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Contextualizing poverty alleviation and gender practice in food security in Africa

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ABSTRACT

From Africa perspective, women are inferior and less powerful when compared to their male counterparts. Hence, their role should naturally be of a domestic calling. In addition to being relegated to the background of domestic affairs, most women function as food producers, at least, at the subsistence level. These dual roles are mostly unpaid, under-valued, and therefore hardly accounted for in monetary terms. Rather than being beneficiaries of development having also contributed to it, women not only lack access to relevant inputs to be productive in agriculture, but also actually become major victims of associated untoward fallouts of developmental processes. Climate change-induced stresses and ecological damage resulting from mineral extraction in most African states exacerbate the burdens of women's role in agriculture. Thus, anchored on feminism; with specific focus on liberal feminism, this paper investigates the agricultural role of women in Africa and the practices undermining it. To guarantee region-wide food security, it recommends a more agriculturally gendered continent.

Keywords: Africa, Women, Agriculture, Liberal Feminism, Climate Change.

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Introduction

Women's rights are characteristically associated with gender equality, non-discrimination and children's rights. In line with Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), there is a provision for equal rights of men and women to participate in political activities of their state. In the same manner, the African Charter (Article. 3) requires States to "ensure the elimination of every form of discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the right of the women and the child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions". Similarly, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) calls for equal rights (Oni, 2014) and Article. 3, No. 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) forbids discrimination based on sex while No. 100 calls for equal pay for work of equal value (ILO, 1989).

Women are the most vulnerable group in any society (Mann, 2014). The general image of women in Africa is that of domestic workers. For the most part, the societal roles of men and women are perceived differently. As mothers, wives and housemaids, women perform vital roles such as childbearing/nurturing, and home making generally, yet, they are very crucial not only to the well-being of the family as an important social unit, but also to the society. In particular, the agricultural role of women contributes significantly to national socio-economic development of most African states (Rae, 2009). Capitalism and colonialism no doubt contributed in no small way to the 'inferior status' of the African women, and therefore their marginalisation (Kauppi & Viotti, 2024; Oni, 2014), while the relative development witnessed as a result constitutes a 'feminism curse'. The role of women in economic development is no doubt a major issue of concern globally.

Generally, women function both as domestic and agricultural workers. Agricultural role of women, especially in the context of subsistence farming, remains a critical factor to most economies in Africa. Aside child nurturing, homemaking, and other domestic services, women dabble into subsistence agriculture to ensure household survival in addition to whatever supports they receive from the dominant male as the head of the family. Although, informal economy is hardly recognised in the capitalist production system, African women impact on what is described as 'hidden' or 'shadow' economy which contributes, in a sustainable manner, to the continent's food security and general economic development. Even in the formal economy that is tasking, demanding more hours with little opportunity for upward mobility, women can hardly compete with men (Benton-Short, 2023: 152).

The patriarchal nature of human and social systems dictates that women are inferior and less powerful when compared to their male counterparts, and their role therefore is naturally confined to that of domestic calling. As such, women are at a disadvantaged position in relation to men. This probably explains why the important role of women in subsistence agriculture attracts little or no recognition in developmental policies in most African states. Although the non-recognition of this role is not so peculiar to the developing world, many other connecting factors tend to make it a unique and perhaps an alarming situation in Africa.

Rather than being beneficiaries of development having also contributed to it, women not only lack access to technological raw materials of productive agriculture, but also actually become major victims of associated untoward fallouts of developmental processes (feminism curse). Norris (cited in Lindsey, 1997: 127) points out that "as development proceeds, women are denied access to productive resources and new technologies," which in turn, "serves to lower their relative, if not absolute productivity". Whereas it is observed that increased access to available scientific and technological resources will lessen women's burden, as well as

augment the productivity of their labours (Snyder & Tadesse, 1995: 61).

