

## **THE IMPACT OF WATER COLLECTION AS A TASK ON WOMEN IN DRIVING SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR HUMANITY IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** Performing the task of water collection by women for household use has increased drastically and constituted great challenges to them despite the target set by sustainable development goal to provide access to sustainable water, basic sanitation and hygiene in order to redress the challenges among the vulnerable groups, those in low and middle income countries. It is the foregoing scenarios that precipitated the innate desire to draw the following objectives of the study. Specifically, the study will ascertain, investigate and find out the extent to which water collection as a task has affected pregnant women in Nigeria, subjected women to waterborne diseases and denied women the opportunity of earning a decent living respectively. The paper is an ex-post facto research and adopted its analytical methodology from conventional content analysis based on secondary data gleaned from journals, textbooks, newspapers, web pages and government publications. Meanwhile, the study employed feminist theory as the theoretical umbrella for this discourse. The study revealed that it was a significant burden on women to fetch water while pregnant. Several women and their kids contracted water borne diseases and because they do not have a decent living. The paper recommends among other things the proper implementation of the national task shifting policy of the federal government. Women should be empowered in skill training and education in order to make them have a decent living.

**Keywords:** Water, Collection, Task, Women, Sustainable Future for Humanity.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Water is a necessity required for drinking, care for domestic animals, cooking food, hygiene, waste disposal and cleaning among others. However, several people indulge in carrying water on a daily basis especially those from poor families because once there are inadequate infrastructures to collect water the human body becomes part of water delivery service. Similarly, as a tradition in most parts of Nigeria, the task of collecting, providing and delivering water for families, home chores disproportionately is considered as the responsibility of women without the slightest knowledge of the health consequences associated with fetching water especially from distant places. Laying credence to this, Jennifer (2021) avers that, over 2 billion people globally lack access to clean water and the closest source of safe water supply to them is at least 30 minutes away by foot. In the light of this, women move about in search of illusive safe water with buckets and jerry cans because

millions of them are groaning under the burden of lack of safe water for their family use. This clearly shows the rigors pregnant women have to go through in order to collect water for their various use most especially in remote areas with poor water supply.

Worthy of note is that, most times these women use the family's meagre income to purchase water from commercial sellers at exorbitant prices without ascertaining how hygienic the water is. It became worrisome that most women invest so much time on fetching water thus their other activities are denied the needed attention such as paid work, education, healthcare which gave rise to impairment of women's quality of life. The task of water collection from outside the home by women especially the pregnant ones were physically stressful and threatened women's well-being. However, little attention was given to how this laborious task affects pregnant women Adegbite, Salako and Okanlawon (2017). Hence, the need to reverse the disproportionate burden of women providing water for their families became an issue of great concern.

### **Problem Statement**

The task of fetching water posed multiple layers of challenges to women in Nigeria. There was a feeling that the task of collecting water is carried out more by women at homes. Thus the cry for unequal gender that considered the weight of the burden as heavy on women. One major challenge is that pregnant women are burdened with the task of collecting water for their home which could be detrimental to the health of both the mother and child. Again, some women missed out on the chance of earning a decent living because of the task of fetching water for their homes. Another challenge is that, carrying heavy jerry cans frequently exerts significant strain on women's bodies. Furthermore, the puzzle of chronic shortage of safe water increased to a crisis proportion such that, on daily basis news of water borne diseases crept into Nigeria. In an attempt to collect water for their families use, they get themselves contaminated with diseases related to the water because they are unsafe. Flowing from the identified glitches, the paper aimed to:

- 1) Ascertain the extent to which water collection as a task has affected pregnant women towards driving sustainable future for humanity in Nigeria.
- 2) Investigate the extent to which water collection as a task has subjected women to waterborne diseases towards driving sustainable future for humanity in Nigeria.
- 3) Find out the extent to which water collection as a task has denied women the opportunity of earning a decent living towards driving sustainable future for humanity in Nigeria.

