

Socio-Cultural Changes, Women Empowerment and Family Welfare among Ubiaja Women of Southern Nigeria

Alenkhe Odianonsen Augustine

Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan
princealenkhe@yahoo.com

Ibiezugbe Irabor Michael

Department of Social Work, University of Benin, Benin City
ibzmike@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The world in the past has experienced a structured and uni-linear direction of cultural practice and this has been the domination and execution of leadership, policy and practice by the male sexes in the society, though there have been transformation in most of her cultural practices, the women folk have not been left behind in this transformation process or agenda. The first and the third article of United Nations Millennium Development Goal Strategy is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and also to promote gender equality and empower women, all these are to improve the life and the welfare of the families in the world especially the developing countries and Nigeria is not exempted in the scheme motion of development as this study examines with kin interest the socio-cultural changes, the various empowerment scheme available to women and its nexus to family welfare among women of Ubiaja, Nigeria. The study is an exploratory design and made use of 150 respondents in Oyomo, Ugbenin, Uokha, Eguare communities of Esan South East Local Government Area, Ubiaja, respondents were interviewed using a structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview, convenient sampling method was used for the study. Based on the findings, it was realized that most of the women in the selected community have been empowered in one form or the other and it benefits revealing. Conclusion and recommendation were deduced from the findings.

Keyword: Women, Empowerment, Women Empowerment, and Development

1. Introduction

Most society in the world has a standard of living and this trend have been followed from ages, and this standard can be referred to as culture. Culture is said to be the way of life of a people and other version states it to be a regularity of human behaviour... (Schneider 1980:5), the way human act and in terms with his social environment may become the standard to which he/she lives. This is in clear terms that culture is distinctively a human attribute and therefore adapting it to our social environment is a continuous process, this process in question can cause dynamism in the act of the individual behaviour and we are usually differentiated from other human by our *doings* and belief system with the society.

However culture doesn't only deals with inanimate object but also with animate object, that according to Fagan (1978:69), culture consists of many interacting elements, many of them highly perishable. This tells that culture is both material and non-material in nature. Society have long witness a normative approach toward societal ways of life, which has seen the male in the front burner in all the affair of the society, thereby giving little or no attention to the female folk in the environment. In selected situation where the women were seen or heard, such societies were tailored and tagged "weak society". In recent time, especially in Africa the women have broken out of their shell by been empowered and later held some leadership position, that have improve the society where they lived.

Empowering human in modern society is nurturing them for future developmental advancement, especially in most developing countries where hunger is the main challenges been faced. According to Nagaraja (2013), the World Bank has identified empowerment as one of the key constituent elements of poverty reduction and as a primary development assistance goal. It will be just to state that African culture to some extent was not fair in its dealing with the female folks, even when they have the skills and strength to bring change, they are still *caged* with the 'kitchen' and 'farm'(where they do the packing and picking of smaller crops for the family consumption). Women account for approximately one half of every country's population (Agbalajobi, 2010), and if these high number of person would be empowered to contribute to

the welfare of the family and the development of the society. Africa and the developing world will experience a tremendous growth

2. An Overview of Women Empowerment

There is a parlance that says 'an empowered society is a powerful society', however the term 'empowerment' is a contested concept which connotes different meanings depending on different perspectives of looking at it (Asnarulkhadi & Aref, 2009). The empowerment of women means for them to have the necessary ability to undertake a number of tasks either individually or in groups, so that they have further access to and control of society resources.

The world has struggle to fight poverty in most of her society, especially in the developing world that comprises Africa and some of the Asia tigers, Africa has seen male dominance for a long period of time and this has place him at the peak of decision making even influencing the fertility determinant of the family size in the society.

Hashemi and Schuler (1993) as cited in Varghese (2011) defined the empowerment of women through the use of six spheres: 1) sense of self and a vision of the future, including resisting negative behaviors of the husband; 2) mobility and visibility, including how women are treated when they are traveling; 3) economic security, including cash income, new skills and knowledge; 4) status and decision-making power within the household, including making purchases on their own; 5) ability to interact effectively in the public sphere, such as joining credit programs, and 6) participation in non-family groups, such as credit programs and solidarity movements.

