

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AS AN ECONOMIC FORCE IN RURAL EMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: NEED FOR THE EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK APPROACH

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Abstract: The fourth item on the agenda of the recently concluded International Labour Conference, 97th Session, 2008 was a general discussion on the promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction. Promoting decent work in rural areas is fundamental to achieving the MDGs. The bid to reduce poverty level worldwide led to the declaration of Millennium Development Goals in the year 2000. The Millennium Development Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (MDG.3) is recognized not only as a goal in itself but also as an essential step for achieving all other goals. In order to alleviate poverty and promote gender equality in rural employment, researchers, scholars, donors and policy makers have recognized the importance of empowering women. Women are central to overcoming rural poverty because of their role in productive activities and in the household economy. However, there are key challenges to achieving these goals at the country and local levels which military and democratic interventions, international expertise and financial resources have not adequately or sufficiently address. The paper therefore examines the need for the Empowerment Framework Approach (EMFA) towards empowering women in order to promote rural employment. Thus the paper spans two important interrelated themes: (a) A brief overview of the current field of rural employment with a focus on The World Development Review 2008, (b) Articulating the link between gender inequalities and rural employment, (c) Outline of EMFA which involves five interrelated steps. i) welfare level analysis; ii) access level analysis; iii) critical awareness level analysis; iv) participation level analysis level; v) control and ownership level analysis.

This paper will argue that women's empowerment can come in a diversity of ways such as education which is deeply embedded in the African culture. The challenges of women's empowerment are more cultural than technological, more about people and systems than about digital tools. This paper will offer suggestions for the future of rural employment and development. Lessons learned will form a firm foundation for the paper and a bibliography for the future study on this topic will be included.

Keywords: Empowerment, Gender Inequality, Household Economy, Nigeria, Rural Employment

Introduction

The scourge of poverty on a significant proportion of the Nigerian population has been charted in the past by a series of four Consumer Expenditure Surveys implemented by the then Federal Office of Statistics: in 1960, 1985, 1992 and 1996 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2005). Over the 16-year period, the report of the surveys indicated that poverty was most widespread in the rural areas and also feminized. Poverty in Nigeria is not gender-neutral. Women have less access to, and control of, land, credit, technology, education, health and skilled work.

The fourth item on the agenda of the International Labour Conference, 97th session, 2008 was a general discussion on the promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction. The intended outcome of the general discussion was to compromise a stocktaking of the nature, magnitude and changing patterns of rural employment in the world, with a particular focus on developing countries, a comprehensive strategy to promote employment and decent work in

rural areas around the world, an integrated plan of action for the international Labour Organization (ILO) to implement this strategy, including a conceptual framework, standard setting, technical cooperation and knowledge management (ILO, 2008). Rural poverty has continually plagued Nigeria over the decades, hence there is need to promote rural employment that is the farm and non-farm economies. For many developing countries, the agricultural sector which is mainly rural is still the main employer especially for women and particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The rural sector is the dominant sector in terms of employment and live hood in Nigeria and is central to employment generation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1998).

The bid to reduce poverty level worldwide led to the declaration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the year 2000. The Millennium Development Goal 3: Promoting Gender equality and empowering women, is recognized not only as a goal in itself but also as an essential step for achieving all other goals. Promoting decent work in the rural areas is fundamental to achieving the MDGs.

In order to alleviate poverty and promote gender equality in rural employment, researchers, scholars, donors, policy makers and all other stakeholders have recognized the importance of empowering women.

This explains why this paper will have to justify the essence of empowering women using the Empowerment Framework Approach (EMFA) and their participatory roles as an economic force in rural employment in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.

Conceptual Clarifications

Rural poverty in most of the world is higher than urban ones. Using the \$1.08 per day poverty line, the poverty rate for rural areas in developing countries (30 Percent) was more than twice that for urban areas (13 percent) in 2002. In a sample of almost 70 countries, the median urban income (consumption) is at least 80 percent higher than rural. One of the key underlying causes of poverty is the construction in different contexts of what it means to be man, or a woman. Gender in this sense, is a manifestation of a general model of power which holds that individual and group behaviors produce social structures (ideologies, rules, institutions) which, in turn, reinforce and “normalize” those behaviors to the point where they are seen as common sense, as the “normal” order of things.

