



Rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey approach with an estimated population of 12,000 rural women in 8 Local Government Area in Bayelsa State. A sample of 387 respondents were used for the study. The random sampling technique was employed to draw respondents for the study. Three research questions were answered. The research instrument for this study is a questionnaire titled: Rural Women Empowerment Programme Scale (RWEPS) and Poverty Reduction Scale (PRS). The reliability of the instruments was established through the Cronbach alpha method; which produced reliability coefficients of 0.81 and 0.87 for RWEPS and PRS respectively. The data obtained were analysed using percentage, mean, standard deviation and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The findings of the study showed that the respondents (i.e. rural women) agreed to the fact that most of the empowerment programmes discussed in the study are the types available for rural women in Bayelsa State. Also, the respondents agreed to the fact that there are several obstacles hindering rural women participation in empowerment programmes for poverty reduction in Bayelsa State. Some include; limited access to education and training, structural and cultural factors, female illiteracy, lack of fund and collateral to access credit from formal financial institutions, lack of infrastructure in the communities, exploitative and discriminatory working conditions, etc. Lastly, there is a high positive and significant relationship between rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that government, NGOs and other relevant agencies should assist the rural women, by providing them loan schemes, education, vocational trainings/skills, access to credit, social protection and many other empowerment programmes so as to bring about poverty reduction at the rural level.

Keywords: Rural Women, Empowerment Programmes and Poverty Reduction

Introduction

Women all over the world are active participants in nation building. From the home front all the way to governance, women have been seen to be outstanding in all human endeavours. They make significant contributions to the rural economy in all regions of the world. In developing countries, women make up on average about 40 per cent of the agricultural labour force, ranging from 20 per cent in Latin America to 50 per cent or more in certain parts of Africa and Asia. Women's roles range from being cultivators on their own or others' plots – as unpaid or paid workers, employers or employees – to being wage-labourers in on- and off-farm enterprises, alongside their key role as providers of unpaid care work in their households and communities (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2017).

The rural woman in Nigeria specifically, engages in all manner of hard labour to eke out a living for the entire household. Many households in Nigeria are being fed, clothed and catered for by the sweat and blood of hard-working women. Despite abuses by the men-folk and the abject poverty where women are most hit, they still stick to any laid down moral code, while attending to societal demands and courageously raising and implementing family budgets, no matter the financial implication involved.

International organizations like USAID, DFID, IMF, World Bank, government and others spirited individuals and private organizations have made concerted efforts in helping women economically, but yet level of poverty has persisted. Women potential labour force is still very high in Nigeria and most of the poor are women. Women consist more than 60% of the African population which has given concern to the economy of the world (FAO, 2017) ^[13].

However, in many settings women face more constraints than men in accessing key productive resources such as land and to services such as credit, extension and social protection; they face wage discrimination in rural labour markets and often work without remuneration on family farms. This limits their capacity to contribute to agricultural production and take advantage of new opportunities. On average women spend 85–90 percent of their time each day on household food preparation, child care and other household chores. Women's triple work burden in the productive, reproductive and social spheres, in contrast to men's, limits their potential to take advantage of new opportunities.

When rural women have equal access as men to resources, assets, services and economic opportunities, they become a key driving force against rural poverty. Enabling women to participate fully in household and community decision-making also translates into improved well-being and better prospects for children, thereby reducing poverty for future generations and contributing to long-term socio-economic development. Despite their role in rural economy, women in Nigeria are most often faced with discrimination and persistent gender inequalities, while some women are experiencing multiple discrimination and exclusion because of factors such as ethnicity or caste. About 68 per cent of working women in extreme poverty operate in the agricultural sector, the other sectors being fisheries, forestry, handicrafts and livestock raising. Women in Nigeria tend to be involved in more than one economic activity simultaneously, and take up informal and unprotected work in the absence of alternative means of generating income. Rural women spend more time than urban counterparts, and then men, on reproductive and household work, including time spent collecting water and fuel, husking, processing food and caring for children and the sick. Many women in Nigeria face disproportionate obstacles in accessing and competing in markets.

These include women's relative lack of mobility, capacity, assets and technical skills in comparable to men. These unequal opportunities between women and men continue to hamper women's ability to lift themselves from poverty and gain more options to improve their living standards. The discriminatory practices and stereotypical attitudes prevent women in some parts of Nigeria from accessing financial support to build their businesses. In some cases women are unable to obtain business loans without their husbands or father's co-signature and support. They perform the bulk of unpaid care work across all economies and cultures. In many states in Nigeria, existing norms dictate that girls and women have the main responsibility for the care of children, the elderly and the sick, as well as for running the household, including the provision of water and energy supplies.