### **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

#### **Water Defined**

Water is one of the essential needs for life. According to Zumdahi (n.d.) water is a substance found at room temperature and pressure as clear as liquid and its molecular formula is (H<sub>2</sub>O). It is inform of rain and could also be found in rivers, seas, lakes and streams. Ice represents its solid form while steam is the gaseous form. It has the capacity to dissolve several other substances, tasteless, odourless and colourless when in small quantity but has an intrinsic blue colour due to its absorption of light at the wavelength of red. In the same context, water could be clean or contaminated. To concur with this view, Healing Waters Media (2022), submits that any water that can not harm a person who comes in contact with it could be used

for drinking, cooking, washing and other domestic affairs. The inverse becomes contaminated water.

### **Task**

It is a piece of work done as part of someone's duties. In other words, it could mean a tedious or difficult undertaking. For instance house chores, jobs. More so, someone could be assigned a task or imposed a task on. Similarly, (Guerrero, 2005) defined task as a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others freely or for some reward for instance typing a letter, cooking food, helping someone across the road, fetching water. In a simple term, a task means several things people including women do in their everyday affair or life at work, play and in between. More so, in everyday language, tasks are usually understood as demands that are generally achievable by an action or a set of actions, e.g. baking a cake, being a good student, or switching on the light. However, the required actions may not be specified by the assignment of the task, (Kunzel, Broeker, et al 2017). In summary, it is the work people do in order to earn a living or towards accomplishing a specified objective.

### **Woman**

Woman means "femina" in Latin. There was need to associate the word female with male and it brought a change in the 14<sup>th</sup> century which made the word woman traceable to the English word "wife" which is also related to man. In the light of Christianity, it became "this is the bone of my bone and the flesh of my flesh, she shall be called a woman, for she was taken out of the rib of a man". For that, it's a compound of "wife" and "man" (Nwobi, 2020).

### **Humanity**

It means human beings as a group, their condition or nature and their quality of being kind to one other, (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022). Similarly, it is our inner conscience that is turned into action for a thriving society. In other words, kindness borne out of the heart, inner conscience is a quality of humanity. Therefore humanity is an act of kindness meted out to someone which in turn bears fruit of happy life. Again, it is showing love to mankind just as we show ourselves, (Malik 2020). In a nut shell, humanity means the capacity to show compassion, be tolerant, demonstrate love, forgiveness, show hospitality and care for other human beings.

### **Brief Historical Excurses of Water**

Uncovering the origin of water is an essential part of understanding the genesis of existence. In the light of this, Oben (2021) argued that, water has its origin from creation account when the spirit of the lord moved over the "waters". In other words, water was created on the second day out of the formless material because the earth was void and formless at that point. Water was referred to as euphemism for deep, dark space. Water creation is the mystery of the all knowing God. Since then it has become so habitable for life over the course of its supposed billions of years history. In the same perspective, Shelling (2017) opined that, scientists were of the opinion that water originated from earth condensation from clump matter flung out of the solar nebula 4.56 or so billion years ago through a hot molten bulb that cools. In the same context, Callaghan (2021) postulated that, incoming asteroids delivered water and allowed earth to become the habitable world we see today. However, this

water source does not match that of the earth. According to Danladi, (2019) prior to 20<sup>th</sup> century, people made use of sources of water like well, dams, rainfall/rainwater and rivers. The British conquest of Kano state that brought indirect colonial rule ushered in water provision via pipe borne water supply which kicked off for the first time in Lagos at about 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Kano for instance, it started in 1924, commissioned in 1931. People were afraid of using pipe borne water in order not to lose their faith as they believed. In order to compel people to make use of the water, the other sources of water supply such as wells were destroyed. Incidentally, pipe borne water became an acceptable source of water for use which eventually was praised with songs of joy. Consequently, water became polluted and hazardous to human health through chemical waters from the factories dumped into water, pesticides applied to farmlands and it enters the surface water and ground water often in large quantities, leakages from underground pipes and tanks which are difficult to clear. This is in agreement with the view of (Denchak, 2018) who submits that, 80% of the worlds waste water is dumped mainly untreated into the environment which pollutes rivers, lakes, and oceans hence make water hazardous to human health to the extent of killing human beings. It became worrisome that on yearly basis, about 1.8 million people get ill as a result of unclean water. It was on account of this that the sustainable development goal “6” out of the 17 was introduced through the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. This was because water scarcity, poor water quality and inadequate sanitation affect food security, nutrition, educational and economic opportunities for poor families across the world.

