

IMPROVING THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF RURAL WOMEN IN NIGERIA THROUGH NON-FORMAL LEARNING.

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Abstract

The study examined the extent to which participation of rural women in non-formal learning programmes improved their economic status. It was guided by one research question and one hypothesis. Stratified random sampling was used to draw 1668 participants in the Women for Women International (WFWI) non-formal learning programmes, out of which 1558 responded to the study. The questionnaire used for data collection was validated by experts in the fields of education and a reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained, using Cronbach alfa formulae for determining the internal consistency of instruments. The research question was answered using mean and grand mean, while the hypothesis was tested using t-test statistics. The results showed that participation in the non-formal learning programmes improved economic status of rural women in Nigeria. There was no significant difference in the mean response of rural in Enugu and Plateau States on the extent to which their participation in the non-formal learning programmes improved their economic status. It was recommended among other things that the programme should be extended to all rural communities in Nigeria and other African countries.

Keywords: Improvement, economic status, empowerment, non-formal learning and rural women.

Introduction

Improvement in this study is seen as enhancing rural women's economic status for their empowerment, while highlighting what rural women are derive from participating in organized non-formal learning programmes. Rural women in the context of this study are women who live in the rural areas of Nigeria most of whom not have formal education but engage in economic activities that hardly earn them and their families a decent living. Women the world over are the most essential contributors to

entire development process, yet they are cheated, discriminated against and relegated to the background (Kristf and Wudun, 2009). This situation results in social and economic backwardness of women in most societies.

In pursuit of women's advancement worldwide, the United Nations organized various international conferences in the 20th century. These conferences were held in Mexico 1975, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985, Rio 1987, Veinna 1993, cairo 1994 and the Beijing women's conference of 1995. The outcome of these conferences gave rise to measures aimed at reversing the ugly trend of relegating women to the background. United Nations (1995) encouraged all national and international government agencies, policy makers, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to include women empowerment programmes in policies and development activities. They added that these programmes should focus on women education, women's access to economic resources, women's access to health care services, women's participation in decision making and elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

In Nigeria, considerable efforts have been made by government as well as non-governmental agencies to implement programmes aimed at the advancement of women. Such programmes like, the Betterlife for Rural Women's Programme, Family Support Programme, Family Economic Advancement programme and most recently the Women for Change Initiative (WFCI) initiated by the wife of the Nigerian President Dame Patience Jonathan. Despite all these efforts, the advancement of women particularly rural women in Nigeria are still not actualized. Azikiwe in Zuofa (2008) revealed that social norms, poor incentives, ignorance, poverty, illiteracy and cultural institution against women in most societies in developing countries are barriers to the advancement of women. Women particularly those in the rural areas needs education, economic and social power to actualize their advancement, hence the need for a comprehensive women empowerment.

Women empowerment simply means giving women power to take control of their lives. Kwapong (2005) viewed women empowerment as a process of improving the human capital of women for effective participation in all aspect of development of a nation. This will transform women to makers of development and history and not just receivers or objects of it. Arikpo, Eze and Taiwo (2006) stressed that an empowered

women should be engaged in a productive activity that will allow her some degree of autonomy. Economic self sufficiency is the basis for women empowerment, when women have improved economic status; they are more likely to be active citizens. Zuofa (2008) & WFWI (2009) observed that women who have high economic status earned income outside their homes, and this advances their financial status in a meaningful and more lasting way. Such rural women respond to opportunities, negotiate their traditional roles and change their lives and that of their families positively.

Education has been perceived as the most effective tool for increasing economic power of rural women (Olaleye, 2008). This is true because majority of Nigerian rural women are poor more for reasons of illiteracy and lack of life skills than lack of resources. Igbo (2008) in agreement with this view identified non-formal learning as one of programmes of adult education which is most effective for empowerment of women. Non-formal learning is education or training outside the formal school system. Ngwu (2006) noted that non-formal learning is planned educational activities or training outside the formal school system for any category of people for the purpose of raising their consciousness regarding their social situation and standard of living. Many reports demonstrated that non-formal learning and other organized activities for rural women have noteworthy results in their empowerment. Kwapong (2005) revealed that women's participation in Non-formal learning programme increased their income generating activities and enhanced their economic status. This was informed by the fact that these women acquired knowledge and skills required for improving and developing their task in all fields as well as facilitating their economic base. Bankee (2003) and Pants (2005) observed that each learning forum exposed these women to new ideas which they are not aware of and which could improve their economic activities.