3. Why Empower Nigerian Women

Man and women have the same constitutional right in Nigeria, except in few cases where they (women) are restricted by culture. Having certain right and privileges will entail certain level of empowerment on the part of the citizen, this entail both men and women in Nigeria. Empowering the individual is a key function for sustainable development. This supports the idea of Nagaraja (2013) who asserted that, the World Bank has identified empowerment as one of the key constituent elements of poverty reduction and as a primary development assistance goal.

According to Handy & Kassam, (2004). as cited in Fatemeh (2011), since the 1990's women have been identified as key agents of sustainable community development and women's equality and empowerment are seen as central to a more holistic approach towards establishing new patterns and processes of development that are sustainable....Over the years men empowerment has lead to limited development in most part of the world, and the Africa continent is not an exemption. Esther (2012) discussed that there has been unequal, and lack of fairness on the distribution of resources and other social amenities, as it affect gender of which the female folk suffers it more.

According to her, though there are few changes in terms of development on gender disparity especially in developing and less developed countries there are still lot to cover, Berniell and Sánchez-Páramo (2011) as cited in Esther (2012) stated that, In labour market opportunities: women are less likely to work, they earn less than men for similar work, and are more likely to be in poverty even when they work. Women spend almost twice as much time on housework, almost five times as much time on child care, and about half as much time on market work as men do. This explain why women are more relegated to domestic work and are also limited to certain job within a given society, however job hazard have incapacitated some men to the extent that there is an upshot of poverty within the family circle if the man is the sole revenue generator of the family.

It has been stated that the average Nigeria earn less than \$2 dollar daily, while 71% earn less than \$1 dollar daily (fact from 2010 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), in a situation where just a family member provides and the end result is less than \$2, it will be of an advantage when he is been supported by another member of the family. This will improve the standard of the family especially when both member (husband and wife) are empowered either educationally, financially, vocationally and otherwise.

4. Education as a Tool for Women Empowerment in Nigeria

Education is generally known as the bedrock of every human society, it is seen as the door for social development. Ojobo (2012) said that, in all countries in the world, education is recognized as the cornerstone for sustainable development. It is a fulcrum around which the quick development of economic, political, sociological and human resources of any country resolves. The CIA world fact book of 2012, stated that, two-third of the world's 793million illiterate adult are found only in

countries which includes Bangladesh, china, Egypt Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and Pakistan. Worrysome is that Nigeria which is striving to become one of the leading world economies by the year 2020. Still tagged among one of the countries under the illiteracy listed countries.

It is very obvious that most developed countries have a very low rate of illiteracy as compared to the developing countries in the world like Nigeria. Idoko (2012) stated that the alarming rate of illiteracy is worrisome; he added that the population of Nigeria that are illiterate has hit 56 millions and this call for concern to most Nigerian that have the country at heart. It is strange to know that many of young women want to get married at an early age, whereas what they really need is education, according to Oyedele (2012), sixty per cent of Nigeria's illiterate 60 million people are women and this has contributed immensely to the high rate of poverty among women.

Abanihe (1997) opined that education is the greatest resource for women empowerment. She further added that, education influences decisively a woman's overall health and access to paid employment and therefore enables her to make informed decision about herself, and to assume a status and identity beyond those that are linked with child rearing and family. It is however noted that most women that have been empowered educationally have excel in one way or the other in their various department and its argued that women are supportive, nurturers, growth-oriented, agent of change and future builders. Educational institutions cannot afford to ignore the strengths of female managers (Adadevoh, 2001).

Oresile (1998) in Tavershima (2012) succinctly avers that; "if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation". He further asserted that, this assertion is borne out of the different roles women are called upon to play in modern society- as -house wives, mothers, social mobilizers, political leaders and citizens. This is based on the idea that women while carrying their various role and duties irrespective of her educational background level, can still do well and bring out the best of themselves in most situations. Oresile buttressed his idea when he re-affirmed that no wonder, developed countries spend a good part of their economic resources towards human development especially with regards to women education. A woman who is educationally empowered will perform roles that would help in the realization of the millennium development goals (MDG). Therefore when women are adequately empowered in an educational economy, the society tend to produce better output considering the fact that the contribution of both sex will bring an above average level in terms of its production output especially when the neglected gender are educated and are allowed to bring out their best in the society.