### **Theoretical Framework of Analysis**

The study adopted feminist theory. It postulates that, women should be given a voice and ways highlighted to better their lives and if both sexes have the power of reason then liberty should apply to women, (Matthew-Richard 2017). The chief proponents of the theory are Mary Wollstonecraft (1794), Laura Cereta 15<sup>th</sup> century, Sojourner Truth (1851) who submits that women have limited rights due to men’s flawed perception of women, (Brunell & Burkett, 2020).

**Tenets of the Theory to the Study:** Feminist theory has the following tenets:

- 1) It analyses and request for gender equality.
- 2) It recognises and reflects on the emotional live of women.
- 3) Explored the production of knowledge from a woman’s perspective.
- 4) To liberate a woman’s perspective from the discourse of a man’s ideologies.
- 5) Our language is so masculine in nature and does not reflect women’s experiences.
- 6) It expands the choice of human to develop interest and choice.

### **Application of the Theory to the Study**

Feminist theory is relevant to the study because it has been lauded as the most influential in the study of gender issues. It enables the discovery of how people interact within a system and proffer solutions to end oppressive systems and structures. In other words, it centers on disruption of oppressive nature meted out on human beings irrespective of gender, (Arinder, (n.d). There was a feeling that the task of fetching water for home use is performed more by women. Thus the cry of unequal gender considered the weight of the burden as being heavy on women contrary to the target set by sustainable development goal to provide access to

sustainable water, basic sanitation and hygiene in order to redress the challenges among the vulnerable groups, those in low and middle income countries. Thus, the knowledge of feminist theory was used to safeguard women by protecting their gender rights against violence from men at homes in order to ensure that their rights are not impinged upon. To pull out of these challenges, women and men should be treated equally without operation. The affected women, who lost the opportunity of earning a decent living, pregnant women who were affected and women subjected to waterborne diseases should be a priority for the nation in order to redress the challenges among the vulnerable groups, those in low and middle income countries.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The paper employed qualitative method both in data collection and analysis. The study adopted an aggregate of secondary sources. Notably, information was gleaned from journals, textbooks, newspapers, web pages and government publications. Meanwhile the data collected for the study were analysed through historical and interpretative methods. The phenomenon took place naturally, has dependent and independent variables but the independent variable was not practical to manipulation by the investigator.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. The extent to which water collection as a task has affected pregnant women towards driving a sustainable future for humanity in Nigeria**

In as much as pregnant women and their babies require water for healthy living, collecting and carrying water is physically demanding while pregnant. For a pregnant woman to carry about 25 litres of jerry can for several miles from the point of water collection to her destination or home could cause difficulties and other reproductive consequences such as uterine relapsed. They experience pains in multiple areas of their bodies such as hands, upper neck, chest, abdomen and feet. If the pain is allowed to persist, it could metamorphose into long term disabilities and muscular skeletal diseases. They as well sacrifice their needs for their children and their partner including water needs if it is in limited supply, (Borga & Grabinsky, 2020). In the same vein, carrying heavy loads on the head causes pains and discomfort on the upper back and hands even headaches. There is also the risk of developing a spinal cord pain or back pains. This pain accumulates over time depending on the size of the family and volume of work. Even at the end of water collections without pains, the women are usually exhausted coupled with other domestic tasks awaiting them at home (Halley, 2016).