As a natural resource-dependent region with agriculture constituting a key driver of most economies in Africa, the continued under-valuing of women's role in agriculture would mean that the potential contribution of the sector to the socio-economic development of the region is yet to be fully maximized. Besides, the aftereffects of mineral resource development is another major continental economic activity will continue to jeopardise the efforts of women as important contributors to national food security, while climate change poses perhaps the greatest ecological threat not only to subsistence farming but also agricultural development as a whole (Amusan & Olutola, 2017). Whereas agriculture remains the most climate-sensitive sector, its import in addressing the same for sustainable development is apt. This is especially the case when one looks into employment opportunity role that agriculture plays among the rural dwellers, where the bulk of the continent's citizenry reside.

Theoretical Framework

Arguably, this paper finds its justification within the theoretical framework of feminism more than any other theories of international relations. However, identifying with the most useful theoretical perspective, given the broad and heterogeneous feminist models, comes with some challenges. As rightly observed, in feminism, "diversity and disagreement occur side by side with unity and consensus" (Chapman, 1993: 195-197; Lindsey, 1997: 17). Although the paper is particularly underpinned by liberal feminism, some aspects of its analysis crisscross other theoretical strands of feminism. The two extremes being realist feminism with its primary focus on the gendered roles of women in war and other security-related situations (Griffiths, 1999: 219-223), as well as socialist feminism with the argument that capitalism promotes sexism by supporting the unpaid labour of women who also function as a reserve labour force only when needed, hence the need to collectivise household labour and child bearing, and as such free women to engage in economic roles outside the homes (Lindsey, 1997:15).

Other variants are some specific issues such as: standpoint feminism that advocates for the construction of knowledge based on the material conditions of women's experiences since "those who are oppressed have a better understanding of sources of their oppression than their oppressors" (Griffiths, 1999: 227); cultural feminism, which focuses on empowering women through positive qualities that are associated with women's roles such as nurturing, caring, cooperation and connectedness to others (Biewener & Bacqué, (2015); radical feminism with particular focus on the patriarchal family as a critical system of domination, more important than a woman's subordination in the paid labour force; biological feminism that sees gender inequality based on natural selection; global feminism, which examines the intersection of

gender with race, class, and issues of colonisation and exploitation of women in the developing world; and, multicultural feminism that focuses on the elimination of specific cultural elements and historical conditions that serve to maintain the oppression of women (Chapman, 1993: 194-200; Lindsey, 1997).

Central to the argument of feminist theories are the notion of gender as an integral basis for social construction, that is the social construction of gender at all levels of world politics (Griffiths, 1999: 229; Lindsey, 1997: 18). Their goal is to end the oppression of women through gender equality. Gender, in their analysis is not a question of female world, that is 'f-world', such that is designed to privilege women over men, but a world of relationship between men and women that offers them equal opportunity to participate in all spheres of social and political life. It not only emphasises the need to integrate women into a wider range of human endeavours, including engagement outside the home in the form of gainful economic employment, but also more generally, the elimination of sexism in terms of women liberation. Gender is a social construction that asserts that the expectations and responsibilities of men and women are not always biologically determined (Snyder & Tadesse, 1995: 14); rather, it is more of social construction (Griffiths, 1999). By opposing the sexism and patriarchy inherent in most societies, feminism conceptualises the existence of an equitable and non-sexist social structure where issues of women's inferiority to men and other practices of socio-economic and political discrimination associated with them become virtually non-existent. Issue of discrimination takes various forms such as imperfect information which leads to discriminatory equilibria in competitive economy. This is supported by what is described as game-theoretic models where the perceived sex-dominating men appear to suppress women. Because of culture and tradition coupled with religion, there is what one may describe as implicit discrimination that is unconsciously displayed by a group against others (Stiglitz, 2013: 86). This is what applies in most cases when dealing with men's discriminatory attitude against women and girls in Africa.

Specifically, liberal feminism is premised on the notion that women and men are created equal and should not be denied equality of opportunity because of gender. Liberal feminists share a common belief: (1) that as humans, women and men are endowed with the same rational faculties; (2) that education offers the means to change and transform society; (3) in the doctrine of natural rights. They pointed out that "what is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing - the result of forced oppression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others" (Lindsey, 1997: 14). Liberal feminists hold the view that the inferior position of women is linked to a class-based capitalistic system and the family structure within such a system. To free women therefore, they advocate not for a complete restructuring of the society, but the need to alter it by incorporating women into other meaningful and equitable roles. This would simply imply the assimilation and eventual acceptance of females in the male-dominated world.

