



Full Length Research

Empowering Rural Women with Socio-Economic Skills for Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Development

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Abstract: Poverty is deadly and should be handled with almost seriousness. This is what the rural women go through from this research. The rural women who are the target of this paper suffer a lot of socio-economic and political setback as a result of poverty. Poverty is seen as when an individual or a household is unable to meet what is considered as minimum requirement to sustain livelihood in a given society. Sustainable development which is a panacea for poverty alleviation is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their needs. Poverty alleviation programme is a task that must rigorously pursued in order to make the rural women live a better life. This call for socio-economic skill, such as functional literacy, entrepreneur training etc. of bringing the rural women out of this condition are recommended, such as elimination of discrimination against rural women, ensure equal right of rural women to own land and inherit property. Finally conclusion to drawn thus, the rural women make serous and reasonable contributions to the economy of the nation and so every effort to liberate them from the scourge of poverty is a welcome idea.

Keywords: Women Empowerment: Rural Poverty: Socio-Economic Skills: National Development: Sustainable Development.

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1.0 Introduction of the Study

There is a wide range of opinion that many Nigerians especially the rural women, are very poor and cannot afford the necessities of life to support and live an active and healthy life for themselves (Awala & Isabella, 2010; Cealia, 2009). Poverty is traditionally viewed in terms of insufficient income for securing the necessities of life such as food, portable water, clothing and shelter (Sam, 2015; Unchendu, 1995). Poverty problem becomes more serious because when people go hungry, it lowers productivity which in turn reduces their income and further worsens their poverty condition. This is the issue and the experience of the rural women. Ogwumik (2000) suggested that “there is poverty when a household or individual is unable to meet what is considered of minimum requirement to sustain livelihood in a given society”. Unchendu (1995) argued that the rural women make essential contributions to the rural economy of all developing countries comprising about 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in these countries yet, women in rural areas have less access than men to productive resources and opportunities so there is need for empowering the rural women in order to lift them out of poverty IFAD Post (2015). The Food and Agricultural Organization estimates that 2% of the rural women had the same access to productive resources as men, increased yields on their farms could lift up to 150 million people out of poverty (Awala & Isabella, 2010; Cealia, 2009). This paper is about empowering rural women with socio-economic skills for poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

2.0 Clarifications of Terms

2.1 The Rural Women: Rural women make significant contributions to the rural economy in all regions of the world. In developing countries, women especially the rural women make up an average about 40 percent of the agricultural labour force ranging from 20 percent in Latin America to 50 percent or more in certain parts of Africa and Asia IFAD Post (2015). The rural women’s role range from being cultivators on their own or others’ plots as unpaid workers, employers or employees to being wage-labour or in on-and off farm enterprises, alongside their key role as providers of unpaid care work in their households and communities (Awala & Isabella, 2010; Cealia, 2009). However, in many settings rural women or women in general face more constraints than men in accessing key productive resources such as land and to services such as credit, extension and social protection (Josephine & Amaechi, 2010). They face wage discrimination in rural labours markets and often work without remuneration on family farms. This limits their capacity to contribute to agricultural production and take advantage of new opportunities.

Josephine & Amaechi (2010) stressed that when rural women have equal access as men to resources, assets, services and economic opportunities, they become a key driving force against rural poverty IFAD Post (2015). Enabling the rural women to participate fully in household and community decision-making also translates into improved well-being and better prospect, for children, thereby reducing poverty for future generations and contributing to long term socio-economic development. Therefore, closing the “gender gap” in access to assets, resources, services and opportunities has been identified as one of the most effective approaches to combat rural poverty and promote agriculture and rural development. (FAO SOFA 2010-11).

2.2 Poverty: There are plethoras of definitions of poverty, as it has come to mean different things to different people. The definition of the term varies widely which may not be surprising, considering that there are both physiological and socio-economic aspects of poverty (Sam, 2015; Unchendu, 1995). This paper examines the following perspective of poverty. Webster Dictionary defines poverty as “the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or materials possession”. The Cambridge International Dictionary of

English defines poverty as “the condition of being extremely poor as lacking sufficient money to live at a standard considered comfortable or normal” IFAD Post (2015).

