

Wealth and Poverty among Women in Sokoto State 1996 to 2018

Aliyu A. Kware
Department of History
Usmanu Danfodiyo University
Sokoto, Nigeria

Abstract

Wealth and poverty are two concepts/phenomena that affect majority of the members of the various societies in the world. Though, wealth is for the select few, poverty is indeed for the majority of the people worldwide. Poverty knows no bound. It has been affecting every category of the people ever since in history. It affects the old, the young, whites, blacks, men, women and children. It however, affects the last two more than the other categories. In fact, women are the most affected by the scourge of poverty. Women are the most vulnerable. The worst of it is that women are the custodians of children, which makes it extremely difficult for the former to get out of poverty. More worst is the fact that women are also in the back seat when it comes to having the vehicles for graduating out of poverty such as education, economic activities, business activities, politics, etc. Women in many societies labour hard to earn a living. On many occasions, women have to pass through very turbulent and difficult terrains to be able to survive. On the other hand, women are very enterprising in nature. When opportune, women can do and excel better like their counterparts, men, if not better than them. There are many examples of such successful women in our various societies. The only problem is that women are, on several occasions and in many societies, denied the opportunities to strive to become self reliant. This paper intends to discuss and highlight the relationship between women and poverty in our society with a view to exposing the pathetic conditions women find themselves in and as well offer solutions and ways out of such quagmire.

Keywords: Women, Wealth, Economic activities, Business activities, Vulnerability, Poverty

1. Introduction

The three concepts of women, wealth and poverty have many things in common. Few women are wealthy. Very many women are poor, finding themselves in poverty. There are more poor women than wealthy ones. The few that are wealthy owe that to their husbands and other males in the society. For poverty, males are to blame to a large extent with few women to blame for women poverty. A key word in any discussion on poverty is vulnerability. The most vulnerable group of people in poverty is that of women. They suffer more than any other group of people. Within the group are wives, mothers, divorcees, guardians, widows, weaker ones, the sick, the old, indigent, the abandoned, etc.

2. Women

A woman is an adult human female. A woman is a man's mother, wife, daughter, girl friend or lover. Biologically, women are the weaker sex. Though, many of them nowadays claim that they can do what men can do even better. But naturally they are different, weak and softer than men. They conceive and deliver. In between this period women fall sick and are therefore weak in doing things.

Culturally, the society has set aside certain roles each individual has to play. Women have their special roles to play. They are wives, mothers, guardians, nurses, etc. They must discharge these roles whether they have means to do that or not. In so many societies however, women have to fend for themselves. They are seen in businesses, in agriculture, etc to be able to make ends meet. Religiously, Islam in particular has accorded women rightful place in Islamic societies. It is the responsibilities of males; father, husband, son or any appropriate male individual to take good care of his daughter, wife, mother, sister, etc.

3. Wealth

Wealth means assets or possessions that make an individual comfortable in a society. He or she uses the assets to live normal or above the standard of living in that society. Any person in that category is called a wealthy individual and is therefore considered to be rich as against the poor person. But in some situations wealth described above cannot be enough to get out of current type of poverty where even if one possesses the wealth he could not get certain basic necessities of life. Things included in the understanding of poverty are quality education, potable drinking water, quality health care facilities, good motor-able roads, adequate and efficient electricity supply as well as freedom, security and a say in the affairs that affect an individual.¹ But all the same with money one can provide many things for him or herself such as borehole, etc.

Wealth basically means abundance of valuable possessions or money. It also means richness, well-being, material prosperity, affluence, etc. Wealth and poverty are the two sides of the same coin. They complement each other. Poverty is the involuntary servant of wealth. That means that the poor people would always be at the service of the rich. It implies that poverty ensures the existence and survival of wealth, and vice-versa.²

4. Poverty

No one can adequately define poverty to the satisfaction of everyone. There is also no exact figure of the poor persons in every society. This is because every individual sees poverty from his or her perspective and experience. Again, a poor person now can get out of poverty any time and any day depending on the opportunities open to him or her. There are however, certain indices used to determine who is poor and who is not. Certain international organizations also came out with their definitions of poverty for the purpose of reference and policy making. For example, the World Bank has said that poverty encapsulates hunger, lack of shelter, being sick, not being able to go to school, not knowing how to read, not being able to speak properly, not having a job, fear for the future, and losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water, powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.³ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), defines poverty as the denial of opportunities and choices for living a most basic or tolerable human life.⁴ Poverty also means weakness and a low position in the social hierarchy. It is a sub-set of the general condition of deprivation whose dimensions include poverty, social inferiority, isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, seasonality, powerlessness and humiliation.⁵ Poverty, thus, is a term or concept used to describe the condition of the poor people. Poverty is also a phenomenon affecting human life. It is no more news that poverty exists in Nigeria particularly in northern Nigeria more especially in Sokoto State. Even in the State, some parts were poorer than others. But the most remarkable thing about poverty is the fact that women outnumber men in the condition of poverty.

