

## **Poverty And The Attendant Impacts On Nigerian Rural Women Participation in Politics: Implications For Sustainable Democracy And Good Governance**

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### **Abstract**

*Poverty has been identified as one of the major problems facing people in the developing world. In developing countries and more importantly in Nigeria, various governments have undertaken a wide range of poverty alleviation programmes purposely to "eradicate poverty". This paper therefore examined the effects of poverty on rural women's participation in politics. The paper argues that the fact those women constitute the bulk of labour force in rural areas, they are therefore a very vital resource in the democracy and good governance is that rural women are not only poor, but are often neglected and marginalized in the formal political system, owing to traditional beliefs and practices which inhibit their participation in the conduct and management of their public affairs. The study concludes, that for an effective or active participation of rural women in politics, government should adopt appropriate policies which would enhance the status of women economically, socially, educationally and politically and this could be done through appropriate training and education, among others.*

In spite of all these vital contributions to economic and national development, rural women in Africa and particularly in Nigeria are not only poor, but are often neglected and marginalised in the formal political system. A number of other important studies have similarly emphasised that Nigerian women are politically under represented and economically disadvantaged (Adesoji, 2001; Dauda, 2004).

Furthermore, Akande (1999) asserts that Nigerian women have been marginalised in the formal political systems owing to traditional beliefs and practices.

According to United Nation Development Plan (UNDP); "sustainable human development is development that not only generates economic growth but distributes its benefits equitably, that regenerates the environment rather than destroying it; that empowers people rather than marginalizing them. It is development that gives priority to the poor,

enlarging their choices and opportunities and providing for their participation in decisions that affect their lives. It is development that is pro-people, pro-nature, pro-jobs and pro-women" (UNDP, 1994).

Unfortunately, the African and Nigerian situation is far from human-centred development due to the problem of poverty. Poverty has been identified as one of the major problems confronting people in developing world and the situation has given rise to dehumanising conditions in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, it is becoming increasingly difficult for most rural dwellers to eat three meals a day (Sokoya 1998). Women in rural areas are mostly affected by this dehumanizing disease called poverty and this has predisposed them to low self morale and lack of interest in the conduct and management of their public affairs.

In general, poverty has been generally described as a condition of low quality of life characterised by people's inability to meet the basic necessities of life, due to deprivation (Onwe, 1997).

In developing countries and more importantly in this part of the world, various governments have undertaken a wide range of poverty alleviation programmes purposely to "eradicate poverty." The most recent of such programmes include the establishment of the defunct Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Better Life for rural Women, Family Support Programme (FSP), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) and NEEDS among others. However, the progress made through all these laudable programmes, though commendable, is still generally limited and often time their impact on rural women has been fragmentary and inadequate. Therefore, it becomes necessary to examine the relationship between poverty and rural women participation in politics, because the economic and political development of any nation are hinged on the production-capacity of the rural sector, which is determined to a very large extent, by the economic power and political awareness of individuals making up these rural populace.

The specific objectives of the papers are as follows:

1. To examine the concepts of poverty, democracy, good governance and participation in politics as they affect Nigerian rural women.
2. To examine the effects of poverty on participation in politics with particular reference to female gender.
3. To highlight some strategies for alleviating poverty and enhancing women's participation in politics
4. To discuss the implications of poverty alleviation programmes for sustainable democracy and good governance.

## THE CONCEPT OF POVERTY

The term poverty is a widely used concept by people in different disciplines like the economists, sociologists, political scientists, agriculturists, anthropologists and medical personnel. Never the less, it has continually defied easy and generally accepted definitions. For instance, economists defined poverty as a situation of low income or low consumption. This definition has been used for constructing poverty lines - values of income or consumption necessary to purchase the minimum standard of nutrition and other necessities of life. As a result, people are referred to as "poor" when their measured standard of living in terms of income or consumption is below the poverty line.

According to Obadan (1997), poverty line is a measure that separates the poor from the non-poor. However, because of its multi-dimensional nature the definition of poverty cannot be limited only to economic indicators such as levels of income, production and consumption, but it includes non-income dimensions such as social inferiority, isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, seasonality, powerlessness and humiliation (Chambers, 1995).

