WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES OF MARGINALISED WOMEN IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: The study explored women empowerment and community development: voices and perspectives of marginalized women. Women's voices are unheard in most developing societies, and this essentially affected their socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural impacts on community development activities. Universally, women encounter traversing discrimination, intensifying poverty susceptibility, and restraining unemployment. 69 of 190 economies restrict women's workforce participation while 43 economies lack workplace sexual harassment laws. SDG goal 5 which focuses on gender equality promises to put an end to the barriers endearing women's voices and perspectives. This marginalisation can be surmounted through women empowerment programmes for sustainable living conditions, equal human rights and social justice among humans. Concepts of marginalization, empowerment, women empowerment, and community development were discussed. Moreover, the obstructions and factors facilitating women's empowerment for community development were also conversed. Therefore, women should be reinvigorated and involved in community development committees to guarantee their voices are heard and valued.

Keywords: Marginalization, Empowerment, Women Empowerment, Community Development, Voices and Perspectives of Women.

Introduction

Women in most developing societies are marginalized and denied voices in socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural activities around the globe. This marginalization practically affected their contributions in community development initiatives limiting their human rights and sustainable living conditions. Globally, women experience intersecting discriminations, exacerbating poverty vulnerability and limiting unemployment (UN Habitat, 2020). 69 of 190 economies restrict women's workforce participation while 43 economies lack workplace sexual harassment laws (World Bank, 2023). 73.5% of employed women globally lack social protection (International Labour Organization, 2020). 37% of women remain disconnected from the internet (International Telecommunication Union, 2022). Closing Sub-Saharan Africa's gender gap is estimated to require 132-140 years (Duwuni, 2023, citing World Economic Forum & McKinsey). In 2022, an estimated 8% (343.4 million) women live on less than $2.15/day with 64% (220.9 million) residing in sub-Saharan Africa (UN Women, 2023). Community development acknowledges the representation of all parties in development undertakings for sustainability purposes. It involves sensitization, re-orientation and encouragement of community members to initiate community development activities that will yield positive transformation in the socio-economic and political life of the inhabitants (Ugwuzor, 2016). To address the menace of women marginalization, the study focused on how women voices were trampled, and marginalized in various communities and the way empowerment programmes have enabled

them to surmount their trapped voices for the promotion of sustainable community development.

Concept of Marginalization

Marginalization is an act of partiality contrary to definite individuals in formal and informal settings such as discrimination in employment, promotions, and performance assessment in administrations and pigeonholing in social settings, thus keeping such individuals in disempowered situations. (Collins cited in Bako, & Syed, 2018). It is defined as a process in which people or groups are communally debarred, thoroughly obstructed from or are deprived access to contribute in social and political procedures which are rudimentary to assimilate with the society (Nigam, 2014). Women marginalization is obstinate in all sphere of the Nigeria economy (Bako, & Syed, 2018; Adegoke, Adegoke, & Oyedele, 2016; Anyoha, Chikaire, & Nwakwasi 2015; Sam, 2014).

Marginalization may be recycled synonymously with the term oppression in contrast to an oppressor as Paulo Freire explained in his famous Pedagogy of Oppressed; 'proletariat' as accustomed by Karl Marx, 'subaltern' modified by Gramsci, 'powerless' as explained by Michel Foucault, or subjugated, defenseless, victimized, disqualified, estranged or oppressed as explained somewhere else in the existing literature (Nigam, 2014). Women's marginalization positioned on matters that boarder on subjugation, discernment, partiality and continuation of dominance (Nartey, 2024). Issues that limit women's involvement in politics, leadership and national development, and other socio-economic discriminations in Nigeria are: gender inequality, educational deficiencies, dearth of finance and political funding, religious practices, denial of land ownership, loan facilities for agriculture; cultural and religious norms, poverty, patriarchal culture, ethnic sub-culture, women-women marginalization, limited access to resources, politics and media (Izuegbunam, 2019; Ojo, Anitsal & Anitsal, 2018; Anyalebechi, 2016; Makama, 2013 & Kupoluyi, n.d). In Nigeria, 51% of men over 15 years have bank accounts compared to only 27% of women over 15 years. According to the NBS statistics between 1999 and 2005, women constituted only 5.76% of the National Assembly members, 29.38% of judges in federal courts, 5.29% of State Assembly Legislators and 5.9% of local government councilors (LeVan, Hassan, Isumonah, Kwaja, Momale, Nwankwor, & Okenyodo, 2018).