5. Wealth, Poverty and Women

Many wealthy women are no better than the poor ones in many societies. This is because many men do not go near wealthy women for fear of being rejected or molested. Some wealthy women themselves do not respect men.

¹ Aliyu A. Kware "Poverty in Sokoto State: An Historical Study, 1976-2009", Department of History, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Pp, 7-17, 2012.

²See Townsend, Peter, *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standard of Living*, England: Penguin Books, 1979, the author listed 15 advantages of poverty saying that the disadvantages of poverty should not be allowed to cloud the advantages.

³Cited by G.T. Ijaiye, "The Roles of the Informal Sector in Minimizing Poverty in Ilorin Metropolis," Unpublished PhD thesis, Sokoto, UDUS, 2002, p, 14

⁴Ibid, p, 13

⁵ Aliyu A. Kware op cit

They feel on top of men and that the men are nothing but inferior to them. As a result of that, such women hardly get husbands and so they remain single because they are wealthy, a situation that does not help women. As such a number of wealthy women suffer in silence.

When it comes to poverty indeed women bear the brunt. There are more poor women than wealthy ones. Many husbands died naturally, some killed, kidnapped, maimed, etc, leaving wives and their children at the mercy of the wicked society. In the IDPs camp in Gandi town of Rabah Local Government presently women and children outnumber men. In many villages of certain Local Government Areas in Sokoto State only women and children roam the streets. Their male counterparts have gone into seasonal migrations to southern parts of Nigeria for livelihood with a view to escaping from poverty. The affected areas were deserted by men because of dryness and lack of viable economic and business activities. Such societies were found in Northern Nigeria, especially north-western part such as Sokoto State. The movements of people connected with the beginning and the end of seasons is called seasonal migration. This type of migration is called *cin rani* by the Hausa people. It is a serious cause of the neglect of women in the State affecting almost all the Local Government Areas particularly Tangaza, Binji, Silame, Gudu, Gwadabawa and Gada. According to Audu, a survey of three villages in Gwadabawa District during 1976 found out that between 46 and 74 percent of dry season migrants left their homes to look for work because of poverty, taxes and poor harvests.⁶

Many factors are attributed to these movements (seasonal migrations). The economic and social conditions prevailing in Sokoto State, such as desertification, dryness, absence of viable economic activities, absence of industries, etc were the prime factors that forced many people of Sokoto State to embark on seasonal migrations.⁷

6. Poverty among Women in Sokoto State

It is indeed a fact that poverty has many dimensions; one of which is women poverty. The main impact of poverty is on women and children who were considered prone to and unable to escape from poverty, i.e. they were a vulnerable group.

Based on the various surveys carried out on poverty and findings thereafter, the most common causes of the scourge in Nigeria are unemployment, ignorance, high level of inflation, poor governance, corruption and environmental degradation among others.⁸ In several other researches on poverty the statistics show that 7 out of 10 Nigerians lived below poverty line of the United Nations and that poverty was depressing and confounding in the country. The causes of poverty affect women more than men. Women and children suffer the hardest deprivation and that they were more likely to be poor and malnourished in most societies. They faced serious social and economic constraints in achieving anything they desire. Most of them were not able to acquire education and sometimes they were left to cater for their babies without adequate health care facilities. Some of them were left with nothing; no husband, no children, no relatives, no good health, no food and above all no work or employment. I met a woman in Gwadabawa town, who narrated the following,

Look at me I have neither husband nor children, my husband died. The village Head gave me this place to squat; I have been sick all this while and have nothing. Prison staff asked me to weed the ward for them and it is the leaves that I intend to cook and sell. During the dry season period I cook and sale potato leaves to be able to get what to buy food. It has now been five years since the death of my husband who died in 2003. All his relatives are poor and my own relatives are also poor. They are in the villages of Lukuwa and Lahhodu and it is now three years since last I visited them.⁹(This woman is one among many silently suffering in poverty in the State)

⁶ P.S. Audu, "Dry Season Migration II" in *Sokoto State in Maps: an atlas of physical and human resources*, University Press Limited, 1982, p, 46.

