

Gender Parity and Poverty in Rural Households of Nigeria: Empowerment as A Way Forward

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Abstract: *Building capacity of rural women and men to deal with the poverty problems has become important issue in most developing countries. This is because the issue of rural poverty is inevitable gender issue. It has been observed that most of the rural poor are women who suffer from unequal empowerment opportunity. The issue is affecting mostly women and children as growing generation. This may be due to their unsustainable source of income. The situation is what World Bank defined as “poverty the inability for women to attain a minimum standard of living”. Indeed where there is poverty, there are women and children. Where women are poor, uneducated and underpowered in society, these characteristics seem to appear among the family members. This study uses descriptive and correlation research designs to compare the income level, the educational level and occupational status of both males and females among household members in the study area. The finding reveals that, there are wider gaps between males and females in all the three domains of investigation. These also indicate that, the women are lagging behind; and these issues need to be readdressed, because in the rural areas, women are the largest and the vulnerable group. Interestingly, empowerment correlation is significant ($p < 0.05$), moderate for females and very small for males respondents.*

Key words: *Gender Parity, Poverty, Rural Household, Empowerment, Way Forward.*

I. Introduction

The issue of seeking for gender equity and equality seem to be global phenomena. But is more pronounce in rural areas of the developing countries. Probably this has to do with the background of the people of the regions. Majority of them are working in a low income job that cannot cater for their survival need. Most of them also have none or low educational qualification. Although there are many of them acquired tertiary institution qualifications. However majority of them are from the second category higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. These are vocational and technical education centers, monotechnic and health technology centers (Katsina, 2004). In these regions, women and children as the most victims, faced with difficulties in their sphere of life. This is confirms by (Gulma and Lawal, 2010) as due to their poor equal educational opportunities. In Africa, women for long have been faced with poverty and lack of education (UNPF, 2009). The family with high level of educational achievement has more likelihood to send their children to school; in addition, the children of educated parents are also more likely to have access and positive outcome in many areas including pro-social activities like participation. Many researchers have found the important of high educational level and its influence on the individual and family values. Azad, and Maleki (2007), recognized that, poorly educated people are concerned more about traditional values. In consensus with the Azad and Maleki, (2007), Rooster, (2006), studied attitude of young people toward family values and found that, there are strong relationship between educational level and family values. In the view of Kaldi (2006), there is relationship between educational style, identity crisis, and family values.

Mahdavi, and Saburi, (2003), confirmed that, empowering both males and females makes the structure of the family in the household more democratic. Straus and Gelles (1986) since attested that, family with poor status are mostly violent. Violence is the most common in less educated, low income, and low job status individual and family (Warner, 1981). Although Ehzazi (2004), believed that family violence happen in all the class of people. But Kani (1997) disputed that, and seen low level of income and economic status are the most leading factor to the family problems such as violence. In recent time, Edalati (2010) confirmed that empowerment increases the values of many families. Sultana (2006) confirms that it could expand their ability to make decision on their lives and family issues, increases their employment and income levels.

II. Theoretical Framework

The theory of empowerment developed by Solomon in 1976 focused on knowledge acquisition and skills necessary for coping with stress and the problems in life. This theory was used by various scholars in the field of education empowerment in many parts of the world. Simon (1994) uses this theory in explaining empowerment tradition of America. According to US tradition, knowledge is a mandatory requirement for life and therefore, basic for empowering individual and society. In Pakistan, Hussein (1995) tested the theory in

women literacy development for women empowerment. Lyonos, Smuts, and Stephens (2001) used the Solomon theory in linking participation, empowerment, and sustainability in urban studies. Nikkah, (2010) applied the same theory for women empowerment in Iran. The Solomon theory is very relevant for empowering different society in the world particularly using education.

Empowerment theory in acquisition of knowledge and skills are necessary for coping with issues and challenges of life. It helps in the ability to gain greater control over one's life and materials, as well as the ability to comprehend social and political realities. This important theory is still relevant; as supported by Nikkah, (2010) Lawson and Garrod, (2001), Lyonos, Smuts and Stephens (2001), Weisberg (1999), and Simon, (1994) as they emphasized the acquisition of knowledge and skills as the mandatory requirement to move out from poverty.

This paper uses same empowerment theory as used in Nikkah, (2010), which is increasingly a tool to understand what is needed to change situation of the poor and marginalized group, especially through education (Lawson and Garrod, 2001, Lyonos, Smuts and Stephens, 2001, Weisberg, 1999, Simon, 1994). The evolution of this empowerment theory was based on knowledge and skills to eradicate poverty.