In the context of this paper, liberal feminism provides a suitable theoretical framework for explaining the agricultural role of women in food security in addition to domestic services. It acknowledges their equal social status with the men folk, and the need for a gendered society in which the involvement of men and women in agriculture not only enhances food security but also

¹Liberal feminism sees women empowerment as a connection "to individual rational choice, efficiency, investment, free markets, entrepreneurship, and, more recently, a social-liberal framing that locates empowerment in relation to governance, poverty alleviation, equal opportunity, capabilities, and effective asset-based choice (Biewener and Bacqué, 2015: 59).

contributes in no small way to socio-economic development of African states.

Women and Food Sovereignty in Africa?

Women are the most vulnerable members of any society (reference). They constitute more than half of the world's human resources and occupy a central position regarding the socio-economic well-being of societies (Snyder & Tadesse, 1995: 6). However, the general image of women in Africa is that of domestic workers which are unpaid for, and therefore hardly accounted for in monetary terms. Lindsey (1997: 127) points out that "these roles are vital to the well-being of the society but undervalued and unpaid for. Yet such roles consume half of the time and energy of women". For the most part, the societal roles of men and women are perceived differently. Most cultures in Africa view women's role as subordinate to that of men. This is concretised through Islamic (purdah culture), traditional (animism) and Christian religious practices which all see women playing second fiddle until recently. As discussed elsewhere, African traditions see women as commodity that may be sold, bought and discarded off at will (Amusan, 2014: 5925). This explains partly why issues of their community are beyond their areas of involvement forgetting that they are the ones that know the environment better as they always go to bush to fetch wood for cooking and travel several kilometres in many cases to fetch water for the family. Unfortunately, when it comes to the issue of resource allocation such as boreholes, community commodes and the likes, the men folks that hardly feel the brunt of keeping the home-front are usually contacted by relevant stakeholders. Even though the multifaceted roles accorded to women are unpaid for, they also face series of domestic violence such as beating, sexual harassment and molestation from their male counterparts, only because they are biologically different from men (Giddens, 2009: 344-349). In this situation, women suffer from various forms of exclusion, discrimination, and inequality and are relegated to the status of second citizen because they are born women (Cohn, 2013: 3). The matter is further worsened by the state through its systematic marginalisation of women, a situation that has given rise to feminist movement calling for gender mainstreaming in key governmental and non-governmental activities with a view to incorporating women into a wider array of socio-economic aspects of societal life. South Africa and Namibia, probably because of their apartheid history, made issues of sexism and gender part of their constitutional rights; on the other hand, Uganda, Ethiopia and Egypt spoke of non-discrimination based on sexism but there is silence on the issue of gender rights. Also, of importance are the rights of the indigenous peoples that are daily violated by nearly every African state with special focus on women and their children. This is common in Gabon, Botswana, DRC, Cameroon, South Africa and Congo (ILO/ACHPR, 2009: 126). Introduction of Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), euphemistic of imposed structural adjustment programme (SAP), vitiated whatever constitution of South Africa imposed on government concerning gender equality (Budlender, 2001: 337-338).

As argued, marginalisation creates vulnerability and insecurity (Anugwom, 2011: 246). Women's vulnerability and powerlessness against oppressive men is a common feature of African life. Their vulnerability is characteristically exposed in many aspects of societal life. The economic crisis in most African states though

