

We Decide, They Decide For Us: Popular Participation as an Issue in Two Nigerian Women's Development Programmes

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Abstract : Participation at all levels of organizing, programme development, and implementation is critical if development programmes are to meet a minimum level of success. An examination of the organizational decision-making structure of two Nigerian women's development organizations, Better Life for Rural Women (BLP), a government-sponsored programme, and Country Women's Association of Nigeria (COWAN), a non-governmental programme, reveals fundamental differences in the level of participation of rural women who were the intended beneficiaries. The mission of each focused on the improvement of rural women's lives; however, the success of the non-governmental organization far outweighed the government-sponsored one because of its basic belief in popular participation. BLP was more likely to encourage bureaucratic and individual politically motivated manoeuvres that only delayed and sometimes subverted altogether services that were specifically designed for rural women. COWAN was less likely to experience these barriers, and therefore more readily responded to and engaged rural women as full participants in development projects that focused on improving their lives. Because of political instability, government projects focusing on women are limited. However, their need for development programmes that directly address their concerns is as great as ever.

Résumé : La participation à tous les niveaux d'organisation, d'élaboration et de mise en œuvre de programme est fondamentale si l'on veut assurer aux programmes de développement un minimum de réussite. Un examen de la structure de prise de décisions de deux organisations féminines de développement du Nigeria—Better Life for Rural Women (BLP, un programme soutenu par le gouvernement, et Country Women's Association of Nigeria (COWAN), un programme non-gouvernemental, révèle des différences fondamentales au niveau de la participation des femmes rurales qui sont censées en être les bénéficiaires. La mission de l'un comme de l'autre était axée sur l'amélioration des conditions de vie des femmes en milieu rural ; cependant,

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la réussite de l'organisation non-gouvernementale a dépassé de loin celle de l'organisation appuyée par l'Etat, en raison de sa croyance profonde en la participation populaire. Si BLP était plus encline à encourager les manœuvres bureaucratiques et individuelles à motivation politique qui ne faisaient que retarder et parfois détourner simplement les services qui étaient spécialement conçus pour les femmes rurales, COWAN, elle, n'était pas exposée à ces goulots d'étranglement, et était donc plus attentive aux femmes qu'elle impliquait pleinement dans les projets de développement qui s'intéressent à l'amélioration de leurs conditions d'existence. En raison de l'instabilité politique, les projets féminins appuyés par le gouvernement sont peu nombreux. Cependant, leur besoin de programmes de développement qui prennent en charge leurs préoccupations, est toujours aussi grand.

The objectives of this study are threefold: first, to analyse the concept of popular participation; second, to review the purposes and activities of two women's development organizations in Nigeria and the extent to which popular participation is recognized and used by each, and third, to discuss the impact of political influences on the integration of popular participation and management in each organization. In the case of the two women's development organizations identified in this study, one is a non-governmental organization and the other is governmental. The non-governmental organization more closely aligned itself with the people it was formed to benefit and actively encouraged their participation. A direct link between the success of these two women's development organizations and their willingness to be inclusive through the encouragement of popular participation is identified. Each organization confidently claims its organizational structure is designed to best serve the individuals for whom the development programmes are designed. A close examination of the architecture of each organization reveals the true involvement of rural women. The trust engagement of grassroots women in organizational decision making, as in the case of Country Women Association of Nigeria, provided direct input that was absent in the operations of the Better Life for Rural Women Programme.

