

Women Empowerment as A Catalyst for Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Adult Education as A Tool

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Abstract

Nigerian society allows men to dominate women with the belief that domestic roles in the society must be carried out by women. This often results into their marginalization and oppression but this has witnessed changes in the contemporary society through women empowerment. The study examined women empowerment and sustainable development among para-military officers wives association in Nigeria. The study answers research question that women empowerment has effect on sustainable development. Data used for this study were primary sources of data. The data were analyzed using frequency tables, percentages and correlational table. The study was conducted using some selected para-military officers wives association (Police Officers Wives Association [POWA] and Road Safety Officers Wives Association [ROSOWA]) in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study found out that women empowerment has positive effect in the society, women empowerment has positive effect on sustainable development and positive relationship exists between women empowerment and sustainable development. The study recommend that education should therefore be seen as a tool for empowering women because empowered women will contribute meaningfully to the development of their society.

INTRODUCTION

Nigerian traditional culture promotes domination of women by men, where women are saddled with domestic roles but contemporary society has witnessed changes in these roles. But despite these changes literature is replete with the fact that women are still being oppressed and marginalised. Open Stax College, Rice University Publication (2013), stated that in patriarchal societies, men's contributions are seen as more valuable than those of women. With this, women's viewpoints tend to be silenced or marginalised to the point of being discredited or considered invalid. This is why Ebirim, (2008) submit that there is no gain saying the fact that in most developed and developing countries including Nigeria women are being marginalised, vilified, dominated, discriminated against, exploited and excluded from participating in major public policy formulation and development programmes. In political arena, Ogbogu, (2012), assert that "Over the years, women in Nigeria have been relegated to the background and are circumscribed within the political arenas by structures, procedures and ideologies that favour men, as well as the existence of an invisible 'glass ceiling' that block their (women's) upward mobility and full participation".

The issue of women's marginalisation in Nigeria, can be attributed to cultural and religious affinity. According to Agbalajobi, (2010) who submitted that throughout recorded history in all parts of the world, women have been subjected to domination by men and this domination has been the result of persisting cultural stereotype, abuse of religious and traditional practices, patriarchal societal structures in economic, political and social power dominated by men and the role women have historically played as followers of male political leaders. She further stated that "this form of discrimination is not simply an African or Nigerian phenomenon but a global one".

Despite the unfriendly disposition of the society to women, the position of women in the society remains a very important one. Eme, Onyishi and Nwaoha (2014) affirms the relevance of women in Nigerian society where it was postulated that the place of women in Nigeria's socio political firmament has always been a strong one. In history, myths and legends across the country, noble roles have been ascribed to women in the past and they have served as agents of change, bringing positive verve to the tone of life in the society. They submitted the examples of women relevance and contributions to the society in the past; example includes Ife, Moremi Ajasoro that is a name that is revered till today because of the role she played in the liberation of her people. In the North, the legendary Queen Amina of Zazzau was a powerful force in the administration of the kingdom in the 15th and 16th centuries. Queen Idia of Bini Kingdom belongs to the same league like Moremi and Amina. In Modern Nigeria, among the names that denote the power of homes are the late Margaret Ekpo, late Gambo Sawaba, late Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, who fought tirelessly against the suppression and taxation of women in the North and Abeokuta.

In relation to their submission, Rhode, (2003) and Adesokan, (2016) submit that participation of women is vital to the success of sustainable development programmes because, they are powerful decision-making force, women are often well acquainted with the pros and cons of their communities and are always in a good position to analyse how best to improve their immediate society. Therefore, in designing any community development programme or project, women participation is highly germane to the sustainability of such programme or project.

The concept of sustainable development is not new in the contemporary Nigerian society. The term has witnessed series of discussions in literature. Sustainable development is an attempt to shape and secure a future. Nwaokugha (2006) viewed that sustainable development contemporarily, has become a password that cuts across all disciplines in today's knowledge industry. According to him, it is associated with "omnipotent capacities" of proffering solutions to all the problems of man and the society. In shaping and securing a future, women contributions cannot be over emphasized. Suffice to say that empowerment of women is relevant to the sustainability of any community development programme or project.