Concept of Empowerment

Empowerment has multiple definitions attached to it. It originated in the days of Freire (1921-1997) in Brazil. Freire created the "pedagogy of the oppressed" in 1970, to empower and prepare the marginalised and neglected individuals in the society with literacy skills through critical reflection. Empowerment is a term that manifested throughout in human service professions (Fredenberger, 1975), feminist literature (Deveaurx, 1994), education (Hagquist & Starrin, 1997), social psychology (Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1988), community (Sandan,

1997). Corwall and Edwards (2014) conceived empowerment as a trip and not a destination. To them, empowerment is a multifarious process of concession and not a straight series of inputs and outcomes. Rappaport in Collins (2013: 6) conceptualized empowerment as "both a psychological sense of personal control or influence" and "a concern with social influence, political and legal rights". From the above notion of empowerment, Collins (2013) observed two aspects of empowerment (internal and external). The internal aspect focused on the internalized view of individuals own capabilities while the external aspect is controlled by resources, social conventions and institutionalized systems.

Thus, empowerment alludes to the development in hoi polloi faculty to make tactical life options in the environment where this skill was formerly denied of them (Kabeer, 2001). Kabeer classified empowerment into three dimensions, which include the resources, achievements and agency. Empowerment is the strengthening of individual's abilities to involve in, negotiate with, control, influence and grasp responsible organisations that touch their lives (World Bank in Yaro & Yakse, 2013: 2). Empowerment is the act of increasing individual or groups' ability to hold, make choices and to transmogrify those choices into positive results (Ahamad, Sinha & Shastri, 2016). Huis, Hansen, Otten and Lensink (2017) conceived empowerment as a multifaceted process, which includes individual and collective awareness, beliefs and behaviour embedded in the social structure of specific cultural context. The above discussion tells us

that empowerment is a form of change in which those placed in a lower class, rank or position has authority to make decision, resist oppression, marginalization and dehumanization in the society they belong.

Concept of Women Empowerment

Women Empowerment (WE) emanated from different practices affecting women in several states. Kabeer (2001) maintained that the direct evidence of empowerment emanated from the devaluation of women, equality in marriage, women emancipation, financial autonomy and distribution of roles and decision-making. There is now prevalent recognition that empowerments signify different things in different situation and that education alone is rarely adequate to bring into being such socio-political change (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), 2014: 3). On certain occasions, empowerment for one woman can mean disempowerment for another (UIL, 2016). Women empowerment stand as an all purposeful effort aimed at educating the women in order to reposition the knowledge and competencies required of them (Alonge, Ige & Osagionbere, 2014). To Arum (2010) women empowerment involves a noticeable change in the psychology, economic, political, social and legal circumstances of women. Onyishi (2011) defined women empowerment as a course through which women obtain knowledge, skills and readiness to critically resolve their situations and take suitable actions to their community status. Onyishi (2011: xxx) while citing Karl and Garba affirmed six stages of empowerment process that concerns woman. The first four stages

were of the thoughts of Karl while the latter represent the ideas of Garba. The stages include awareness; skill expansion and capacity building; greater control and contribution in decision-making; action change; skill and capacity assessment; and evaluation stage.

Vyas (2018:9) identified two levels of measuring WE. They include: individual and collective level. Individual level measured WE looking at self-image, self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect. At the collective level, WE take overall custody of their lives and personal agenda by changing their position. Women empowerment depends on certain factors that make up their life chances. Giele in Nwosu (1998:60) presents a list of what explains women's life chances as women's political expression; education; work and mobility; family formation, duration and size; health and sexual control and cultural expression. Women empowerment could come in various form or methods such as education, economics, politics, social and technology Alonge et al (2014).

Educational empowerment allows women to acquire basic and functional knacks; reposition their lives, augment their consciousness, sustain, and explore their communities. Bhaltacharjee (2015) affirmed that educational empowerment helps women to thwart social barriers, traditional orthodox roles, know the world, obtains literacy, reduces inequalities, improved their rank and equip them with the faculties to responds to challenges and changes affecting their lives.