Through empowerment an individual will gain greater control over the resources (Batliwala, 1993). Since rural poor are usually women, gender analysis has necessarily become vital in poverty alleviation to improve rural wellbeing (Smith, 2003). Therefore, education empowerment is one of the most important means of empowering individual and group (Vijayanthi, 2002). Feminist poverty is a rural issue in many developing countries. Thus, it is critical but is unavoidable to be discussed from gender perspective (Zumilah 2010). The effects of gender empowerment according to Czuba (1999) has the potency to create powerful influence on family, community, norms and values, and finally to the development of laws governing the society.

III. Methodology

The paper uses descriptive and correlation research designs as proposed by Leech, Barrett and Morgan, (2008). The descriptive focuses on the variables as education, occupation and income levels among males and female in the rural household, while correlations compares the levels of both males and females in the three domain. This study is a quantitative research with main focus on the rural household in Katsina rural communities. The central zone of Katsina State is the study area with total population of 2, 145,124 (36.7%) out of which the rural areas have up to 1,642,090 (28.3%), while the urban areas had only 503,034 (8.7%) (NPC, 2007). The three rural LGAs were selected randomly for this study – Batsari, Dutsin-ma, and Safana LGAs. The total population of these three selected LGAs was 542,428 with 49.9% male and 50.1% female respectively (NPC, 2007). The second sampling procedure was focused on the sample size. From the number, 384 respondents were determined as sample in this study using Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table. However, this study was oversampled by considering 400 units in order to curtail any problem regarding questionnaire rejection and poor return rate. A special questionnaire was developed and used as instrument for data collection. The background information was age, tribe, religion, marital status, education type, occupation, educational level, and monthly income as well as marital age. Other group of variables is family background which consisted of household economic background, family living arrangement, household monthly income, number of wives for males, number of children, and house type.

IV. Findings

The results of this research consist of three sections. The first section is the on the occupations of the respondents that were presented in three category; employed by government or private sector, self employed and non employed/ odd job and house makers respondents. The second section presents results on education level of the respondents by sex disaggregated data- no school/primary, secondary school, and tertiary level of schooling. Section three describes the income levels of the respondents; low income level, middle income level and high income level. The findings were described both in tables and discussed, and finally the conclusion was drawn from the find as presented below.

Occupation

Occupation in this study was classified into three types- the government or private employees, self employed or business operators and odd job as well as house makers. Occupations of the majority in this study reflect their economic activities which may also represent their income level. Table 1 shows that, 40.8% of respondents are working either with government or private organization. The self employed and business groups constituted 35.6%, while those doing odd job and home workers are at 23.6%. In a government or private sector, the male are at 28.7%, but female represent only 12.1%. For self account and business operators group, male are at 13.9% while female respondents are at 21.7%.

Table 1: Gendered Analyses on some of Respondents Background

Background Description	Category	Sex (n=355)				Total	
		Male		Female		n	%
		n	%	n	%		
Occupations	Government/private	120	28.7	34	12.1	145	40.8
	Self account	49	13.9	77	21.7	126	35.6
	Odd job and house workers	26	7.3	58	16.3	84	23.6
	Total	177	49.9	178	50.1	355	100
Education level	not schooling	22	6.3	36	10.1	58	16.3
	primary	10	2.8	32	9.0	42	11.8
	Secondary	21	5.9	46	13.0	67	18.9
	Tertiary	124	34.9	64	18.0	188	52.9
	Total	177	49.9	178	50.1	355	100
Income (USD)	<125 (low income)	40	11.3	142	40.0	182	51.3
	126-375 (mid. Income)	90	25.3	30	8.4	120	33.7
	376 above (high)	47	13.3	06	1.7	53	15.0
	Total	177	49.9	178	50.1	355	100

Source: Field survey, 2012.

This result may be due to two reasons; firstly, tertiary education levels of the female is at low as 18.0% only, secondly the socio-cultural constrains which put the females under permission of the fathers or husbands for any activity outside home. Sultana (2006) reported that poor women empowerment particularly in education increases women burden which is socio-cultural constrains. Most of females are in home-based occupation and or odd job. Majority (38.0%) were in self employed, business operator or doing odd job and house makers. The proportion of males employed in the public and private sector is more than doubled of the proportion of employed females on the counterpart (Table1). This occupational segregation on females has long history:

“Occupational segregation has had a comprehensive effect on the labour market status of women affecting occupational choice, the sector of employment (where) women are concentrated, the possibility of promotion and most importantly the level of pay. Because occupational segregation crowds women wages in those occupation . . . the view that as women choose jobs that are not segregated, their pay level will increase and pay gap will shrink, ignore labour market realities including projected growth in low wage occupations where women are heavily represented” (pp 29-30) Malveaux,1990).