exposes every citizen to the resultant challenges like poverty and general poor conditions of life, it affects women most seriously (Snyder and Tadesse, 1995: 5). Similarly, in situations of resource-induced governance crisis and political instability resulting in civil unrest, and in extreme, cases war and state implosion, for which the continent is well known, women no doubt suffer most from their aftermath effects. Not only are women vulnerable to the eventualities of such crises, but are also at the receiving end of the negative fallouts including sexual abuses like rape and other forms of sexual harassment, human right violations, discrimination, military brutality, displacement and refuge-taking, trafficking, flogging, maiming, kidnapping, killing, arson and destruction of personal property (Akubor, 2011: 27; Odoemene, 2011a; Odoemene, 2011b). Olankunle (2010: 133) puts it more succinctly that "women lose virtually everything from property to life". Besides, women constitute majority of the poor populace and illiterate adults in Africa. In some instances, women are forced to assume dual roles of both father and mother parenting, thereby proliferating matriarchal households in many African states. This not only reduces their production activities in the form of farming, fishing and animal husbandry, it also, on most occasions, aggravates existing level of poverty in many ways. Taking care of the sick from terminal conditions/diseases such as HIV/AIDs, TB and other incurable diseases shortens the number of hours they spend on food production. As much as it is given that man should provide for the family, because of their nature of keeping more than a family, there is less care for the children in a polygyny environment (Amusan, 2014: 5925).

It is a well-known fact that Africa as a continent has huge agricultural potentials. With relatively large proportion of its landmass as arable and other agro-based natural resources like water, the continent is no doubt one of the richest sources for agricultural growth in the world. However, this agricultural potential is yet to be fully unlocked. Given its agricultural resource-base, and to mitigate some of the familiar challenges that nature entrusts on women, most of them engage in subsistence farming as a means of livelihood. In addition, they also engage in trading in foodstuffs and other agricultural related small businesses like fish trading. This is particularly true of less privileged women in the rural areas who contend with the everyday challenge of taking care of their families. They represent majority of people living in abject poverty worldwide, but ironically account for more than half of the world's food production (Lindsey, 1997: 127). According to Akubor (2011: 27), this agricultural role of women constitutes 60 to 80 percent of the agricultural labour force and accounts for 90 percent of family food supply.

Women farmers hardly own land for cultural reasons, and they also lack access to technological resources needed to ease the burdens of their agricultural role for lack of collateral security to access funds from financial institutions. Inheritance of property is considered to be for male children in most African societies, and women and girls are considered to be outsiders in their parents' houses (Lee-Smith & Trujillo, 2006: 161-163). On the other hand, when they eventually get married, some parts of Africa, for example, the Igbo speaking people in Nigeria believe that a widow should either move out of her late husband's house or she constitutes inheritance to the family with no say in her husband's property. As if this is not enough culturally, in the Islamic world, it is stated in the Holy Quran (Chapter 2 verse 223) that a woman is

a tilth which implies that one should tender her and nurture her against any abuse. Unfortunately, they are relegated to position of second citizens when one looks into how they are perceived, even in the Mosque and other activities within the religion. From Christianity perspective, some dogmatic churches still see women as second fiddle only to listen to the preaching of men and strictosensus abide by men's directive as the head of a family. This unequal relationship continues to checkmate the activities of women when it comes to property accessibility and by extension engaging in productive farming. Their capacity no doubt is at the lowest run of the ladder as many women farmers also do not have the required skills to effectively perform as agricultural workers even at the subsistence level. Given that women farmers, especially in the rural areas are mostly illiterate adults, they also face the challenge of lack of access to micro-credit facilities and other state interventions in the form of assistance to farmers to boost agricultural productivity, thereby ensuring national food security. It is worth noting that credit facility as mentioned here is not the 'rogue capitalists inspired' that perpetuates poverty among the poor, but that of Muhammad Yunus of the Grameen Bank and Sir Fazle Hasan Abed of BRAC in India and Bangladesh respectively (Chang, 2010: 160-162; Hirschmann, 2006: 71-86; Stiglitz, 2013: 246). Without all these supports, and in particular access to skills, financial aid and resources, women's labour would remain unproductive and exhausting (Snyder & Tadesse, 1995: 61). They would continue to depend on government handouts and foreign donors whose generosity is not altruistic, but a continuation of exploitation because foreign aid is a foreign raid.