From the definitions above we could see that poverty simply means a state of having nothing. It could be financial or material possessions. Apart from material poverty there can also be mental social and spiritual poverty (Sam, 2015; Unchendu, 1995). Some writers and jurists see poverty in the following fundamental human rights perspective. According to Adoyade (2000) “poverty” like an elephant is more easily recognized than as it is defined. He queried: “why search for elusive definition of poverty he concluded that in the final analysis, poverty, though being a tragic and socially unacceptable human experience, is probably not a subject to be defined or measure. To be appreciated, it may have to be personally suffered. Oputa (1989) viewed that poverty is another modern form of slavery (Awala & Isabella, 2010; Cealia, 2009). He also contends that, many Nigerians are poor at one time or another during their lives. Aguda (1988) opined that poverty “the practical actualization of most of the fundamental rights cannot be achieved in a country like ours where millions are living below or just at starvation level”. From the study it is seen that being poor is painful and people who are poor are deprived from leaving the kind of life very one values and usually they are very vulnerable to all health economic dislocation and natural disaster.

3.0 Socio-Economic/Sustainable Development

Josephine & Amaechi (2010) reported that over one hundred definition of sustainable development exists, but the most widely used one is from the World Commission on Environment and Development presented in 1987. It states that sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Martins, 2009). Sustainable development promotes the idea that, social, environmental, and economic progress is all attainable development approaches, everything in the world as being connected through space, time and quality of life. In the context of this paper sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. Sustainable is a crucial contemporary issue because the actions of today do not only have implications for tomorrow’s wellbeing. Cealia (2009) found that poverty affects other parts of the earth as a result of global connectivity. Sustainable development constantly seeks to achieve social and economic progress in ways that will not exhaust the earth’s finite natural resources.

Socio-economic development is any programme that creates sustainable access to the economy for its beneficiaries (Sam, 2015). This means that socio-economic development should be providing sustainable benefits to those designed to benefit from it. To use the old saying, socio-economic development projects, teach people to fish than giving them a fish. If a company or organization or government is not creating sustainable access to the economy for beneficiaries then they are not involved with socio-economic development (Swarth, 2001). On the other hand, sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Ezeudu, 2003). It is noteworthy that sustainable development is defined differently (Zeleiute, 2008):

- i. In economics: It is development ensuring that the per capital income of future generation is not lower than that of the present generation.
- ii. In sociology: It is development that preserves the communities i.e. maintain close social relationship in communities.
- iii. In ecology: It is development that preserves the diversity of biological species, essential ecosystem and ecological processes.

4.0 Poverty Alleviation/Reduction

The fight against poverty is usually regarded as a social goal and many governments have institutions or departments set out to tackle the problem of poverty (Unchendu, 1995). One of the main debates in the field of poverty alleviation or reduction is the way and manner of how actually state should manage the economy and provide public services, to tackle the problem of poverty. Poverty alleviation is the most difficult challenges facing Nigeria and her people especially the women and mostly the rural when and greatest obstacle in pursuit of sustainable socio-economic growth (Awala & Isabella, 2010; Cealia, 2009). A great number of efforts have been initiated by the Nigeria government and international communities at improving the basic services, infrastructure and housing facilities for both urban and rural population especially the rural women; as well as extending access to credit farm input and creation of employment. But still, they have not succeeded in changing the living situation of the very poor people, the fact is that most programmes seem to have benefitted those who were less needy and already on their feet economically (Awala & Isabella, 2010).

Josephine & Amaechi (2010) opined that the constitution of Nigeria guarantees the right to education and being educated will help in alleviating poverty. But delivery of education in Nigeria also depends on quality, infrastructure and facilities at all level especially at rural areas where the target of this paper dwells IFAD Post (2015). In order to reduce poverty there is need for full integration of rural women in the economic, social, political and cultural lives in the country. Generally improving health of the rural women will reduce poverty.

