



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: H
INTERDISCIPLINARY
Volume 19 Issue 5 Version 1.0 Year 2019
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460x & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Managing the Challenges of Women and Youth Empowerment Programmes in Nigeria

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GJHSS-H Classification: FOR Code: 940199



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Managing the Challenges of Women and Youth Empowerment Programmes in Nigeria

Lovlyn Ekeowa Kelvin-Iloafu ^a, Nick Ngozi Igwe ^o & Joy Ifeoma Enemuo ^p

Abstract - This paper on managing the challenges of women and youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria has the following objectives; to determine the challenges facing women and youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria and to determine the prospects for youth and women empowerment in Nigeria. Mostly secondary data were used in the study. Findings reveal that there are so many challenges working against youth and women empowerment in Nigeria namely; instability in government policies, failed health facilities, unplanned strikes, Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen menace, kidnapping, lack of necessary infrastructure, and so on. Prospects for women and youth empowerment include but not limited to; reduction in the rate of unemployment, stability in government policies, installation of effective, efficient and result oriented economic team, profitable negotiation, land use law reforms, improvement in the provision of quality and well-equipped health facilities and basic infrastructure. The paper concludes that since women and youth economic empowerment programs thrive in positive developmental settings, and these promote youth competence, confidence and connections. Therefore, they should participate in established empowerment programs that have a variety of benefits, which will help them become embedded within the Nigerian culture and communities. The paper recommends among others that; policymakers need to establish an enabling environment that facilitates access to financial services for women and youth entrepreneurs, through the development of a supportive legal and regulatory framework, and the development of education and vocational training opportunities that are more aligned with the specific needs of women and youth in Nigeria.

Keywords: youth, women, empowerment, challenges and prospects.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a developing economy with 83.5 per cent of her population falling into the youth age bracket of 0 – 40 years (Adenikinju, 2005). Besides, women constitute about half of the people of Nigeria. Any plan to develop the Nigerian economy must consider women and youth improvement (Akpan, 2015) very seriously. The youth unemployment rate is 11:1 per

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cent, mainly due to the limited formal job opportunities available (Shibru, 2017). As Africa's youth population is yet to more than double by 2055, it is imperative for governments to identify and promote alternative pathways to sustainable livelihoods (Shibru, 2017). Women and Youth in a country are the most viable and potential human resources not only in population structure but also in social structure (Hossian, 2010). According to Jin (2017), "empowering girls and women is powerful. Today, we know it is the key to economic growth, political stability, and social transformation". The contribution of women to economic development is well documented (Sanusi, 2012). There exist several barriers to the full optimisation of women's economic potential. These barriers range from cultural, to religious, traditional, and legal discrimination amongst others (Sanusi, 2012). Nigeria's participation on issues that relate to the position and empowerment of women has been a recurring phenomenon for the past two decades as garnered from her involvement in national and international conferences on women development since the era of the 1995 Beijing conference (Omoyibo, Egharevba and Iyanda, 2010).

Without proper and integrated bio-social development of the youth and women, a nation cannot achieve her human development goals intended. Although the Government of Nigeria has formulated policies, plans and programmes for youth and women empowerment and welfare but implementing these programmes through Government Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations is the challenge been encountered by the promoters of these programmes. Over the last two decades, quality of life (QOL) has emerged as an essential unit of measurement to evaluate the success of empowerment programmes. It is employed as a goal of plamens and as well as an indicator of effectiveness. In contrast to Quality of Work Life (QWL), which is a relatively new concept, (QWL) is the overall quality of an individual's working life. QWL is sometimes considered as a sub-concept of the broad idea of QOL, which refers to the overall quality of an individual's life. However; there is no standard definition of QOL. A person's QOL is dependent upon subjective evaluation of the individual aspects of that individual's life, (Kar, Pascual and Chickering, 1999).

There are no doubts that Nigeria is a nation where the opportunities are boundless. That is why today we can see a trend in different women and youth

empowerment programmes that would help the Nigerian youth as they grow to become the leaders of tomorrow. Relevant literature suggests that youth in this country, irrespective of all age-grades and regions face a lot of socio-cultural problems; as such they cannot play their significant roles in the country's socio-economic development and change. Many women have suffered varied traumatic experiences arising from neglect which have manifested itself in gender inequality and discrimination that has far-reaching implications for the empowerment of rural women in Nigeria (Omoyibo et al., 2010). As in other developing nations of the world, women in Nigeria are faced with numerous socio-economic challenges, for example, inadequate access to finance which has been identified as one major limiting factor to women entrepreneurship development. There is a foundational need for improvement of female access to education and health facilities to enhance women participation in the formal sector and an increase in their productivity. A closer look at Nigerian societies shows that the survival of many communities depends heavily on activities associated with women in the informal sector (Fatile, Ejalonibu, and Aliu, 2017). This notwithstanding, some laws deny women equal opportunities with men such as land ownership and opportunities to invest freely. These laws function as a handicap to women's economic capabilities and perpetuate a culture of dependence. It is against this background that the study seeks to determine how to manage the challenges of women and youth empowerment in Nigeria.

a) *Objectives of the study*

The study has two specific objectives, they are;

- a. To examine the challenges facing women and youth empowerment in Nigeria.
- b. To assess the prospects of women and youth empowerment in Nigeria.

II. CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS OF EMPOWERMENT

In Hornby (2006), empower means to give enablement or authority; authorise, especially by legal or official means: the giving of an ability; enablement or permission. The empowerment of a person or group of people means the process of giving them enablement and status in a particular situation. In South Africa, empowerment is seen as a policy of providing unique opportunities in employment, training, and development for Black people and others disadvantaged under the apartheid system.