Education is just one aspect of empowerment and there are other various types of empowerment as stated by Lopez-Claros et al. (2005) in their paper presented to the United Nation on advancing gender equality, according to them the following are the various types of empowerment. 1) Economic empowerment. 2) Political empowerment. 3) Educational empowerment. 4) Health and well-being empowerment.

5. Role of Women in Nation Building

Ekong (2008) asserted that various researchers (such as Agbola 1990, 1996; Okoro 1996; Mivanyi 1996; Ekong 2006) had reported on the contributions of women in agriculture, community development and physical development. He added that that women are the real engine driving the economy of this country and are the keys to development and therefore crucial to the goal of sustainable development. Neglecting the role women in the country could be seen as withdrawing from attaining the developmental goal of the nation, as women are often refer to as the driving engine of the family (which is refer to as the bedrock of the society). This could be traced to the FAO reported of 1975, which stated that 70% of all the work in food processing and almost 100% of all domestic and households' chores are performed by women. This trend has not changed except that women now take additional burden of extra-domestic affairs.

Women contribution in the society are taken with levity as they are taken as very insignificant, however this has gone a long way to put some food on the table of some families, change the family status both economically, educationally and socially. The role of women in 21st century nation building can never be over flocked, little wonder the Millennium Development Goal Strategy (MDGs) was centered on women for most of her achievement. According Ngunjiri et al (2012), Millennium Development Goal Number 3 and 5 promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. Besides, women are expected to play a key role in contributing towards meeting most of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), on poverty reductions, mortality and morbidity reduction, environmental protection among other goals.

One of the objectives of the Millennium Development Goal strategy is to eradicate gender inequality in all levels of education by 2015. Olufunke (2011) opined that women in developing countries have always and are still participating in the traditional sectors of both rural and urban areas, she further added that women are actively engaged in farming, food processing and craft work such as pottery, petty trading, weaving etc. the activities of these women are to combat hunger and poverty which is one of the major goal of the Millennium Development Goal strategy and Nigeria is a major anchor in

this stream of development.

The function of women in contributing to the development some of the sectors in the country still lack some recognition, as Olufunke (2011), asserted that despite the contribution of women in development process, such as a child bearing, raising of children, fetching of water and fuel wood, social activity and other various community organization they belongs to, their role in promoting economic and social change continues to be inadequately recognized and undervalued. The idea of nation building has its root from the family and women that are mother have played key roles in the upbringing of their child to be quality children that becomes youth that are leaders and later becomes the rulers and shakers of the sectors of the country economy.

6. Nexus between Empowering Ubiaja Women and Developed Family Welfare

There is a parlance that states "empower the women, and then you are empowering the nation" this is because women are seen as nation builders, Ubiaja is a famous town in southern Nigeria, during the colonial era and till date it is renowned for its location in the rain forest region, rich in red soil that is really fertile for agricultural purpose, her citizens are good farmer in crops like yam, cassava and beans, and even cash crop such as oil palm, cocoa and rubber. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubiaja), art like trading and profession such as teaching, fashion designers are also visible in the physical environment. However most of this art and profession need some special skills and the women shouldn't be left out of this scheme.

When people (especially the girl child) are empowered, they tend to be more productive, using education as the first point of call, Ojobo (2008) asserted that in all countries of the world, education is recognized as the cornerstone for sustainable development. And this development cut across all the span of the society even the family welfare. This education may be as vocation, where the individual tend to a specialist in one trade, art or craft. It may be formal education where he/she passes through the stages and became an educational literate, where he/she transfer his/her academic prowess to the general public through teaching, acting and administration of other various services. All over the world when men as well as women are really empowered, they tend to be more creative and productive in their various endeavours and the Ubiaja community is not exempted from this scheme.

Isah et al (2013) opined that a society with greater gender equality, especially when they are adequately empowered are likely experience faster economic growth, and benefit from greater agricultural productivity and improved food security. Empowering women to participate in and lead public and private institutions makes these institutions more representative and effective. Increasing girls' and women's education and access to resources improves the health and education of the next generation. Empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors and throughout all levels of economic activity is essential for transformation to:

- i. Build strong economies.
- ii. Establish more stable and just societies.
- iii. Achieve internationally agreed goals for development, sustainability and human rights.
- iv. Improve quality of life for women, men, families and communities.
- v. Propel businesses' operations and goals.