⁷ Aliyu A. Kware, "Seasonal Migrations and Poverty Reduction in Sokoto State 1976 to 2014: A Historical Exposition" in *Lapai Journal of Humanities*: Department of History and International Studies, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State, Nigeria, Volume 9 Number 2, 2015.

⁸ B. E. Aigbokhan, "*Poverty, Growth And Inequality In Nigeria; A Case Study*, Kenya, African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), 2000, p, 1

⁹ Interview with Ummu Hassan, a widow, in Gwadabawa town on 24/08/2008, She said she was born during the famine of *Muda*, which took place in 1953 as indicated on the list of famine in the appendix, she was therefore aged 55 at the time of the interview

The few educated women were sometimes discriminated against especially in casual or low-paying jobs. A lot more of school leavers among women and girls were not employed.¹⁰

7. Some of the Things Women do to Fight Poverty in Sokoto State

Some women faced serious problem especially in Sokoto town where young girls were married to rich people only to be divorced before long, and the consequence was drifting into begging and prostitution. Many of them roamed the streets begging and sometimes their conditions made them fall into prostitution.¹¹ Indeed this was unknown in the history of Sokoto State until from the 1990s. It is however, as a result of the unscrupulous behaviour of some of the society's Wealthy individuals, who just because they had money, kept on marrying, divorcing and remarrying again just to satisfy their sexual urge, and that resulted in increasing number of divorced women in the State who in turn increased the number of the poor. The most uninteresting consequence of this unbecoming act was the hardship the divorced women and their children suffered as most of them were divorced after becoming either pregnant or have just delivered. They were again likely to get pregnant in their clandestine prostitution in a bid to survive thereby intensifying their hardship and poverty.¹²

In marriage life many of them suffer unnecessarily. Many of the married women were kept in seclusion ordained by Islam and in that regard they were not allowed to go out without permission. They would not go out to carry out business activities or to earn a living on their own, that must be done by their husbands who must provide everything the wives needed to survive and prosper according to the dictates of the religion.¹³ Women were however, not prevented from conducting certain businesses while indoors and that was why they used their sons, daughters and sometimes the husbands, to hawk or conduct business for them. On many occasions however, the businesses engaged by some women in seclusion were petty types and because of that many of them were poor. The poverty of women in seclusion was not because they were barred from going out freely by Islam, but because not all the husbands took adequate care of their wives as stipulated by the religion of Islam. Many husbands were jobless and as such were poor, which meant that their families would also be poor, sometimes extremely. The percentage of wives who were poor was however, difficult to get because the data to that effect did not exist. But by conservative estimate, such wives were as twice as the number of husbands who were about one out of three of the people in Sokoto State. Several informants told me that some wives have been going to their parents to get food and other necessities of life due to poverty of their husbands.¹⁴ That made hawking involving children a necessity to avoid extreme poverty. But hawking involving young girls has its serious repercussions in the sense that some girls were abused sexually by some unscrupulous men.¹⁵ The girls in the process become pregnant thereby creating more poverty to the family. Many housewives have no enough basic things for survival because their husbands do not afford. Their inability to afford led many husbands to engage in visiting the houses of some wealthy individuals to source means of survival. This is called *raraka* in Hausa language. On many occasions the wives and children also engaged in the same activity. As stated by Khalid Sulaiman, Hausa society was patriarchal in nature providing for a strong male influence on virtually every sphere of life.¹⁶

¹⁰ Interview with the District Head of Gande in his palace on 2nd July 2008

¹¹ Interview with A. N. Ejike popularly known in Sokoto town as *Baban Naira*, an Ibo man residing in Sokoto town since 1977, He was a rich businessman who knew much about the poor persons because they always visited him in batches. He was interviewed at his shop along Ahmadu Bello Way, Sokoto, on Friday 25th July 2008, aged

¹² *Ibidem*

¹³ For details on the practice of seclusion of women in Islam reference can be made to S. Khalid, "Gender, Purdah and Political Participation among the Hausa of North-Western Nigeria" in A. M. Jega, H. Wakili and M. Ahmad, (eds.), *Democracy and Democratization in Nigeria 1999-2001*, Centre of Democratic Research and Training, (CDRT), Mambayya House, Kano, 2002, p, 125

¹⁴ I heard this in various localities in Sokoto State during some of my tours. One of the informants was Hajiya Maryam Isah Yari a businesswoman and politician, aged 67, on Saturday, 3/1/2009