In their separate studies, Blumberg, Rakowaski, Linker and Monteon (1995) & Zuofa (2008) observed that participation in non-formal learning exposed rural women to knowledge and skills which enhanced their competence to access and manage their own resources. In a similar view, Kwapong (2005) and Oladapo (2008) affirmed that non-formal learning increased rural women's income generating activities, improves their financial autonomy and enhanced their social status. These women became financially independent and contributed to their home finances. In as much as these were reports of

improved economic status of rural women in various parts of the world, Nigerian women still constitute 2/3 of the unpaid work force in the country (Women for Women International, 2009). Women's lack of control over their assets and poor income from productive activities in the rural areas reduced their economic status to the barest minimum. This situation has spurred many international organizations and non-governmental organizations such as United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and others including, Development Education Centre (DEC), Women for Women International (WFWI) to organize non-formal learning programmes for rural women in developing countries including Nigeria.

WFWI educate Nigerian rural women through its Non-formal learning programmes titled "Renewing women's life skill training curriculum (ReneWls)". WFWI is an International Nongovernmental Organization that provides learning empowerment programmes for rural women in Nigeria and other developing nations. The ReneWls education programme learning curriculum is organized in four modules and runs for twelve months, combining rights awareness education and vocational skills training. The ReneWls learning programmes were launched specifically to ensure that rural women who participate in the programmes would have sustainable income, maintain good health, participate in decision making and have improved social network status. WFWI has been educating rural women in two states of Nigeria, Enugu and Plateau States through the ReneWls education programmes. The Nigerian country director of WFWI asserts that over 23,000 rural women who participated in the programmes in the two states were empowered economically. This study was therefore conducted to determine the extent to which participation in ReneWls education programme improved the economic status of these women.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine how participation in ReneWls Education programmes improved the economic status of rural women in Nigeria.

Research Question

To what extent has ReneWls education programmes improved the economic status of rural women in Nigeria?

Hypothesis

A null hypothesis was tested at .05 level of significance and an appropriate degree of freedom.

H₀: There is no significant difference between the mean response of rural women in Enugu and Plateau states on the extent to which ReneWls education programmes have improved their economics status.

Research Method

The design of the study was survey research design because, it concentrated on discussing events as they were without any interference on what was observed. The population for the study was 16659 rural women who graduated from the ReneWls education programmes from 2007-2010, 10,484 from Enugu State and 6,175 from Plateau State. Stratified random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample size of 1668 out of which 1,049 were from Enugu State and 619 from Plateau State.

A 14-itemed four point rating scale / questionnaire, with a response format of very great extent (VGE), great extent (GE), low extent (LE), very low extent (VLE) was used to obtain data applying numerical values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was validated by three experts in the field of education (Measurement and evaluation; and Adult education). Based on their comments, some items were reconstructed. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronobach's alpha formula and internal consistency reliability co-efficient of 0.79 was obtained. The questionnaire was administered to the ReneWls programme graduates during their monthly group meetings in their various communities with the help of trained research assistants. The questionnaire served as an interview schedule where respondents experienced difficulty in reading and writing.

The research question was analyzed using mean statistic, while the hypothesis was tested using t-test statistic at .05 level of significance. The decision rule was as follows, any item with mean 2.50 and above was accepted as great extent of improved

economic status; while those below 2.50 were not accepted and regarded as low extent. Where the calculated t-value was equal to or greater than the critical value of t, the null hypothesis was rejected, but if less than the critical t value, it was not rejected.

Results

The results of the data analysis were presented in tables according to research question and hypothesis

Research Question

To what extent does ReneWls education programmes improved the economic status of rural women in Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean ratings of rural women's responses in Nigeria on the extent to which ReneWls education programmes have improved their economic status.