Planning development programmes whose goal is to improve the lives of the oppressed are rarely initiated today without discussions of inclusion. The purpose of many of these programmes is to help people

in developing countries improve their daily lives through increased productivity and welfare. Previously, some development programmes were designed by outsiders for the people, while others were designed by the people in consultation with individuals outside the organization or community. The latter has proven to address the real needs of the people more directly because they participate in the identification and implementation process. Participation of the people who are the beneficiaries is critical to the success of development programmes. 'Top down' management strategy was the plague that led to the demise of many development efforts, while participation by the beneficiaries of these efforts provided greater group and individual investment that could lead to more positive results. Researchers (Snyder and Tadesse 1995; Moser 1993; Young 1993; Rahnema 1992; Bekou-Betts 1990) confirm that when people are locally involved and participate actively in projects, much more is achieved, even in sheer financial terms. Awa (1989) observes that too often rural development projects are planned by outside agencies, some of which are domestic, operating from capital cities, and all of which may be unknown to the people who they identify as their beneficiaries.

Popular Participation

Various definitions of participation include some element of inclusion among the grassroots. Kreps (1990) notes that true participation allows management and workers to identify with one another's needs and goals. Davis and Newstrom (1989, cited in Awa 1994) see participation as the mental and emotional involvement of persons in group situations that encourage them to contribute to group goals and share responsibility. Awa (1994:3) identifies three aspects that are critical to understanding true participation:

- Involvement—mental and emotional involvement, not just mere physical presence.
- Contribution—a motivation to contribute which requires creative thinking and initiative.

- Responsibility—an acceptance of responsibility which involves seeing organizational problems as corporate problems, ‘ours’ not ‘theirs’.

Design, implementation, and maintenance are other terms used for these stages (Longwe 1991; Brydon and Chant 1989). Popular participation inherently increases control over resources and productive movements of those previously excluded from such control (Rahnema 1992:120). These individuals can take charge of their lives in ways that encourage greater productivity to rise from the poverty they experience not because they have been unproductive but because of exploitation and oppression. The ultimate aim of such participation is to achieve power:

- a special kind of power—people’s power—which belongs to the oppressed and exploited classes and groups and their organizations, and the defence of their interests to enable them to advance towards shared goals of social change within a participatory system (Ibid.).

Popular participation includes dialogue and interaction between the intervenors and the intervened; thus, according to Rahnema (1992:121), enabling the oppressed to act as free subjects of their own destiny.

In an effort to advance human potentials, all human resources should be mobilized as a means of achieving the objectives of development. In her book *Planning and Development With Women*, Kate Young (1993) looks at the involvement of women at all levels of development thinking, planning, and implementation as a capacity for change not only among the women but also for larger society. She notes that because women are valuable resources, they will no longer accept being treated as workhorses for development strategies planned by others, but require to be treated as partners in development practice and planning (pg. 147). Popular participation becomes: a process of empowerment in which opportunities for collective decision-making and reflection, the capacity for critical thought, and collective action

toward goals that benefit society are encouraged (Ferguson 1994; Young 1993; Okojie 1991; Savane 1988; Loutfi 1987; Akande 1984).

As a model of development, popular participation has been recognized and protected, but actual practice and implementation has been slow. Many of Nigeria's rural development projects have been plagued by continual marginalized participation of people who were the identified beneficiaries. Even government agencies such as the Directorate of Foods, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) that was started in 1986 and promoted rural change through construction of rural feeder roads and water and electricity supply failed to be inclusive in its planning process. While this department advocated rural empowerment, in actuality bureaucratic and decision-making practices neither allowed for sensitivity or promotion of popular participation.

At the heart of gender analysis of development initiatives are basic needs of women, and in particular poor women. The effectiveness and longevity of projects and women's organizations addressing these needs is grounded in an open and democratic process where the poor gain increasing autonomy and control over their lives (Young 1993; Sen and Grown 1987; Brydon and Chant 1989). These are the individuals most affected by change, and Young (1993:164) suggests that 'care has to be taken to reach out to the unorganized since the poorest often have the least structural capacity for organization'. Boserup (1970) noted that although women were key contributors in the economic system, they were neglected in development plans and their potentials remained untapped. Two rural women's development programmes in Nigeria were identified for this study in an effort to determine the presence and level of advocacy of popular participation in each—Country Women Association of Nigeria and Better Life for Rural Women Programme. First, some brief comments about organizational styles that have been used traditionally by the Nigerian government sets the stage for reviewing contemporary development programmes.