Rural women play a critical role in agricultural production and in the rural economies of developing countries. In the developing world as a whole,

agriculture accounted for about 63 per cent of total female employment in 1997 and is still the most important sector for female employment in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia (United Nations, 1999). Rural women make major and multiple contributions to the achievement of food security and produce more than half of the food grown worldwide (United Nations, 1995).

But what is the level of remuneration for the work women do? FAO (2011a) reported that rural women work long hours and many of their activities are not defined as “economically active employment” in national accounts but are essential to the well-being of their households. They also constitute a significant proportion of the labour on their family farms - whether producing for household consumption or for enterprise or both (UNIFEM, 2005).

The issues of access to land, tools, agricultural innovations, credit and other factors of production have been often cited as constraints to women’s productivity. Their potential to do so is limited by multiple and diverse constraints by persistent structural gender disparities that prevent them from enjoying their economic and other right as outlined in the convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action)¹.

Rural women are constrained by unequal access to productive resources and services and inadequate or inaccessible infrastructure. The limitations rural women face in turn impose huge social, economic and environmental costs on society as a whole and rural development in particular including lags in agricultural productivity (Hill, 2011).

The underlying causes of gender issues in rural employment is a gender gap which is the observable (and often measurable) gap between women and men on some important socio-economic indicators (e.g. ownership of property, access to land, enrolment at school etc.) which is seen to be unjust are all precipitators of rural poverty.

Gender Issues in Rural Employment in Nigeria

The term, rural employment is defined as any activity, occupation, work, business or service

¹ CEDAW Article 14 is the only article in International Law addressing the rights of rural women. It commits States Parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas.

performed by rural people for remuneration, profit, social or family gain, or by force, in cash, or kind, including under a contract of hire, written or oral, expressed or implied, and regardless if the activity is performed on a self-directed, part-time, full-time or casual basis. It comprises agricultural employment and wage employment both on-farm self-employment and wage employment in the agricultural sector, as well as non-agricultural employment, which includes non-farm self-employment and wage employment (FAO/IFAD, 2011)

Gender inequalities in rural employment exist everywhere, regardless of the level of economic development in the country/region, but exhibit different patterns according to social, cultural, religious and economic factors. Some of them such as burden of unpaid work at home, lack of education and bargaining power, and limited access to assets - clearly constitute significant economic disadvantages for women compared to men. In this context, it is interesting to observe that 90 percent of the wage gap between men and women in developed or developing countries is unexplained. In other words, it is attributed to gender discrimination (FAO/IFAD/ILO, 2010b; pg X).

There is the need to define each of the following terms describing rural employment: (a) Off-farm activities are usually defined as remunerative activities outside the farm by household members residing on the farm, including both self-employment and wage labour (Burger, 1990). (b) Non-farming activities are either defined as all income-generating activities outside agriculture (Haggblade et al 1989), or as all income-generating activities apart from fishing, hunting, forestry and agriculture (DyK, 1981) or defined as self employment type of activities only (Liedholm, 1973). (c) Rural industries include industries processing primary products, manufacturing industries and related repair services (Chuta and Sethuraman, 1984) or all industries in which a majority of the employees and customers or client come from a rural area, excluding transport, trade and services (Weijland, 1985). (d) Small scale industries or enterprises are mostly defined as industries with less than 50 employees (10-50 employees) (LivingStone 1991).

What are the underlying causes of Gender Inequalities in Rural Employment?

Gender inequalities are endemic in Nigeria's rural employment. According to Longwe (2002) in order to understand and analyze gender issues propelling inequalities in rural development, levels of gender issues was outlined. They are: (a) Technical

Dimension (b) Social Dimension (c) Political Dimension

Technical dimension refers to the obvious empirical manifestation of a problem, and also how it affects individuals.

Social dimension refers to the underlying social factors in a problem.

Political dimension involves issues of power and control.

It is necessary to recognize these three levels of gender issues in order to be able to address gender inequalities adequately and sufficiently in rural employment.

Conceptualizing Women's Economic Empowerment

SIDA 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. Women's economic empowerment can be achieved through equal access to and control over critical economic resources and opportunities, and the elimination of structural gender inequalities in the labor market, including a better sharing of unpaid care work.

