

ASSESSMENT OF WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AS A PANACEA FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN YAKURR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

By

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Abstract

Many critique have raised the question why there is a wide gap between women and men participation in economic development and social change in our society. It is on this backdrop that this paper wishes to critically assess women economic empowerment as a panacea for social change. However, seven major communities were selected for this research and information such as the conditions of women as compared to men in the various aspect of life were captured in the questionnaire using stratified sampling technique. Findings show that women have the desire for better income and are ready to engage in meaningful and gainful activities that would enhanced their economic empowerment as evidenced in the tested hypothesis one with a calculated value of 32.2 greater than 5.66 critical value. This result was also confirmed in hypothesis two which shows that there was a relationship that exist between women co-operative ability and the desire for social change in the area. However, the results have shown that women economic empowerment can serve as a catalyst for social change inYakurr Local Government Area.

Key Words: Women empowerment, social change, catalyst, economic development, society.

Introduction

The concepts of women empowerment and gender analysis cannot be linked to sustainable development without focusing on female participation in the informal labour sector. In this regard, the least few decades have seen a steady flow of women entering the labour market throughout the world. While overall female activity rates differ from one region to another and within a given region, the level of female activity has risen significantly (ILO, 1980). Historical evidence indicate that African women's participate in economic life was deeply rooted everywhere on the continent. Women in African however, have engaged in economic and political activities for a long time. Their increased agitation for empowerment in a lot of spheres, stem from the desire to break loose from Moribund traditional convictions (Buvenic, 1983). Today, the increasing migration of men to urban areas, rural villages are populated increasingly by women who are solely engage in informal labour activities base on the fact that they have no qualifications to work in the structured formal sector.

Undoubtedly, the nature and priorities of women's empowerment processes are shaped by historical, political social, economic and male dominated or patriarchal conditions. The concept of women empowerment appears to be an outcome of several critiques, debates and discourses generated by women's movement throughout the world and particularly the third world (Buhler, 2001). The full participation and partnership of both women and men is required in productive life including shared responsibilities for the care and maintenance of children and the household. It is quite surprising that not until recently women are facing threats to their lives, health and well-being as a result of over burdened with work and their lack of power and influence. This situation has caused women not to make meaningful contribution to social change in our traditional societies especially in developing countries. This scenario is applicable to Cross River State were only a few women who can not contribute to social change in the society are economically empowered.

Beside, in Yakurr local government area of Cross River State, women are caught to fall in the poverty trap due to inadequate education, unemployment, hunger, negatively skewed patterns of access to land and other productive assets, huge labour burden, cultural norms and powerlessness which have affected their contributions to social change in the area. It is at this background that this work seek to evaluate the rate at which women economic empowerment can lead to social change with specific reference to women's co-operative ability and the desire for social change and women's desire for better income and engagement in gainful activity.

Methodology

This study was conducted in Yakurr local government area of Cross River State. Information such as the nature and extent of empowerment and participation of women as compared to men in various aspects of life including, housing, services, income, education, child rearing, decision

making, use of time and other related parameters were also statistically estimated for the whole of Yakurr local government area. A total sample population of 500 (five hundred) respondents were used. The communities sampled were Ugep, Agoi, Asiga, Idomi, Ekori, Nko and Mkpani. Two hypotheses were tested in this work which include to assess if or not there is a significant relationship between women's desire for better income and engagement in gainful activity and to evaluate if there is a strong relationship between the collective ability of women to work co-operatively and their desire to instigate social change. However, the data were analysed using chi-square (χ^2) at 0.05 level of significance.

Women and development approach

Concepts relating to women and development originated within the independence movement of the 1950s and 1960s. They have been influenced by development theory itself. The earliest development theory was "modernization". It contrasted traditional with "modern" societies, and consequently was called the dual economy theory. It made western industrialization "its prototype, trade not aid" was the favoured approach and economic growth that would trickle down to the poor was the promised outcome for developing countries after a certain, "take-off point" was reached (Snyder and Tadesse 1995 : 9). In the mid 1960s, modernization theory began to be challenged by 'underdevelopment' or neo-Marxist concepts. The most important of these was the dependency theory, whose major thesis was that global capitalism operated to "underdevelop the Third World". Developing countries called for new international economic order that would release them from dependency. Rather than work towards a new global economic order, however, the reaction of the international community to the negative impacts of modernization on the poorest people of the world was to stress basic needs. Minimum family requirements for consumption and essential community services were the less opportunities. It is expected that women with high co-operative ability will exhibit a great opportunity for social change.