Empowerment is the encouragement and the development of skills for, self - sufficiency with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the group. It occurs through improvement of conditions, standards, events and on a global perspective of life. This process can be difficult to start and to implement effectively, but there are many examples of empowerment projects which have succeeded (<http://sughoshim/Empowerment.html>, 2010). The issue of women empowerment emerges as a result of marginalisation and discrimination against women all over the world. Though, Nigeria government has been responding to the clarion call for women empowerment through United Nations series of programmes, conferences and declarations that promotes gender equality, but the rhetoric question that needed to be raised is that is women empowerment capable of sustaining community development programme or project in Nigeria? It is on this basis that this study intends to examine the effect of women empowerment on sustainable development in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In the past, women have always been neglected and marginalised in the development process in the country because of dependency culture which include poverty level, low level of education, poor job opportunities as well as socio-cultural barriers among them most especially in Nigeria but contemporary Nigerian society has witnessed the development in their status; women have now being integrated into development process. Ifedili and Ifedili (2012), submitted that Nigerian women are stalled by culture, which made them, vulnerable to effectively join the workforce and contribute to economic and thus, national development.

This submission implies that some factors such as work hour restriction, and the type of job they are permitted to engage in among others may deprived them of the need to harness opportunities in being a completely productive members of the labour force. But on the other hands, these factors will not hinder them to contribute to their national development if they are fully mobilized and empowered. Though, researches have shown that Nigeria government has been responding to the clarion call for women empowerment through United Nations series of programmes, conferences and declarations that promotes gender equality, with this recent development, this study intends to examine the effect of women empowerment on sustainable development in Nigeria.

Objectives of study

1. To ascertain the effects of women empowerment in the society.
2. To examine the effect of women empowerment and sustainable development.
3. To determine the relationship between women empowerment and sustainable development.

Research questions

1. What are the effects of women empowerment in the society?
2. What are the effect of women empowerment and sustainable development?
3. Is there any relationship between women empowerment and sustainable development?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women Empowerment in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges

The concept of women empowerment is the development of the mental and physical capacity, power or skills in women, for them to operate meaningfully in their social milieu, thereby experiencing a more favourable level of social recognition and subsequently enhance their economic status (Akomolafe, 2006; Onah 2011). Women empowerment is the process through which women, who are currently most discriminated against, achieve gender equity (Mayoux, 2005). What one immediately notices from these definitions is that women empowerment has not been referred to as the extension of public appointments to undoubtedly highly qualified women.

Onah (1999:50) cites Vickers (1991), Egonwam (1991) and Okwuosa (1992) to highlight that women globally, are underprivileged, suppressed and underrepresented in positions of power and authority. Onah (2011:133) also cites Uchem (2001:12), Agbro (2005:57), Nwangwu and Ifeicho (2009:135), Agbasiere (2000:38 - 39) and Fayomi (2009:97), to argue that women in most cultures are accorded low status. They are marginalised in the society, including the Nigerian society they are bound to be backward compared to their

male counterparts.

Sri vastava, (2009) submit that women work longer hours than men but are usually paid less and are more likely to live in poverty. In subsistence economies, women spend much of the day performing tasks to maintain the household, such as carrying water and collecting fuel wood. In many countries, women are also responsible for agricultural production and selling. For women to break these barriers they need access to power over economic, social, psychological and cultural situations to enable them have knowledge to transform the world to their advantage. Knowledge gained, if put into profitable use, help in liberating people from the shackle of hunger, poverty and other vices that hinders ones proper existence.

According to Gusim (2012), the Nigerian woman has proved to be more than a mere bench - warming spectator even in the midst of the male - dominated congregation. Women have proved their strength and competence in all spheres even in male dominated professions and the rise of women to lead several professional male - dominated environments gives hope, as their achievement is a pointer to the capability of the Nigerian woman. Three of such male dominated professions, argues Gusim (2012); the Nigerian Medical Association, the Nigerian Bar Association and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria, have been led by female presidents. Hence, the steady advancement of women in contributing to the nation's socio - economic development and their progressive prominence in the national scheme of affairs have, to a large extent, impacted on the Federal Government and the Government has responded positively in many ways (Gusim, 2012). The subsequent creation of the National Commission for Women and a ministerial portfolio for Women Affairs provides additional avenues for the promotion of women - related issues and the enhancement of the role of women in national development by way of a statutory body and a Ministry (Gusim, 2012).