Women's economic empowerment is the single most important factor contributing to equality between women and men. It is also recognized as one means for reducing poverty and economic growth. There is increasing recognition that economically empowering women is essential to achieve broader development goals.

In discussing the relation between empowerment and poverty reduction, World Bank 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 (World Bank, 2001).

OECD/DAC (1998) defined women's empowerment as a process by which women gain access to resources and are able to develop their capacities with a view to actively participate in shaping their own lives as well as that of their communities in economic, social and political terms.

Empowerment is the highest point of self-realization which implies an increase in consciousness. Different people use empowerment to mean different things. However, there are four aspects which seem to be generally accepted in the literature on women's empowerment (Longwe, 1989). They are: (1) To be empowered, one must be disempowered. Women are disempowered relative to men. (2) Empowerment

Conceptual Framework of Women's Empowerment and Rural Employment

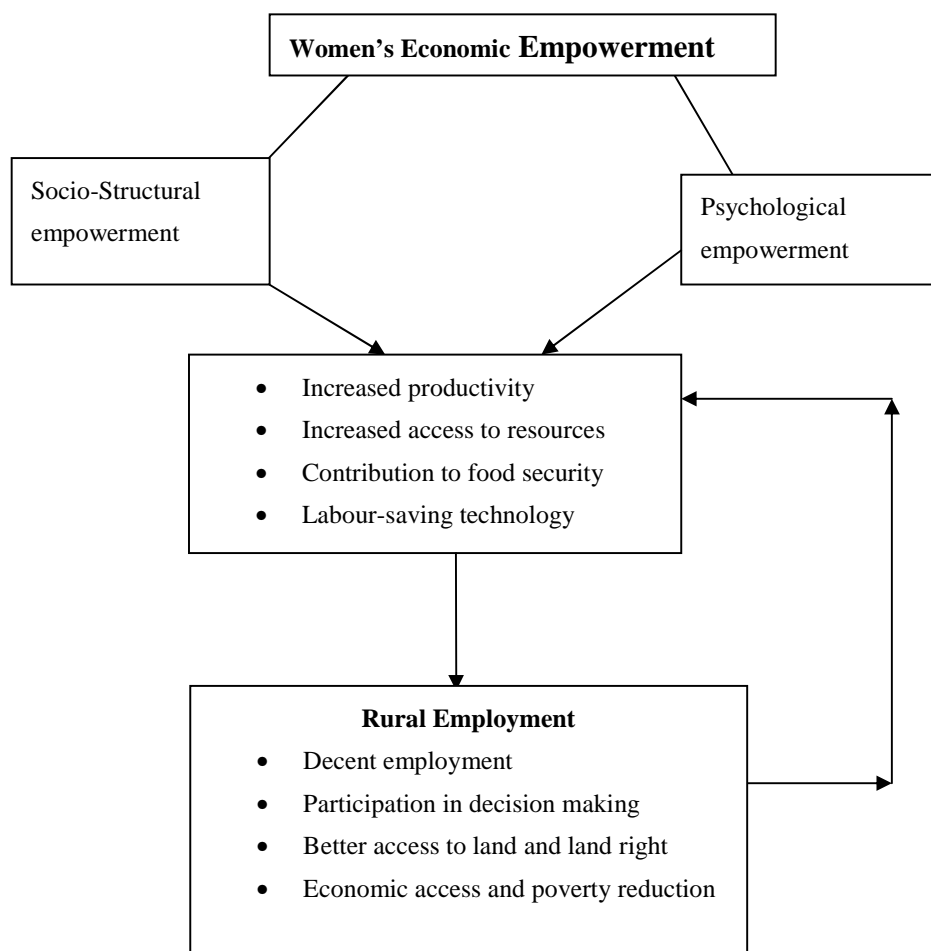


Figure 01: Conceptual framework of women's empowerment and rural development

cannot be bestowed by a third party. (3) Decision-making means people take their stand on an issue. Reflection, analysis and action are involved in this process which may happen individually or collectively. (4) Empowerment is an ongoing process rather than a product.

