

## **Poverty Is A Woman Issue In Africa**

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**Abstract:** *Poverty has been in existence for decades ago before I was given birth and is considered as a way of life, in the same way blood is flowing in our body's vein. In Sub Saharan Africa, women poverty increases due to the nature of the people's culture and tradition and the lack of wheel power on the part of their governments to make laws or rather enforces the laws made as regard to such culture and tradition of the people that contribute in increasing poverty. More so, the issue of privatizations of government companies that provide social services to the citizens as direct by IMF and World Bank increases the suffering of the poor. The study uses documentary source of data in collecting data. The paper concludes that poverty in women is a serious problem which must to be address or reduced to the bearest minimum most especially the issues of lack of income, access to land and properties, opportunities by the governments and international communities. Poor governance as results of fraud and corruption in most African countries contribute in draining their resource and deny the citizens access to social services that will reduce their suffering and poverty.*

**Key Words:** *poverty, women, poverty line, structural poverty, contingent poverty, Africa.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Poverty existed very long time ago before I was given birth and it has been regarded as the way or part of life, just like the blood flowing in our body's vein. Poverty is seeing as your sons dying in your presence and you can't save them. I know poverty in the same way I know my father's names. Poverty does not go for break or summer and poverty never goes to sleep (Mcferson, 2010). Over one billion out of the total population in the world exist on one dollar per day. While 2.7 billion are managing to leave on below two dollar daily (Johnson, 2013). Poverty in the under developed world is more than just lack of income. It means tricking for over one mile each day for the purpose of fetching firewood and water, suffering from sickness that have been eradicated for quiet along period of time in the developed nations. More so, about 17 million die annually from diseases like malaria, diarrhea and pneumonia that are preventable (Johnson, 2013).

For more than decades now poverty is being seen as a women issue or affair. Jawaharlal Nehru the first prime minister of India said "you can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women (Nachiappan and Rajan, 2008). Jagger (2013) observed that more than half of the world's population is made up of women, who undertake almost 2/3 of the world working hours, collect only 10% of the world income and possess below one – hundred of the resources or assets in the world. Hence, there have been a lot of critics and contrasting views on the fact that poverty wears a women face (Green, 2010). The feminization of poverty is a characteristics that is common on most of the under developed nation, of which one over two of the world

Population is women who account for 70% of those people living in poverty in the whole world (Maghadam, 2005; UNIFEM, 2013; Chant, 2003).

Women constitute over 80% of farmers in Africa, and over 40% of women are illiterate without access to formal education in Africa (Johnson, 2013). When you look at the poverty statistic what do you feel emotionally? How would it look like to exist in poverty? What do you think will be the reaction of those living in poverty with you and your family?

Although, it is amazingly hard to differentiate the claim that poverty is a women affair (Jagger, 2013). This is because the different yard sticks for measuring poverty have different degree of merits and demerits and no one among them reliably assess or measure poverty with specific reference to gender (Smith, 1976/1904). More so, to engage in head to head counting is difficult and hard to do and the means to use in ascertaining the actual data is not many and scarce. Government and those concerned may not like to show the actual statistics on poverty due to the fact that, the government doesn't want to know that there is the need for services in that area or aspect (Thomas and Reddy, 2010). The lack of consensus on the figure of people living in poverty arose from the fact that different organization assesses poverty using various measures or yard sticks. Some uses different currencies or other indicators in assessing the level of poverty or rather to identify and know who is poor and who is not poor (David, 2010).

History, has shown that there is the tendency of women to be poor than there counterpart men and are prompt to being in danger of lack of food and lack of necessity of life due to discrimination they encountered in

search and access to job, healthcare service, education, ownership and being in absolute control or charge of properties. Poverty is very common and

more prevalence in women with great implications without some fundamental rights to getting better job, medical services, clean environment, access to good drinking water. Small or no protection from violence and do not have the capacity to participate in making decision in the household and the community at large (UNIFEM, 2013). Abiola and Olaopa (2008) opine that the poverty scourge in sub Saharan Africa give way to lack of knowledge, hunger and malnutrition, sicknesses and inability to access credit facilities, short life span and hopelessness. Poverty is the inability to have cash, health services, good drinking water, food and nutrition, good and affordable housing, which lead to hunger, sickness, death and war in a nation (Myer, 1999). For us to know our role in eradicating poverty we have to investigate what truly poverty is.