Furthermore, carrying water in extreme heat under the sun leads to dehydration or sunstroke due to high temperature. While fetching water, the women carry their babies on their backs and the problems are replicated on these children. More so, staying awake at night to ensure collection of water for house use would translate to limited hours of sleep for the pregnant women. It would as well cut into the time apportioned for other household and family tasks hence translates to staying up at night to keep up. Furthermore, consumption of unsafe water is dangerous to the mother and child because women who lack safe water end up suffering from water related diseases associated with low birth weight and slow child growth including hookworm infection, (Plumb, 2013). In concurring with the above summation, Maternal Health Task Force (2011) avers that, pregnant women who walk or bath in a contaminated

water stand a chance of contracting preventable hookworm related anaemia. This could expose them to the risk of death during pregnancy and at the same time deliver low birth weight babies who could as well die.

Fetching water reduces the uptake of antenatal care and increased the chances of leaving a child at home alone for more than one hour. Even when they take the child or children along, they go through unsafe routes as a result of environmental conditions, hazardous traffic and interpersonal violence. In other words, a child would be left at home without supervision within the period the mum goes to collect water. These kids would suffer reduced parental care especially when the baby is sick, (Ives & Psych, 2019). It shows that spending so much time to collect water by women subjects their kids to numerous challenges such as lack of supervision and suffering from the adverse effect of the environment etc.

## **2. The extent to which water collection as a task has subjected women to water borne diseases towards driving a sustainable future for humanity in Nigeria**

Surprisingly, these women lack the knowledge that the water they collected are mostly unsafe for use because about 80% of all the human diseases in human beings are caused by water. As a result of that, women who collect water for their families expose themselves to serious health puzzles and end up contracting water borne diseases from the contaminated water. Even when water cannot be gotten at home, collecting water from any source whether safe or unsafe in a storage container increases the chances of contamination. This is because there is no certainty about the cleanness of the jerry can with which the water is being fetched by women. The contamination could translate to diseases and even death with particular reference to kids under age five (Farley, 2018). Again, travelling miles to fetch water for their families which perhaps could be contaminated subject women and their children to likely death as a result of water related diseases (Hacey, 2019). In other words if necessary precautions are not taken by women in the course of fetching water, it could result to diseases and possibly death.

When these women and their children drink the contaminated water they have fetched for family use, they develop diarrhoea which is a killer disease that makes someone to lose water and essential body fluids and minerals thus the body is weakened. If allowed to persist could cause someone to defecate rice water stools and vomiting, dry mucous membranes, muscular cramps, thirst, loss of skin elasticity and low blood pressure. They also get infected with typhoid and paratyphoid fever. This is transmitted when ingesting food or drink manipulated by infected persons or after drinking water contaminated by faeces, waste water containing bacteria. In the same direction, the contaminated water could carry viruses such as hepatitis A and B bacteria like E. coli transmitted via hand to hand like there are dysentery, polio and meningitis. Even using the same water for bathing could cause skin and eye diseases such as trachoma which could cause blindness, (Narayana, 2019). It became alarming that, about 3.4 million people of which Nigeria constitutes a significant percentage are estimated to die annually as predicted by World Health Organization because of water borne diseases tied to unsafe water and inadequate sanitation, (Vanguard, 2017). It points to the fact that, part of the water collected by these women for use are contaminated therefore they are not in any way excluded from the projected death. Women often stay at home to care for the kids. So they stand a risk of being infected with diseases due to pathogens because of their exposure to waste water. Since women have less physical capacity to carry heavy water than men. It makes their body metabolism to go through pressure on the skeletal system which leads to

arthritis. Again, they are at risk of being sexually molested in the cause of going through a long distance to get water.