Health Empowerment equips women with elementary and fundamental health knowledge; enlighten them on their body functions and other health related issues. This occurs through community health education, health promotion programmes and health communication.

Political Empowerment, permits women to enthusiastically partake in political decision-making, vote and be voted for, and understand the political structure of the country. Women political empowerment entails the "process of increasing capacity for women, leading to greater choice, agency and participation in societal decision-making" (Sundstrom, Paxton, Wang and Lindberg, 2015). Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) a new approach to democracy which was co-hosted by University of Gothenburg and University of Notre in 2014, constructed three indices on women political empowerment (Sundstrom, et al 2015). The indices include: civil liberties, civil society participation and participation. The civil liberties index measures women's domestic movement; freedom from servitude and force labour. Civil society participation index measures women's capacity and capabilities in public debates; public organizations; and journalism. The last index (participation) measures the extent women are embodied in formal political positions and decision-making. Therefore, women political empowerment emanated from political education and public enlightenment programmes.

Economic Empowerment gives strength and makes women self-independent in financial affairs. Economic empowerment according to Sabeh and Mohammed (2007) contains the competence to concentrate in income

generating deeds that will create access to independent income and enhanced individual's capacity and capability to own resources. Divshali, Zare and Zare (2015) avowed the crucial factors promoting women's economic empowerment as economic partnership, family cohesions and social awareness. Thus, women economic empowerment occurs through education for occupation and economic self-reliance, acquisition of new skills, capacity building, career development, provision of loans and grants.

Technological Empowerment inculcates in women new thoughts and methodologies of tackling technological challenges. This occurs through mass media (radio, television etc.), computer literacy, technological literacy and information communication technology (ICT) programmes. Particularly in emerging nations, ICT have been promoted as ultimate solution for WE (Maier and Nair-Rieichart; Hafkin and Huyer; and Friedman cited in Nord, Paliszkiewicz, Grubljesic, Scarlat and Svanadze, 2015). Tomlin cited in Daher (2012) observed that social media augment women's input in political and socio-economic life and permit them to multiply their self-expression and endorse social change in the society. Therefore, technological empowerment assists women to habituate and adapt with technological vicissitudes.

Social Empowerment supports women in wiping off sex stereotypical attitude and social stratification practices. This affords women opportunities to socialize actively with their male-counterpart in social gathering and events. This may come through educational sociology.

Concept of Community Development

The practice of community development (CD) is not new. It was formalized in 1948 at the Cambridge Summer Conference (CSC). CSC as quoted in Hanachor (2013: 183) defined CD as: "a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and if possible, on the initiative of community, but if this is not forth coming spontaneously, by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to ensure its active enthusiastic response to the movement". The above view of CD has attracted a lot of definitions from different authorities. United Nations in Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008: 22) gave a universal definition of CD as:

a process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities, to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of community, to integrate those communities into the life of the nation and to enable them contribute fully to national progress.

The major concern of CD is social change and justice; by partnering with communities to diagnose their opportunities, needs, privileges and obligations, organise, plan, take action, and assess the impact of the action in ways which challenge oppressions and tackle inequalities (Community Development Exchange, 2013).

Obstructions to Women Empowerment

There are so many hitches to WE identified by different authorities. International Development Law Organisation (IDLO) (2013: 8-9) observed that "disempowerment of women is not simply due to lack of knowledge of laws and legal procedures, but rather due to a host of economic, social and cultural practices that perpetuate inequality in the community and the society at large". The impediments depriving women in community development were conversed below:

Political Marginalization: women in countless forms and varying degree have endeavoured to partake and even influence events in politics. Repeatedly, they were neglected, marginalized and deprived access to political matters. Women endure a lot in politics; they are under-represented; and their stimulus on community decisions is limited (Ichino and Nathan, 2018: 2). Egunyomi, Fadeyi, Folaranmi and Adelore in Adekola (2011: 279) observed that about fifty percent of Nigerian inhabitants are women; they are embodied in the senate by only nine out of one hundred and nine senators and occupy less than 1/3 of the ministerial position. Locally, women do not see it as their duty to chair community development committee (CDC), hold leadership positions or play leadership roles in CD projects. Therefore, they believe initiatives, innovations and creativity for CD are the obligations of men (Olayele, 2011: 175). Ezeonwuka (2008: 68) asked a serious question that demands a genuine answer; "how come it that we have the large number of females who are voters and yet men emerge almost always the winner and are voted by women themselves?"