The concept of empowerment was adopted after the Beijing Conference in 1995. The Beijing Declaration (Section 13), presents women's empowerment as a key strategy for development: Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality development and peace (Commission on Women and Development, 2007)

According to Commission on Women and Development (2007), any attempt to understand the meaning of the word empowerment requires us to consider the notion of power. Empowerment can be considered as the process to acquire power individually and collectively. The four aspects of empowerment were outlined as follows (a) **Assets** (Power to) which refers to greater economic power in terms of materials assets such as income, land, tools or technology. (b) **Knowledge and know-how** (Power to) means having more practical and intellectual knowledge or skills, enabling a person or a community to make the most of the opportunities that arise. (c) **Will** (Internal Power) refers to power within, psychological strength or spiritual power: one's values and fears self-confidence and self-

Table 1: Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework (Adapted from Teberg, 2011)

Longwe's Women Empowerment Framework	
Control Ownership	Empowerment seeks a balance of power between women and men, so that neither is in a position of dominance. It means that women have power alongside men to influence their destiny and that of their society. In Longwe's view, empowerment is an interconnected cycle of countering discrimination and oppression. Addressing the roots of inequality at one level leads to a discussion about all of the other levels. Empowerment takes place as individual women and groups of women move between levels, gaining strength along the way.
Empowerment occurs in the process of social change	
Participation/Mobilization	The individual woman in the home or rural areas is not likely to make much progress in challenging traditional norms-power expands in numbers and connection. Mobilization is therefore the fourth and crucial stage of empowerment, which enables the collective analysis of gender issues and the collective commitment to action. mobilization is largely concerned with defining participation of a mobilized group will spark the search for empowerment
Social Change occurs with mobilization	
Conscientization/ Critical awareness	Here an understanding of the difference between sex roles and gender roles comes into force with the belief that gender relations and the gender division of labour should be fair and agreeable to both sides, and not based on the domination of one over the other. Access here pertains to women's access to factors of production, land, labour, credit, training, marketing facilities, and all publicly available services and benefits on an equal basis with men. Equality of access is obtained by securing equality of opportunity through legal reform to remove discriminatory provisions.
Social Change is on the agenda	
Access	The gender gap at the welfare level results from inequality of access to opportunity, information, and other resources. Empowerment means that women are 1) made aware of the gap and 2) animated to take actions for gaining access to their fair and equal share of the various resources available within the household, the community, and within the wider system of state provision.
Action here takes women automatically to the next level.	
Welfare	At this base level work views women as passive recipients and welfare pertains to the level of material welfare of women, relative to men, with respect to food supply, income and medical care, without reference to whether women are themselves the active creators and producers of their material needs. This level is not sustainable nor does it empower women.