In a similar dimension, international organisations such as World Bank, the United Nation' Development Programme among others have also defined poverty in their own ways based on their individual antecedents (Igben, 2001). For instance, the World Bank in its 1990 report as stated by Uniamikogbo (1997), defines poverty as "the inability to attain a minimum standard of living." The World Bank Development Report of 1990 further established two "imaginary" global poverty lines. The report suggested that any household whose purchasing power parity (PPP) in dollars in 1985 was below \$275 was considered "extremely poor" and those below \$370 were classified as "poor." The implication of this is that Nigeria with a GNP per capita of \$370 in 1990 falls under "poor" nation (Aku, Ibrahim and Bulus 1997).

Another concept that is closely related to poverty line is poverty gap which measures the total income necessary to raise anyone who is below poverty line up to that line. According to Lipton, (1983) absolute poverty is largely a rural problem and it has been observed that the percentage of the rural population in poverty is usually at least doubles that of the urban population.

Unfortunately, recent research findings have revealed that poverty in sub-saharan Africa has been on the increase and the number of people that are referred to as "poor" has increase significantly since the 1980s (Dreze, et al, 1995).

## POVERTY INDICATORS AND WHO IS POOR

It is a truism that poverty is a common feature in our society today. However, the problem that is confronting social scientists is the search for answer to the fundamental question of how the poor can be identified. Researchers, over the years have attempted to identify and highlight some poverty indicators. They have identified some characteristics such as the personality of the individual, place of origin, dwelling environment, level of education, type of occupation, eating habit, children, type of occupation, relationship with the community and general attitude to life among others (Igben, 2001).

Igben (2001) quoting some authors such as Adebayo (1995), Anyanwu (1995) and Olowononi (1995) emphasised that a "poor person" exudes wretchedness, unkemptness and under nourishment. He dwells in a ramshackle house devoid of facilities.

*"He is not well clothed and cannot afford to change his dresses which often constitute his uniform. As a result of under nourishment, the poor and members of his/her family are often ill thus perpetuating absenteeism at work and at school... The poor is not bold enough to associate with other member of the community. If and when he summons courage to mix with other members of the community, he is not expected to speak because the other members of the society do not respect him nor do they believe that he will say anything useful..."*

Following the same trend of thought, Deng (1995) emphasized that a poor man lacks primary and secondary basic needs and the lack of these resources leads to a state of powerlessness, helplessness and despair, and thus the inability to protect oneself against economic, social, cultural and political discrimination, deprivation and marginalization. This predicament often leads to desperation and hopelessness if the community/society is indifferent to the plight of its poor. Deng (1995) further categorise the following as poor, especially in the Nigerian content.

- a. Those households/individuals below the poverty level and whose income are insufficient to provide for their basic needs.
- b. households or individuals lacking access to basic services, political contacts and other forms of support
- c. people in isolated rural areas who lack essential infrastructures.
- d. Female-headed households (especially with pregnant women and mothers who are breastfeeding, and infants) whose nutritional needs are not being met adequately.
- e. persons who have lost their jobs and those who are unable to find employment (such as school leavers and tertiary education

- graduates).
- f. ethnic minorities who are marginalized deprived and persecuted economically, socially, culturally and politically.

It is important to mention at this juncture that in practice, it may be difficult to strictly classify the poor into the above stated categories. However, they assist in providing a useful background for discussion on poverty alleviating policies.

### **TYOLOGY OF POVERTY**

In literature of poverty, different types of poverty have been identified based on different criteria. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1990, classified poverty into absolute and relative poverty, using the basic needs as their yardstick (UNDP, 1990, Schubert, 1994; Hemmer, 1994). However, Marie-Therese Feverstein in her book, "Poverty and Health," as quoted by Sokoya (1998) classified poverty into types, causes and effects. She identified ten types of poverty as given below, stating their main causes along with the types.

**Inherited Poverty:** This typology of poverty occurs when poor parents pass on their poverty to their children. It can be part of a seemingly unending poverty cycle.

**Instant Poverty:** This term is characterized by sudden hazards and circumstances such as earthquakes, typhoons, drought, bankruptcy, war and refugee movement.

**Temporary Poverty:** This type is caused by some of the same hazards as that which create instant poverty, but lasting a shorter time.

**New Poverty:** In this typology, income and savings of workers and pensioners are eroded by high unemployment, inflation rates, or small cash-crops farmers are ruined by high input costs and low prices of agricultural products.

**Relative Poverty :** According to Galbraith (1969), "people are poverty stricken when their income, even, if adequate for survival, fall radically behind that of the community... they are degraded, for in the literary sense, they live outside the grade or categories which the community regards as acceptable." In other words, this type of poverty is relative to the standards set by the community.