These and many more have hindered women chances of being properly educated, empowered or being able to translate returns on their own productive work into increased and more secure incomes, better working conditions and increase standard of living. Thus, closing these gaps, the

focus of this study is to: find out the types of empowerment programmes that can be made available to rural women for poverty reduction in Bayelsa State; the obstacles hindering rural women in participation in empowerment programmes for poverty reduction, and the relationship between rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction. It intends to specifically answer the following questions and hypothesis, such as; what are the types of empowerment programmes available for rural women in Bayelsa State for poverty reduction; what are the obstacles hindering rural women in participation in empowerment programmes for poverty reduction in Bayelsa State; what is the relationship between rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction, there is no significant relationship between rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction.

Literature Review

This section will deal with review of literatures under the following sub-headings: Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Review.

Conceptual Clarifications

Poverty Reduction

The United Nations in September 2018 notes that human poverty still remains widespread in certain parts of the world. Globally, the number of extreme poor has dropped by 650 million in the last three decades, a level of progress humankind had never seen. But still there are more than a billion people living in extreme poverty. Looking at poverty before the definition of poverty reduction, it has been observed that poverty is a concept that is experienced by the poor and observed by the rich, but its definition is with difficulty and has defied universally accepted and objective definition because it is not only an expression of life situation, but equally a state of mind and a perception of self in the complex web of social relation (Ekong, 1991 in Adawo, 2011) ^[2].

It was in the light of this understanding that Aboyade as cited in Ehinomen and Adeleke (2012) ^[11] state that poverty is like an elephant, it is more easily recognized than defined. It is defined as a social condition characterized by inadequate access to basic human needs (food and non-food) to the sustenance of socially acceptable minimum standard of living in a given society. Some of these basic determinants of well-being include adequate food, shelter, portable water, healthcare, and education and employment opportunities (Akintola & Yusuf; 2001) ^[4]. In a nut shell poverty can be seen as a situation in which an individual is unable because of economic, social, political and psychological incapacitation, to provide himself and his family the barest basic necessities of life. Therefore, any effort made in tackling this situation is known as poverty reduction.

Poverty reduction is the process which seeks to minimize the level of poverty in a community or state (Ajaakaiye & Olomola, 1999) ^[3]. It involves improving the living conditions of people who are already poor. It is also a set of measures, both economic and humanitarian, that are intended to permanently lift people out of poverty. These measures are those that raise, or are intended to raise ways of enabling the poor to create wealth for themselves as a means of ending poverty forever (Parker, 2001) ^[23].

Women Empowerment Programmes

World Bank (2001) ^[30] defines empowerment as the

expansion of freedom of choice and actions and increasing one's authority and control over the resources and decisions that affects one's life. It refers to the process of change that gives individuals greater freedom of decision, choice and action. From the above definition of empowerment, it can be deduced that women empowerment programmes is the development of mental and physical capacity, power and 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) ^[5]. In other words, they are policies and programs that states and international organizations undertake to alleviate the adversities that women face every day in order to enable them have more power over resources and decision-making.

Kabeer (2001) ^[15] notes that women empowerment programmes are processes or steps taken by government, NGOs and well-meaning individuals through which women gain the ability to take ownership and control of their lives. Although this process of empowerment depends on women themselves involving consciousness raising, participation, and organizing themselves. It can also be facilitated through education, capacity building, training and other measures. Danjuma, *et al.* (2013) ^[9] maintain that the aim women empowerment programmes is to enhance the socio-economic status of women through creating an economic culture that will address the technical know-how in the pursuit of women's multi-faceted roles, retooling them with various economic ventures as well as enhancing the emancipation of women from poverty. While this, is because women are generally regarded as being "poor" and they constitute majority of the population in the world. Promoting women's empowerment programmes is seen as the driving forces behind reducing poverty and aiding economic growth.

A process of empowering for women is dependent upon available resources and whether women have the skills to use them; access to economic opportunities; and control over economic benefits that can be used to achieve positive change. A woman is said to be economically empowered when she has: (i) the ability to succeed and advance economically; and (ii) the power to make decisions and act on economic decisions without interference. Schmitz (2009) defines women's economic empowerment as the process which increases women's real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in society.

Therefore, from the researchers point of view women empowerment programmes are direct or indirect measures taken by authorities and other well-meaning individuals to enable women to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways which recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. It increases their access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information.