In an effort to attain liberation for women-folk Roseline, Arikpo and Justina (2006) advocate empowering women as a way of boosting their capacity to make choices and to transform the choices made into desired actions and outcomes. The issue of women and empowerment came into forefront during the United Nation decade for women (1976 - 1985). The observed marginalisation and discrimination against women all over the world compelled the United Nation to hold conferences, pronounce declarations and embark on programmes to redress the imbalances. The central theme of all the conferences has been the need to raise the status of women and bring them into the development process (Ike, 2006). Beijing Conference Reports indicate that empowerment of women must be viewed beyond mere participation in decision-making. It should lead to a process whereby women will perceive themselves as able to make decision (United Nation, 1995). Nigeria, as one of the participating nations in the Beijing Conference came up with a National Policy on Women in 1998, which articulated women plights and ways of addressing them. The Policy emphasises, that woman empowerment can best be achieved and sustained through enlightenment campaign, skill acquisition, functional literacy and numeracy.

Adult Education as an Empowering Tool in Nigeria

Adult education is a multi-disciplinary programme that covers very wide programmes that aimed at empowering people. Adult education according to (Onyenemezu and Okanezi, 2013) is regarded as the key to human development. It emphasizes all forms of functional education programmes for youths and adults outside the formal school system. Such education programmes include basic literacy programme, post literacy programme, continuing education programme, and vocational education programme (FRN Blue Print 2008).

More expressively, Greenough (1972) sees adult education as a process whereby persons who no longer attend school on a regular or full - time basis can pursue organised studies or to develop their knowledge and skills and so become equipped to perform roles in their societies in more or less creative or critical fashion so that they can be of greater use to themselves, their families and to the community. Adult education is the process whereby adults engage in systematic and sustained learning activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes or values. (Merriam, Sharau & Brockett, 2007).

Adult education, as an integral aspect of education is a learning process whether formal, informal and non-formal which the adult person engages in for better information, self and national development (Onyenemezu, 2012). Adult education emphasises all forms of functional education programmes for youths and adults outside the formal school system. These adult education programmes are geared towards human and national development. Onyenemezu (2012), submitted that adult education exerts enormous influence on the larger society in terms of national development.

The purpose of adult and non-formal education according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) in Onyenemezu (2012:4) includes:

- i. To provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or (dropouts)... These include the nomads, migrant families, the disable, and the disadvantaged gender.
- ii. To provide functional and remedial education for those who did not complete secondary education.
- iii. To provide education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to

improve their basic knowledge and skills.

iv. To provide in-service, on-the-job, vocational and professional trainings for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills, and

v. To give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural, and civic education for public enlightenment.

The above purposes of adult education are laudable and commendable. They are geared towards national development and securing a future. Adult and non-formal education emphasises all forms of functional programmes for youths and adults outside formal school system. Adult education as an aspect of national development encompasses; developing the human (adult) mind, knowledge, attitude, skills, behavioural pattern, physical and necessary ideas capable of solving human and societal problems in order to achieve sustainable national development. This is possible because adults are occupying the greater part of the production sector of the nation's economy. Obviously, no one or society can ignore the powers of education in transforming man and the society towards national development. This is why education is generally regarded as the back bone (bed rock) of any meaningful national development .

Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Sustainable development is an amalgam of two component words according to (Onyenemezu and Okanezi, 2013) "sustainable" and "development". The concept of sustainable development according to Kempe (1996), was brought into common usage by the World Commission on Environment and Development in its 1987 report. The report conceptualised sustainable development as human progress that meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Ugwu & Ijah 2011). This means conservation, reservation, usage and management of resources so that what we do to improve life and living standard today does not compromise future use of such resources and improvement in the quality of life for all the people (Oyebamiji & Adekola 2008)

The concept has become so popular and has attracted attention across disciplines and scholars of various dispositions. In the 1987, the United Nations (UN) released BruntLand Commission report which offered the most widely recognized definition of sustainable development as development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs" (Wikipedia, 2009). It contains within it two key concepts; namely;

The concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world poor, to which overriding priority should be given, and

The idea of limitation imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

Also, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) conceived sustainable development to mean environment, economic and social well - being for today and tomorrow. Abraham (2012) submitted that sustainable development mantra enjoins current generations to take a systematic approach to growth and development and to manage natural, produced and social capital for the welfare of their own and future generations – a system that connects space; and a system that connect time.

Contemporarily, sustainable development has become a password that resonates across all disciplines in today's knowledge industry (Onyenemezu and Okanezi, 2013). It is associated with "omnipotent capabilities" of proffering solutions to all problems of man and the society. It suggests harmonious living and quality growth among individuals in the society in order to secure the well being of future generations. In other words, the present generation should avoid practices and activities that can be harmful to future generations. Craven (2009) opined that the concept of sustainable development is rooted in a system where quality of life is perceived and appreciated.

The building of a literate society will lead to the development and empowerment of women to be able to understand their environment and institutions governing them (Yusuf, 2013). Education for women means that they will come to know the importance of understanding their rights and duties. Adult Education therefore gives a better chance for empowering people of all age most especially women because of its flexible in nature.

METHODOLOGY

The paper examines women empowerment as a catalyst for sustainable development in Nigeria. The study was conducted using some selected para-military officers wives association (Police Officers Wives Association [POWA] and Road Safety Officers Wives Association [ROSOWA]) in Oyo State Nigeria.

Sample size of 320 from a population of 478 and 193 respectively. 301 copies of questionnaire representing 94% of the questionnaire were accepted for analysis. The study adopted a survey approach. The data were analyzed using frequency tables, percentages, mean and Pearson correlation. Five-point Likert measurement scale, with answers ranging from 1 to 5, of strongly agrees to strongly disagree was adopted. SPSS Software version 20.0 was used to analyze the data collected.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Question I:

What are the effects of women empowerment in the society?

Table I: Frequency distribution Table Showing the effects of women empowerment in the society

S/N	Statement	SA	A	SD	D	Total
1.	If women are empowered they will contribute to the development in their immediate environment	67 22.2%	123 40.9%	45 14.9%	66 21.9%	301 100%
2.	Women who are educated will know their rights	131 43.5%	100 33.2%	67 22.3%	3 0.9%	301 100%
3.	Empowered women will not be discriminated against in the society	99 32.9%	145 48.1%	57 18.9%	-	301 100%
4.	Empowered Women will be able to liberate themselves from the shackle of hunger, poverty and other vices that hinders ones proper existence	71 23.6%	151 50.2%	34 11.3%	45 14.9%	301 100%
5.	Empowered women will be able to transform the world to their advantage	103 34.2%	79 26.2%	55 18.3%	64 21.2%	301 100%
6.	Empowered women will be able to boosts their capacity in making choices and to transform the choices made into desired actions and outcomes	123 40.9%	103 34.2%	34 11.3%	41 13.6%	301 100%

Table I above shows 190 or 63.1% respondents agreed that if women are empowered they will contribute to the development in their immediate environment 111 or 36.9% respondents disagreed, 231 or 76.7% respondents agreed that women who are educated will know their rights while 70 or 23.3% respondents disagreed, 244 or 81.0% respondents agreed that Empowered women will not be discriminated against in the society while 57 or 18.9 % respondents disagreed, 222 or 73.8% respondents agreed that empowered Women will be able to liberate themselves from the shackle of hunger, poverty and other vices that hinders ones proper existence while 119 or 39.5% respondents disagreed, 180 or 60 .5% respondents agreed Empowered women will be able to transform the world to their advantage while 119 or 39.5% respondents disagreed. 226 or 75.1% respondents agreed that empowered women will be able to boosts their capacity in making choices and to transform the choices made into desired actions and outcomes while 75 or 24.9% respondents disagreed. This therefore women empowerment has positive effect in the society because they will contribute to the development in their immediate environment, they will know their rights, they will not be discriminated against in the society, they will be able to liberate themselves from the shackle of hunger, poverty and other vices that hinders ones proper existence, they will be able to transform the world to their advantage and they will be able to boosts their capacity in making choices and to transform the choices made into desired actions and outcomes.