Harding (1998) shows that, women worked for long hours with a very little reward. Yaqoub (2005) reported that, the women have easy access only to low-pay job in which the benefits cannot promote their economic wellbeing. The finding from this study shows more than 59.2% of females are not working formally. The unemployment rate affects the majority (38.0%) of female who are not working. than (21.2%) of males on the counterpart. Females are not working but depend on the casual work when available and petty trading operation in the houses with a very little capital (World Bank, 2002).

Educational Level

Table1 shows 28.2% of the populations were not schooling or stop at primary level of education. Other 18.9% had completed secondary level of education. However 52.9% of them attended tertiary level of education. This finding may reflects the nature of the respondents; who are the parents of the empowered girls in education, the head of primary schools and parent of the schools children usually whom were assumed to be educated. Therefore they attained a high level of education. Another possible reason is that tertiary level of education in this study is divided into two; firstly, from first group high Learning Institutions (HLI₁). These include Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, and Schools of Nursing. Secondly, is from second category high learning institutions (HLI₂). These are vocational and technical education centers, some monotechnic and health technology centers, Abdullahi (2012). Apparently, most them in this study at 51.3% earn very low income (<USD 125). These may not be unconnected to fact that, most of them acquired their qualifications from HLI₂. In these centers skills and competency are the most important without considering good number of credits from ordinary level for admission.

By sex disaggregate, 34.9% were males in level of education, and only 18.0% are females. On the extreme end, for primary and not schooling group, females are at 19.1 %, and only 9.1% of their male counterpart. This finding may be connected to the tradition and cultural practice of most society that paved way to these biases. Most society in Nigeria until today, view educating girl- child as waste of resources and opening ways for the girls to immorality. They believe that the only best place for female is husband’s house where she will be cooks, and take care of her children (Mahuta, 2007). This believes according to Hussein (2005) dictated the females’ other roles beside mothers and house wives and militated against females’ educational progress. Women knowledge is very useful for household resource management and complimentary to that of men in relation to household management and productivity (Phankasem,1998). One important issue with empowering women in Katsina rural area is that, the correlation between empowerment and their economic wellbeing was moderate and significant ($r=0.415$, $p<0.05$), and it was very low ($r=0.192$, $p<0.05$) for their males counterpart.

Income level

This study found that majority at (51.3%) their income is low (USD <125) monthly. probably this cannot be enough to cater for their daily need. This is indicating the need for social supports from governments and nongovernmental organizations to empower the rural populous to cater for their basic needs. This may be a reason for Sophie (2007), to write in gender issue and socio-cultural power relations between males and females in rural area are complicated. The income earners are divided into three groups – low, middle, and high income groups. Who earned below USD125 per month was grouped within the low income group. Those earning USD126 to USD375 per month were grouped as middle income, and those who had monthly income above USD375 were classified as higher income group. As the income increased from the low group to the high group, the number of people decreased (Table1). On daily basis, majority (51.3) earned USD<4.2. The middle class income group is (33.7%) while the high income group are (15%).

By sex disaggregation, the number of females in the low income group was much greater at 40.0% than their male counterparts at only11.3%. On the other hand, there were much more males in the middle and high income groups at 25.3%, and 13.3%, than their female counterparts at only 8.4% and 1.7% respectively. This may be related to females' level of education where only18% of female attended higher institution of learning and mostly from HLI2. The income is determined by their occupation, and it is directly related to unskilled rural economic activity (Jariah, 2000). The study showed large proportion (more than 50%) earned less than USD125 per month and only very small proportion (15%) earned USD376 and above. Income disparity between males and females in this study was very wide. By sex disaggregate, the average monthly income for male was USD303 whereas average monthly income for female was USD96. The number of females in the low income group was more than three times the number of their male counterparts in the same group. On the other hand, the number of male in high income group was more than ten times the number of female in the same group. This is what put in a hardcore poverty or below the poverty line. Based on income group defined in this study, it was only 15% of the population that may be able to sustain their economic wellbeing. UNDP (2007) reported that economic wellbeing of individual and family could only be sustained by having enough income to have an acceptable standard of living.

V. Conclusion

This study agreed that family problems such as violence and divorce mostly happen in the household of low educational background and the household where the educational gap between husband and wife is very wide. Though there are no apparent specific laws that force parents to send their children to any education system in Nigeria. However this study recommends the proper teaching in the two types of education system; the religious based education and the western education system should be intensify for both males and females children. Given opportunity to males and females children to have education and be entrepreneur increases family economic strength. This also promotes the individual and societal functions in the development processes, but is yet to be understood by many Nigerian societies. Although the phenomenon affects more girls than boys, it is poor conceptual awareness and proper education empowerment appeared to be the most hindering factors particularly in rural areas.

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