The situation points to the fact that as important as the involvement of women in small-scale backyard farming is not only to the economic well-being of the family but also to the society as a whole, it is hardly acknowledged as a vital socio-economic growth denominator. In most cases, because of lack of enough land for women to till due to land accessibility challenges, they may not be able to engage in cash crop farming of long-term gestation period. Instead, they embark on food crops of short-term maturity. As much as there is no incentive for women in embarking on large scale farming until recently due to the introduction of willing-seller-willing-buyer principles in most of the capitalist states, women were forced to embark on organic food production. The implication of this is that introduction of genetically modified food that is confirmed to be harmful for human health may not be consumed by household. As much as this is a right direction to stay healthy, it is a source of economic underdevelopment in tune with the globalisation principles that called for large scale food production for the teeming population because of development in technology and very low mortality rate on the continent. In other words, the important role of women as primary natural resource managers is to a large extent trivialised. Lindsey (1997: 128) rightly observed that "the subsistence farming roles of women have been de-emphasised if not totally ignored in evaluating labour force activities in the Third World, development policies have also largely ignored their contributions as well" despite what Ha-Joon Chang (2010:34-36) describes as washing machine age that released many women into previously men's areas of jurisdiction in term of job opportunity and normal house chores.

Impacts of Climate Change and Women in Food Chain

Classical liberalism suffocated feminism, but promoted capitalism, colonialism and lebensraumism during the Industrial Revolution. It was a common trend during colonialism to introduce forced labour in different forms through direct and indirect means of forcing Africans to produce what they did not consume and consume what they did not produce solely for the development of the colonialists. This was when forced labour and promotion of cash crops plantation both at small and large scales were reined in in East Africa. The same explains why coffee was imposed on Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, and DRC by the British and Belgian governments. When competition was at its nadir for sphere of influence, industrialisation began in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt and many other African states through multinational companies (MNCs) with the introduction of unsustainable technologies that have become a vampire hunting the very survival of Africa till date.

The above development brought about plethora of changes in African socio-economic chemistry. Men that should be tillers of the soil and producers of food crops were released to cash crops production willingly or unwillingly because of the financial gains compared with food crop production. Also of importance was the need for men to move to some fertile land conducive for cash crop production which might be far away from their immediate family to start plantation farm such as cocoa, palm tree, rubber, coffee, sisal, and groundnut. Their wives whom they left behind were forced to embark on food production to sustain the family in the absence of the real heads of the family. Burden of holding the fort and serving dual purposes of head and wife in a house came to be a normal norm for women in Africa. Industrialisation of many African states and sky-rocketing industrialisation of Europe and America, which later was replicated in Asia brought more hardships to Africa in the form of the negative impacts of climate change. Though denialists' anti-anthropogenic climate change like Margaret Thatcher and oil MNCs keep on increasing, for various reasons Greenhouse gas emissions have become unabated with negative implications on women in the long run (Coll, 2012: 184-185; Thatcher, 2002: 451-452). Increase in the sea level, heat waves, drought and flooding is some of the attributes of climate change that always destroys farmland tendered by women for the survival of their families. The end results of this are hunger, diseases of different kinds, drought, famine and water-born related ailments and submergence of many civilisations with special focus on low lie littoral states such as parts of Mauritius, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Mozambique, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, and the Gambia to mention a few (Amusan, 2009: 22 & 2011). Perpetuation of this vicious circle ensues as a result of lack of adequate data and weather forecast that may guide women in their food production. They only rely on traditional weather reading that may not be adequate in the era of climate change (Jerven, 2015: 113). Therefore, it is necessary for government to embark on training of women as a form of capacity building by agric-extension officers who are familiar with environment under which these farmers operate (Mann, 2014). Also of relevance is the need to familiarise them with climate change and its implications on their occupation so as to avoid crop failure and loss of animals to drought. Supporting this with education will enhance women in control of income with improved multiplier effects on "infant mortality declines, child health and nutrition, agricultural productivity, economic expansion and broken cycles of poverty" (Coleman, 2010: 13).

Extraction industries development is another out-and-out source of women challenges in food production and poverty alleviation in many parts of Africa. When a valuable mineral is discovered by the MNCs at commercial quantity, government's eviction of population around the place with relevant legislative acts will follow with less compensation to the affected communities. Though in 2015, there was a ruling promoted by the Friend of the Earth in the Netherland that such human right abuses may be brought to the Hague. The question is: how can the poor with less information about this go to the Hague to ventilate their grievances? This impacts more on women than men as it is a source of employment for the latter to the detriment of the former. Farming in such a fertile land will be halted and poverty will prevail as sources of food and income will be in a total halt. This explains why many communities in extractive states such as South Africa, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Angola and South Sudan remain poor coupled with pockets of protest by the communities concerned. Extractive industries including cement companies bring about ailment from environmental pollution in the era of limited state with unlimited quest (Amusan & Oyewole, 2012).

