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JUBILEUMI TANULMÁNYKÖTET II.

Szerkesztette:

Obádovics Csilla,

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Women Empowerment: Panacea for Poverty Alleviation and Economic Growth In Nigeria

Adeleye Oluwakemi Rachael¹ – Tibor Farkas²

Abstract

Gender equality has been identified as one of the keys to long-term economic success by many countries, regions, and international development organizations, of which women's empowerment is fundamental and cannot be overemphasized. Women empowerment has been linked to having a great impact on poverty reduction and promoting economic growth. It has a significant influence on health, nutrition, education, and the overall wellbeing of society. Despite the importance of women in the economy, there is still a lag in women's economic empowerment over the years, impacting the growth and development of many nations. This study examined the importance of women empowerment on poverty alleviation in Nigeria and what strategies could be implemented to create enabling environment and positive impact of women empowerment in the country at the social, economic, and political front.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Economic Growth, Poverty Reduction

Introduction

The empowerment of women has been widely acknowledged as an important goal in international development (Malhotra–Schuler, 2005). It has been recognized that policies and projects which do not consider the position of women in society have an adverse impact on development. The United Nations International Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, emphasized the significance of reducing gender inequality and boosting women's empowerment (Mujahid et al., 2015). There has been a call to “no one left behind”, and hence the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were launched (Upadhyay et al., 2014). Achieving gender equality is regarded as one of the critical goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Women and girls continue to suffer serious discrimination problems in every part of the world (UN, 2015). Gender equity has been one of the specific targets coming as goal 5 of the 17 SDGs aims at empowering all women and girls with great reinforcement on the need to have a

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reliable indicator to track progress. Gender equality has been further identified as key to long-term economic success by many countries, regions, and international development organizations (Mujahid et al., 2015). The important part of women's empowerment is linked to improving health and nutrition status, ensuring food security, eradicating hunger, and reducing poverty (Wei et al., 2021; Malapit–Quisumbing, 2015).

Poverty is one of the most pervasive issues confronting humanity. It is a significant impediment to fulfilling human rights and long-term development in most developing nations of the world today (Deedam–Onoja, 2015). It has been explained as a condition when a household or an individual cannot meet what is considered a minimum requirement to sustain livelihood in each society (Ogwumike, 2001), thereby causing deprivation at the physical, emotional, and wellbeing state (Deepa et al., 2000). Poverty is often traced to lack of adequate food and shelter, education, and health deprivations that keep people in such situations from leading the kind of life that everyone values. They also face extreme vulnerability to ill health, economic dislocation, and natural disasters. And they are often exposed to ill-treatment by institutions of the state and society and are powerless to influence critical decisions affecting their lives. These are all dimensions of poverty (World Bank, 2001).

Nigeria, the giant of Africa and a blessed nation with both human and material resources at her disposal has unfortunately not been able to put to appropriate use most of her resources, causing lots of her citizens to live below the poverty line. World Bank in 2018 reported that almost half of poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa live in just five countries: Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Madagascar; this is clear evidence of the poverty problem that the country has been combated with. Also, in 2021, another report given by the World Bank revealed that around 4 in 10 Nigerians were living in poverty. Millions more were vulnerable to falling below the poverty line, as economic growth was slow and not inclusive. Based on the most recent official household survey data from Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics, 39.1 percent of Nigerians lived below the international poverty line of \$1.90 per person per day (2011 PPP) in 2018/19. A further 31.9 percent of Nigerians had consumption levels between \$1.90 and \$3.20 per person per day, making them vulnerable to falling into extreme poverty. Nigeria has struggled to invigorate the broad-based growth needed to tackle poverty, given continued oil dependence, rapid population growth, and limited job

creation. One fundamental way to properly use the country's resource base is to engage and empower women in Nigeria.

Globally, the women population is about 49.58% of the world population (UN, 2019), and on the Sub-Saharan Africa continent, women consist more than 50% of their population, of which about half face poverty problem. This has generated concerns for the world economy (Okechukwu et al., 2016) and the interest of international organizations like USAID, DFID, IMF, World Bank, government, and private organizations to help women combat poverty persistence among them (Okechukwu et al., 2016). Empowering women and enhancing women's status can play a significant role in achieving many development programs and help bring positive societal transformation (Gupta–Yesudian, 2006). This study is a contribution not solely to descriptive literature on the present condition of women in Nigeria. The study also offers critical insights into the effects of women's empowerment on their households and how the promotion of women's economic empowerment can be a driving force to reducing poverty and aiding economic growth.