National Development Plans

An understanding of Nigeria's National Plans is useful when analysing the organizational structure of governmental departments and agencies. Since independence, Nigeria has initiated development plans that addressed the sub-standard conditions of rural dwellers. However, after numerous national development plans, the living conditions of rural people continued to deteriorate (Dibua 1990). Each of the four national development plans were initiated without input from local government authorities, although the plans' projects were supposedly designed to directly address the lives and well-being of local people. Dibua further concludes that the urban-based bureaucrats involved in the design of these plans were out of touch with situations in rural areas and thus the needs of the grassroots were not considered. The unit of government closest to the overwhelming majority of the country rural dwellers, approximately 70 percent of the population, was noticeably absent in the planning process although they were more strategically placed to represent the needs and aspirations of the people (Dibua 1990:4).

This organizational style of Nigeria's government was not limited to the national development plans, but could also be found in other development programmes targeted for specific segments of the population. The then President Babangida often spoke of the need to engage local governments because of their contact with the local people, but this recognition of popular participation escaped the planning process. Later in this paper are comments about one government programme that was established for women, but failed to emphasize popular participation. The Better Life for Rural Women Programme was a victim of insular development planning dominated by urbanized bureaucrats that enslaved rural Nigerians in terms of resource allocation and political development (Omorie 1992:6).

Two Case Studies in Ondo State, Nigeria

The two Nigerian rural women's self-help organizations explored for this study are Country Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN) and Better

Life for Rural Women Programme (BLP). With organizational missions that advance the basic needs of rural women, their stated activities were designed to respond to the need of rural women by providing self-help, self-improvement and self-empowerment opportunities that increase self-sufficiency. The human resource development approach of these two organizations recognized the reproductive roles of women in their nation's economy and the need to give these roles greater recognition. Snyder and Tadesse (1995:10) note that the goal of this approach is identical to the goal of development itself, namely creating better lives with greater freedom and well-being for members of the family, the local community and the society as a whole. As women are empowered and mobilized, they are more likely to engage in political, social, and economic activities. With this approach as a guide, grassroots women could see the potential for indigenous leadership with popular participation supplanting their contributions to the community and society.

Bota COWAN and BLP were structured to increase input in all these areas. COWAN started with six groups in 1982 and by 1995 boasted 31,000 members in eight states with additional health and family planning services extended to approximately 3.5 million women in Ondo State. The impact of BLP on women throughout the country is more dubious to determine; however, disparate levels of participation was noted in each of the then 304 local government areas. Mrs. Babangida (1990) noted that 3,000 women cooperatives were registered in 1990 compared to 450 in 1987. More specific information about these numbers would provide greater insight into the breadth of active involvement of rural women and benefits they received. A review of the actual activities of each organizations provides data on the encouragement and actual use of popular participation, as well as the effectiveness of the two to achieve real and accountable outcomes.

Country Women Association of Nigeria

A non-governmental development organization founded in 1982, COWAN, is dedicated to the improvement of the lives of rural women. The existence of COWAN is due to the visionary thinking of Chief (Mrs.) Bisi Ogunleye who understood the plight of rural women. In its 1990 Newsletter, COWAN is described as a 'bottom-up' organization with decision making in the hands of the people, and providing services designed to meet community-level needs. The Newsletter further states that COWAN's concern is placed more on community development and serving of the people, as well as engaging the people in small-scale projects because 'small is beautiful' (pg. 2). Emphasizing the need for the fruitful participation of rural women in massive food production and economic and social development in the state and the country in general, COWAN identifies eight objectives. These are to:

- increase the productivity and consequently the earning capacity of the rural folks for better living standard;
- promote programmes that have an inbuilt self-sustaining growth that could be replicated in the various ecological zones of the states;
- diversify economic opportunities available in the rural areas by promoting rural crafts, processing of agricultural products and by creating jobs for artisans in various fields;
- develop rural-based technologies for increased cottage industries and home-made products;
- train rural women in relevant improved skills and management of small enterprises and to enhance self-reliant rural development;
- associate itself with the government's aspiration to develop the rural areas, feed its teeming population and become self-reliant; and

- organize product marketing strategies and develop in rural women product-marketing skills beyond traditional local market distribution networks.

