

CREATIVE AND FUNCTIONAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY IN NIGERIA: THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN A COMATOSE ECONOMY

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Abstract

Women empowerment is vital for the realization of economic survival and development as it creates an environment for women to make economic decisions in an economy as Nigeria is almost lifeless. The role of women if empowered will go a long way to improve the economy. However, the Nigerian women have been for so long excluded from economic empowerment while more emphasis is laid on men. This paper looks at the place of women in the traditional society, creative and functional women empowerment, the objectives of women empowered and its relevance to Nigerians economy. The paper also takes a look at the Programmes of the Wife of the president Mrs. Aisha Muhammadu Buhari towards women empowerment especially the “Future Assured”, challenges and prospects of women empowerment are discussed. The paper recommend among others that skills acquisition centres for women should be set up, public enlightenment campaign should be intensified on the benefits of empowering women and conclusion drawn.

Keywords: Empowerment, Entrepreneurship, Comatose, Creative, Economic

Women empowerment is very vital for the realization of a meaningful economic recovery in Nigeria today. Emen in Uzorka (2013) observed that empowerment enables women to identify their needs and to allocate and use family and public resources justly. Empowerment makes a woman more focused, she knows her area of strength and is not only able but also willing to reduce the burdens of the family which by extension improves the living standard of the society.

There is need for economic changes in Nigeria today and the role of women if empowered cannot be neglected. The gravity of poverty in the country especially at the grassroots level needs solutions to come from the immediate environment where women occupy and have opportunity to make impact.

Women Empowerment

Women empowerment is the process whereby women are made to realize and become conscious of their

inner power to express and defend their rights and gain greater self-confidence, self-identity, self-esteem and control over their own lives, personal and social relationships. Uzorka (2013) apart from being able to take decision on matters pertaining to their lives, empowered women gain access to means of production and economic resources generally.

Women empowerment is a way of equipping women with necessary skills, knowledge and ideas needed for proper functioning and participation which is beneficial to their lives and that of others around them. Women empowerment also means where an environment is created for women to make decisions about their lives which are profitable to them as well as for the society.

The Place of Women in Nigerian Traditional Society

Traditionally, the role of women was that of house wives and a mothers, however, because the society is dynamic, the need for changes in women's role has become vital, thus the need for women empowerment, (Fapohunda2010). In the Nigerian society, women are not usually considered in decision making.

In Nigeria it is estimated that women especially rural women provide 80% of the labour force in rural areas and 60% of food production. Though they are the main producers of cash of cash crops, the environment does not allow them to own their own wealth. Women do not take decision in the reproductive issues. For example most women cannot decide on

the number of children in the family, though they are the ones playing a big role in child rearing (FGN, 2001).

Lihamba (2003) observed that women play a critical role in maintaining equilibrium in the society by the upbringing of their children as responsible members of the community. A woman who is empowered will definitely do better even in children upbringing since it involves not only making moral decisions but also financial decisions. Nigeria women who are properly equipped can become motivating factors in the economy as they play the roles of mothers, workers and producers in the home and outside the home.

Creative and Functional Women Empowerment

Functional women empowerment is such that leads to increase and improvement of social, economic, political as well as legal strength of women to guarantee their rights and give them confidence to claim such rights.

Women empowerment should be guided by the following principles for maximum result.

- Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality
- Treat all women and men fairly at work
- Promote education, training and professional development for women
- Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men at work.
- Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women,

➤ Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality. (<http://www.unwomen.org/en/pa.>)

It is vital to mention that businesses and the private sector can be guided by women empowerment programmes on how to empower women in the workplace market place and community.

For women empowerment to become functional the following key factors must be put into consideration:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations.
- A sense of self-worth should be developed in women, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.
- Develop ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order.

Objectives of Women Empowerment

According to the African Union, the following are the objectives of women empowerment:

1. Fighting poverty and promoting economic empowerment of women and entrepreneurship. This can be achieved through;
 - ✓ Attaining decent work for women and equal opportunities in employment, promotion and movement towards parity at the workplace.
 - ✓ Create employment and services by supporting women entrepreneurs particularly in informal sectors including

small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs)

2. Agriculture and food security:

✓ Achieve food security and fight hunger

✓ Increased women access to agricultural loan, farm inputs, credit, technology, extension and access to water through water harvesting, boreholes, etc.

✓ Link women to markets through value addition of their products including agro-based supply chain creating new markets for their products including agricultural food stuffs.

3. Education, science and technology:

✓ Achieve parity in education at secondary and tertiary levels and achieve high retention rates for girls.

✓ Increase literacy levels of women through adult education

✓ contribution of women scientists and information communication technology (I.C.Ts)

4. Health, Maternal Mortality and HIV and AIDS

5. Peace and Security and Violence Against Women

Work with the African Union Peace and Security Department (PSD), the Peace and Security Council and the Panel of the wise in relation to United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888, and 1889 with particular focus on violence against women, peace building and reconstruction (Team Work, 2015).

Nigeria as a member of African Union stands the opportunity of developing her economy through women empowerment following the above

objectives which focused on the needs of women.

Relevance of Women Empowerment to Nigeria Economy

The importance of women empowerment cannot be over emphasized. For the fact that women in our society have been neglected and have suffered violence and domination among others in the hands of men, the following could be addressed by empowering women:

1. Under-employed and unemployed Women population constitutes about 50% of the world population. In Nigeria a large number of women are unemployed, where the women are suitable for certain jobs, men are preferred.