Statement of Problem

Gender inequality is one of the world's most common forms of inequality. It silences women's voices, undervalues their efforts, and places women in inferior positions to men, from the home to the national and global levels. (Oxfarm, 2021). Despite some important progress to change this in recent years, women have not achieved economic equality with men in no country, and women are still more likely than men to live in poverty. Women most often face discrimination and persistent gender inequalities, while some women are experiencing multiple discrimination and exclusion because of ethnicity or caste (Okechukwu et al., 2016). 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 the world, Nigeria inclusive, from accessing financial support to build their businesses. In some countries, women cannot obtain business loans without their husbands' or fathers' co-signature and support. In many societies, existing norms dictate that girls and women have the primary responsibility for caring for children, the elderly, and the sick, as well as for running the household, including

the provision of water and energy supplies. These hinder women's chances of being properly educated or translating returns on their productive work into increased and more secure incomes, better working conditions, and increased standard of living (Okechukwu et al., 2016).

According to the report given by Oxfam international as of 2021, about the poverty state of women, it reveals that women are in the lowest-paid work, and globally, they earn 24% less than men, and at the current rate of progress, it will take 170 years to close the gap. 700 million fewer women than men are in paid work. 75% of women in developing regions are in the informal economy – where they are less likely to have employment contracts, legal rights, or social protection and are often not paid enough to escape poverty. Also, about 600 million are in the most insecure and precarious forms of work. Women perform the bulk of unpaid care work across all economies and cultures. The value of this works each year is estimated at least \$10.8 trillion, more than three times the size of the global tech industry. That means globally, a young woman today will work on average the equivalent of four years more than a man over her lifetime.

Gender inequality in the economy costs women in developing countries \$9 trillion a year – a sum that would give women new spending power, benefit their families and communities, and provide a massive boost to the economy. Countries with higher levels of gender equality tend to have higher income levels, and evidence from several regions and countries shows closing the gap leads to a reduction in poverty. Supporting women to have access to quality and decent work and improve their livelihoods is vital for fulfilling women's rights, reducing poverty, and attaining broader development goals. A key to achieving this is through women's empowerment. The overall objective of this study is to examine the position of women empowerment as a strategy for poverty reduction, national development, and growth in Nigeria.

Literature Review

The focus, agenda, and terminologies used to characterize women's empowerment are all very different (Narayan, 2005). The terms "women's empowerment", "gender equality", "female autonomy", and "women's status" are all commonly used in literature to refer to women's power and influence over their lives. The meaning of the word "empowerment" varies depend-

ing on the social, economic, and political environment in which it is employed. It is a complex concept for which several definitions exist (Ewerling et al., 2017). Empowerment implies the transfer of power in a dynamic way over a period (Keshab, 2013). It ranges from defining it as a primarily individual process of taking control of and being responsible for one's life and situation to defining it as a political process of granting human rights and social justice to disadvantaged groups (Priya, 2017). The World Bank's Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook defines empowerment in its broadest sense as the "expansion of freedom of choices and action, which could increase women's authority and control over resources and decision making as it affect their life" (Narayan, 2002).

The empowerment definition above applies to women and other disadvantaged or socially excluded groups. However, it is crucial to recognize that women's empowerment has some additional features that are specific to women. First, women are not only a subset of society's disempowered subgroups (the poor, ethnic minorities, and so on); they are a cross-cutting category of humans that overlaps with all these subsets. Second, family and interfamilial connections constitute a primary hub of women's disempowerment, unlike other disadvantaged groups. This means that attempts to empower women must consider the effects of broader policy changes at the family level. Third, while empowerment, in general, necessitates institutional change, women's empowerment necessitates systemic change, not only of any institutions but particularly of those that reinforce patriarchal structures (Malhotra–Schuler, 2005).

Women empowerment has been linked to significantly impacting poverty reduction and promoting economic growth (Chaudry et al., 2012). According to United Nations Women Policy Division (2013), women empowerment needs to be focused on, and all the development projects and policies need to be gender sensitized. In most developing countries, due to early marriages, the high female unemployment rate and limited investment in them compel females to depend on men. Early marriage is one of the crucial reasons of the lower participation of females in the labor market compared as to developed nations (World Bank, 2007). Plethora of literature demonstrates that women empowerment is directly linked with the economic growth and development of a nation. One of the key areas of empowerment discovered by Ali and Salisu (2019) was free education and skill acquisition programs which the government can provide for women in Nigeria, as education is key to enlightening and an effective tool for empowerment. Other studies have examined many other

factors that need to be considered, such as political participation, resource control, domestic violence, entrepreneurialism, health, decision-making, and wellbeing (Hindin, 2000; Badejo et al., 2017). While women's empowerment is essential, research has also shown its positive correlation to improving children's health, increase in productivity, economic growth, and poverty reduction (OECD, 2012).