Undoubtedly, climate change is a major problem confronting the contemporary global system. It is said to be one of the greatest challenges of our time, with impacts crisscrossing natural resources, economies and societies (Nachmany, et al., 2014: xiii; UNDP, 2013: 1). The common scientific position is that Africa contributes less to climate change but suffers most from its negative impacts because of lower mitigation and adaptive capacity of many states in the region, coupled with other factors such as contending with the pursuit of national developmental objectives (Adano and Daudi, 2012; DEAT, 2004; Stern, 2006; Tadesse, 2010). It is also widely understood that the continent's vulnerability arises from a combination of factors, including extreme poverty, high rate of population increase, frequent natural disasters such as droughts and floods, and agricultural systems (both crop and livestock production) that depend heavily on rainfall (Africa Governance Institute [AIG], 2014; UNDP, 2013; Adano and Daudi, 2012; Mwiturubani and Wyk, 2010; IPCC, 2008 and 2007).

Although the impacts of climate change are multidimensional, affecting water, energy, transportation, agriculture, ecosystems, and health (Karl et al., 2009), it is clear that agriculture and water are the two most-sensitive sectors (UNDP, 2013; Nwangi, 2010). The predictions about climate change reveal that its impacts on the continent will manifest in large-scale temperature rise and sea level, lower or delayed precipitation, lengthening growing seasons, alterations in river flows, and other extreme events like frequent droughts, floods, soil erosion, frost, hail, rainstorms, strong winds/storms, heat waves, cold snaps, etc. (Karl, et al., 2009; Tadesse, 2010; UNDP, 2013). The cumulative effects remain debilitating for agriculture, especially in the form of reduced agricultural productivity. This again implies that the women's agricultural role will be greatly impaired. Obviously, the lack of access to 'new' technologies to mitigate the accruing challenges of climate change will further exacerbate the burden of women's role in subsistence agriculture, and therefore relegate them more domestically to the background as 'full' mothers, housewives, and housemaids, with marginal or no contribution to the economic well-being of the family and the society at large. As opined by some students of Third World States (TWSs), women and girls' activities that are not factored in the GDP of a state are no more than

underestimation of a state's productive sector. Although food production by women is not calculated in a state production, at the same time, it contributes, in no small measure, to sustainability based on its quality and easy accessibility by the rural dwellers.

Apart from agriculture, many African states also depend on mineral resources as major drivers of their economies as the continent is richly endowed in varied world's most valuable mineral resources like fossil fuel, coltan, gold, diamond, platinum, coal, and iron ore, to mention but a few. The extraction of these mineral resources takes place at a huge social, economic and environmental costs to the host states. Extractive activities produce a lot of environmental problems with serious implications for agriculture. These range from pollution (air, water and noise), land and soil damage, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, conflict over land use, labour hazards, health risks, and so on. In the situation, the obvious fact remains that the externalised socio-economic and environmental consequences of mineral extraction will affect agricultural activities in no small proportion. Mineral extraction often results in destruction of farmlands, and other potentially deleterious consequences for wild and marine lives (Badmus, 2010; Egwemi, 2010; Mähler, 2010). Thus, agriculture, and particularly the agricultural role of women, is most negatively affected. This explains partly why oil production in riverine areas of Sao Tome and Principe, Nigeria's Niger Delta and Gabon eludes fisher women of their traditional roles. Not only its effects on aqua occupation, but also of sedentary farming farmlands, are lost to water and land pollution from oil multinationals activities coupled with climate change effects in some littoral areas.

