



# The Tripod of Women's Role in National Development

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## ABSTRACT

It is axiomatic to posit that there is a linkage between women and national development. This interaction is not only symbiotically connected; but, one depends on the other for its sustenance. Therefore, the role of women on national development cannot be over emphasised. The wheel of development of any country lies on the shoulder of how productive and creative the female populations are. The women in any society are the engine of growth and development; because, they provide the labour force for production of goods and service to take effect. Women have enormous responsibilities to God, man and society. This is the great tripped of women's role in national development. The complexities and challenges of modern society have compelled women to abandon the home front, a crucial component of the tripped, to join the men in fending for the family, thereby creating a vacuum in the home-front. The dilemma of women is how to strike a balance among the components of the great tripod. It is suggested that the best way to do this is to create institutions or agencies which can take-over the crucial role of women in the home-front. These institutions or agencies are nationally articulated and co-ordinated Nursery Schools and Day-care Centres, manned by well-trained Teachers and other professionals, and executing a programme of nationally approved socialization programme.

**Keywords:** Gender, Politics, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Marginalisation, National Development & Gender Policy.

## INTRODUCTION

There is an adage that says; ‘‘behind every successful man is a woman’’. Women have been regarded as fragile hence, be subordinate to the man. In the recent times we know that some women can play very important role for the betterment of the society more than their male counterpart. Their supposedly fragile nature has made them to have domineering influence over men on many occasions in the history of mankind. For instance during the pre-colonial era women played a very significant role in history for instance, in the ancient Zaria in the North, there were records of women who held titles and offices like the ‘Iya, Magajiya, and Mardanni’, before the 1804 jihad. These women titleholders held outstanding positions in the societies. Just as their male counterparts, they wielded power in the administration of their towns.

The modern city of Zaria was founded in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century by a woman called Queen Bakwa Turuku she had a daughter called Amina who later succeeded her as queen. Queen Amina of Zaria was a great and powerful warrior, she became famous because of her widespread conquests. She built high walls around Zaria in other to protect the city from invasion. She extended her influence to

Nupe, built many cities, and received tributes from many powerful Hausa leaders (Okonjo, 1975). The people of Kano and Kastina paid tributes to her. She turned Zaria into a very prominent commercial center. Yet again another vital role played by women in history in the early colonial era was the Aba Women's Riots also known as the Women's War, it was an insurrection in British Nigeria which occurred in November 1929. The revolt broke out when thousands of Igbo women from Umuahia and other places in eastern Nigeria travelled to the town of Oloko to protest against the warrant Chiefs because of the obnoxious taxes imposed on them by the colonial masters. The protest encompassed women from six ethnic groups (Ibibio, Andoni, Ogoni, Bonny, Opobo, and Igbo) it was organized and led by rural women of Owerri and Calabar province. Essentially, the riot was a response to the women's economic and political suppression during the colonial period in Nigeria, (Uchendu, 1993:37).

The one million naira question is not whether or not women should be involved in national development, but rather to what extent and at what levels should they be involved? At first sight, this question seems naive and overly simplistic. But on a more sober reflection, the import of the question appears as an albatross on the landscape of unimaginative thought.

Women, it must be admitted, have crucial role to play in any society – that of ensuring the perpetuation of the human race. Although, obviously men are crucial partners with the women in this noble enterprise, there is no gain saying the fact that women have more direct, more enduring, and more challenging responsibility in the entire process of societal regeneration.

It is, perhaps, in recognition of this very important role of women in the perpetuation and development of the human race that educationists have averred, “educate a man and you educate an individual, but educate a woman, you educate a nation”.

A woman does not only bring a child into this world, in partnership with a man, she outlays the man in this wonderful and sacred game by appropriating or monopolising a larger part of the socialization function, a vital process in the up-bringing of the child.

Needless to say, this role is both natural and social. The first face a child recognises is that of the mother. In the process of breast feeding, the child fixes its tender and innocent eyes on the mother's face, it not only recognized the face and appreciates it, somehow, along the line, and an organic link strewn with reciprocal love develops between the mother and the child. This is the natural and, if you like, the divine role of women in the process of human perpetuation.