Economic empowerment of women and promoting gender equality have a great multiplier impact on human development and reduce women violence and maltreatment at home and work (Okechukwu et al., 2016). Economic empowerment places women in a stronger position and gives them the power to participate, together with men, in shaping society, influencing development at all levels of society, making decisions that promote their families and well-being. In the united efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, which recognizes the importance of gender equality, the influence of empowered women in eradicating poverty are essential to economic and social development

Discussion

Women's participation in development in Africa and other developing economies (a situation that could have improved the poverty situation of women) has been rated low (Deedam-Onoja, 2015), considering the rising poverty levels in Africa, which continue to pose a towering challenge to national governments and the international community (Ewuim et al., 2015). Women in Nigeria are also subjected to this plight. There is a need to understand their status in specific contexts such as poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, and involvement in national identity.

Women account for about 60% of Nigeria's poorest individuals, and the International Monetary Fund (2017) estimates that Nigeria has over 87 million people living in extreme poverty, which equates to approximately 52 million women. Although successive Nigerian governments have made efforts to enhance women's livelihoods and raise them out of poverty, the facts on the ground are not encouraging since a considerable percentage of women continue to live in extreme poverty. Most Nigerian women have no say in the power systems that determine resource allocation. As a result, inequalities in asset control and discrimination in the labor market are the primary causes of female poverty in Nigeria. (Kakwagh, 2017). Another essential reason for female poverty is due to

lack of education. The Nigeria constitution encourages access to education for all, but there is a wide disparity in education among the girl child and women in Nigeria. Women's Consortium of Nigeria (2004) quoted UNESCO as positing that Nigeria was one of the nine countries with the highest rate of illiteracy and that women constituted the most significant percentage. Report has it that, educational level wise, women earn less than their male counterparts. In some cases, men with less education earn more than better educated female peers. Also, Nigerian girls drop out of school earlier than their male counterparts (Aja-Okorie, 2013).

The contributions of Nigerian women to national development have been widely acknowledged by many international organizations, especially in agriculture (rural women) and household chores. The Food and Agricultural Organization reported more than four decades ago that 70% of the work in food processing and almost 100% of domestic and household chores are performed by women. Kakwagh (2017) further asserted that Nigerian women are the operators of the economy and constitute a significant arm of the labor force. However, Nigerian women have been decimated beyond agriculture and household chores and not allowed to compete with their male counterparts in the social, economic, and political spheres and underrepresented at leadership positions (Nkiruka–Akubue, 2012).

Also, violence against women has increased, and thousands of Nigerian women are often subjected to sexual, physical, or psychological suffering. The violence against women has no regard for income, class, and cultural boundaries as all women/girls are affected. It is a direct consequence of unequal power relations between men and women. Women's rights have often been denied simply because they are women, and they have little or no say in the decisions affecting the family, community, and nation (Kakwagh, 2017).

Women's empowerment is a multifaceted process, and the measures proposed are intended to address the existential problems preventing Nigerian women from realizing their full potential. Women's empowerment is a requirement for sustainable economic development and pro-poor growth. Solid government policies and long-term commitment are crucial to attaining women's economic empowerment. Gender-specific views must be considered at the outset of policy and program development. Women must have equal access to assets and services; infrastructure programs should help the impoverished, including men and women; and employment prospects must be increased while raising acknowledgment of women's extensive unpaid work. (OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality, 2012)

One crucial key strategy in achieving women's empowerment is education. As earlier explained, women have low education in Nigeria, and this has retarded them from participating actively in every sphere of life. Education will help women/girls develop skills and self-confidence, ultimately enabling them to participate effectively in society. Education also brings women to the pedestrian of knowledge, understanding their rights, ability to compete at the leadership platforms, and increase their income opportunities, thereby tackling the problem of poverty in the country.

Another critical strategy is economic empowerment which a lot of women lack. Studies have shown that most women lack freedom and the ability of choice to access economic strength. They have less access to credit, inheritance and ownership rights, and many other facilities that could help boost their status, especially entrepreneurial women. Women should therefore be economically empowered, and there should be designs that focus on building creditworthiness and financial independence among women leading to poverty alleviation. There should be policy reform supporting gender equality in Nigeria where traditional views, lack of confidence, gender discrimination, and intimidation will be removed, instead of social and political support and capacity-building opportunities will be promoted.