The economic crisis of the 1980s gradually fostered a new consensus, that the crisis came from giving governments too much power and from constraining market mechanisms. Privatization, deregulation and retrenchment of the public sector became popular prescriptions for developing countries. These policies were packaged in economic "structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), and they constituted conditions for loans and debt (Structuring by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. The conventional wisdom had returned to pre-world war two values - survival of the fittest. The plight of the less fit became an international issue with a publication, which documented the frightening effects of adjustment programmes on the most vulnerable members of societies. The ill effects on women, who bore the brunt of education

and health cutbacks, began to be noticed (Cornea and Stewart, 1987 ; 44). These beliefs fed 'dependency reversal' theories, which held that the reasons for underdevelopment lie within developing countries, and that capitalism is the only reliable path to development and eventually to socialist revolution in the Third World, (Pronks 1990 : 11). They dealt a heavy blow to dependency theory through their belief that the dynamics of development 'are being modelled by Third World states themselves rather than by international economic factors only', (Kohl, 1986 : 15). With responsibility for development laid at the doorstep of developing countries, their participation in the highly competitive free markets" of the global economy became the new popular prescription for progress, (Sklair, 1991 : 35).

The women and development approach has some basic assumptions which are outlined below, these are:

- i) Development means to bring about sustained improvement in the well being of the individual and to bestow benefits on all.
- ii) Because women comprise more than half of the world's human resources and are central to the economic as well as to the social the being of societies, development goals cannot be fully reached without their participation.
- iii) Women and development is thus a holistic concept wherein the goal of one cannot be achieved without the success of the other.
- iv) Women therefore, must have "both the legal right and access to existing means for the improvement of oneself and of society".

There is now, widespread agreement about the fact that women are all but excluded from access to and control over local, national and international resources and about the harm to human well being that results. There is less agreement amongst theorists about the approaches that should be taken to resolve that problem. As these concepts evolved, however, they have had a profound effect and impact on feminist theory. However, even though researched been carry out with respect to women empowerment none has devoted interest in the important of women entomic in the backdrop of this work paper.

Findings

The socio-economic characteristics of the people

The socio-economic characteristics of the people presented in table 1 shows that out of 500 sampled population, 70 are in the age range of 15 - 19 years, 74 are in the range of 20 - 24 years, 100 fall within 25 - 29 years, 78 are between 30 – 34 years, 85 are in the range of 35 - 39 years, 62 respondents fall into the range of 40 - 44 years while 31 are in the range of 45 years and above. The dominant age group is between 25 - 29 years, followed by the age groups between 20 - 24 years.

This representation for the age groups confirms the fact that there are no easy openings for young people to migrate to cities for formal employment, so young women in rural areas take the easier route of informal employment. The low representation of women from the age of 40 years and above may be due to women's roles as local farmers, mothers and housewives rendering them far less flexible and immobile, unable to generate needed income having established themselves and their families in their little niches. The marital status of the people presented in table 1 shows that 245 are married. Out of these, 80 are single, 105 are separated, 60 are divorced and 10 are widowed. The level of education attainment of the people presented in table 1 shows that out of sample population of 500, 25 are of no known educational level, 84 are primary school leavers, 291 are of secondary school level, university level has 20 persons while other (vocational level) are 80. This result shows that 58.2% of the sampled population had attend a secondary education while 4% of the people attained only university education. Nevertheless, out of the 500 sampled population, 125 respondents are engaged in hair dressing, 75 are engaged in tailoring, 70 are stall holders, 1000 are food vendors, 105 are engaged in goods hawking, while 25 respondents undertake small scale manufacturing. This information indicate that majority of the sampled population were engaged in hair dressing and food hawking with values of 25% and 21% respectively.