Originally an organization functioning in Ondo State, COWAN's increased recognition of its engagement of the grassroots led to its expansion across Nigeria.

Popular participation is the basic tapestry of all of COWAN's involvements. Holding to its commitment to the 'down-trodden' people, COWAN ensures the maximum and full participation of beneficiaries in planning development efforts that address their contribution to the local and national economy. An article in the January-April 1990 Newsletter addresses popular participation and its importance to the organization.

In simple language, Popular Participation is the coming together of people, usually in groups, to work together to achieve either social or economic development. In the Nigerian context, this means the coming together of the grassroots people by putting both human and financial resources together to achieve economic and social development. An example of popular participation in Yorubaland is 'Aaro'. COWAN programme relies on popular participation because low-income people are poor in financial resources but adequately rich in talents and skills (pg. 5).

The 'bottom-up' participatory structure of COWAN 'gives room for the masses to be heard'. This is carried out using a four-tier structure:

- Tier one—the coming together of individuals from the family unit to form primary societies at the village level.
- Tier two—the coming together of elected representatives of all the primary societies in local government to share their successes and problems.
- Tier three—the state level, known as general executives. The members are made up of representatives of the primary societies. Serving units are various committees and an administrative section.

- Tier four—the national level. Members of the national executives are nominated representatives of the state chapters.

In this structure the beneficiaries who know their needs best and the most appropriate way of fulfilling these needs are active in setting the organization's activity agenda. The employment of this strategy assures that change is congruent with the goals of the organization, and most importantly with the needs of the people. Through on-going communication, efforts were evaluated, feedback was welcomed and successful strategies and problems were discussed, thus laying the ground-work for improvement and strengthening of development efforts. This level of popular participation in COWAN differs sharply from the operations of the government-controlled BLP. The long arms of COWAN that reached deep into rural areas is evidenced by its membership roll of 91,000 active members and 1,390 registered groups in eight states in 1995.

Better Life for Rural Women Programme

The Government of Nigeria parlandced about its recognition of women's role in development, especially throughout the 1980s. An example of this was reiterated again at the 1989 UN Economic Commission for Africa Conference held at Abuja as a follow-up to the Arusha and Nairobi conferences of 1984 and 1985, respectively. Mrs. Maryam Babangida, First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, took a personal interest in the conference, and President Ibrahim Babangida noted in an opening speech Nigeria had made great strides to advance women. He also announced the formation of the Better Life for Rural Women programme and a Women Commission (Snyder and Tadesse 1995:173).

In support of the development efforts made by non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, and regional institutions (and as a means of accelerating their progress toward socio-economic transformation and recovery of Africa) this conference initiated a declaration, the Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development of Women in Africa in the 1990s. The Conference also called for the monitoring of the

implementation of this document. Sections of the Abuja Declaration emphasized the importance of popular participation in all development efforts. Ironically, this document was issued in Nigeria during the infancy of BLP and yet was not used as a model in women's development projects sponsored by the Nigerian government.

The Nigerian Federal Military Government recognized the changing role of women and their contribution in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the nation and formally established Better Life for Rural Women in 1987. Noting the numerous and often demanding tasks of women at the grass roots, the then Vice-President Rear Admiral Augustus Aikhomu presented the Government's support of this new initiative at an organizational meeting in Abuja in September 1987. Mrs. Maryam Babangida was identified as having conceived the idea for the programme through her inclination and vision (Women in Ondo State 1989:3). The programme, which by 1989 had become 'a household affair', was embarked upon to make rural women fully aware of their role, position, and contributions to national development (pg. 3).