The first language a child learns and speaks is that of the mother, hence the expression “Mother-tongue”. And invariably, the first word a child speaks is “mama” or words to that effect. From then on, other words that child learns and speaks are drawn from the mother's lexical reservoir. Infact, what the child later learns and knows about its society is derived from its (the child's) mother. This is the societal or social role of women in the process of societal perpetuation.

It is, therefore, clear, even if by an unkindness extension of the arguments above, that women have enormous responsibilities, first to God, then to man, and finally to society, in the entire process of human creation, socialisation and betterment. For want of a better expression, we shall refer to these tripartite functions as the great tripod of women's role in national development.

### **Contextualizing Women & National Development**

#### **Women:**

The word “Women” is a plural word, meaning more than one woman. It refers to two adult females, group of adult females and women group's organization. According to Hornby (2000:1372), a Woman is referred to as adult female human beings. Also, the Oxford Dictionary of current English sees Woman as an adult human female, the female sex, wife or girlfriend. But in this context, Women would refer to all the adult females in the society. It is usually used to refer to married females mostly mothers.

#### **National Development**

The term national development is a term that refers to a sustainable growth and development of a nation to a more desirable one. National development is people oriented and its success is evaluated in terms of the impact it has had in improving the lot of the masses. In defining the concept, the Third National Development plan of 1980 says;

True development must mean the development of man, the unfolding and realization of his creative potentials, enabling him to improve his material conditions of living through the use of resources available to him. It is a process by which man's personality is enhanced, and it is that enhanced personality creative, organized and disciplined-which is the moving force behind the socioeconomic transformation of any society (FGN, 1980).

According to Onabajo and M'Bayo (2009), says 'national development should be man oriented and not institution oriented, that is, individually in collectiveness and not individual. To Elugbe, (1994), 'national development refers among other things, to the growth of the nation in terms of unity, education, economic well-being and mass participation in government. In summary development entails the provisions of all the necessary materials and equipment that will guarantee that man in every society make a living and essence out of life.

Anaeto and Anaeto (2010) citing Todaro and Smith (2003), identified three objectives of development which are;

1. Increase availability and widen the distribution of basic life sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health and protection.
2. To raise levels of living in addition to higher incomes, the provision of more jobs, better education, and greater attention to cultural and human values, all of which will serve not only to enhance material well-being but also to generate greater individual and national self esteem and
3. To expand the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nation by freeing them from servitude and dependence, not only in relation to other people and nation states but also to the forces of ignorance and human misery.

Development is the socio-cultural, political, economic and the spiritual well being of a society. In a truly developed state there is assurance of good quality of life, exercise of all human rights, and freedom to participate in the democratic process. From the foregoing, development implies enhanced quality of life, equity and justice, as it takes into consideration the wellbeing, growth and advancement of individuals within the society.

### **Theoretical Perspective: Why Women are in Dilemma in National Development.**

Marginalisation is the most topical issue in Nigerian Polity in recent times. There have been claims and counter claims of marginalisation from ethnic groups, States, and geopolitical zones of the polity. Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo (2000) define marginalisation as the deliberate disempowerment of a group of people in the federation politically, economically, socially and militarily, by another group or groups, who during the relevant time frame wield power and control the allocation of materials and financial resources at the centre of the Federation. Therefore, it entails the apparent deliberate exclusion of any particular group (s) by another similar group or groups from either having access to and or taking due possession of common key positions and common resources, as manifested in the political, economic, military, educational, media and bureaucratic realms. (In order words, the five realms above could be seen as occupying commanding heights of any polity or society.) In essence, for a group to marginalise the other, that group must of necessity, have a functional apex control of combination of these commanding heights in the polity or society.

The issues of culture and religion are very serious in some societies. Some cultures still do not believe that women can be leaders while men are followers. Because of this, women who venture into politics are seen as cultural deviants. In other words, patriarchy is not only entrenched in the society, but is also elevated to the state of policy. Women are expected to subordinate themselves to men. This is what cost Mrs. Margaret Icheen her seat as the speaker of Benue State House of Assembly. The seat was made so hot for her that she eventually resigned. According to Boserup (1970), Kaufman Dorsey et al (1989), Imam (1990). Will's (1991), UN (1987) Nzomo (1994), among others have posited that the most significant barrier is the socio-cultural system of belief are myths, which informed the socialization process and the gendered education and training most men and women are exposed to from childhood.