2. Women are talented – previously women were not allowed higher education like men and hence their talents were wasted, but now women can school to any level. You have women in leadership positions and this is why more Nigerian women should be equipped for economic impact.

3. All round development of the society.

When a woman is empowered, she transforms her children and the society at large.

4. Economic benefits – women empowerment is beneficial to both the individual and the society at large. Women's place is not just in the home but also out there in the larger society. Empowered women can become financially independent as they earn money for their family leading to the growth of the country's economy.

5. Poverty reduction – with the present economic situation in Nigeria, the men alone cannot cater for the family. Additional earnings by women can help bring the family out of poverty by providing for the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter and education.

Women Empowerment Programmes in Nigeria

Women empowerment is an important key to the nation's economic growth. Empowering women is viewed by her Excellency the wife of the president Mrs. Aisha Buhari as very critical to family sustenance. Family sustenance leads to the country's sustenance.

The wife of the president in her effort to equip Nigerian youth which include girls who are potential women, Launched Educational Programme for the youth which is a key component of "Future Assured" tagged youth Educational Empowerment Programme (YEPP) on 25 May, 2017. The programme is meant to intervene in the area of educational support to increase for the youth, the changes of entry into tertiary institutions of learning. YEPP organizes tutorial classes for WAEC, NECO, NABTEB and JAMB, and train youth to develop writing communication and public speaking skills.

The Humanitarian Pet project has trained 6000 in skills acquisition. The wife of the president lays emphasis on the need to empower parents to enable them meet financial obligations of their children. It will be wise for Nigerian leaders at all levels especially women in leadership position to get involved in these projects

Creative and Functional Women Empowerment for Economic Recovery in Nigeria: The Challenges and Prospects in a Comatose Economy - Philomena Member Solomon

to bring about a turnaround in our economy. Women need to be empowered.

The humanitarian pet project is another programme that is focused on changing the status of women. The project is meant to advocate for improved health and promotion of health status of the vulnerable and marginalized section of the Nigerian population, Nwabuhiogu (2016). Healthy women will make a healthy nation capable of exploring all resources for maximum benefits. Giving health and life will bring out their potentials for economic recovery.

Strategies for Women Empowering Women

For Nigeria to revive her economy through women empowerment, the following strategies could be applied or used:

1. Creation of job opportunities through skills acquisition programmes. Women should be trained in various skills and encouraged through loan to finance their enterprise to become self-reliant and self-employed.
2. Public awareness campaigns: Awareness should be created on the importance of education of any form as a tool for freedom from economic backwardness of women.
3. Mobilization exercise – Government and non-governmental organizations to mobilize human, material, financial and informational resources for the achievement of a better economy through women empowerment.

4. Standing policy any project towards women's right should be put in place and monitored.

5. Entrepreneurship Education: Entrepreneurship training should be given to women to become effective in business.

Challenges and Prospects of Women Empowerment in Nigeria

Singh and Belwa in Shukurana and Adamu (2017) reveals that lack of finance, lack of management competence-exposure, lack of markets and distribution network among others are some of the challenges of women empowerment.

Other challenges include:

- ✓ Ignorance – many women are not aware of government programmes put in place for their benefit. Apart from being unaware of government programmes, most women do not know who they are, what they carry and what they can do and this keeps them always at the bottom of life.
- ✓ Negative societal attitudes to women: Some Nigerian society place little or no value on women education, women are seen as baby machine, personal property of men and must be confined within the house. Such attitude hinder capacity building for women through empowerment.
- ✓ There is also religious influence on the rights of women, their potential and possessions to men does not encourage most women to seek decision about their lives. It keeps them dependent on the men. This does not encourage women empowerment.

✓ Lack of finance as revealed by Singh and Belmal in Shukurana and Adamu (2017) is a serious challenge. Finance is vital to any economic venture but most women do not have the financial power even after receiving training through women empowerment programme, the absence of takeoff capital makes them unable to stand on their feet. Nevertheless there is hope for the Nigeria economy through women empowerment if women will be supported with finance, encouraged to learn entrepreneurial skills, Nigeria economy will be a better place for investment. Nigeria is also blessed with a lot of natural resources which can create employment opportunities for women for example farming of any scale.

Ameli (2005) noted that personal fulfilment is the only true measure of success. Your fulfilment is tied to fulfilling your purpose. Life remains empty and void until you know the reason why you were created. Nigerian women need fulfilment of their life purpose and they should be supported.

Conclusion

Women empowerment is crucial to Nigeria's present economy situation. Women constitute a good percentage of the population and cannot be ignored. It is the responsibility of the government and non-governmental bodies to empower women as it is a key factor to Nigeria economic solution from the family level which is the basic unit of the society.

Women should desire to be equipped for economic independence and to contribute positively to their world.

Through women empowerment, sense of responsibility, self-worth and positive self-esteem would be developed in Nigeria women.

Recommendations

Fighting poverty through women empowerment can bring about transformation in the economy of Nigeria considering various efforts made to empower women and the challenges, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Women should be given their proper place in the home, society and nation at large as it will enable them define their self-interest and choices, it will also make them competent enough to offer their contribution for economic growth at all levels.
2. Financial support should be given towards women empowerment programmes and to women who desire a start off capital. This will make women empowerment attractive to more women for the betterment of the country.
3. Women who are educated should be given leadership positions at all levels of governments. They will identify and be more sensitive to the plight of other women. It will also create in women the willingness to take up responsibilities.
4. Public awareness should be created to eradicate ignorance from women, giving them the ability for high labour participation that will facilitate reduction in female discrimination at all levels of the society.

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