¹⁵ Several informants testified this episode of girls being spoilt by some corrupt men

¹⁶ S. Khalid, "Gender, Purdah and Political Participation among the Hausa of North-Western Nigeria" in A. M. Jega, H. Wakili and M. Ahmad, (eds.), *Democracy and Democratization in Nigeria 1999-2001*, Centre of Democratic Research and Training, (CDRT), Mambayya House, Kano, 2002, p, 125

Khalid Sulaiman added that almost everyone in Hausa society seemed to have been contented with the structure of living which made the man to participate in public life and monopolize public affairs while the woman remained submissive, obedient and contented to enjoy reflected status of her husband.¹⁷

In the rural areas the women and children were left behind languishing in abject poverty. They get stipends only occasionally and very meagre. As a result of the absence of their husbands and able-bodied men they starve sometimes to death due mainly to diseases, hunger, etc.

It is on record that many husbands and other youth died round trip in seasonal migration as a result of auto accidents due to distance and bad roads. Some of them from Sokoto State go as far as Calabar and Port Harcourt in the southern part of the country. Many are killed while in their temporary abodes in the south of Nigeria as a result of ethno-religious and political violence. While these are going on, it is the women and children that bear the brunt. Those husbands and other able-bodied men that returned, they sometimes transported diseases from the south, transmitting them to their spouses, which on many occasions led to death of either the men or the woman or both.

Many women and sometimes married women trooped to urban centres especially Sokoto Metropolis to Beg. They are seen in groups meeting people everywhere in the Metropolis begging, sometimes sending their children to any group of men they could see. Others stay at major commercial centres where wealthy individuals go for shopping such as Double 7 now renamed Simple 7, Oasis Bakery, Shanghai Bakery, Da'am Restaurant, Dadin Kowa Restaurants, all in Sokoto town, etc. They usually demand for money to buy food or medicine but many of these beggars, were worth hundreds of thousands of Naira.¹⁸ These people were therefore not poor in economic terms, despite the fact that, they go about begging.

In many parts of Sokoto State, women till the land to earn a living. Some of them engage in labour in the farms for some token pay. Some gather stalks and fire woods for sales in the towns. Some women engage in pounding grains for pay to be able to survive, etc. I conducted several interviews with some of these women in the various Local Government Areas such as Isa, Gudu and Gada.¹⁹

Women, particularly housewives in Sokoto metropolis and other towns and also some villages in the State, engaged in some forms of business using electricity. Women realized substantial amounts of money with which they engaged in several social and cultural commitments in their individual places. Many of these places outside the Metropolis where women engaged in various businesses included Illela, Gwadabawa, Tangaza, Gidan Madi, Binji, Gande, Silame, Kware, Achida, Goronyo, Rabah, etc.²⁰ Indeed women in all the parts of Sokoto State have been participating in one type of business or the another, using electricity or not. The supply of electricity was however, epileptic but the women were able to sell various items such as pure water, *sobo*, *fura* and other items.²¹ Housewives in Gandi town also engaged in using electricity to conduct similar trades especially from 2004 when the town was connected to the National Grid from Rabah town.²² Indeed, it is a fact that all over the State women participated in various trades, especially those in food sector.²³

¹⁷See Ibid for details. It should be noted however, that Khalid Sulaiman was one of the Socialists, whose discipline allowed them to generalize. In History, a certain situation relating to some people would not be applied to the whole society.

¹⁸Interview with Muhammadu Sambo Waliyyi, at his residence in Gidadawa area of Sokoto Town on Tuesday 26/08/2008, He was a retired Civil servant aged 71

¹⁹ Modaci and Balle

²⁰I was working with Rabah LGC as Deputy Director Administration, when it was provided and commissioned by Group Captain Rufa'I Dan-Asabe Garba. Several informants also told me that when electricity was supplied in most of the above towns, women particularly housewives engaged in using the electricity to carry out petty trading and were able to realized a lot of money.