According to Nzomo (1994), the sex-stereotypes and gender segregation in employment and allocation of roles in private and public life are fundamentally a product of the early socialization process, the indoctrination of the social environment. In this regard many women's hang-ups and

lack of confidence in their ability competently to execute public leadership roles arises from socialization for subordination. However, it is in the social-cultural context that women's secondary role is most evident and has the most important consequences for the participation of women in politics.

In the words of Osinulu,

The consideration of the Federal Republic of Nigeria clearly stipulates that no individual (man or woman) should be discriminated against in the exercise of his or her rights to certain basic necessities of life, citizenship, shelter, education, right to freedom of speech, etc. In practice however, discriminatory practices against the female gender abound in all facets of life. Women are discriminated against at the early stages of life. For instance, the arrival of a baby boy in the family is heralded with great pomp and bride by its parents, but not so with the baby girl. The girl child; in May part of the country is withdrawn from school to help on the farm or share in the household chores, while the boy child is allowed to continue his education uninterrupted. Even where girls do continue their education, the rate of attraction is much higher for girls than boys (1996:20).

These are other discriminatory practices in our socio-cultural environment have had the effect that the average Nigerian woman is timid, uneducated, lack leadership skills and is no match for her male counterpart. She has not been prepared for any leadership position of any sort. Women are expected to support men, not to be seen to be confronting them or demanding equality and thereby fostering hostility and antagonism:

There is no need for a woman to be liberated from man ... the Men own the government. There is a need for women to fully participate in government but we need some level of understanding. We (the NCWS) are not there to take away what they have but we Are there to assist them in doing whatever they do better (Pereira, 2003: 146)

In other words, this thesis posits that women's roles are secondary and are just an additional activity to their domestic roles. Imam et al (1985) and Parpart (1990) among others have documented the woes of the 'double day' that working career women have to bear, especially in Africa where support services are few, absent or even when they exist. Nzomo (1994) quoting Paepart (1990) notes that,

Given the existing gender division of labour, there are not easy solutions for a woman who wants to succeed in her career: most working women juggle harried schedules... having fewer children or becoming single, separated or divorced in order to reduce time spent on husband's care, delay and give up marriage or family and relationships (Nzomo, 1994:205).

A 1987 UN survey further notes that even in the rare occasions when a woman has fought her way into the top decision-making position, further barriers are often erected that contribute to disemboweling her and crowding her effectiveness in that position (UN, 1987:35).

Explaining the socio-cultural sex role thesis further, the 1987 UN study goes on to argue that because people rely on stereotypes to evaluate observed behaviour, there may be perceived conflict between the behaviour that the high position requires and the behaviour general expected of women. And because most leadership positions are filled by men who are used to relating to women as mother, sister daughter or secretary-assistant, many professional male managers may never have had male as a woman 'boss' as top executive. Moreover, due to the deep rooted traditional beliefs about the subordinate role of women in society, both men and women may find it difficult to accord the top female public decision maker the respect and cooperation she requires to be effective (Nzomo, 1994:205).

The second barrier to women's participation in public role and politics is the lack of access to adequate quality formal education thesis. This thesis posits that lack of adequate quality of formal education in itself acts as a major barrier to a woman's advancement to top decision-making level. And because of

lack of education, because of the customs in which they were brought up, the men who were in the position to write all the documents are the domineering factors that keep singing that a woman's place is at home. According to Osinulu, (1996:21-22):

The lack of education and expertise among the womenfolk in relation to the demands of political leadership is an impediment incidental to women's participation in politics. As a result of low educational and professional attainment, they are poorly equipped mentally to venture into the male dominated world of politics. As a result of her deficiency in the fields of education, professional ability and poor leadership skills, the Nigerian woman lacks self-confidence, courage and boldness required to aim for the highest post in political arena. The reasons that account for such that account for such a poor status are not farfetched; the literacy rate is lower for women (54%) than for men (31%) in many parts of the country, girls are withdrawn from schools for various reasons (child marriage, child labour, trading, etc), while for those who do enroll in schools, the rate of attrition is higher for girls than for boys.

In political terms therefore, individual resources which include education, personal income, age, marital status, number of children, and view of the spouse among others are significant determinants for the women's participation in politics.

