related tasks, as well as for other community duties as unnoticed sanitation and health workers. These services are unpaid, despite exerting a lot of energy, time and cost.

Wage gap and gender force assessment: While much of the public discussion of the wage gap has focused around women occupying higher positions or getting equal pay for the same work as their male peers, many women struggle with the pregnancy penalty. The main problem is that it is difficult to measure, but some experts say that the possibility of having a baby can be enough for employers to push women back from their line. Therefore, women are subjected to positions where they need to make the decision of whether to maintain the workforce or have children.

Sexual harassment and social exposure: Sexual harassment in particular is a large barrier for women in their gender space; sexual harassment is a clear form of gender discrimination based on sex and a manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women. This appears in almost all industries and there is increased sexual exploitation of women before they could achieve a specific goal.

Gender norms and discriminatory social norms: barriers to women's empowerment and equity lie ingrained in cultural norms. Many women feel these pressures, while others have become accustomed to being treated inferior to men. Even if legislators, NGOs, etc. are aware of the benefits women's empowerment and participation may offer, many are scared of disrupting the status of the women and continue to let societal norms get in the way of development.

Benefits of economic empowerment of women according to the UN WOMEN

Women's economic empowerment is central to realizing women's rights and gender equality. Women's ability to participate equally in existing markets, access to decent work and control over productive resources, control over their own time, lives, bodies, and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions is encouraged. Integrating women into the economic system and closing gender gaps in the workforce are pointers for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, achieving National Goals, and conquering gender inequality, as well as promote full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Women's economic empowerment boosts productivity, increases economic diversification and income equality in addition to other positive development outcomes. For example, increasing the female employment rates in OECD countries to match that of Sweden, could boost GDP by over USD 6 trillion; however, recognizing that growth does not automatically lead to a reduction in gender-based inequality. Conversely, it is estimated that gender gap costs the economy some 15 percent of GDP, thereby increasing women and girls' educational attainment contributes to women's economic empowerment and more inclusive economic growth. Education, up skilling and re-skilling over the life course, especially to keep pace with rapid technological and digital transformational affecting jobs, are critical for women and girl's health and wellbeing, as well as their income-generation opportunities and participation in the formal labour market. Increased educational attainment accounts for about 50 per cent of the economic growth in OECD countries over the past 50 years. But, for the majority of women, significant gains in education have not been translated into better labour market outcomes. Women's economic equality is generally good for business; studies have shown that companies have greatly benefitted from increasing employment and leadership opportunities for women, which is shown to increase organizational effectiveness and growth. It is therefore estimated that companies with three or more women in senior management functions produces higher and positive results in all dimensions of the organizational performance.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Women demands freedom from the natural and societal assertion of being the second class sex, as well as a reconstruction and redefinition of Beauvoir's ideology of a woman being the other gender that lacks the potentials of

independence from the men's folk. The attachment and definition of womanhood to man's existence is consequential as it denies the woman full recognition and participation in the society; significantly denying the society full exploration of the potentials and capabilities of the woman's abilities. Economic women empowerment will give women increased spaces and enlarged coast for their participation in development agendas and also be able to demand for their rights. It will also increase women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, properties, productive assets, skills development and market initiative. Increasing the role of women in the economy of any country is part of a solution to the financial and economic crises and critical for economic resilience and growth. Gender inequality should be addressed because equality is a prerequisite for economic women empowerment, because their social strata if paid attention will boost their social immunity and relatively activate the woman in them for economic development. Devoting adequate budgetary resources to improve economic opportunities and facilitate the creation of decent work, it also recommends a greater collective voice for women in shaping economic policy. Employment opportunities for women in crucial positions in the economic level shall be improved while increasing recognition of women's vast unpaid work. Equal job opportunities, salary and wage pay should be given to both genders. Women should have more equitable access to assets and services with infrastructural program designed to benefit the poor especially women

Challenging and transforming the negative and harmful norms that limit women's access to work and that often devalue their work is core to achieving women's economic empowerment, thereby, encouraging and supporting women to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to eliminate poverty among women and the world at large. Recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid work and care, progress on the agenda to expand women's economic empowerment depends; to a significant extent, the rate of closing the gender gap in unpaid work and investing in quality care services and decent care jobs. Building assets with Digital, financial and property, eliminating gender disparities in work and in the society depends on interest on eliminating disparities in access to key assets because digital, financial and property assets matter for economic opportunities. Changing business culture and practice, business culture, practice and policies are major drivers of women's economic opportunities. Beyond basic protections and standards that are the "right thing to do," companies are realizing the business value of women's economic empowerment.

Improving public sector practices in employment and procurement, beyond their key roles in determining the legal, institutional and policy environments that affect women's economic opportunities, governments are major employers and procurers of goods and services. The power of governments in setting high standards for and exemplifying gender equality at work cannot be underestimated. Ensuring legal protection and reforming discriminatory laws and regulations: Laws reflect society's expectations for gender roles. By guaranteeing equal

opportunities and protections, and by removing legal barriers, governments signal their commitment to achieve and enforce gender equality. Strengthening visibility, collective voice and representation, the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining are fundamental labour and human rights, enshrined in international ILO conventions going back to the 1940s. These rights apply to all workers, including workers in the informal economy. Women's organizing allows working women to voice their needs and demands more effectively, enhance their bargaining power, advocate for legal and policy reforms and increase access to markets on fair and efficient terms. Entire nations, businesses, communities and groups can benefit from the implementation of programs and policies that adopt the notion of women empowerment. Empowerment of women is a necessity for the very development of a society, since it enhances both the quality and the quantity of human resources available for development. Empowerment is one of the main procedural concerns when addressing human rights and development.

Women's economic empowerment and achieving gender equity is essential for our society to ensure the sustainable development of the country's economy, and of course many world leaders and scholars have argued that sustainable development is impossible without gender equity and women's empowerment. Sustainable development accepts environmental protection, social and economic development, and without women's empowerment, women wouldn't feel equally important to the process of development as men. It is widely believed that, the full participation of both men and women is critical for development, therefore, only acknowledging a greater percentage of men's participation will not be beneficial to sustainable development. In the context of women and development, empowerment must include more choices for women to make on their own. Without gender equity and empowerment, the country could not be just, and social change wouldn't occur; as such, women's empowerment is a very significant contribution which plays a huge role in the development of a system. Women inclusion and integration into the development system should be prioritized and given maximum consideration to ensure proper benefit and contribution to the development of the country.

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