This paper is going to look at the concept of poverty, types of poverty, the roots of poverty in African women, the problem of definition and assumptions, concept in feminization of poverty and responses to poverty.

## **II. Concept Of Poverty**

Poverty can be said to be the other side of wellbeing which is not only concern about income, but rather it encompasses the inability to own a piece of land, have access to credit, health care service, quality education, exposure to violence, external economic shock, natural hazard, voicelessness and social exclusion (Yekini, Rufai, Adetola, Akinwale and Ojo, 2013). Development Assistance Committee (2001) Opine that poverty comprises of various dimension of denial that is associated to human abilities, consumption and availability of food, healthcare, quality education, rights, good job, protection and dignity. Richard and Sonja (2008) reports that

poverty is not only limited to inability to have access to material resources, but include lack of access to education, health services, inability to take part in the process of decision making and exposure to external circumstances. Rocha (1998) observed that the different dimension of poverty circumstances in the whole world has contributed to so many write ups in form of the meaning, measurement and policies. More so, the difficulty in measuring poverty is shown in the complexity of arriving at the true meaning as observed by (Maxwell, 1999). This difficulty keeps on increase most especially when individuals continue to define their poverty measures or indicators differently.

However, poverty is measured by the use of consumption expenditure through income as a yardstick or tool. The used of poverty line through the use of income is encouraged as a result of the usage by most national governments and development agencies for the assessment of anti -poverty policies and the poverty itself (Maxwell, 1999; Garba, 2006). Studies have shown that income cannot effectively measure poverty as a result of the fact that there are plenty ways of deprivation the core poor are faces with, which are not encompassed or captured in the income poverty measurement. In another study Oriola (2009) avers that using income is not an enough means of measuring welfare, due to the fact that those living in poverty suffer from different types of denial that income poverty measure cannot be effectively used to address them. Furthermore, studies have indicated that other measures of poverty were incorporated in 1980s, apart from income. These includes; non monetary measures like hopelessness and isolation, sickness and physical weakness, social inferiority and humiliation, voicelessness and drastic reduction in consumption level of the poor. Knowing this aspect of poverty is relevant in understanding income poverty (Hulme and Mosley, 1996).

Poverty can be seen to be all pervasive, where most part of the population exist under the poverty line or income level which is in adequate to satisfy their necessity of life and the resources at their disposal is not enough to meet the population basic needs even though it is shared equally(Gore, 2002). The study add that pervasive poverty leads to environmental degradation, because the bulk of the population would have to rely on capital stock in the environment to meet ends need, and hence , the state abilities to take care of its citizens will be weak where extreme poverty is all pervasive. Smith (1904) observed that poverty is the want of basic necessity of life and add that it is not only about the things or items that people cannot do without for human existence, but whatever the tradition of that nation considers it as indecent for a creditable person even at the lowest level to exist without them. According to Smith, avoiding poverty entails not only being at the disposal of things needed to support existence or life, but also being in disposal of goods needed for a decent and acceptable living, together with those needed to accord self respect and the respect of one another in the society.

## **III. Fmination Of Poverty**

Women unfair access to social, resources and opportunities arises from the demerit situation they found themselves in form of class, race and gender in any given society. Class can be refer to as a social relationship on having the chance to use and possess resource together with means of production, distribution, exchange and consumption of products (Bradley, 1998). Gender has to do with social functions, behavior, hopes and expectation as they exhibit in their cultural and social beliefs, as shown in the interaction between men and women in the communities (Blackden and Wodon, 2006). The concept of gender and race are not static but

rational, defining economic, political, and social roles in the communities. The concepts are susceptible or prompt to change and influence by change in the sphere of political and economic environment that explain them (Kehler, 2001). It is a well established fact that women status in the communities is determined by their access to positions and roles in paid jobs and their status gave them domestic and reproductive role (Hakim, 1996). Therefore it is the explanation of social roles and responsibilities based on gender and that gave room for inequality the women are facing in all societies. The existing culture and tradition and social values is responsible for the consideration of women in the society as less important, which is not only shown in the behaviors and attitude as can be seen every day, but also exist in policy making and legislative organs of government (Bradley, 1998). Culture and society look at women social role mainly as the care giver and care taker in connection with their production function, while, men are seen as the bread winners' as explain by their productive role. It is as a result of this discussion of responsibility that gave birth to the belief that men's are more important than women most especially when it comes to the contribution and maintenance of the household or rather the family (Kehler, 2001).