Research Question II:

What are the effect of women empowerment and sustainable development?

Table II: Frequency distribution Table Showing the effects of women empowerment and Sustainable Development

S/N	Statement	SA	A	SD	D	Total
1.	Empowered women will help in solving problems in their immediate environment	103 34.2%	100 33.2%	98 32.6%	-	301 100%
2.	Empowered women will be much more interested in solving problems in their immediate environment	77 25.6%	78 25.9%	91 30.2%	55 18.3%	301 100%
3.	Empowered women will know the steps to take in sustaining community development programme/project	100 33.2%	63 20.9%	50 16.6%	88 29.2%	301 100%
4.	Empowered women will know the goals or target to incorporate in sustaining community development programmme/project	44 14.4%	109 36.2%	33 10.9%	115 38.2%	301 100%
5.	Empowered women will be able to assess the sustainability of any community development programmme/project	73 24.3%	81 26.9%	56 18.6%	91 30.2%	301 100%

Table II above shows that 203 or 67.4% respondents agreed that empowered women will help in solving problems in their immediate environment while 98 or 32.6 % respondents disagreed, 155 or 51.5% respondents agreed that empowered women will be much more interested in solving problems in their immediate environment 48.5% respondents disagreed, 163 or 54.2% respondents agreed that empowered women will know the steps to take in sustaining community development programme/project while 138 or 45.8% respondents disagreed, 153 or 50.8% respondents agreed that empowered women will know the goals or

target to incorporate in sustaining community development programme/project while 148 or 49.2% respondents disagreed, 154 or 51.2% respondents agreed that empowered women will be able to assess the sustainability of any community development programme/project while 147 or 48.8% respondents disagreed. The finding shows that women empowerment has positive effect on sustainable development because empowered women will help in solving problems in their immediate environment, empowered women will be much more interested in solving problems in their immediate environment, empowered women will know the steps to take in sustaining community development programme/project, empowered women will know the goals or target to incorporate in sustaining community development programme/project, empowered women will be able to assess the sustainability of any community development programme/project

Research Question III:

3. Is there any relationship between women empowerment and sustainable development?

Table III: Correlation between women empowerment and sustainable development

		women empowerment and sustainable development	
Spearman's rho	women empowerment and sustainable development	Correlation coefficient	.704**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	300
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

The table III above shows the level of relationship that exists between the women empowerment and sustainable development. It shows that the Spearman's rho correlation value is 0.704 and this shows a high positive association among the 2 variables and it can be deduced that the value is statistically significant at 5% level of acceptance; there is high relationship between women empowerment and sustainable development in Oyo State, Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Sustainable development is fundamentally seen as an education concept. Adult education through its forms of education is capable of empowering women to shape and secure the future. Most importantly, it can develop in people (women) the ability to participate and explore the entire development processes towards national development.

In essence, women role should and must be seen beyond domestic roles and they should be empowered through broadening of educational opportunities by engaging adult education, for their fulfillment because women are the major occupants of the production sectors of the economy.

Formal or non-formal education most especially Adult Education can be relied upon for sensitizing people to analytically assess the impact of government’s economic, political, social environmental and general policies (Onyenemezu, 2013). Adult education, as an aspect of education is for national development. It encompasses developing the women's mind, knowledge, attitude, skills, behavioural pattern, physical and necessary ideas capable of solving human and societal problems in order to achieve sustainable national development. In achieving sustainable development, gender inequality or imbalance must always be eliminated through sensitising women through adult education programme in Nigeria. The researcher recommends education should therefore be seen as a tool for empowering women because empowered women will not be oppressed, marginalized and will know her rights and be able to contribute meaningfully to the development of their society.

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