BLP's objectives were to:

- encourage and stimulate rural women in particular, and the rural populace in general, toward improving their standard of living, their families and environment;
- include the spirit of self-development, particularly of rural women, in the areas of education, business, and recreation;
- create awareness among the populace about the plight of women (Directorate of Women's Affairs, Situation Report 1991:3).

With national government officials and the President's wife as its national president, the four other levels in this 'top-down' organizational structure included the State Commission on Women's Affairs in the state governor's office, the state governor's wife as state

chairwoman, the wife of the local government chairman as local BLP chairwoman, and finally, almost as an afterthought, the local women themselves. Chuka (1994) notes that at each level, committee membership was comprised of individuals from the elitist class. These women were concerned about self-preservation and the protection of self-interest. Such insular bureaucratic decision-making and implementation does not give rural women a new and confident belief in the future because the tendency of bureaucrats and low-level state personnel is to side with the rich and powerful of the local community. BLP experienced this pitfall in its organizational structure. Organization and development planning inclusiveness is critical if it is truly targeted to the grassroots. Bola (1995) viewed BLP as the government of women by women that emphasized class-based gender oppression in which women in power impose their ideas, plan and objectives on the women 'under their control' (pg. 78). Udegbe (1994, cited in Bola) reports that some participants accused elite women of 'hijacking' development programmes. Researchers (Sen and Grown 1987; Awa 1994) note that input of local voices is virtually eliminated in the top-down management structure of development organizations such as BLP. Believing that the organizational structure of BLP would stimulate, mobilize, and motivate women, Mrs. Babangida (1990) stated:

The structure is a total departure from the usual method of merely instilling a women's bureau or committee which forms part and parcel of the bureaucratic apparatus of a ministry. It is designed to ensure a direct approach between leadership and the grassroots through a smooth hierarchical short-line of authority which eliminates red-tapism.

When analysing the efforts and impact of BLP, this organizational structure is identified as a major drawback and blockage since many benefits for women often did not pass beyond the local government level to the needy and deserving rural women. This deliberate isolation of rural women negates some other more sound and correct efforts that would respond more directly to rural women including the

survey that was conducted to identify what rural women wanted for themselves and their communities (Okonkwo 1994).

Most of the early organizing activities of BLP took place in Ondo State, the home of COWAN; this was a calculated and politically planned manoeuvre (Lucas 1995). Ondo State Governor Olabode Ibiyinka George and his wife guided BLP activities by forming women's groups organized around the broad topics of health, education, technology, nutrition, and arts and crafts. Mrs. Babangida identified a steering committee of 27 'influential and respectable but city-bound women' to advise programmes throughout the nation. More specifically, these elite city-bound women would propose ways of motivating the country's rural women. The choice of these women suggests that they would 'plan' for the rural women and not 'with' them. BLP was managed at the state level by leading women in the state, most often the local governor's wife, whose intent was to give rural women a more involved and meaningful existence. Most of these women, notes Bola (1995) were selected not for their competence, understanding of, or sensitivity to gender issues, but on the basis of a combination of their husband's status, social status, social relationships and sex. BLP protected the interests of the ruling class by failing to address rural women's oppression and forces that perpetuate such oppression (Chuka 1994; Ibie 1992). Given BLP's organizational structure and its deliberate oversight of involvement of rural women, its real intent is called into question. Was there ever a genuine concern for the plight of rural women or was the initial plan to gain resources only for a small group of elite women carried out as intended?

1 The success of COWAN caught the attention of Nigerian officials who initiated talks with COWAN leaders in the mid-1980s. Through coercion and usurpation, governmental officials sought to align COWAN's operations with BLP. After unsuccessful take-over attempts, charges of communism and international spying were levelled against COWAN leaders in an effort to discredit them. This conflict led to the imprisonment of Chief (Mrs.) Bisi Ogunleye in 1989. The release of Chief Ogunleye coincided with the complete separation of COWAN and BLP activities.