In the same perspective, Nigeria recorded 2,141 deaths as a result of cholera in twenty three states and federal capital territory (FCT) as of September 2021, (Agency Report, 2021). This is traceable to contaminated water. Furthermore, the collected water used for drinking and domestic chores increased the risk of diarrhoea infection particularly if the water is contaminated. This contributed to the death of more than 70,000 under five Nigerian children on a yearly basis, (Okeke, 2019). The rapid spread of diseases among women is an indication that fetching and using contaminated water by women is a bogus burden that has to be stopped.

In consonance with the above view, fetching and drinking contaminated water by women has contributed immensely to high level of diarrhoea related death. Statistics revealed that, about 57 million people in 2015 did not have access to improved source of water. In the light of this, over half of death associated with kids below five years was traceable to diarrhea, malaria and pneumonia, (UNICEF, n.d.).

### **3. The extent to which water collection as a task has denied women the opportunity of earning a decent living towards driving a sustainable future for humanity in Nigeria**

Essentially, women make up about half of Nigeria population and its workforce. Yet the work they do, the condition under which they work and their access to opportunities for advancement at work and other areas of life differs from that of men. To assure the accuracy of the above submission, UNICEF, (2016) held that, the task of women fetching water for their families, shortened the time available to spend at work, with their children, on childcare and other household tasks. In addition, several women forgo or curtail employment because of family responsibilities. Thus, they could not unleash a strong force for innovation, productivity, and economic growth. Besides, they lacked control over household resources because they had no income opportunities at their disposal. Similarly, investment in their children's health and education which women are known for was denied. As a result of this, they were undeveloped; their growth was reduced now and for the future. Even they could not have control over their lives and those of their kids. They could not foster investment in skills, health of children because of lack of employment. They were ravaged by poverty that made them unable to have a strong say or control in their destinies, (Silva, 2016).

According to statistics, the living condition of half of the female citizens as at 2020 was generally bad. Again, 26.6% of women were very bad while 21.4% was fairly bad. In simple terms, the living condition of women was discouraging, (Statistica Research Department, 2022). In the same vein, there are twice many women below poverty line than men and up to 19 times as many men in executive positions. This is because of women's subordinate role such as fetching water to their male counterparts, (Akinyemi, 2021). Stretching further on that, most women who fetch water at homes do not have any major source of income which means they live totally on single source of income from their husbands. As a result of that, they are at risk of poverty that could translate to hard financial times, longer stretches of work before retirement and absolute financial failure, (Adebambo, 2019).

## Conclusion

From the preceding, women who performed the task of fetching water for household use increased drastically and constituted great challenges to them despite the target set by sustainable development goal to provide access to sustainable water, basic sanitation and hygiene in order to cushion the impacts of water collection among the vulnerable groups, those in low and middle income countries, women whose psychosocial well-being are threatened, and women shortened the time available to spend at work, with their children, on childcare and other household tasks. Findings from the study revealed that, it was a significant burden on women to fetch water while pregnant. Secondly, most of the women and their kids contracted water borne diseases from fetching water. Finally, the task of fetching water could not give them the needed opportunity to have a decent living. The sum of the above was a challenging puzzle to the lives of women in general.

## Recommendations

The paper recommends based on the findings as follows:

- 1) The federal government should make a legislation restricting pregnant women from fetching water when the need arises until they deliver. To achieve this, it has to be a collective effort of both the federal government and the federal ministry of health to sign into law the dangers associated with pregnant women fetching water. Defaulter will be liable to six months detention.
- 2) In order to curb water borne diseases, the federal government should make adequate provision for sustainable safe drinking water as contained in the sustainable development goal “6”. To achieve this, there should be adequate supply of safe water supply to all the areas in Nigeria, must be made available regularly by ensuring residual chlorine of about 0.5 to 1ppm with zero bacterial count at all consumers points and monitored.
- 3) To earn a decent living, women empowerment is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). There should be training in skills and education necessary to enable them have a decent living. To achieve this, governmental legislation should encourage this both in words and in action in order to reduce their vulnerability, dependence in all areas of life and boost women’s economic activities.

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