The Nexus between Women Empowerment Programmes and Poverty Reduction

Globally women empowerment programmes have been identified as means for reducing poverty and economic growth. In Nigeria for instance, women play a significant role and are highly visible in the micro and small enterprises sub-sector. The majority of them are engaged in small income

generating self-employment in agriculture and non-agricultural activities with low prospect for growth (Dejene, 2014) ^[10]. Vandana and Robert (2014) ^[29] report that as a result of women's wide ranging responsibilities; productive, domestic and community duties, they are generally involved in a broader range of tasks than men and will therefore require a wider range of technical knowhow on which to draw for their livelihood pursuits. Clinton (2009) ^[8] the former president of United States of America addressing the annual meeting of the Clinton Global initiative opines that "women perform 66 percent of the world's work, and produce 50 percent of the food, yet earn only 10 percent of the income and own 1 percent of the property". The president maintains that whether the case is improving education in the developing world, or fighting global climate change, or addressing nearly any other challenge we face, that empowering women would be critical part of the equation. Studies show that women are affected by poverty, susceptible to diseases, prone to discrimination, marginalization and environmental degradation which are all detrimental to women empowerment and poverty reduction (Danjuma, *et al.*, 2013) ^[9]. But when they are empowered these will basically be reduced or completely alienated. The women empowerment programmes is a prerequisite for sustainable development, pro-poor growth and the achievement of sustainable development Goals (SDGs). Gender equality and empowered women are catalysts for multiplying development efforts. Investments in gender equality yield the highest returns of all development investments (OECD, 2010) ^[21]. A higher proportion of earnings of women are invested in their families and communities than men. A study conducted by United Nations (2015) stress that investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth. The empowerment of women is a human rights and social justice issue, but it also reduces poverty, and strengthens economic growth and development.

Women's participation in empowerment programmes are fundamental to strengthening women's rights and enabling women to have control over their lives and exert influence in society (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2010). Women empowerment programmes also contributes to the reduction of gender-based violence, increases women's family-planning possibilities and slows the spread of diseases. Women's improved economic situation provides opportunities to escape exploitative relationships at home by breaking the economic dependence on a partner that is often at the root of domestic violence. Empowerment entails an expansion of women's choices, including those in the domain of sexual and reproductive health. An increase in women's decision-making power and control over their reproductive health can facilitate in reducing of poverty.

Theoretical Review

Gender and Development (GAD) Approach

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach is the theory underpinning this study, and it was developed by Rathgeber in 1989 ^[24]. Gender and Development (GAD) approach identifies women empowerment as a crucial component of the social change process. The approach recognizes participation as a tool that is vital for enhancing the process. It emphasizes the need for a bottom-up approach to development (Chambers, 1994; 2001; Booyesen-Wolthers, 2007) ^[7]. This approach emerged in the 1980s as an

alternative to the radical feminist Women in Development (WID) approach, which mainly aimed to incorporate women into developmental processes. According to Rathgeber (1989)^[24], the GAD approach treats women as active agents of development. The approach departs from the premise that in order to improve gender relations, both men and women must participate in developmental processes, including decision making. Mosedale (2005)^[19] supports this view, stating that “focusing on the empowerment of women as a group requires an analysis of gender relations.” Also, this author points out that gender relations vary both geographically and temporally, hence the need for contextualizing women empowerment initiatives.

In this study, we examined rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction in Bayelsa State in the light of the GAD principles of participation of women, men and community leaders. The researcher believe that giving rural women their rightful position in the society through empowerment programmes would bring about poverty reduction and more sustainable development compared to situations where only men are involved.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey approach to examine rural women empowerment programme and poverty reduction in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The population for this study consists of estimated number of 12,000 rural women in the eight (8) Local Government Areas in Bayelsa State. The sample size of 387 respondents were chosen for the study, this was drawn using Taro Yamen's formula. The researcher employed a simple random sampling technique to draw respondents (rural women only) from different local government areas in Bayelsa State. The research instruments for this study were questionnaires titled: Rural Women Empowerment Programme Scale (RWEPS) and Poverty Reduction Scale (PRS). Both RWEPS and PRS possessed items to elicit information from the respondents. The items of the instruments were responded on a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agreed (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Data used for this study were sourced primarily using interview method because of the target population. The reliability of the instruments were established through the Cronbach alpha method; which produced reliability coefficients of 0.82 and 0.87 for RWEPS and PRS respectively. For the data that were analyzed, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to answer research question one and two, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to answer the research question three and also to test hypothesis using SPSS generated P-value at 0.05 level of significance. However, to interpret the extent or magnitude of relationship, Nwankwo (2013) provides the interpretation of correlation coefficients as follows: very high (0.9-1.0), high (7.0-8.0), moderate (0.5-6.0), low (0.3-0.4) and very low correlation (below 0.2). As

part of data collection, the researcher distributed 387 questionnaire to the respondents 306 copies were retrieved and found suitable for analysis resulting in 79 percent response rate.