**Absolute Poverty:** According to Igben (2001), "this term is used to describe those who fall below the poverty line. They are those who cannot provide themselves and members of their family the basic needs for physical and biological survival." The two variants of absolute poverty are

primary/stochastic/conjuncture and secondary/structural/core/chronic. While primary absolute poverty is marginally below the poverty line, secondary poverty falls very far below the poverty line making people in this category seemingly irredeemable.

**Hidden Poverty:** This is similar to relative poverty in the sense that people may have adequate food and shelter but lack other basic needs such as access to health care.

**Endemic Poverty:** This is usually caused by low productivity and poor resource base, reflected by low income, poor nutrition and health, often affecting small-scale farmers.

**Overcrowding Poverty:** In this type of poverty, population is heavily concentrated into area of high density.

**Terminal Poverty:** This is characterised by a situation where people are poor at the beginning and at the end of their lives.

In addition to the above typology of poverty, other less commonly used types include generalized, island, case, collective, cyclical and personal poverty. From the above typology of poverty, the main types of poverty encountered by the rural populace, especially the rural women include: inherited, new, relative, absolute, hidden, endemic overcrowding, collective, personal and terminal.

### THE CONCEPT OF RURAL POVERTY

In Nigeria, as Amakiri (1993), pointed out, over seventy-five per cent of the population resides in the rural areas. Their economy is mostly agricultural-based, and currently characterised by a largely traditional sector, which comprises two-thirds of the poor (Sokoya, 1998). Their enterprises are also characterised by small-scale production, low income, low savings, low capital investment, resulting in vicious cycle of abject poverty. Sokoya (1998) further pointed out that rural poverty are often manifested in malnutrition, hunger, illness, poor education as well as the lack of inadequate purchasing power for the basic comfort and active participation of community members. He further argued that the average per capita income of \$365 per year recorded by the World Bank Report is grossly inadequate to meet an individual's basic needs. And the fact that most rural dwellers earn below the annual average income and their diet falls consistently below the naturally recommended daily calorie intake needed to sustain human life. This explains the reason why most of the rural dwellers, especially women are categorised to fall under the poverty line.

Englana and Bamidele (1997) have observed that based on the above poverty line measure, the nature of poverty in Nigeria shows that poverty is overwhelmingly a rural problem. According to them, the statistics from the then Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) in 1992 revealed that 66 per cent of the poor, those below the poverty line, lived in the rural areas. Seventy-two per cent of those at the depth of poverty -the degree to which people fall below the poverty line- was in rural areas, and 69 per cent of those at the severity of poverty -those with expenditure below the lower poverty line of N198 -was rural (The World Bank, 1996).

From the above, it is obvious that whichever way it is measured, absolute poverty is largely a rural problem. Aku, et al (1997) observed that rural poverty is common among small-scale farmers and self-employed artisans and petty traders. They further categorise the poor into two basic categories:

1. Those who do not own enough land to grow food for family consumption. They are poor because of unequal distribution of cultivable land.
2. The landless agricultural labourers and non-agricultural groups, who rely on employment opportunities in the countryside.

### **WOMEN AND RURAL POVERTY**

In developing countries and more importantly in Nigeria, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening daily. It is also pathetic to say that the gap between women and men in our society is also widening. Majority of Nigerians are hung in abject poverty, while the remaining relatively insignificant minority are wallowing in affluence. It has been observed that since the 1990s, poverty has been increasing its tools on the women and children. In spite of the fact that the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) raised awareness of gender issues and the declining situation of women worldwide, women continue to suffer greater impoverishment in absolute terms than men (Sokoya, 1998). Statistics provided by the United Nations World Survey on role of women-in-development indicated that "women everywhere are paid less than men, have less access to training and capital than men, work longer hours than men, and are hardest hit in times of economic crisis." The statistics also revealed that women constitute about 70% of the world's poor people and the number of households maintained by women alone is rising. In spite of this, women are still own no more than 1% of the world's property and earn less than 10% of the world's income (UN, 1986).