N = 1558

S/N	ITEMS	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
Because of my participation in ReneWls education programmes:				
1	I now own a personal income generating business	2.92	0.99	G.E
2	I now manage my income myself	2.90	0.94	GE
3	I now take care of my financial needs	2.67	1.10	GE
4	I now contribute towards my children's education.	2.85	1.00	GE
5	I now help my husband in bearing the family's financial burden	2.88	1.06	GE
6	I now obtain loan from outside the family without my husbands help	2.81	1.00	GE
7	I am consulted by other women on financial matters	2.88	1.04	GE
8	I now execute major family project alone	2.81	1.11	GE
9	I now take over some of my husbands financial responsibilities from him	2.84	1.05	GE
10	I am now actively involved in family business	3.02	0.99	G.E
11	I now make financial contribution to community projects	2.93	1.01	GE
12	I now have some savings from my personal business	3.03	0.95	GE
13	I no longer depend solely on my husband for financial needs	3.10	1.00	GE
14	I no longer get financial assistance form my husband for economic venture.	2.65	1.14	GE
Grand Mean		2.88	1.02	GE

Key GE = Great Extent

The table shows that a grand mean of 2.88 was obtained for all the 14 items on the impact of ReneWls education prorgammes on the economic status of rural women in

Nigeria. This shows that participation in ReneWls education programmes improved the economic status of rural women in Nigeria to a great extent.

Testing of the Null Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the mean response of rural women in Enugu and Plateau State on the extent to which ReneWls education programmes have improved their economic status.

Table 2: t-test analysis of the significant difference between the mean response of rural women in Enugu and Plateau States on the extent ReneWls education programmes has improved their economic status.

Location of Rural Women	n	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
Enugu State	1030	2.91	0.98	1556	1.45	1.96	Do not Reject H_0
Plateau State	528	2.83	1.06				

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value at .05 level of significance and 1556 degree of freedom was 1.45, while the critical value under the same condition was 1.96. Since the calculated t-value was less than the critical value of t, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This means that significant difference did not exist between the mean response of rural women in Enugu and Plateau States on the extent to which ReneWls education programmes have improved their economic status.

Discussion of Findings

Results from data analysis revealed that rural women's participation in ReneWls education programme in Enugu and Plateau States has improved their economic status to a great extent. Rural women who participated in the programme affirmed that they engaged more in income generating activities; manage their own income, contributed to family finances and have some savings for the upkeep of the family. The findings were in agreement with the earlier views of Blumberg, Rakowaski, Linker and Monteon (1995) and Zuofa (2008) who asserted that the participation of rural women in non-formal

learning programmes exposed them to knowledge and skills acquisition enhanced their competence to access and manage their own resources. In line with the findings of the study, Bankee (2003) and Pants (2005) asserted that positive and impressive changes were noticed in rural women due to their participation in non-formal learning programme. They learned survival skills which they did not have before their participation. These outcomes were very important for improving the women's economic activities. Butteressing this view, Kwapong (2005) and Oladapo (2008) added that rural women's participation in non-formal learning programmes increased their income generating activities made them financially independent and enhanced their social status in the society. This implied that participants in the ReneWls non-formal learning programme acquired economic power by generating and sustaining income due to new ideas, information, knowledge and skills for improving their economic activities.

The tested null hypothesis showed that significant difference did not exist between the mean response of rural women in Enugu and Plateau states regarding the extent to which participation in ReneWls education programmes has improved their economic status. This finding could be as a result of rural women's subordination which Oladapo (2008) traced to lack of financial autonomy. Rural women in the two states were working enthusiastically to acquire skills that will increase their economic power. Secondly, due to their families poor economic state, their husbands and male relatives encouraged them to actively participate in non-formal learning and acquire more skills and continue to improve their economic status by contributing more to family finances. This situation is in line with the assertion of a female participant in a non-formal learning programme as cited in Pant (2005), she stated that because of women's contribution to household expenditure, their husbands and in-laws have a more positive mindset concerning their new engagements.

Conclusion

The findings revealed that due to rural women's participation in the ReneWls education programme, the economic status of rural women has improved significantly in Enugu and Plateau States rural communities.

Study implications

The ReneWls education programmes are effective.

The programmes are universal and cut across socio-cultural barriers

They are likely to have the effect on rural women in other parts of Nigeria and Africa

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made.

- (1) The ReneWls education programme should be extended to all rural communities in Nigeria to enable more women to participate in the programme.
- (2) Government should support WFWI and other Non-governmental organization in carry out non-formal learning programmes for rural women in Nigeria.

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