Popular Participation and BLP

The language used in BLP publications does not mention popular participation. Is this an accurate presentation of the actual operation of this organization? The 'top-down' description of the organizational structure and management of BLP indicates little to no direct input from the intended beneficiaries of this development effort (Lucas 1995). Government officials offered hollow promises of popular participation to poor rural women, as was the case with Rear Admiral Augustus Aikhomu when he addressed a workshop on BLP in 1987 (Fawunmi 1987). Chief Aikhomu indicated that the government wanted rural women to be directly involved in decision-making matters affecting their welfare.

The quarterly magazine, *Women in Ondo State*, reported that Mrs. Feyi George, wife of the Military Governor of the State, 'has achieved such a huge success and her drive to create opportunities for the realization of the full potentials of rural women in all parts of the State is yielding results (pg. 2)'. Mrs. George is further credited with having 'mustered support of all the women of Ondo State', and 'launched rural markets, one of the greatest things that have ever happened to the women of Ondo State'. Thus, according to the magazine, the fact that the Military Administration has given women in Nigeria a place of pride, it should therefore seize the opportunity to develop their potentials to the optimum (3-4) [Emphasis added.] The terminology used in describing Mrs. George's involvement indicates null or at best limited popular participation in determining what should be done and how.

Further lack of popular participation can be found in the following statements in BLP publications.

Activities of the Better Life Programme revolve round all spheres of human endeavour like Agriculture, Education, Social Services, etc. To make sure that the Better Life Programme through the directorate achieves the aims and objectives of transforming the lives of rural dwellers, various task forces and committees were set up by the Wife of the Military Governor to tackle specific issues. One of such is the Resource Group comprising Women Leaders, Professionals, Market and Business Women drawn from the 22 Local Governments of the State. Although this Group was formed before the

Resource Group comprising Women Leaders, Professionals, Market and Business Women drawn from the 22 Local Governments of the State. Although this Group was formed before the Directorate, the Group still serves as a link between the Directorate and the women. This Group in conjunction with the Iyalodes, Iyalajes and Iyalojas was saddled with the task of seeing the women forming themselves into co-operative groups and mapping out strategies on how the rural women could set up their own projects, i.e., cottage industries and thus improve their standard of living (Women in Ondo State 1989:4) [Emphasis added.]

The actions of the Government continued to isolate the role of the grassroots in giving input into programmes of rural markets, soap making, cloth weaving, gari processing, credit schemes, and immunizations and education programmes. The above article includes a statement noting that 'from all indications, however, the women *for which all the programmes aforementioned have been designed*, to alleviate if not totally eradicate their problems have come to (sic) realise their potentials in nation building and have taken up the challenge' (5) [Emphasis added.] A year after the formation of BLP, the national information minister stated 'rural dwellers have been forced to play a secondary role, usually as observers rather than active participants in matters affecting their lives' (Ayeni 1989:1642). A study of three rice-growing communities in Ondo State by Ademola (1994:321) found that most women farmers did not obtain agricultural services from the Nigerian government. Commenting on the failure of BLP to address the real needs of the rural women, Dibua (cited in Chuka 1994) stated that the neo-colonist state restricted attention to food production and processing and gave little attention to empowerment through participation in other higher income-earning occupations including entrepreneurship and business ventures (pg. 63). Many of these rural women tended to align themselves with non-governmental organizations and community associations known as *esusu*. Lucas (1995) found that women in Ondo State did not feel their lives had been improved by BLP, and some women joined COWAN because they felt it would do more to address their needs. A lack of accountability for BLP activities led many observers to conclude that

more funds were spent for seminar, trade shows, and conferences than on projects for rural women. A critic noted:

The programme has been for some a veritable avenue for self-aggrandisement. Seminars and conferences organized in the opulence of five-star hotels adorned with the splendour of her excellencies, the first ladies have become more synonymous with the operations of the programme than the task of rural development (*The Guardian*, cited in Bola 1995:79).