5.0 Socio-economic Skills for Rural Women: Poverty Alleviation for Sustainable Development

There have been several attempts by the Federal Government of Nigeria to alleviate poverty through employment creation, enhancing agricultural output an income a determining the rural-urban migration tide which has greatly contributed to rise in poverty levels (Sam, 2015; Unchendu, 1995). Examples of such schemes are Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Free and Compulsory Primary Edcation (FCPT), Green Revolution, Low Cost Housing, River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP), Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), Strategic Gain Reserves Programme (SGRP), Rural Electrification Scheme (RES) and Rural Banking Programme (RBP). There were also programmes like Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life Programme (BLP), People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN), Community Bank Programme, and Family Support Programme (FSP), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP). The Obasanjo Regime also established the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001 etc. all these were aimed at alleviating or eradicating poverty especially at the rural areas (IFAD Post 2015). The following are some of socio-economic skills the government, NGOs, and even corporate bodies use in empowering rural women in trying to alleviate poverty for sustainable development (Awala & Isabella, 2010; Cealia, 2009).

5.1 Education-Rural Women: Play important roles in the society and as such they need to be given functional literacy. The high rate of illiteracy among rural women calls for concern. To state that it is very important to eradicate illiteracy among Nigeria rural women is to state the obvious (Sam, 2015; Unchendu, 1995). The eradication of illiteracy in all its ramifications among women in Nigeria is an important factor in the empowerment of rural women in our society.

5.2 Functional Literacy: is the kind of education that is well designed in order to prepare those it is designed for to function purposefully, effectively and confidently in any social situation that they may find themselves at the present and in the future and to contribute their quota t societal development. UNESCO (1951) describes a

literate person as a “person who can with understanding both read and write a short, simple statement on his everyday life”. On the other hand, Battaile (1976) perceived illiterates as “people without education and without educational motivation, as well as without scientific and technical dimensions. However, functional literacy goes a step beyond literacy. It is more than reading and writing. It involves other skills which can affect the health, nutrition, agricultural techniques, using new technology, banking etc. According to Mbipone (1991) “functional literacy gives the citizen the opportunity to get the best out of his or her community. It is a mean of self improvement which is aimed at transforming, constructing and reconstructing experience.” Other socio-economic skills are: Training and capacity building. Skill acquisition/training for rural women in tie and dye, cake and snacks production, balloon decoration, soap-making, hat making, hair braiding and weaving etc. Capacity building in agriculture-related skill like vegetable farming, poultry and piggery as well as in confectionary (Sam, 2015; Unchendu, 1995).

Training of rural women in cooperative society formation and management. Provision of grants and assistance the provisions of necessary working materials to enable them establish small business and achieve self-sustenance. Gender in agriculture: Provision of agricultural credit to rural women. Provision of farm input services at affordable cost to the rural women. Finally, Garba (2006) noted that all of the poverty alleviation programmes since independence in 1960 have failed woefully or yielded very little fruits because the programmes were mostly not designed to alleviate poverty; they lacked clearly defined policy frameworks with proper guidelines for poverty alleviation. They suffered from political instability, interference policy and macro-economic dislocation; they lacked continuity, they were added with corruption, political deception, outright kleptomania and distasteful looting (Josephine & Amaechi, 2010).

6.0 Conclusion of the Study

The study noted that there has been some progress toward alleviating poverty at the rural areas where the target audience dwells. There is still wide prevalence of poverty, meaning more efforts have to be put in order to attain projected growth rate considered sufficient to reduce poverty against the rural women. Furthermore, Nigeria’s situation has continued to baffle the world because the level of poverty contradicts the country’s immense wealth. A greater percentage of the women in rural areas wallow in absolute poverty with inadequate food, clothing and shelter. For poverty to be alleviated at the rural areas, it requires extensive inclusive and all encompassing programmes, requiring efforts of the government, communities, non-governmental organization and even individuals and of course with the backing of law. In the final analysis, the rural women need to be properly and adequately empowered with relevant socio-economic skills for poverty alleviation which will ultimately lead to sustainable development. If we begin to look at the way poverty is ravaging the rural women and the entire people we have no choice but to put more efforts in eradicating poverty at the rural area where the target of this discussion dwells (the rural women). I therefore recommend the following and I strongly believed if properly implemented they will lead to poverty alleviation at the rural area: Eliminate discrimination against rural women in politics, economic and public life. Ensure equal right of rural women to own and inherit properties. Increase the share of rural women and men communities an businesses with secure right to land, property and other assets. Strengthen productive capacity by providing universal access to financial services and infrastructure such as transportation, information and communication. Finally increase public participation of rural women in political and civil engagements.

7.0 References of the Study

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