Illiteracy: illiteracy which is occasionally perceived as the inability to write and read in any given language has limited women's involvement in community development process. Illiteracy in Nigeria is both a reason and a result of ignorance, poverty, deprivation and underdevelopment. It is commonly accepted that the gains of development cannot reach the general populace until basic illiteracy are provided to all, especially women (Ukwuaba, 2015). Women literacy programmes are ordinarily perceived as a second class education because of their reliance on female volunteer teacher. These teachers often lack opportunities for career development as programmes are inevitably run on a short-term basis (UIL, 2014). Women constitute 2/3rd of the world's non-literate population. This was given support by UIL (2013) in spite of enormous attention and discussion on literacy intervention particularly targeting women, the unfair treatment between genders continued.

Economic Difficulties: Women in rural communities labour excessively to satisfy their family needs. They engaged themselves in household tasks and farming activities to sustain the nutritional health of their homes. Divshali, Zare and Zare (2015) stated the barriers confronting women economic empowerment as personal-psychological factors, economic participation, infrastructural factors and social institutional factors. Onyenechere (2009: 83) identified poor credit facilities, inaccessibility to socio-economic facilities, land tenure, and poor road access as constrains militating against women informal economic activities in Imo State. In most

organizations, women suffer wage discrimination outside the ones experienced in their households; majority of them are housewives and cannot boast of being self-reliant or self-employed; while others are jobless and underemployed. These experienced difficulties weaken women activeness in financial issues, increase poverty rate, hunger and low per capita income. Olayele (2011) maintained that women to a fairly large degree, especially in evaluation to male-counterpart are financially weak and they frequently avoid taking part in CD. Elsayed and Roushdy (2017) women in most evolving countries suffer from poor socioeconomic empowerment and greater restrictions in labour markets. Women have finite contact to resources and do more of domestic responsibilities, low productivity jobs and prevented from involving in labour market to the same pinnacle that men do (World Bank and Independent Evaluation Group (IEG), 2017).

Sexual Abuse: Women in different occasions have been molested sexually. This unfair and offensive attack manifested in form of rape (sex attack), sexual harassment usually at their workplace and poor sexual orientation (sex education). Sometime, victims of this act are afraid and avoid partaken in CD activities. Bello (2017) observed that many spouse encouraged marital rape, beat, criticize their wives and finally divorce them, claiming crime free. To them, the issue remains a matter of choice between superior (male) and inferior (female). According to Moss (2015) statistics on sexual violence are hard to found because sexual crimes are usually under-reported, a United Nation (UN) assessment found millions of women as sufferers of sexual abuse each year, from sexual coercion within their romantic relationship, to rapes in countries experiencing conflict.

Cultural Prejudice: Most culture gives preference to male dominance. The dominance emanated from cultural customs and values agreed by the community. Women were deprived access to family inheritance, community leadership, etc. Social injustice prevented women's impact in community development programmes or projects. Most decisions were centered on ignorance and in favour of the menfolk. World Bank and IEG (2017: 18) in some culture, women's ability to move easily from one place or social class is limited, controlled by rules or laws; women are probable to stay at home, keep quiet during community meetings and go along with opposite gender decisions. To show the submissiveness and inferiority of womenfolk in most cultures, once a woman dies, during her funeral, the man is advised to get married. But, the tongue changes once a man dies. His consort becomes the first suspect; has to prove her innocence by drinking the water used in washing the dead body of her partner and so also is the iniquitousness of the shaving of women's hair at the passing away of their men (Ezeonwuka, 2008: 67)

Gender Disparities: In the Global Gender Gap Report, Nigeria was marked 118 out of 144 countries in 2016 and 122 out of 144 countries in 2017 in four fundamental areas: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, health and survival.

Table 2.1 Global Gender Gap Report

Country	Nigeria	Economic Participation & Opportunity	Educational Attainment	Political Empowerment	Health and Survival
Rank	122	37	135	135	94
Scores	0.641	0.728	0.813	0.052	0.972
Number of Countries	144				

Source: World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Index, 2017.