Rural women who were aware of the existence of BLP watched as select elite and urban women reaped the benefits of a rural development programme while their daily lives remained stagnant or, in some instances, worsened. Widespread disillusionment, especially with fraudulent rural development programmes like BLP, led to negative feelings toward the government and to feelings of apathy and disregard for future women's programmes (Bola 1995). Comments by other researchers (Madubuike 1994; Onwekwe 1994; Obanu 1994; Okonkwo 1989) note the contribution of BLP especially in the area of credit and agri-business for Nigerian women. Each researcher, however, makes sweeping statements about rural women in general with little support for specific advantages brought to the women through BLP.

The schism between reality and political posturing further identified in comments made by Mrs. Babangida in a speech given in 1990. She notes that the achievements of BLP include the establishment of the programme in all states and local governments, and achievements in health, agriculture, education, social welfare, and co-operatives that numbered 3,000. Such general statements are projected with little concrete factual support for claimed widespread impact and lasting achievements of BLP. Citations of specific changes and the number of rural women benefiting would provide concrete information to support the broad sweeping statements about BLP's effectiveness. According to a July 25, 1991 article in *The Guardian*, Mrs. Babangida recognized that BLP was suffering from a crisis of perceptions and noted that 'the major setback hinged on the view that

its major beneficiaries had been the urban elite, the relatively well-to-do and privileged women' (Kareem 1991:11). Mrs. Babangida's insights are evident of the critical appraisals of the efforts of BLP.

The Political Arena

Popular participation is sometimes used as a politically attractive strategy of inclusiveness intended to convey responsiveness and improvement. By giving the impression of popular participation, governments contain and control input from segments of the population. Political actors portray genuine sensitivity to the plights of their constituencies and engage in dialogues to learn more details in a responsive mode, but often few changes result from such engagements (Rahnema 1992:118). In these situations, participatory development is closely linked to national political participation. In order to genuinely meet their needs, rural women must be heard, empowered, and engaged in meaningful probing dialogue. As was indicated earlier, many women involved in BLP were politically connected to the existing government or were professionals with rural women noticeably absent from the planning and implementation process. This was in stark contrast to COWAN's practice of popular participation among its members who had direct input into all the organization's activities.

As African countries gained independence, women's roles in the development process received greater recognition. The hope was that development programmes and policies would be blueprints for greater economic security. Many of the programmes of the First UN Decade for Development failed, as was often the case with programmes at the end of the Second Decade. In fact, the conditions of the poor in underdeveloped countries persisted and in some cases worsened (Mabogunje 1980:14). Numerous communities and individuals saw no change in their status as a result of new development efforts because benefits never 'trickled down'. The old imperialistic legacies combined with human greed repeatedly lead to inordinate corruption at the top that interfered with development efforts. Anise (1993) noted

that across the whole of the African continent, development too often has no human face and sometimes takes place in the name of the people but not always for the people (pg. 80). This unfortunately was the case throughout the life of BLP.

Nigeria has experienced continuous political and economic turmoil since the introduction of structural adjustment programmes (SAP) in 1985. In many instances, SAPs had adverse effects and left Africans poorer. For women, SAPs have often increased work performed with no increase in income (Ahonsi 1995). The failures of BLP are indicative of failures throughout the government's structure. Contributing factors to BLP's failures were its 'femocratic' and anti-democratic practices that marginalized input from the intended beneficiaries. That is, BLP did not exist for rural women, but rather was dominated by a clique of women whose interests derived from being married to powerful men rather than from any ideas or actions of their own real interest in the plight of rural women (Bola 1995).