Results and Analysis

The results of the analysed data for the research questions and hypothesis are presented on tables.

Table 1: Personal Data of Rural Women

A.	Ages	Frequency	Percentage
	Below 25 years	45	15
	26 – 35 years	37	12
	36 – 45 years	108	35
	46 – 55 years	65	21
	56 and above	51	17
	Total	306	100
B.	Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
	Married	147	48
	Single	21	7
	Divorced	12	4
	widowed	89	29
	Separated	37	12
	Total	306	100
C.	Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
	F.S.L.	194	63
	WACS/GCE/NECO	76	25
	Diploma/O.N.D	24	8
	H.N.D/First Degree	12	4
	MBA/M.Sc/Ph.D	0	0
	Total	306	100

Source: Survey Data, 2020

From the personal profile in table 1 on the age brackets of the respondents, 108 respondents making a total of 35% out of the 306 respondents indicate that their ages falls between 36 – 45 years, 65(21%) respondents are between the ages of 46 – 55 years, 51(17%) are between the ages of 56 and above, 37(12%) respondents are between the ages of 26 and 36 years.; while 45(15%) of the respondents are below 25 years. On the marital status of the respondents, out of 306 respondents, 147 respondents making about 48% were married, 89 respondents making about 29% are widowed, 21(7%) respondents are single; 12(4%) respondents are divorced; while 37(12%) are separated.

Also, table 1 shows the educational qualifications of the respondents. Out of 306 respondents, 76 respondents making about 25% have WASC/GCE/NECO, 24(8%) have Diploma/O.N.D, 194(63%) have F.S.L., 12 respondents making about 4% have H.N.D/B.Sc; while none of the respondents have MBA/M.Sc/Ph.D.

Research Question 1: What are the types of empowerment programmes available for rural women in Bayelsa State for poverty reduction?

Table 2: Types of empowerment programme available for rural women in Bayelsa State for poverty reduction

S/No	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Enlightenment/awareness campaigns	2.67	.60	Agreed
2.	Job creation in the community	2.36	.49	Disagreed
3.	Vocational training and skills	2.60	.55	Agreed
4.	Provision of microcredit scheme	2.26	.63	Disagreed
5.	Protection of rural women from violation.	2.50	.65	Agreed
6.	Adult education and training.	2.57	.72	Agreed
7.	Investment in care programmes for girl children and women	2.46	.53	Disagreed
8.	Health intervention programmes for women	2.51	.54	Agreed
9.	Social groups and political activities	2.63	.65	Agreed
10.	Collective bargaining and social dialogue initiative	2.52	.81	Agreed
		Average Mean= 2.51		

Source: Computed from Survey Data, 2020.

Note: In the above table, the decision of “Disagreed” means that the respondents did not agree with the item statement (which is below the criterion mean of 2.50) while “Agreed” means that the respondents agree with the item statement (which is above the criterion mean of 2.5).

Therefore, based on the Grand mean of 2.51 which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, it was observed from Table 2, that most of the items (i.e. seven out of ten) were accepted, showing that respondents (i.e. rural women) agreed to the fact that those items accepted are the types of empowerment

programmes available for rural women in Bayelsa State for poverty reduction. However, the result also showed that items 2, 4 and 7 were rejected by the respondents as not types of empowerment programmes available for rural women in Bayelsa State for poverty reduction.

Research Question 2: What are the obstacles hindering rural women participation in empowerment programmes for poverty reduction in Bayelsa State.

Table 3: Obstacles hindering rural women participation in empowerment programmes for poverty reduction in Bayelsa State

S/No	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
11.	Limited access to education and training	3.18	.77	Agreed
12.	Structural and cultural factors	3.42	.58	Agreed
13.	Female illiteracy	2.81	.61	Agreed
14.	Lack of fund and collateral to access credit from formal financial institutions	3.37	.60	Agreed
15.	Lack of infrastructure in the communities.	3.50	.59	Agreed
16.	Exploitative and discriminatory working conditions	2.71	.52	Agreed
17.	Vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse at the community level	2.57	.65	Agreed
18.	Scale of Operation of small enterprises	2.74	.81	Agreed
		Average Mean= 3.04		

Source: Computed from Survey Data, 2020.