For an institution like the World Bank (2014), empowerment means the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Empowerment is a process while

empowering is the verb action word. Through the process, an individual becomes an agent of change. More simply put, it's the "can do" factor, going from "I can't" to "I can." (Jin, 2017)

Akpan (2006a) remarks that empowerment starts from the correct identification of the cause of poverty, deprivation, impoverishment or marginalisation, followed by a planned programme of actions on how to overcome the problem and realise growth, the execution of such action plan, monitoring and evaluating the process for success and improvement. Empowerment is thus better conceptualised as a process of activities that will culminate in breaking the bonds of poverty circle and set in motion the virtuous circle of businesses that support wealth-creation and perpetuate prosperity. Poverty alleviation policies are a form of empowerment programme, but there are some other measures for empowerment. These include a cultural transformation that offers more opportunities for the accumulation of human capital through access to education and health facilities (Akpan, 2015).

Youth comprise persons in the 15years to 29years age category, following the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Global Affairs Canada (2017) asserts that "Youth empowerment is a process where children and young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives". They do this by addressing their situation and then take action to improve their access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values, and attitudes. Being young is a stage of life where anything is possible, and much can be achieved. As a result of this, youth is a period of instability, change, uncertainty, and a constant search for purpose. The interest of young people is vastly different from those of older people. Young people want to change the world and establish their innovative values. They can only change society for better if they have the support of government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and public-spirited individuals. That is why Youth Empowerment in Nigeria is so essential. The challenge of the youth in this 21st century is universal formation, which is a condition for humanity's integration and human identity. This identity subsists at three levels: individual, social (cultural) and human identity (universal), (Maduabuchi, 2015).

Youth empowerment occurs in homes, at schools, through youth organisations, government policy-making and community-based programmes. Major structural activities where youth empowerment happens throughout society include community decision-making, organisational planning, and education reform.

The 53 member countries of the Commonwealth of Nations have all signed up to the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (2007–2015). The Plan of Action underpins the work of the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP). On the

Commonwealth definition, "Young people are empowered when they acknowledge that they have or can create choices in life, are aware of the implications of those choices, make an informed decision freely, take action based on that decision and accept responsibility for the consequences of those actions. Empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their behalf, and on their terms, rather than at the direction of others" (CYP, 2007–2015).

While youth face enormous challenges, particularly concerning employment and livelihoods, they nevertheless represent the opportunity of today and tomorrow—as educators and innovators, entrepreneurs and investors, health professionals and scientists, politicians and peacemakers. This makes it doubly important to invest in them now—making it possible for future generations not only to survive but also thrive, and so that countries that spend in their youth can realise the vitally important 'demographic dividend' these youth represent (USAID policy youth, 2012).

Youth empowerment aims to improve quality of life. Youth empowerment is achieved through participation in youth empowerment programs. However, scholars argue that children's rights implementation should go beyond learning about formal rights and procedures to give birth to a concrete experience of rights (Golay and Malatesta, 2014). There are numerous models that youth empowerment programmes use that help youth achieve empowerment. A variety of youth empowerment initiatives are underway around the world. These programmes can be through non-profit organisations, government organisations, schools or private organisations.

Contrasting the definition of empowerment with development, Ledford, Lucas, Dairaghi and Ravelli (2013) opine that, youth empowerment is different from youth development because the event is centered on developing individuals; while empowerment is focused on creating greater community change that relies on the development of individual capacity.

Empowerment movement makes the youth to gain momentum, become viable, and become institutionalised. Youth empowerment is often addressed as a gateway to intergenerational equity, civic engagement and democracy building. To Sazama and Young, (2006), "activities may focus on youth-led media, youth rights, youth councils, youth activism, youth involvement in community decision-making, and other methods".

Surprisingly, there is no universal definition of women's empowerment. The word "empowerment" does not exist in most languages. Although the phrase "women's empowerment" is used pervasively in the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment space (and beyond), it is generally in the context of issues like economic empowerment, political participation, and girl

child education. Furthermore, most of the data that have been collected is on gender equality, or more accurately inequality — counting the number of boys vs girls, men vs women. There is a dearth of information on women's empowerment, particularly at the global level (Jin, 2010). In line with Sustainable Development Goal and according to the International Labour Organization definition, decent and productive empowerment for women means opportunities that allow for economic empowerment and advancement of women in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity by taking measures to combat discrimination and to promote equal access and opportunities (Global Affairs Canada, 2017).

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Empowerment theory focuses on processes that enable participation; enhance control through shared decision making; and create opportunities to learn, practice, and increase skills, (Zimmerman, 1995; 2000). Empowerment theory suggests that engaging youth in pro-social, meaningful, and community-enhancing activities that the youth themselves define and it helps youth gain vital skills, responsibilities, and confidence necessary to become productive and healthy adults, (Reischl, Zimmerman, Morrel-Samuels, Franzen, Faulk, Eisman, and Roberts, 2011).

a) *Types of empowerment*

Youth and Women empowerment examine six interdependent dimensions: psychological, community, organisational, economic, social and cultural empowerments.

- Psychological empowerment enhances an individual's consciousness, belief in self-efficacy, awareness and knowledge of problems and solutions and of how individuals can address issues that harm their quality of life. This dimension aims to create self-confidence and give youth the skills to acquire knowledge.
- Community empowerment focuses on enhancing the community through leadership development, improving communication, and creating a network of support to mobilise the community to address concerns.
- Organisational empowerment aims to create a base of resources for a community, including voluntary organisations, unions and association that seek to protect, promote and advocate for the powerless.
- Economic empowerment teaches entrepreneurial skills, how to take ownership of their assets and how to have income security.
- Social empowerment teaches youth and women about social inclusion and literacy as well as helping them find the resources to be proactive in their communities.