The changes in Nigeria's political regimes since 1993 have added to the instability of the country. As a new government structure gains control, programmes of the former government were often eliminated or left to a slow death from neglect and lack of funding. If development programmes continued, they became mere shadows of their past: BLP was a programme of the Babangida years. During the Abacha years, the wife of the President, Mrs. Mariam Abacha launched another national programme to address the issue of women in development with the family as the focus. This programme, the Family Support Programme was launched November 5, 1994 (Madu 1994).

International Recognition for Development Efforts

The leaders of the two rural women development efforts discussed in this paper have received international recognition for their work. The New York based Hunger Project's Africa Prize for Leadership recognizes African men and women who have demonstrated exceptional leadership in the alleviation of persistent hunger; it named

Mrs. Maryam Babangida and Chief Bisi Ogunleye as recipients in 1991 and 1996, respectively. Noting her intent to empower rural women, Mrs. Babangida was described as a potent force for changing women's social, economic, and political status. Chief Ogunleye was accurately recognized as a pioneer in the economic empowerment of rural women and, in addition, as a fighter against environmental degradation and injustice. The Hunger Project acknowledges African leaders who have created lasting self-reliant solutions to surmount challenges to health, education, nutrition, incomes, and women's empowerment; Chief Ogunleye continues to work for sustained changes for rural women. Chief Ogunleye once stated, 'whatever the problem, the right solution is always to base our plan on the needs of the people and to involve people in planning' (Hunger Project 1996). This enduring practice of inclusiveness is an outstanding distinction for the work and longevity of COWAN. On the surface, the leaders of COWAN and BLP claimed to have made their marks in the international arena, but only an in-depth analysis of each organization, its projects, and the benefits to rural women unveils the truly deserving merit and subsequent recognition of each leader.²

Conclusion

The recognition of women as important contributors to the development process is critical and their participation in all development efforts is essential if projects are to be inclusive and successful. While government and non-governmental organizations have attempted to address women's basic needs through development programmes, governmental agencies are more prone to become prey to politically motivated behaviours, self-aggrandisement, and lofty expectations of power acquisition among political players.

² COWAN continues under the leadership of Chief Ogunleye and currently has 1,400 women's groups in eight states. Some of the projects include credit schemes, entrepreneurship, small-scale technology, and training in business management. Chief Ogunleye is a frequently sought international consultant on women development projects.

Government sponsored and led organizations can more easily become bogged down in red-tape manoeuvres that require more time to get things done, if at all. The lag time involved may cause recipients of such programmes to receive delayed or few services.

The status of women in developing countries like Nigeria is such that women's development programmes must respond in concrete terms with real services and less lip service to rural women. The level of services that benefited rural women is questionable in the case of BLP. Political self-aggrandising motives cannot cloud development efforts if the intent is to address real issues by improving human conditions. BLP is an example of a rural development effort gone wrong. From its inception it camouflaged its real intent and ultimately served the interests of elite and professional women, while rural women reaped no real or lasting benefits. Non-governmental women development organizations, like COWAN, have proven to be models that fulfil their goals to respond to the basic needs of rural women by providing avenues for productivity, self-sufficiency, involvement, and empowerment. Bottom-up management, feedback, and participation by grassroots rural women is integral to the functioning of these organizations. The rural women become real participants and beneficiaries through their involvement, contribution and acceptance of organizational responsibility. The needs of Nigerian rural women are as urgent today as in the 1980s and early 1990s. The instability and uncertainty of government initiated and supported efforts put greater demands on non-governmental organizations to respond to the economic, social, and political empowerment needs of these women.

Government organizations can learn much from NGOs that have focussed expertly on rural populations by involving them in the planning process. Rural women must have input in programmes that are intended to meet their needs. This approach leads to true empowerment of the women themselves who are the best public relations advocate for reaching other rural women like themselves. While it is fair to say women development programmes recognize the need to achieve economic and social development, it is clear from this

analysis that leadership and management are essential if the critical and immediate needs of rural women are to be addressed. Rural women cannot be relegated to positions of observers, but must be viewed as and encouraged to be full participants in development efforts affecting their lives.

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