Before the rapid migration of the labour force of the rural dweller to the urban settlement (especially during the era of the Oil boom) the Nigeria society have been basically farmers and hunters, as most on the Nigerian populace are rural dweller, according to Nwokocha,(2007) the society Nigeria has a very high number of rural inhabitants that migrate to cities with high hopes of overcoming the powerlessness consistent with rural life is unprecedented. the migration is due to this rural dweller may also be due to the gap in development or disparity in social development experience between both habitat (rural and urban). When citizens are duly empowered and are given avenue to display the expertise there is a tendency that there will be growth and development both in the family and the society at large.

7. Statement of the Problem

Nigeria is blessed with human resources and has virtually all the natural resources at her disposal and still cannot compete with some countries economically, culturally masculinity in authority and job allocation has hinder some aspect of development especially as it affect the family and its welfare. If the fact from 2010 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is anything to go by where It has been stated that the average Nigeria earn less than \$2 dollar daily, while 71% earn less than \$1 dollar daily, and the level of poverty is increasing and family welfare is deteriorating, then there is need to examine the empowerment of all sex in the

society and revisit some of our societal norms that will enhance the welfare of the family in our society.

8. Objective of the Study

1. To examine how women in Ubiaja are empowered
2. To investigate the recent social cultural changes and the benefit of women empowerment on families welfare in Ubiaja

9. Method and Materials

The study been an exploratory study, made use of Structured questionnaires and In-depth interview in getting the required response from the study location, this was carried out using a convenient sampling method, however on the spot assessment of the women interviewed was also carried out based on their various trade, profession and others craft they engaged in. The target populations are women within the study area which is in some selected community in Esan South East Local government of the Edo State, Ubiaja. And the communities interviewed include, Uokha, Eguare, Ogbenin and Oyomon and this involves women who are engaged in one form of trade or the other, the study made use of 150 copies of structured questionnaires to get the respondents view on the subject matter. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis.

10. Findings form the Study

Women empowerments have been discussed and the following below are the response from the respondent in the study area.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristic of respondents

Sex:	Male (0) 0%	female(150) 100%			
How old are you?					
	Below 25yrs (30)20%	25-35yrs (55)36.6%	35-45yrs(22)14.7%	45yrs & above (43) 28.6%	
Educational level of respondents					
	Dropout(24)16%	Primary(48)32%	SSS(24)16%	tertiary(44)29.3%	others(10)6.7%
Religious affiliation:	Christian(135)90%	Muslim(3) 2%	ATR(12)8%		
Marital Status:					
	Single (7)4.7%	Married (128)85.3%	Divorced (3)2%	Separated (11)7.3%	
Occupation of respondents:					
	Trader (44)29.3%	Fashion Designer (13)8.7%	Farmers (39)26%	Politician (27)18%	professional(teachers, Nurses etc) (18)12%
					Others (09)06%
Socio-Economic Status:					
	Upper Class (3)2%	Middle Class (82)54.7%	Lower Class (65)43.3%		

Source: Fieldwork 2014.

Implication of table 1

Women empowerment is a phenomenon that is associated mainly with the female folk, and the table 1 above reveals the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents in selected community of Ubiaja in Esan South East local government of Edo state. From the table the result shows that the entire respondents were women and most of them claimed to be within the age interval of 25-35years and 45years and above with 36.6% and 28.6% respectively. On the educational level of the respondents a vast majority of the respondent claimed not to have gotten a tertiary degree from any institution, as only 29.3% claimed to have gotten one degree or the other from tertiary institution, from the table the result explains that most of the women are Christians with 90% of them affirming this, it also shows that 85.3% of the entire respondents were married. On the occupation of the respondents, the traders and the farmers took the front burner as they occupied more than half of the entire respondents while 12% of the entire respondents are professional in their various field such as Nursing, teaching etc, however 18% of the respondents claimed to be strongly involved in politics of the community. The socio-economic status of the respondents shows that 98% of the respondents were either in the

middle class or lower class while just 2% claimed to be in the upper class, as they have virtually all that is necessary at their disposal and also coupled with their position in that community.