Another factor, which is viewed important, is the political system, as it promotes or hinders women's political activity. For example, the party structure can impede participation of women. Information about politics can be disseminated through channels that men have more access to than women and the language of politics can be a decidedly male jargon, which appears foreign to women. Political ideology can reinforce traditional division of work by gender, with politics being linked to the activities of men rather than women (Haavio \manila, et al, 1985:48). As Agina-ude argues:

It is not known that any political party has any strategy for equal representation in its executive as required by the platform for action. So far, besides creating the post of the women leader, parties have not adopted any other system to increase the number of women holding party offices. Experience during the last general elections shows that some parties had unwritten policies against female aspirants. The cases of Chief (Mrs.) A.M Osomo and some others who won the party primaries but were supplanted with men that lost are illustrative. Even though the parties tried to hide the actual reasons for the injustice, they later admitted that the fear that the women would lose in the final elections was the real motive. Such fears might not have been unfounded as Nigerian electors are still largely biased against women (Agina-ude, 2003: 4-5).

In the words of Sarah Jibril "... how many women qualified to run for the senate? Out of four or five, but only one won, if the party had promoted women's course, more women would have won because they are not mediocre. It appears, in the two parties, men worked against women" (Ogunsola, 1996:77). In addition to the barrier discussed above, is the lack of adequate finance or amount of money. Politics an expensive business that requires huge sums of money, especially in Nigeria where the amount of money one has in his/her pockets goes a long way in determining one's electoral fortunes<sup>1</sup>. This thesis is that many women are poor, and even the wealthy ones may not be independently so. Hence, they may not be able to afford the enormous amount of money required to fund an electoral campaign (Wills, 1991:22). According to Nzomo (1994), the overall argument then being made in much of the literature of this subject is that socio-cultural, economic, political, organizational, legal and political factors are related to the level of participation of women in political and bureaucratic decision-making

positions. Duverger summarizes the constants to women's political participation appropriately as follows:

If the majority of women are little attracted to political careers, it is because everything tends to turn them away from the, if they allow politics to remain essentially a man's business, it is because everything is conducive to this belief tradition, family life, education, religion and literature. The small part played by women in politics merely reflects and results from the secondary place to which they are assigned by the custom and attitudes of our society and which their education and training tend to make them accept as the natural order of things (Duverger, 1975:129-130; Nzomo, 1994; 206).

### **The Tripod of women's role in National Development: A Thematic Discourse**

Now we can answer the question we posed at the beginning of this discussion. Women should be involved in national development at the three levels of the great tripod to the extent that such involvement does not detract from or displace any or all of the components of the great tripod. Consequently, the troublesome cleft of the dilemma of women in national development becomes how to strike a balance among the component parts of the great tripod. We shall discuss them in themes:

### **Procreation: The Wonderful and sacred role of women in God's plan for mankind**

Let us say, right from the onset, that any argument as to who, man or woman, plays a greater part in the process of procreation is neither here nor there. The point, and a vital one for that matter, is that it was only when Eve was created that God's command, "increase and multiply and fill the whole earth" became realizable.

Again, as a result of the sin of our first parents (Adam and Eve) man was doomed. The wonderful work of human salvation had to await the role of a special woman – Blessed Virgin Mary – the Mother of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, in accordance with God's promise during His rebuke of Satan: "..... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; she shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise her heel"

These Biblical accounts show, at least for the believers, that women occupy a special place in God's plan for human procreation and development.

Unfortunately, today following the "emancipation" of women, and the general and, sometimes, vague calls for women mobilization, women in certain parts of the world are now shirking this divine or natural responsibility imposed on them by God. Some women even go to the ridiculous extent of saying that this noble role of women debases womanhood. Others say that it disfigures them, and yet others maintain that it is an unnecessary encumbrance.

The members of the last two categories then proceed not to breast-feed, but to "Cow or goat-feed" their children, sometimes through the agency of "Nannies" and house-maids, thereby denying their children the opportunity of developing that organic link of reciprocal love between child and mother.

Without the benefit of this initial love and care, the child grows up estranged from both the mother and the father, and subsequently, society. The consequences of this initial neglect merge unwittingly with the second component of the great tripod-socialization.