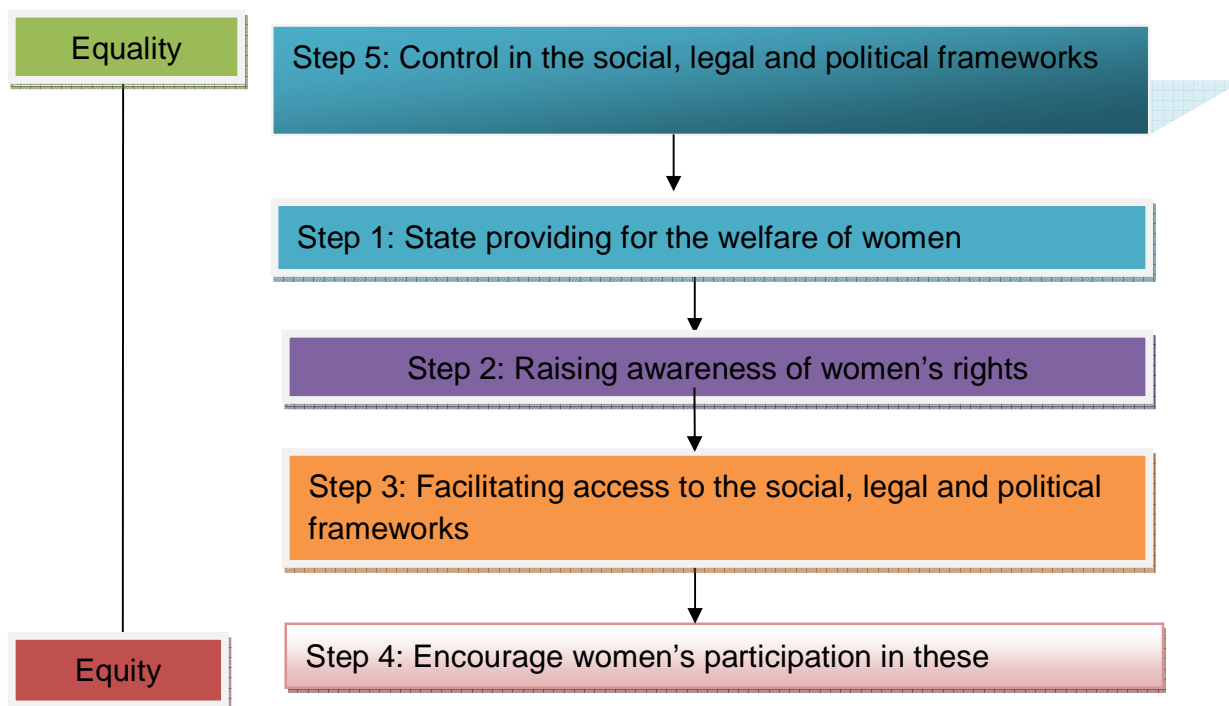


Figure 2: Longwe's Women's empowerment Framework Adapted from Teberg (2011)

perception. It is the ability and will to make one's own choices for the future, the awareness of one's life plans as well as the challenges facing one's community. The concept of "will" also includes the two elements of state of mind (being) and the ability to use it towards others (knowing how to be). (d) **Capacity** (Internal power and power with) means having the opportunity to make decisions, take on responsibility, be free to act as one pleases and use one's resources (assets, knowledge, will)

Conclusively, from the foregoing it is clearly evident that women can achieve economic empowerment if the resources are available and women have the skills to utilize them; they have access to economic opportunities and control over the economic benefits of those opportunities, and they can use those benefits to make strategic choice leading to positive changes in their lives. Empowerment is a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviours to social policy and social change (Rappaport, 1981, 1984).

The Empowerment Framework Approach (EMFA)

The Women's Empowerment Framework was developed to incorporate gender awareness, women's participation and women's issues into development programs, with the goal of overcoming inequality (Grown et al 2005). According to Mosedale (2005), empowerment through economic improvement is an approach which has been extensively used with women. Based on the assumption that women's relative powerlessness is primarily a function of their poverty, there is the need to apply EMFA towards empowering women in order to promote rural employment. Women Empowerment Framework is one of the commonly used gender analysis frameworks. This is an important approach to understanding rural poverty and the root of vulnerability and marginalization plaguing rural women.

An Empowerment Framework Approach according to World Bank, 2002: (a) Guarantees equal access to

opportunities and resources and equal protection under the law (b) Seeks a balance of power between women and men so that neither is in a position of dominance. (c) Increases expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.

This paper will adopt the Women's Empowerment Framework also called the Longwe Framework, developed by Sara Longwe, a gender expert from Lusaka, Zambia. The purpose of Longwe's Women Empowerment Framework is to move from gender equity to gender equality. Her model is explicitly political, arguing that women's poverty is the consequence of oppression and exploitation (rather than lack of productivity) and that to reduce poverty, women must be empowered. It emphasizes the assessment of women's empowerment and equality with men regarding equal participation in the development process to achieve control over the factors of production on an equal basis. The Framework states that women's development can be viewed in terms of five levels of equality which are the basis of gender equality analysis on the one hand and determinants of the level of women's empowerment on the other of which empowerment is an essential element at each level (March et al, 1999; Women's Information Center; 2005), table 01.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that all empowerment levels are interrelated. What occurs at one level has an impact on the other empowerment levels.

The importance of EMFA in rural employment

(a) Addresses poor/rural women's access to social and economic resources. (b) Integrates the need for ownership "gender" by replacing "women only" perception. (c) Promotes gender budgeting, policy and programming in vital areas e.g agriculture, manufacturing, production etc (d) Gives more equitable access to markets and business services. (e) Increases assets and freedom of choice (f) Increases social protection social safety nets and mechanisms to address increasing feminization of poverty. (g) Increases women's participation in rural development.

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