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

Age range	No. of respondents	Percentage
15- 19 years	70	14.0
20 - 24 years	74	14.8
25 - 29 years	100	20.0
30 - 34 years	78	15.6
35 - 39 years	85	17.0
40 - 44 years	62	12.4
45 and above	31	6.2
TOTAL	500	100
Marital status	No. of respondents	Percentage
Married	245	49.0
Single	80	16.0
Separated	105	21.0
Divorced	60	12.0
Widowed	10	2.0
TOTAL	500	100
Educational levels	No. of respondents	Percentage

No education	25	5.0
Primary	84	16.8
Secondary	291	58.2
University	20	4.0
Others (vocational)	80	16.0
TOTAL	500	100
Type of occupation	No. of respondents	Percentage
Hair dressing	125	25.0
Tailoring	75	15.0
Stall holding	70	14.0
Food vending	100	20.0
Goods hawking	105	21.0
Small scale manufacturing	25	5.0
TOTAL	500	100

Source: Field survey, 2012

Result Analysis

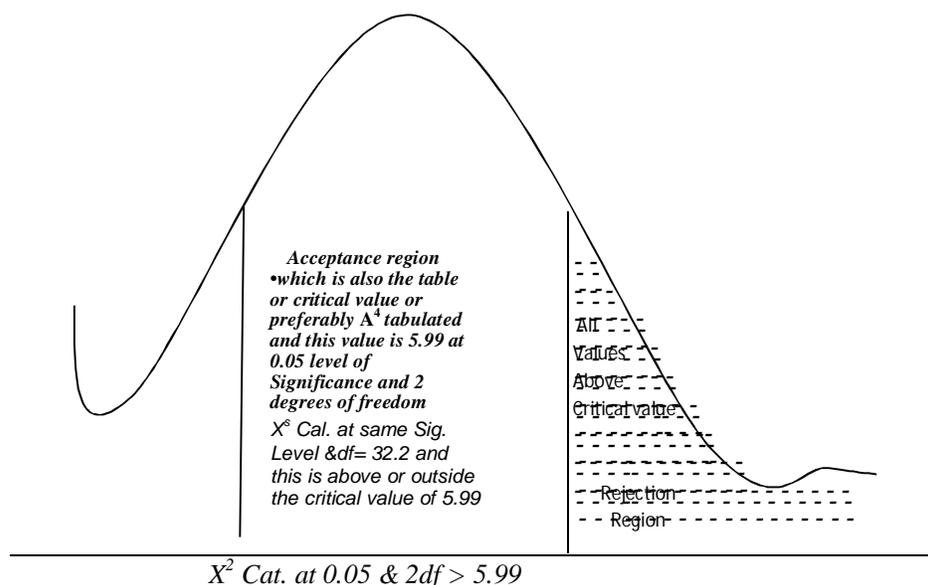
The result of the hypotheses which states that there is no significant relationship between women desire for better income and engagement in gainful activity indicate that a calculated X^2 value of 32.2 was found to be greater than table value of 5.99 at 2 degrees of freedom. Looking at the type/nature of non-formal occupation/work, carried out by women, these include trading, hair dressing, food vending (selling), seamstress and others. With the employment in these occupations, the highest income bracket was 36 percent (10,000 - 19,000) followed by 33.6 percent in the non-formal sector. With the current work done, place of work, days of work, income and other variables, the present work and income level with outstanding economic demands are highlighted. However, this result is an indicator that there is a significant relationship between women desire for better income and engagement in gainful activities. This result shows that the Yakurr women are ready to be involved in meaning opportunities that would enhance their economic well-being hence helping them to also contribute meaningfully to social change of their society.

Table 2: Observed relationship between women's desire for better income and engagement in gainful activity

LEVELS OF DESIRE	ENGAGEMENT IN GAINFUL ACTIVITY			ROW TOTAL	X ² CALCULATED	DEGREES OF FREEDOM	X ² TABULATED
	EMPLOYED	SELF-EMPLOYED	NOT WORKING				
High	46	182	70	298	32.2	2	5.99
Low	32	76	94	202			
Column	78	258	164	500			

Source: Data analysis, 2012

FIG. 1: Construction of critical value on women's desire for better income and engagement in gainful activity.