²¹For more details on the roles played by housewives in economic development of their households, consult F. Adamu, "Savings and Investment among Married Women in the Informal Sector of Sokoto Economy", Unpublished M.Sc. Economics, Department of Economics, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, 2002

²²Interview with Alh Muhammadu Maccido, Yarin Gandi, aged 75, on Friday, 29/8/2008 in Gandi town

²³They engaged in producing some cooked food items such as *kuli-kuli*, *kalwa*, *bula*, *tuwo* and *masa*, and other items of trade. Some of them engaged in the business of selling *atamfa* and blouse

In some places they involved in tailoring and knitting (of sweaters and some related items) and many other businesses, especially as from 2007.²⁴ In Modachi village of Isa LGA, some women engaged in the business of grain thrashing to earn a living.²⁵ To trash a bundle of millet a woman would get one measure (*mudu*) of the grains or 80 Naira in cash. In a day a woman could trash between 5 and 6 bundles of millet or corn, which would give her 400, 480 or 560 Naira depending on her ability.²⁶

Many other women also engaged in cutting and gathering firewood for sale. Such women, mostly widows, went to bush to gather the firewood for sale, in order to generate income to be able to survive.²⁷ Some of them engaged in trashing of grains and hawking of water while others engaged in commercial pounding of grains to make porridge. It is also confirmed that just like the Dakarkari women of Zuru Emirate, some women in Balle till the land for livelihood.²⁸

8. The Solution

Poverty in a number of societies was a man-made phenomenon. Much of the blame goes to the leaders of the various societies. If good leadership is in place in our societies and justice prevails where the resources of our country are equitably distributed among the citizens, be rest assured that poverty would be a thing of the past. Let those essential things in life be provided adequately such as education, health care facilities, good drinking water, electricity, good roads and other infrastructure in our societies. These things are enough to provide the much needed employment and other livelihoods among the people more especially the womenfolk. If you educate a woman, you educate a nation. Empower her you empower many.

9. Conclusion

The menial jobs engaged by women in Sokoto State, does not mean that there were no viable ones. There were thousands of women engaging in various businesses in the State, especially in the Metropolis. Even in the business of selling motor vehicles, there were several women involved. There were women contractors, transporters, school proprietors, politicians, etc. It is indicated above that women are naturally enterprising and as such, many of them have prospered in the above mentioned businesses. It is however, to be reiterated here that women still constitute the majority among the poor people in Sokoto State during the period under review.

Poverty is a phenomenon that has been with societies from time immemorial. No one can date the advent of poverty in this World. It is as old as human beings. Poverty is however, the companion of women, children, the weak, the aged, etc. It is more devastating among women than in other categories. Its causes are diverse and its effects are as well diverse. The consequences of poverty in our societies are grave. Some of them include violence, crisis, insecurity, underdevelopment and disintegration. It is therefore, up to the leaders, in their own interest, and that of the teeming population to, reduce or eradicate the scourge of poverty for peace to reign.

²⁴With the skills acquisition centres established in the 23 LGAs of Sokoto State, more women were trained to engage in knitting, tailoring, etc

²⁵Interview with Kalanda Jada Modachi, a housewife engaging in thrashing of grains for payment, aged 46, on Sunday 21/9/2008 in Modachi village

²⁶Ibiden

²⁷Interview with Attahiru Alh Mai-Kano Balle, aged 50 and Dan-Wanzam Bangi, aged 60, on Sunday, 14/9/2008 in Balle town, They said many of the women have no alternatives rather than to engage in the exercise. Some of them have no husbands, no sons, etc

²⁸Interview with Shehu Muhammad Balle, businessman, aged 45 and Muhammad Ibrahim Balle, a businessman in Balle town, aged 42, on Sunday, 14/9/2008

10. References

- Adamu, F., "Savings and Investment among Married Women in the Informal Sector of Sokoto Economy", Unpublished M.Sc. Economics, Department of Economics, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, 2002
- Aigbokhan, B. E., "Poverty, Growth And Inequality In Nigeria; A Case Study, Kenya, African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), 2000
- Audu, P. S., "Dry Season Migration II" in Sokoto State in Maps: an atlas of physical and human resources, University Press Limited, 1982
- Ijaiye, G. T., "The Roles of the Informal Sector in Minimizing Poverty in Ilorin Metropolis," Unpublished PhD thesis, Sokoto, UDUS, 2002
- Jega, A. M., H. Wakili and M. Ahmad, (eds.), Democracy and Democratization in Nigeria 1999-2001, Centre of Democratic Research and Training, (CDRT), Mambayya House, Kano, 2002
- Kware, Aliyu A., "Poverty in Sokoto State: An Historical Study, 1976-2009", Department of History, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Pp, 7-17, 2012
- Kware, Aliyu A. "Seasonal Migrations and Poverty Reduction in Sokoto State 1976 to 2014: A Historical Exposition" in Lapai Journal of Humanities: Department of History and International Studies, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State, Nigeria, Volume 9 Number 2, 2015
- Several informants were interviewed during the field work.