Table 2: Importance of women empowerment on family welfare in selected community of Ubiaja, Esan South East Lga of Edo State, Nigeria

Are women in this community empowered :	Yes (141) 94 %	No (09) 06%
Have you ever empowered by anyone, organization or government?	Yes (136) 90.7%	No (14) 9.3%
If yes, how?		
Educationally (29)	21.3%	
Skill acquisition (32)	23.5%	
Economically (42)	30.9%	
Material/Items(28)	20.6%	
Others(5)	3.7%	
Have this empowerment change your family positively in anyway?		
Yes (136)	100%	No(0)0%
If yes, how has it benefited your family?		
Supported my business (32)	23.5%	
Aid sponsoring my children education (40)	29.4%	
Helping me to secure a good job (30)	22.1%	
Increase our family status (23)	16.9%	
Others (11)	8.1%	
Do you think women empowerment enhances the family welfare in Ubiaja?		
Yes(85)	56.7%	No (25) 16.7% A little(40) 26.6%

Source: Fieldwork 2014.

Implication of table 2

On examining the importance of women empowerment on family welfare in selected community of Ubiaja, the table 2 above reveals that 94% of the entire respondents agreed that women in Ubiaja are empowered, however 90.7% of the entire respondents asserted that they have been empowered by either individual, government or organizations within and outside the community, and how they were empowered, the women claimed that they were empowered educationally (21.3%), economically (30.9%), materially (20.6%), through skill acquisition (23.5%) and 3.7% were classified as others.

100% of the respondent interviewed agreed that women empowerment has changed their family in a positive way and of this, the empowerment has benefited the family in the following ways; Supported my business, Aid sponsoring my children education, Helping me to secure a good job, Increase our family status and Others. From the table also 56.7% asserted that women empowerment enhances the family welfare in Ubiaja, while 26.6% said it only enhances family welfare a little and only 16.7% of the entire respondents said No

In an interview, a respondent said;

Me bha yi uwa ebe, omon si men righo mhen ni mhen re due'ki, eleni mhen mien bho neki na ole me re ariele bhie uwa ebe noneh. O bhen no khuo re yie owa ebe or lue imena obo, oasabor luole uwa imudia nonsen.

Translation:

Am not educated, but my children gave me money to trade, and the benefit and gains from the proceeds from this business, that is what I am using to train my other children in higher education. It is relevant for a woman to gain education or be involved in a vocation (to be empowered), as this will make the family progress steadily. (IDI- Madam Aikhomu, a trader, Uokha)

Another respondent said:

Am the principal of a prominent school in the community, I think women should be empowered, so as to assist their male counterpart especially their husbands to better the life of their family members, I was trained at the University and with my degree I am working, by God's grace my husband is not doing bad at all in his transport business and together, we are training our children in higher institutions and also erecting our second house in this community. (IDI- An anonymous from Oyomo community, Ubiaja)

It has been observed that only when persons (especially women) are empowered and are also involved in the economic activities of the family that is when there will be a leverage in the welfare of the family, as the cross will be a little bit easier when the work load of catering for the family is not solely the responsibility of the man, being the head of the house.

11. Conclusion and Recommendation

It is therefore pertinent to note that women empowerment is a global concept and the Nigeria society should not be exempted, as the family is at the receiving end and the society will feel the vacuum, the high rate of poverty in Nigeria is visible to the eye that the family welfare is feeling the burnt. Culturally the man being the head should also seek advice and assistance from the wife and also encourage her by empowering her in no small way, this is because the Millennium Development Goal Strategy attainment period is at the corner (2015) and Nigeria is still lacking behind in the scheme of things (development). Therefore the following are recommended;

- Women should be enlighten on the benefit of being empowered, and also be involve in the economic activities of the society, this to bring out the best in the standard of living in the Nigeria society.
- Government should encourage the women by giving them necessary support for the development of themselves, as this will aid the training of future generational leaders by mothers with well train virtue and knowledge
- Community leaders should revisit some cultural values that are anti-developmental as this will hinder the country from attaining the benefit of the MDGs by 2015
- Finally, women should come out from their sleeves. As they are mothers of the nation and not slave that will always hide under the shadow of their masters, for when they do this and assist the men in some economic activities the family will grow and developed and their welfare improved.

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