The matter of equal or better representation of women is considered very

important for the proper development of the country, and the seriousness devoted to it is reflected in declaration of Affirmative Action by the United Nations conference on Women (1995) in Beijing, where it was decided that 30 percent of all positions in government owned concerns and agencies should be given to women. Dauda (2004) observed that Nigeria government has not put in place appropriate legislation relating to the Beijing Declaration. A number of other studies have indicated that women and children suffer the hardest deprivation and are more likely to be poor and malnourished in Third World countries (Bruce et al, 1988, Moshen, 1991). Many rural women are ironically deprived of good and adequate nutrition; because in most cases, they lack adequate nutrition education and therefore find it difficult to make the best use of the nutritional values of their agricultural product. Young women are particularly at risk, because of their nutritional needs in adolescence pregnancy and lactation (Sokoya, 1998).

In many rural areas, women have less access to clean water and sanitation and in most cases women trek long distance in search of "clean" water and they carry heavy loads of water on their head. This not only produces extreme fatigue, but can result in personal injury, arthritis and slipped discs (Sokoya 1998). Also, rural women who are poor lack access to basic education and social amenities. Sokoya (1998) observed that rural families, especially mothers/women usually experience a very low self esteem and often perceive themselves as inferior to their urban and literate counterparts, and do not feel that their contribution towards national development (in terms of food production and food security) is being appreciably recognised and valued by the various tiers of government.

### **UNDERSTANDING POLITICS, DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE**

The term "politics" has come to be used in a loose and sometimes misleading fashion. It has been used to mean diplomacy. However, the concept has been defined by many authors. Ball (1981) refers to politics as the administration or organisation of a state. He further emphasized that politics involve disagreements and the reconciliation of such disagreement.

Following the same trend of thought, Adedipe (1985) defines politics as the process of discourse through which members of a society seek to assess and ultimately reconcile their wishes. However, as aptly opined by Adesoji (2001) politics concern man because it determines the model of relationships in a society. Another term that has developed from politics is democracy. Democracy in its ordinary meaning and usage, involves the



pooling of available resources for an effective operation. This usually involve the process of inducing self-consciousness, and self-awareness in the people as to their own relationship with the objective reality of their existence, the realisation and the determination of the will to change things around, and the empowerment of women, or rather the seizure of power by them to determine their own orientation and restructure their won life-styles in accordance with their self-determined world-view (Freire, 1985).

Adesoji, (2001) traced the etymological meaning of democracy. He emphasized that the word "democracy" took its origin from the compound word "demos" meaning "rule of the people." Democracy means a government where the people are directing the activities of the state as opposed to government by a single class, selected group or autocrats. Therefore, democracy is a system of government where every citizen must participate in the act of governance and management of their own public affairs (Adesoji, 2001). Democracy has also been described as an ideology of "majoritarian" decision-taking. It is governance "achieved" as distinct from governance "ascribed" by status. Other definitions include those adopted by Lipset (1994); Brook field (1957); and Huntington (1991). However, common to all perspectives of democracy are the ideals of fundamental human rights, and social justice (Dauda, 2004). Abeke (2001) succinctly declared that democratization in its connotative meaning and especially when applied to women, must be seen as a multi-programmatic concept whose dimension must include the following;

- (i) Establishment of genuine equality between all sectors of the society, especially in all those matters that affect human dignity and survival. This must involve the restoration of equal rights to all those disadvantaged and marginalized;
- (ii) Building up self-confidence and the spirit of self-reliance in the people's auto -development capabilities in realistic appreciation that the most authentic, the most durable and self-multiplying development is self-development,
- (iii) Raising the level of cultural, social and political consciousness of the women through programmes of enlightenment that liberate than domesticate;
- (iv) Opening of access to, and acquisition and use of knowledge through universalised functional literacy for both young and old and multivariate of non-formal education programmes for their social, economic and political capacitation (Akinpelu, 1988).

## THE CONCEPT OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

Good Governance as a concept is closely tied to elite politics where the functions of the governing elite appropriate state apparatuses, pursue class interests and immiserate the civil society. Anifowose and Seteolu (2004) distinguished between good governance and democratic governance. According to them democratic governance process is totalistic, all-embracing and foster political and economic empowerment for the weak social groups. Here, the public domain is democratized, accessible and amenable to popular influences.

## WOMEN AND POLITICS

A Historical Analysis in Nigeria, as in other African countries the role of women in politics has been minimal despite notable has been minimal despite notable initiatives made by pre-female political activists and leaders of women's movement (Dauda, 2004). An assessment of the political assessment of the political system in Nigeria reveals that gender inequality has been observed in the virtually every aspect of decision-making process and political participation. This phenomenon is not new in the sense that there is a vast literature that underscores a backlog of past experience with the women and their potential roles in the democratization process. Adesoji (2001) emphasized that women were ignored by the colonialists, who insisted that they should occupy the private sphere. The European administrators also trained women to be good, humble, submissive and as such became wives for catechists and clerks. The trend has not changed since then for women in contemporary Africa, particularly Nigeria are still disadvantaged in the sphere of decision-making, be it political, economic or social.