### **Socialization: The Wonderful and Social Role of Women in Man's World of Struggles.**

Let me say right away that socialization as used here includes, but is by no means limited to, the process of transmitting the societal values, norms, mores and ways of society from one generation to another. It also involves the actual socialization or social interaction that goes on between man and woman in their endless quest to meet the challenges of their daily existence.

As the society becomes more and more complex, more and more competitive, and more and more challenges, the man, the head and bread winner of the family, is enmeshed in debilitating tension, consequent upon the imperatives of mere struggle for family survival.

Women play critical roles in the Nigerian's economy especially in rural communities where they are producers of food. They have the responsibility not only for food production but also for processing, fuel, water, health, childcare, sanitation, and the entire range of survival needs of the country. Women also participate in the commercial sector, and local enterprise to generate income to meet the needs of

their families. They are strong, resourceful but lacking in the opportunity to take full share in society and in development. In context of the Nigeria, Women constitute majority of the poor, the uneducated, the marginalized, ignorant, and diseased. They are the most affected by the pollution of communal ponds and rivers that supply drinking water. The health hazards from toxic waste and the pollution of drinking water are borne more by women and their children, while young girls have been lured and deceived to respond to the lust of thousands of oil workers. The result include rising incidence of female prostitution, teenage pregnancies and mothers, and broken homes. Women have also been victims of state security force harassment and repression. They have played active roles in the conflict between the oil producing communities and the State and oil companies and also intervened to mediate the conflict.

In this circumstance, the man needs a comforter, an understanding woman, to cushion the effects, and soothe the bruises and sores of the daily challenges.

The success of any man in this type of enterprise depends critically on the role of the woman in boosting his morale and gently urging him on. It is in this context that the saying "behind every successful man, there is a woman" becomes not only meaningful but revealing.

Again, as the society becomes more and more complex as a result of multiplicity of roles, and functions as well as over-expanding needs and expectations of the population, and the survival of the family becomes more and more uncertain as a result of the stiff competition, for scarce resources and opportunities, the man is drawn further away from the family, precisely because he has to grapple with these complexities and expectations. In the circumstance, the woman moves in swiftly to fill the vacuum. She now combines the role of the rather with that of the mother.

The entire function of socialization of the children devolves on her. She means the home either directly or indirectly through the agency of nannies and house-helpers. Depending then on her status, she cooks or supervises the cooking of food, organizes the children, cuddles them, plays with them, teaches them when she finds the time, and generally moulds their character. This is the vital role of women in man's world of struggle. They effectively man or "defend" the home-front.

Unfortunately, today, this role is seriously under jeopardy. Consequent upon the complexity of modern society, and responding to the challenges of ever-dwindling resources of the family, occasioned by the glaring inability of the man to adequately cater for the family, the woman has abandoned the home-front to join the man in the hot theatre of war of family survival. She now fights side by side with the man in an attempt to garner enough booty for the family. Is it any wonder then, which such women now want to change the slogan "beside every successful man there is a woman".

To be sure the problem is not that women have abandoned the home-front, but that they left it wide open without making an alternative arrangement for its protection and security. Certainly, the home-front cannot be effectively manned or protected by the aged and illiterate nannies, and the immature and restless housemaids.

Even the television and video sets are no adequate substitutes for motherly care and concern. Moreover, the programmes and pictures which the children are exposed to in the absence of their parents are likely to cause more harm than good in the impressionist minds of the children.

In the end, the vacuum created at the home-front by the exit of women in search of bread, remains pathetically unfilled. And this places a serious question mark on the role of women in the third component of the great tripod-economic activities.

### **Economic Activities: The Inevitable Role of Women in Society**

For want of a better expression, we use "Economic Activities" to describe all the contributions of women in the productive, extractive, and service sectors of the society which lead ultimately to development. Development as used here approximates the lexical meaning of the word-to grow larger, fuller or more organised. For our purposes here, development is the bringing to fruition the procreation and socialization activities, thereby leading to the emergence of a whole man capable of functioning effectively in a vastly improved, well-ordered and humane society. It is the culmination of the procreation and socialization activities resulting in a better society.