In attempt to cover the aforementioned gap at workplace, marketplace and community, UN Women (2018) announced principles of WE that will support institutions, organisations and countries identify strengths, gaps and opportunities to augment their performance on gender parity. The principles include establishing high level corporate leadership for gender equality; treating all individuals fairly at work, reverence and encourage human rights and non-discrimination; ensuring welfare of all individual workers; elevating women education and career development; putting into practice enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women; raising equality through community initiatives and advocacy; measuring and publicly reporting on movement or advancement to achieve gender equality.

Factors Facilitating Women Empowerment for Community Development

Favourable Policy Initiatives: Nigeria government has made effort to bring about encouraging and helpful policy initiatives that will empower women to gain the right expertise for promotion of CD. According to National Coalition Affirmative Action (NCAA) (2009), Nigeria gender policy goal "build a just society devoid of discrimination, harness the full potentials of all social groups regardless of sex or circumstance, protect the health, social, economic and political wellbeing of all citizen in order to achieve equitable rape economic growth; evolve an evidence based planning and government system where human, social, financial and technological resources are efficiently and effectively deployed for sustainable development." Aja-Okorie (2013:274) identified salient policy initiatives with a gender concentration in Nigeria: blueprint on women's education, 1986; nomadic education programmes, 1986; national commission for

mass literacy and non-formal education, 1991; family support basic education programme, 1994; universal basic education, 1999; national policy on women, 2001; education for all-fast track initiatives, 2002; strategy for acceleration of girl's education in Nigeria, 2003; national economic empowerment development strategy (NEEDS), 2004; and universal basic education act, 2004. These policy initiatives were aimed at empowering women through NFE programmes.

Availability of Adult Education Programmes and their Facilitators: Adult education programmes have been recognised as one of the elements facilitating WE in Nigeria and globally. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) (2016: 16) states that "countries all over the world have long recognised that adult education and learning has an important role to play in promoting social inclusion, citizen engagement, health and sustainable economic growth". Literacy, vocational, civic and political education, lifelong learning, consumer education and so forth are NFE programmes. These programmes are used by different institutions, organisations, change agents and facilitators in empowering women to realise their potentialities.

EducationalResearch/Documentation:

Research are carried out to carefully identify and scrutinize positive and negative causes of events with the objective of providing solutions to them. Medel-Anonuevo and Boechynek (1995) affirmed that previous research and documentation enable us to understand successful and failed programmes of the women movements, this will persuade us to learn more and generate new techniques that will assist us to assess and implement strong educational programmes for women empowerment.

Interventions of International and National Agencies: Here, international and national agencies include both governmental and non-governmental agencies like UNESCO, World Bank, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), African Protocol on People's Right and the Rights of Women (APPRRW), Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD), Federal Ministry of Education (FME), National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and so forth. According to Danjuma, Mohammed and Alkali (2013) international communities like USAID, World Bank, IMF, DFID, government and other private organisations and individuals have made several efforts in empowering women. These agencies repeatedly organised conferences, seminars, workshops and symposium. Some of them awards scholarship and provides grants and aids in attempt to shrink gender differences and social stratification affecting the women in their various communities. In Nigeria, the mission of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development according to NCAA (2009) is to function as the national vehicle; bring about speedy and healthy development of Nigeria citizens; ensure the survival, development, protection and involvement of all youngsters in preparation for meaning adult life.

Presence of Women Organizations at the Community Level: Wambua (2013: 2) observed that in most communities, there are

women organizations forums created by women to address socio-economic and political issues affecting their well-being and through such groups, members benefit from the opportunities afforded by these organizations such as economic empowerment, skills development, awareness creation, social interaction and moral support. Among the Igbo communities for instance, the Umuada (Daughters of Community) association usually fight for the wellbeing of their affiliates.

Suggestions

Based on the above discussions, the following suggestions were made:

1. Women should be reinvigorated and involved in community development committees to guarantee their voices are heard and respected.

2. Unsafe cultural practices, gender pigeonholes and social customs that propagate women's marginalization should be confronted and relegated.

3. Subtle gender policies that address gender discrepancies should be developed and implemented by government to support women's empowerment.

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