A retrospective glance at the political history of Nigeria reveals that women involvement or participation at all levels of governance have not been impressive. For example, Adesoji (2001) pointed out that a total of 17 females were elected as legislators, senator and minister between the first and second republic. Adetutu (2001) submitted that " ..... only 3 women were elected as chairpersons out of about 591 positions contested for during the election ..... women legislators in the state and Local Government Levels numbered only 27 (2.3%) in all 30 states of the federation out of a total number of 1,172 Legislators. The story did not change during the military regime. The present dispensation has not changed the situation. As a matter of fact, adequate mechanism that will promote women's involvement in the current democratic system has not been put in place.

## **POVERTY AND OTHER FACTORS HINDERING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS**

The participation of women in democratization process is generally linked to their quality of life. Nwokoma (2004) emphasized that the basic needs concept of the provision of food, clothing, shelter and health care are generally used in determining the degree of poverty in any society. The absence of these basic needs provides the basis for the degradation of society. Specifically in a society where the majority of its members are poverty-stricken, the resultant effect is that people will lose confidence in the constituted authority. According to Aku, et al (1997) poverty is consequential in building political apathy among contending forces. With particular reference to rural women, poverty was the consequence of inhibiting their decision-making power, in particular and advancement and development in general.

In spite of the fact that Nigeria is a signatory to the 1989 UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, children and adolescents. But evidence shows that women still have low status and lack full access to basic needs and other rights necessary for their well-being and survival (UNICEF, 1994). Dauda (2004) observed a recent Federal Office of Statistics (1990) report, based on the analysis of a series of consumer expenditure surveys for poverty in Nigeria over the sixteen year period (1980 -1996) and he pointed out that the female-headed are households over represented among the poor. He also noted that lack of economic opportunity and productive resources have been largely responsible for the growing incidence of poverty among women. He also pointed out that extensive poverty and ignorance which manifest in form of illiteracy, ill health malnutrition, destitution and high level of discrimination in the labour force acts as a major barrier to active participation of women in politics and decision-making.

Poverty has the potential of breeding social disillusionment with respect to what the societal objectives are and members' responsibilities towards the attainment of these objectives. Aku et al (1997) linked ignorance with poverty. According to them, just as ignorance maintains poverty, so also can poverty perpetuate ignorance since the victims cannot think and plan beyond where the next meal is coming from. Abeke (2001) also pointed out that African woman who is very poor, who has no school knowledge, no steady job, may discover that there is no way she can contribute her quota of what it takes to run the affair of even her little home. So the first challenge is that a woman who wants to have a say in the running of the home, community must be gainfully employed and self-sustained.

Apart from poverty, other factors hindering women's participation in governance and decision-making are:

- (i) **Inaccessibility to basic infrastructural facilities:** This has negatively affected women's productivity and limits their involvement in economic activities thereby facilitating their exclusion from active participation in politics and decision-making.
- (ii) **Discriminating Social Practices:** Some social practices in our society relegate women as nothing more than appendages to their husband and as such, their view should not be heard. Such practices hinder and impede their emancipation and development.
- (iii) **Misinterpretation of religious doctrine:** Some religious doctrines have negatively militated against women's involvement in power-sharing and decision-making process. For instance, Muslim women who are in purdah, are unable to actively engage in productive activities and in extreme cases are excluded from participating in group activities and decision-making until they attain a particular age (Olawoye, 2001).
- (iv) **Gender inequality in Education:** Until recently, fewer Nigerian women have access to formal education than. United Nation (1995) posits that education is the basic tool that should be given to women in order to fulfil their roles as active member of the society. This is the only way to enlighten them and entrance their active participation in local and national politics,
- (v) **Establishment of Anti-democratic female Power Structure:** Some authors have decried the anti-democratic female power structure, exemplified by the wives of successive military Heads of State between 1985 and 1998 regime. Most of their efforts to address women-related issues have only been an avenue for "engendering bureaucratic corruption" (Okeke, 1998).