Conclusion

Women's empowerment is a critical human rights issue with implications for the wellbeing of women, their families, society, and socio-economic development and poverty reduction, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Women need education, skills, access to assets/credit, and social protection to fully develop their productive assets and tackle poverty. This paper recommends that for women, their families, and society to reap the benefits of economic development and poverty reduction, investments in and empowerment of women both economically and socially is inevitable. The suggestions and strategies are also useful as a policy tool for planners, government policymakers, development workers, and NGOs to initiate and appropriate them to achieve excellent results in women's sphere in Nigeria.

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Kulcsár László egyetemi tanár, emeritus 1946. december 11-én született Egerben. Szülei pedagógusok voltak, kezdetben a Heves megyei Erdőtelten, majd Egerben tanítottak. A szülők „klerikális” nézetei miatt a családot 1952-ben kitelepítették a Pest megyei Kakucs községbe. Az ócsai Bolyai János Gimnázium elvégzése után felvételt nyert az ELTE Állam- és Jogtudományi Karára, ahol 1970-ben végzett. Első munkahelye (1970-1985) a Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóközpont volt, ahol tudományos kutatóként dolgozott. Társadalomtudományi (szociológia) és módszertani tudása ebben az időszakban teljesebben ki. Felkérésre 1986-ban elvállalta a szociológiai tanszék megalapítását az akkori Gödöllői Agrártudományi Egyetem Gazdaság- és Társadalomtudományi Karán. Már Gödöllőn védte meg 1987-ben

MTA aspiránsként a kandidátusi disszertációját „A mezőgazdaság szociológiai kérdései” címmel. A kezdeti politikai és szakmai ellenszél jelentette nehézségek után a tanszék Agrárszociológiai Tanszékké, majd Vidékfejlesztési és Szaktanácsadási Intézetévé változott, ami egyben tevékenységének kiszélesedését és a munkatársak számának emelkedését is jelentette. Kidolgozta az agrárszociológia, a vidékfejlesztés oktatásának programjait a Gödöllői Agrártudományi Egyetemen és a Szolnoki Főiskolán. Egy cikluson keresztül Dr. Székely Csaba dékán mellett ellátta a tudományos és nemzetközi dékánhelyettesi funkciót. Vezetése mellett a Vidékfejlesztési és Szaktanácsadási Intézet jelentős szerepet vállalt a vidéki térségek fejlesztési programjainak kidolgozásában, elképzeléseinek megvalósításában szinte az egész ország területén. Az EU SAPARD előcsatlakozási programjának kistérségi felkészítését irányította a Minisztérium (FVM) felkérése alapján, amin közel 500 ember vett részt. Az FVM szakértői csoportjának egyik tagjaként részt vett a LEADER+ program magyarországi elindításában.

Több vidékfejlesztési projektet vezetett a FAO, valamint a Hargita megyei tanács megbízásából és a magyar kistérségek felkérésére. Csapatával dolgozta ki az Ister - Granum magyar – szlovák fejlesztési koncepciót Esztergom központtal és a Duna – Tisza – Kőrös – Maros térségének magyar – román – szerb együttműködésben megvalósuló fejlesztési programot. A Határon Túli Magyarok Hivatala megbízásából szakmai irányítója volt az Erdélyi Magyar Tudományegyetem (Sapientia) létrehozásának Kolozsvár központtal.

1993-tól kialakított tudományos együttműködés keretében a Cornell University (Ithaca, NY, USA) által irányított, amerikai, magyar, lengyel, szlovák nemzetközi vidékszociológiai kutatási program irányító testületének magyar tagja volt 1996 – 2005 között. Ennek keretében többször töltött hosszabb-rövidebb időt különböző amerikai egyetemeken. A projekt az amerikai Mellon Alapítvány támogatásával valósult meg. Az együttműködésből több publikáció született amerikai, lengyel, szlovák és magyar folyóiratokban, illetőleg konferenciákon az Egyesült Államokban, Norvégiában, Nagy-Britanniában, Brazíliában, Lengyelországban és Szlovákiában.

2009-től a Nyugat-Magyarországi Egyetemen dolgozott (Jelenleg Soproni Egyetem) nyugdíjba vonulásáig (2016). Jelenleg a Soproni Egyetem Lámfalussy Sándor Közgazdaságtudományi Karán lévő Széchenyi István Doktori Iskola programvezetője. 2019-től a kőszegi iASK Institute of Advanced Studies ösztöndíjas tudományos kutatója.

Főszerkesztő-helyettese a „Gazdaság és Társadalom” c. folyóiratnak (Soproni Egyetem), főszerkesztője az „Autonómia és Társadalom” c. folyóiratnak és tagja a „Journal of Appalachian Studies” amerikai folyóirat tudományos tanácsadói testületének. Tudományos munkásságát összesen 502 közlemény jelzi, amelyekre összesen 1133 hivatkozást kapott (2020. 02.15. MTMT).