In a way a parallel can be drawn between the role of women in building and maintaining the organic equilibrium of the society, through their subtle, gentle, and sometimes, pervasive influence over their men and children, on the one hand, and the magnetic pull of the queen bee which organizes the bees

and dictates their daily busy activities, on the other. Remove the queen bee, and the entire edifice or community of bees is irretrievably destroyed. In much the same way, remove the women the entire human community is annihilated.

Women are the objects as well as the subjects of all human activities. This central and crucial role of women in activating, dictating and sustaining all human activities has been variously discussed in many theories of human behaviour bordering on eros, sex and other gender-related terms. Although some of these theories approach the subject from very narrow perspectives which tend to explain man's behaviour as a response to sexual urge, they never-the-less highlight the unassailable position of women in all human endeavours.

Unfortunately, today, this wonderful role of women is in serious danger of displacement. Having abandoned the home-front, women now find themselves in the man's world of stiff competition for mere survival. Faced with challenges, and anxious to transcend them, woman are compelled to exploit their potentials, both natural and social. And being generally acknowledged as the fairer sex, women flaunt their natural wealth-fairer body to secure advantages. They also activate their social potentials in a bid to manipulate and control men for their personal advantages.

It is said that nothing destroys more than success. In their euphoria of apparent success over men, women now want to take over men's role in society. They now move into games, occupations and professions hitherto considered exclusively men's, such as boxing, marine engineering, space exploration, and even taxi-driving. "In the process of pursuing this ambition, which manifests itself in the current saying that what a man can do, a woman can do even better". Women turn their backs to their tripartite roles to God, to man and to society. This is the dilemma of woman's role in national development. What then is to be done?

### **Towards a Strategy of Balance among the Tripartite Roles of Women**

The way out of this dilemma is to develop a strategy of balance among the tripartite roles of women. For effectiveness, this strategy must recognize the forces which have compelled women to abandon the home-front. Ordinarily, women would have loved to remain behind and man the home-front. But the complexities of modern society, the ever increasing challenges and pressures on their men, and their natural sense of love, care and sympathy, have conspired to force the women into the man's world. Having gone into that world, it is now difficult to bring them back home without serious disruptions to societal peace and equilibrium.

The urgent task is no longer how to bring them back to the home-front, but rather how to fortify the home-front in their absence so that the vacuum they left behind can be effectively filled. In other words, what is needed is an agency or institution that can perform the crucial functions of women in the home-front.

It is, therefore, suggested that there should be a nationally articulated and co-ordinated policy of Nursery Schools and Day-care Centres. These institutions should be located in strategic places for the benefit of all working mothers.

Once established, these institutions should be manned by well-trained Teachers and Professionals. The curricula of study should be nationally developed, and should embody the approved national values couched in stories and anecdotes. They may even contain in the fashion of plate's Republic, certain values such as heroism, patriotism and dedication to duty to the young ones.

In this noble enterprise, the role of television and video sets should be closely controlled. What is shown to the children should be approved, to avoid polluting the young minds of our children with foreign cultural traits. In this way the home-front could be taken care of, and the women could devote their time to the newly acquired professions and be saved the agony of being torn apart by conflicting role demands.

### **CONCLUSION**

The cultural beliefs that the education of a woman ends in the kitchen, makes it almost impossible for males to see the immense contributions of women groups to national development. For example, through picture books, girls are taught to have low aspirations because there are few opportunities available to them. It is believed that men's work is outside the home and women's work is inside the home. It has always been the ideological perception in Africa that the women folk should be seen



more often at home washing, cooking, cleaning, going to the market and taking care of babies. This has over the centuries been the core African tradition on the path of women which has thereby reduced the potential values of women and what they could give positively to the society for change, of which is a true assertion that women could bring positive change in the society at large.

The dilemma of women is how to strike a balance among the components of the great tripod. It is suggested that the best way to do this is to create institutions or agencies which can take-over the crucial role of women in the home-front. These institutions or agencies are nationally articulated and co-ordinated Nursery Schools and Day-care Centres, manned by well-trained Teachers and other professionals, and executing a programme of nationally approved socialization programme.

This study also recommends collaboration and coordination among key institutions to provide the research, training, mentoring and education needed to nurture and promote women's leadership in their chosen areas of influence. Some of the needed traits to achieve these included determination to make a difference, the ambition to lead others, the drive to serve others, and a commitment to the hard work required to realise their goals.

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