### **POVERTY ALLEVIATION; A CHALLENGE TO ALL STAKEHOLDER, TOWARDS ENHANCEMENT OF THE POLITICAL STATUS RURAL WOMEN**

Before we discuss the way out of poverty, it is important to briefly highlight the major causes of poverty in Nigeria, which we have already examined. There is no gainsaying that the primary cause is lack of good governance. Other specific causes include lack of employment opportunities, inadequate access to physical assets, minimal commitment to rural development programmes, inadequate access to social and infrastructural

facilities, ineffective public polity on natural resource management, lack of beneficiary participation in a development programmes and inadequate attention to social security among others (Oduola, 1997).

Thus, any meaningful efforts at alleviating poverty must pay particular attention to all the points mentioned above. In addition, such efforts must include some gender strategies in all development programmes. A good example of such programme in Nigeria is the "Women-in-Development Programme" which was established in the Agricultural Media Resources and Extension Centre (AMREC) of the University of Agriculture Abeokuta (UNAAB), in March 1991. According to Sokoya (1998), the programme was established specifically to "improve the participatory capabilities of women in the development of themselves, their families, their immediate communities and the nation at large". Put differently, the programme recognizes the peculiar nature of the female gender and her multi-purpose roles. Sokoya (1998) further discussed the various strategies and actions currently embarked upon to alleviate poverty in farm families. This include

- (i) improvement of the agricultural productive capacity of women
- (ii) introduction of technologies to process, utilise, preserve, package and share agricultural produce
- (iii) encouragement of cooperative societies
- (iv) provision of farm-family health education and care scheme
- (v) provision of education
- (vi) introduction of girl-child development strategies
- (vii) family stability promotion strategies

In addition to the above, Nigerian government have recently working up to address issues relating to women's political exclusion, exploitation and marginalisation through the formulation of national policy on women (Dauda 2004). The policy is aimed at ensuring effective enforcement of the principles contained in the Nigerian constitution, improving national awareness of citizen's constitutional and human rights, eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and empowering women through enhanced strategic human resource development among others. Dauda (2004) however contented that little or nothing have been done to achieve these objectives.

It is therefore pertinent to say that the achievement of the above-stated objectives depends largely on the cooperation and collaboration of all stakeholders such as the government, international communities, the non-governmental organizations, and men and women alike. This paper therefore suggests that for an effective or active participation of rural

women in governance and national development, the following should be considered:

- a. Enhancing the economic status of women: this can be done through adequate provision of economic infrastructural facilities within their immediate environment.
- b. Provision of access to credit facilities to encourage rural women scale entrepreneurs.
- c. Encouraging vocational education and training
- d. Effective enforcement of laws to ensure women are adequately represented in decision-making at all levels
- e. Embarking on effective enlightenment/awareness campaign to educate and raise their level of cultural awareness.
- f. Encouraging participatory development such as the establishment of community development committees (CDSs) at the village levels.

#### **IMPLICATIONS OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE.**

As stated earlier, the major cause of poverty in Nigeria is lack of good governance and thus entrenching good governance in Nigeria is a sine-qua-non for ameliorating poverty (Oduola, 1997). Some determinants of good governance are accountability and transparency and this are fundamental to sustainable democracy and development. The entrenchment and sustainability of some components of good governance within the society, will go a long way in curbing the menace of poverty in our rural areas and in Nigeria at large. To also ensure a sustainable democracy and good governance, government need to urgently adopt social service-oriented policies that improve the general welfare of both men and women in the country, Such policies must focus on stimulating growth and employment which will provide incomes for the poor.

A common feature of most development programmes established by the government is that each are targeted towards men, while it is assumed that women are only concerned with caring for their young ones and at most, operating a small-scale homestead gardens for domestic consumption; whereas most farmers are women (Sokoya, 1998). The failure of government to adequately address the multifarious needs of women and to target the training at those who would use it most, has negatively affected women's productivity and income, their social status as well as their participation in the conduct and management of their public affairs.

## CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed the effects of poverty on women's participation in politics. Strategies for alleviating poverty and enhancing women's participation in governance have been briefly outlined. It is clear that in spite of the fact that women constitute the bulk of labour force in rural areas, they are still poor, often neglected, marginalized and disadvantaged because they are not empowered. The quest for sustainable democratic governance demands active involvement of all stakeholders in the nation's economy. Until government adopt appropriate policies which would enhance the status of women economically, socially, educationally, the idea of active participation in governance or politics may well be a mirage.

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