Results from table 3 shows that the Grand mean of 3.04 is far above criterion mean of 2.50, it was observed from Table 3, that all the items were accepted, showing that respondents (i.e. rural women) agreed to the fact that there are several obstacles hindering rural women participation in empowerment programmes for poverty reduction in Bayelsa State. Some include; limited access to education and training, structural and cultural factors, female illiteracy, lack of fund and collateral to access credit from formal financial institutions, lack of infrastructure in the communities,

exploitative and discriminatory working conditions, vulnerability to sexual exploitation/abuse at the community level, scale of operation of small enterprises, etc.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction?

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing the Relationship between Rural Women Empowerment Programmes and Poverty Reduction

		Rural Women Empowerment Programmes	Poverty Reduction
	Pearson Correlation	1	.715**
Rural Women Empowerment Programmes	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	306	306
	Pearson Correlation	.715**	1
Poverty Reduction	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	306	306

Source: Computed from Survey Data, 2020

Results from Table 4 produced a correlation coefficient, ‘r’ of 0.715; which means there is a high positive relationship between rural women empowerment programme and poverty

reduction. To test the hypothesis, the r of 0.715 is significant with $P < 0.05$. The result is significant and the null hypothesis is rejected ($r=0.715$, $p= 0.000$). Thus, there is a significant

relationship between rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction.

Discussion of Findings

The first result showed that the respondents (rural women) agreed to the fact that those items accepted in Table 2 are the types of empowerment programmes available for rural women in Bayelsa State for poverty reduction. While item 2, 4 and 7 which were rejected by the respondents as not types of empowerment programmes available for rural women in Bayelsa State for poverty reduction. This is tandem with Awasom (2004) ^[6], ILO (2014) ^[14] and FAO (2017) ^[13], whose studies present information on the types of empowerment programmes available for rural women for poverty reduction.

The second result from Table 3 showed that all the items were accepted, indicating that the respondents (rural women) agreed to the fact that there are several obstacles hindering rural women participation in empowerment programmes for poverty reduction in Bayelsa State. Some of which include; limited access to education and training, structural and cultural factors, female illiteracy, lack of fund and collateral to access credit from formal financial institutions, lack of infrastructure in the communities, exploitative and discriminatory working conditions, vulnerability to sexual exploitation/abuse at the community level, scale of operation of small enterprises and many more. This finding corroborates Ukwoma and Njoku (2013) ^[27] and Okechukwu, *et al.* (2016) ^[22] whose empirical and scholarly contributions to knowledge attest to these obstacles. These may further be explained in the fact that respondent have come to the realization that the obstacles identified by these scholars are the banes hindering the empowerment programmes of women especially in rural area for poverty reduction.

Lastly, the third finding of the study revealed that results from Table 4 produced a correlation coefficient, 'r' of 0.715; which means there is a high positive relationship between rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction. This finding is in consonance with OECD (2010) ^[21], Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2010), Ukwoma and Njoku (2013) ^[27], United Nations (2015) and Okechukwu, *et al.* (2016) ^[22] whose comments and research finding present information on the relationship between rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction. Explanation from their findings showed that there is a strong positive and significant relationship between women engagement in empowerment programmes and poverty reduction. In addition, the scholars in their respective studies asserted that women empowerment programmes also contributes to the reduction of gender-based violence, increases women's family-planning possibilities and slows the spread of diseases. Women's improved economic situation provides opportunities to escape exploitative relationships at home by breaking the economic dependence on a partner that is often at the root of domestic violence. This is evident in the hypothesis which indicated that there is a significant relationship between rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be deduced that there is a high positive and significant relationship between rural women empowerment programmes and poverty reduction despite several obstacles hindering the

implementation. Hence, rural women need education, vocational trainings/skills, access to credit, social protection and many more in order to fully develop their productive assets and tackle poverty.

Policy Recommendations

The following were recommended based on the findings and conclusion of this study:

1. Government, NGOs and other relevant agencies should assist the rural women, by providing them loan schemes, educative information, vocational trainings/skills, access to credit, social protection and many other empowerment programmes so as to bring about poverty reduction at the rural level.
2. Government should intensify effort to address obstacles hindering rural women from participating in empowerment programmes in order to give them a sense of belonging.
3. In view of the strong relationship between rural women empowerment programme and poverty reduction, government should invest and empower rural women economically and socially in order for them, their families and the society to reap the benefits of economic development and poverty reduction.

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