Research have shown that the present position of economic reforms, globalization of the policy of the world bank and IMF to privatize public services and utilities and the universal quest for reduction in social spending are some of the things that will reduce participation of women in employment and increase their poverty level (Kehler, 2001; Quisumbing, 1996). Since women are being seen as the one's most exposed and vulnerable in employment, as such they may be sack long before their counterpart men will be sack during retrenchment. Therefore, the effect of privatization of public service fails heavily on women since they are regarded as the care takers, who are the major recipients of the services. Women do depend more on social services and reduction in expenditures will have great effect on women's plenty roles. The reduction on social expenditure and the resultant reduction of the services given by the state will raise women's care taking and reproductive responsibilities or tasks. These scenarios give way to feminization of poverty instead of socio economic empowerment and lifting the standard of living of women. The above indicate that the black women working class, gender and race access to opportunities and resources, together with the present changes in the economy leads to inequality and poverty and hence, contribute to the reduction in their socio economic position (Black and Wodon, 2006).

This shows clearly and openly the reasons for African rural women as being the poorest of the poor, and the reason for experiencing poverty and lack of fairness in a different way as does the men and the reason for the variation in the changes on their socio economic impact (Kehler, 2000). African women inability to have basic services and resources together with lack of equity in the right of the family, unfairness to household resources, such as livestock's, land etc. This justify why rural women in Africa are not only poorer in their family, but rather in their communities and the state at large, as well as explain the reason of their poverty level and the nature they are which is more than that of men. Hence, women in Africa are prompt to subjugation and discrimination in their home and outside their home.

Since having opportunities and access to resource depend on class, gender and race, women will be more prompt to inequality and poverty than men. Geisler and Hansen (1994) conclude that, since men take charge of productive resources such as labor, credit, housing, tools and land, women's prospects may be different from that of men's, most especially when there is economic pressure. For this vicious cycle of poverty to be removed from the society, good Policies as regard gender equity and reduction of poverty must give consideration to the plenty roles women play in the society and their relevance to socio – economic and informal contribution to the growth and development of the nation.

#### **IV. Types Of Poverty**

Poverty according to Mcferson (2010) is divided into two type, Contingent poverty and structural poverty. Contingent poverty takes place due to a particular adverse event or activity such as sudden rise in the prices of food stuffs and fuel, natural hazard and others. Contingent poverty most at a time exist for a short period of time, although, in some instances it may lead to permanent poverty. This type of poverty can be reverse whenever the cause of the event stops. To tackle contingent poverty, policies responses most appropriate to take care of the adverse event and stimulate the overall economic activities that can lead to growth and development in the society effected most be pursued. Structural poverty exists in the social, economic and political sphere of the nation and it is difficult to reduce the intensity of the poverty no matter the general policy of economic stimulus or investment adopted. Women in the rural areas of sub Saharan Africa are more prompt to structural poverty and are disproportionately infected with all kinds of poverty which contribute in making them the most poorest in all the continents in the world (Mattes, 2008 and 2009).

While, Johnson (2013) classify poverty into three types. Extreme or absolute poverty, moderate poverty and relative poverty. Extreme poverty is a situation where by an individual is not being able to have access to immediate basic things of life for continuing survival. Evidence has shown that eight million people die as a result of absolute poverty in the world yearly. Living in extreme Poverty means living in less than one dollar per

day. Moderate poverty enable individual household to have access to basic necessity of life, but unable to have access to health services, education that we consider them for granted. In an event there is job loss or health problem survival becomes a tied rope or rather difficult. People living in moderate poverty live with only one or two dollars daily. Relative poverty has to do with an individual household having an income less than the national average.

### **THE ROOT OF POVERTY IN AFRICAN WOMEN**

The quality of life of African women is worse than that of men, even though their life expectancy is almost similar. More so, women contribute greatly to the economic growth and development of every nation. Any attempt to eradicate poverty in its totality must tackle the issue of women's poverty in Africa. To tackle the problem, one needs to know the genesis of poverty.

#### **Gender and property rights:**

The custom and laws of majority of African countries those not allow women to possess own and take care of land. This scenario expose the poor African women to be vulnerable economically due to their inability to have a defined right to property, such as cattle's, land in their countries. Evidence has shown that, women are 80% of the agricultural labor force and only 5% of them are registered owners in Kenya (Mcferson, 2010). In Africa the major issue of women weak property rights can be seen vividly when a women is divorce or in a widowhood situation, where the right to properties such as land of the husband are been collected or taken over from them, even though they have been using for years. These incidences deprive the women from their source of income as a means of livelihood (Mcferson, 2010). The poverty cycle keep on widening or rather continue to increase as the children of the women who are denied access to their husbands land must leave school to search for a job to earn a living and hence, making their future to look so dark.