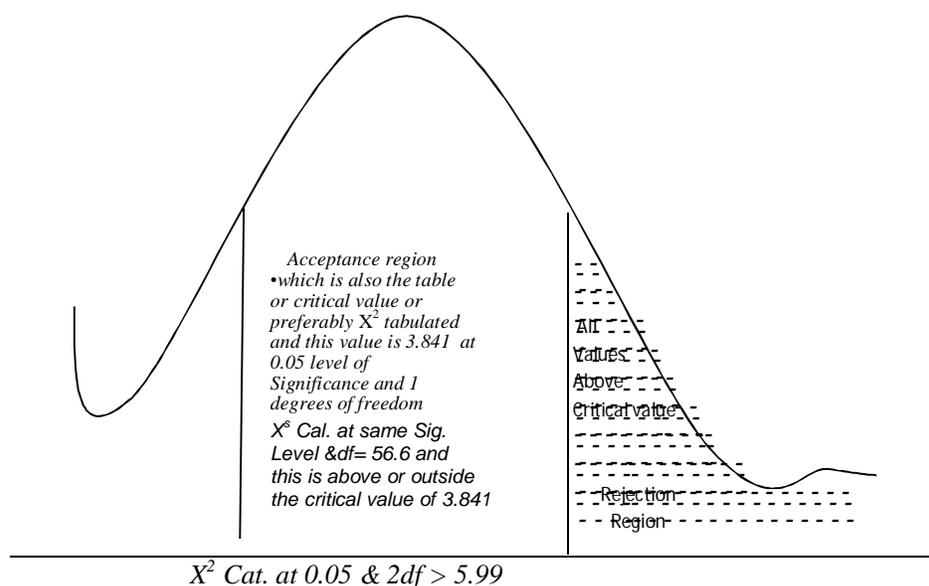
However, the hypothesis two which intend to show if or not a strong relationship exist between the collective ability of women to work co-operatively, and their desire to instigate social change presented in table 3 shows that a greater calculated X^2 value of 56.6 at 0.05 level of significance was obtained as against 3.84 critical value which shows that a strong relationship exist between the collective ability of women to work co-operatively and their desire to instigate social change in the area.

Table 3: Women's co-operative ability and the desire for social change

Levels of co-operative ability	Opportunity for social change		Row total	X ² calculated	Degrees of freedom	X ² tabulated
	Great	Less				
High	168a	52b	220k	56.6	1	3.841
Low	120c	160d	280L			
Column total	288m	212n	500m			

Source: Data analysis, 2012

FIG.2: Construction of critical value on the relationship between women's cooperative ability and social change



Recommendations

The quest for women economic empowerment is of great concern to many scholars especially women in the rural communities whose livelihood are seriously condition by men and whose social and economic life have been affected by the political system in Nigeria. Therefore, the following recommendations are put forward as a strategy for women economic empowerment in Yakurr local government area.

- Effective reforms should be put in place to meet the challenges and outturn the barriers to women 's empowerment and participation in labour must start from the women themselves
- Policies should be created by government that guarantee equal access to education
- Policies should be put in place that would eradicate gender inequality
- Support should be ensured for affirmative action towards integrating women into the decision-making process and adaptation of policies along a gender perspective
- Women must have access to financial markets since the burden of home making childbearing limits women in the economic sector and confines most of them to the informal sector, women must therefore have access to soft loans and credit
- The government and private individual should provide enabling environment and encourage women to participate in formal education that would help to empower their economic ability in the society

Conclusion

The position of women in the family as mothers and housewives is often used as a justification for less pay compared to men who are deemed the breadwinners. This situation has not only discouraged women's participation in formal activities but it has affected their contribution to societal change and development in the society. However, the neglect of women in development planning has many deleterious effects, such as aggravating declines in food production and loss of income earning opportunities. However, it is important for various organizations to embark on one form of development projects in order to improve the social and financial well-being of women.

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