Women not only suffer loss of farmlands due to explorative activities, their economic survival and that of the family is also seriously threatened. The likely implications are threatened food security, increased general poverty due to food shortage, increased unemployment, forced rural-urban migration, high incidence of HIV/AIDS and other curable/terminal diseases often associated with poverty, hunger and suffering.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Women represent an important social segment of any society. Though vulnerable compared to their men counterparts, especially in the African context, they function in many different ways that are critical to the survival of the family and its economic well-being, and that of the society as a whole. In line with JS Mill as quoted from Amusan (2014: 5925), "what is now called the nature is an eminently artificial thing – the result of forced oppression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others". Aside performing the roles of mothers, wives, and housemaids, most women particularly in the rural areas engage in subsistence farming as a means of livelihood. However, this important agricultural role of women has been downplayed despite its contribution to the socio-economic growth and development of many African states. Agriculture and mineral resources are key major drivers of economies on the continent. While climate change portends serious implications for agriculture as the most climate change-sensitive sector, the extraction of mineral resources produces even more damaging effects. In other words, the agricultural role of women majorly in subsistence farming faces daunting challenges arising from climate change-induced stresses on the one hand, and untoward externalities of extractive activities on the other. To say

the least, the agricultural role of women in terms of their subsistence economic life is direly threatened. Cultural practice and patriarchal system deny women access to agricultural inputs and credit facilities. This no doubt implies additional pressure on food production generally, thereby constituting more threats to the socio-economic well-being of familial and societal lives in many African states.

To remedy the situation, several measures need to be considered, undertaken, and prioritised at the individual African states' level. More attention needs to be given to the agricultural role of women as important to national economic growth and development. The aim is to encourage the involvement of more women in subsistence farming, and to guarantee food production and consumption for domestic purposes. Doing this will serve multipurpose objectives, including encouraging organic food production with less pressure on foreign exchange in terms of food importation that continues to drain many African states' financial resources partly based on the imported Euro-centric international trade that reduced the continent to the producer of industrial inputs with neglect in the production of food as alluded to by Morten Jerven (2015: 131), that "most models of economic development are derived from studies of Europe and the West, the tool box of economists is conceptually Eurocentric". Adhering to this will enhance a state's prestige in the comity of nations. It is also important to train and empower women through formal and informal education, both in subsistence farming and commercial agriculture as a strategy for achieving national food security, since agriculture is the mainstay of most economies on the continent. The training and empowerment may also come through women's cooperatives in agribusiness though with more supports from the state. This may be in the form of provision of extension services as against the present theorised extension activities of relevant ministries' that are riddled with corruption. Governments' intervention will also be needed to work out easy credit arrangements for women in agriculture through relevant formal institutions like Bank of Agriculture (BoA) and microfinance at a zero or single-digit interest rate, as well as provision of insurance cover to manage any associated risks about the agricultural role of women. As discussed above, women in many African societies are relegated to an instrument of men, a helper, a mother, a domestic worker and an object of every violence practice. Through cooperative associations specifically to empower women, who are naturally care-takers and administrators' availability of Yunus Mohammed's financial support in rural areas will boost crop and animal production with positive implications on standard of living, sustainable development and food security.

Moreover, new and women friendly technologies should be made available at little or no cost to women farmers at all levels to reduce their burden as a socially vulnerable group, and more importantly to enable them to mitigate and adapt effectively to the impacts of climate change and other resource-related ecological challenges. In addition, efforts need to be made in extending adaptation technology to women farmers through distribution of weather forecasting devices, and allocation of extension agents to assist in interpreting weather information to enable them to make appropriate decisions concerning farm operations. Besides, agricultural cropping calendar should be produced in their local dialects and distributed to them freely to aid their knowledge of appropriate and best agricultural practices. Lastly, gender

mainstreaming in all agricultural activities at all levels should be vigorously pursued.

From the foregoing, it is anticipated that the measures, if faithfully implemented, will strengthen the role of women as food producers at the subsistence level; engender gender equality in agriculture; and more importantly, increase their income generating ability to contribute both to the socio-economic well-being of the family and the society. This is necessary to ensure sustainable development and, by extension political stability, as food security is a *sine qua non* for a stable society. Not too far from this position is a need to involve women in decision-making at the grassroots level. Because of culture as practised in many of African settings, women may not be allowed to get involved in critical decision-making. This is not only against gender equality and human rights; it also violates tenets of value allocation.

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