Despite effort by many African countries to enact laws to care for women's lack of land rights, the laws are rather not enforce, partially may be because they are not in agreement to the customary laws of their land and so become ineffective. For example, Kenyan's constitution outlaw gender discrimination and also uphold customary laws on inheritance and marriage and divorce (Blackden and Wodon, 2006). Therefore effort is required to address gender issue in the enforcement of new legislation.

Gender and globalization:

Studies have shown that there is a relationship between gender dimension of poverty and globalization (Moghadam, 2005), but there is no impact on Africa. The limited space on globalization on countries capabilities to give social protection present a great challenge to programs to meet the needs of the women and children that are vulnerable and exposed to difficulty. The reduction or change of welfare services by the states gave birth to negative outcome for the women existing in poverty, as a result of government pushing the cost of social protection to the household, which in turn contribute to the increase of workload to the women or the household (Bisnath, 2002).

#### **Gender, governance and corruption:**

The problems of governance and corruption are more prevalence in Africa than the rest of the world. Governance is regarded as the way in which the power of a nation is exercised and corruption as the used of power given for personal gain or advantage (Schiavo – Campo and Mcferson, 2008). It is pertinent to note that poor governance and corruption deter a nation from growing and developing and hence, the poor and those who lack connection are mostly affected. While good governance can benefit and change the condition of the poor for a better most especially women who are the larger portion of the poor in Africa (Baden, 1999). Poor governance lead to civil war in a state and that contribute to increase in poverty (Mcferson, 2009; Collier, 2007).

#### **Gender and Time:**

Women and children are expected to give their time to different type of work or tasks and so have to leave their plight to getting education to meet up with other demanding task before them (Canagarajah and Coulombe, 1998). In contrast with the argument by Collier (1998) that those living in poverty have less time for the work they do, due to lack of job and under employment, but the reverse is the case in Africa where rural women don't have enough time to meet up with plenty task they have to undergo daily under normal circumstances. During conflict or war period girls and women are force to engage at all time in task that is necessary to get something for the male who are engaged in war. Quisumbing (1996) observed that time poverty occur as a result of less access to labor, fertilizer and farm inputs by the women as against the men. If these differences are removed the productivity of the women will increase. This will lead to 25% increment of crops yields when women in the rural areas are given equal chance to get education, experience, farm input just like their counterpart.

## V. Responses To Poverty

To eradicate poverty from its source or roots, we have to give more emphasis on investing in women. This is because they are the one that are been left behind even though they are the back bone of the society. If the women are being given all the necessary support, by providing them with tools, opportunities and education they can chance the standard of living of plenty people in the communities most especially when you look at their efforts as wage earners, farmers and care givers in the household (Dean, Schaffer and Smith, 2005). Areas that people are expected to be involved in tackling poverty are as opined by Johnson (2013) are:

Given women and girl's education, wage war against world hunger to reduce it and enlighten them to stop HIV/AIDS in our communities.

Visit rural areas most especially those areas that the poor people are many and organize training for the women on farming, gardening and the ways to store their products.

Plan and carry out recognize days that will be observe annually like world AIDS/HIV day (1 December), world food day or end hunger (October 16).

Make better world club to be part of your global women group. Their ideas and resources are made available online at betterworldclubs.com.

Print a letter from poverty.com web site (<http://poverty.com/printletter.html>) directly and sent it to government officials in support for international aid, so that there will be increase in the international aid to be given to the poor.

To become a spoke person for women by taken their problems before others, by writing to your member house of representative, senators and world leaders requesting them to take action or engage in programs that will reduce poverty in their communities or the state at large.

You can make it a point of duty to pray always for the needs of the poor. Pray by country or use online news source to pray for the present condition engulfing the poorest nations of the world.

## VI. Conclusion

Te paper concludes that poverty in women is a serious problem which must to be address or reduced to the bearest minimum most especially the issues of lack of income, access to land and properties, opportunities by the governments and international communities. Laws formulated to check traditions and cultural practices on the issue of gender inequality are not enforce to the core in most African countries this contribute to increase in poverty. Lastly, poor governance as results of fraud and corruption in most African countries contribute in draining their resource and deny the citizens access to social services that will reduce their suffering and poverty.

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