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**EMPOWERING WOMEN AS A TOOL FOR ERADICATING POVERTY IN NIGERIA: A  
CASE STUDY OF AYETORO WOMEN IN YEWA NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT, OGUN STATE.**

OKHIRIA A.O

OLABISI ONABANJO UNIVERSITY, COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF HOME AND HOTEL MANAGEMENT  
AYETORO, OGUN STATE.

**ABSTRACT**

This study was designed to investigate the sources of funding available to Ayetoro women in their trades and vocations, assess the level of their participation and engagements in vocational skills for empowerment; and examine the feeding patterns of their households in order to ascertain the level of their empowerment in relation to their diets and nutrition. Result contained indicated that 64.29 percent obtained capital to finance their trade and vocations from cooperative societies i.e. ajo, esusu. Other sources are finance agents 15.71 percent, and 11.43 percent rely on friends and relations for assistance. The beneficiary from Ogun State Employment Generation Programme (OGEGEP) were 5.7 percent. Among others, the study recommended that Rural Credit Schemes should be established especially for women farmers, food processors and distributors.

**INTRODUCTION**

Any study of poverty must begin with a conceptualization of poverty Ettagbo (2001). A study shows that there is no general consensus on any meaningful definition of poverty because poverty affects many aspects of human condition including physical, moral and physiological, which is universally accepted. The World Bank report of (1997) described Nigeria as one of the poorest countries in the world, statistics shows that few household can afford to give their families members the required food, clothing and shelter needed for growth; development and quality life.

To alleviate poverty in Nigeria, one of the effective strategies is to empower women through Agricultural and technological Assistance. Empowerment is the development of skills and abilities to enable people manage better, have a say in or negotiate with existing development delivery system. World Bank (1996)

Women are well – noted over as effective agents of food security. Studies have shown that the bulk of the work on food produced for family and local consumption in developing nations to ensure food security falls on women FAO (1996). On a global scale, women produce more than half of all the food that is grown. In sub – Sahara Africa (Nigeria

inclusive) and the caribbean, they produce up to 80% of basic food stuffs in Asia, they provide 50 – 90% of the labour force rice on cultivation. And in south East Asia and Pacific as well as latin America, women's home gardens represent some of the most complex Agricultural system ever known, World Food Submit (1996). In Nigeria, women represent about 50% of the agricultural labour force and produce much of the country's food, Adeyemo (1990).

However, despite their contributions to both household and national food security, women tend to be invisible actors in national development. As a result, they are often underestimated and restrained from enjoying many faculties that would have enhanced them for more economic and social productivity.

These include women's right to landed property which is subjected to varying traditional and cultural practices, monetary policies, indirect taxes, pricing policies, legal and regulatory environment for women. Adedoyin (1998) and Hassan (1990) indicated that women were of a significant disadvantage in gaining access to various developmental credits. According to World Bank report (1994), women generally have lower returns on saving level than men and therefore obtain lower

returns on saving due to minimum balance requirements in banks. Specifically in Nigeria, women's access to credits seems to be constraints because, for the most part, they do not own marketable land rights, and for social and cultural reasons, seldom have the opportunity to acquire independent credit history for credit worthiness Adeokun (2002).

The study is designed to: investigate the sources of funding available to the women in their trades and vocations; access the level of their participation and engagement in vocational skills for empowerment; and examine the feeding pattern of the women's household in order to study the level of their empowerment to their daily dietary intake.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

Ayetoro town is located in Yewa North Local Government of Ogun State Capital. The College of Agricultural Sciences is located within the town. The town was zoned into four quarters consisting approximately five major streets each and where the population seems to be highly concentrated.

These zones were centralized from the junction towards, Aibo, Kikelomo, Oke-oyinbo and Idagba roads. From each zone a street was selected by stratified random sampling to represent the particular zone. Structured and pre - tested questionnaires were administered to 90 respondents from each of the four zones, giving us a total of 360 questionnaires at the end of the exercise 350 completed questionnaires were received back. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistic.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The result indicates that majority of the respondents (28.57%) were women in the age ranges of 31 – 35 years, followed by those who were of age 36 – 40 years (24. 29%) while those above 40 years to 50 years are lower in percentage. 51 years and above were 8.7%. Those of higher categories are the youths whom Adeokun et al 2002 characterized as possessing innovation, prudence, minimal risk aversion, faster in reacting to time, greater physical strength, greater knowledge, acquisition property and faster in learning, they are also matured and capable of undertaking responsible projects. As for

their marital status, 55.71 percent were married (Table 2). In education, 60% which represent the highest percentage did read beyond primary school, 14.29% had secondary education, 8.86% graduated from institutions and 16.86% has no formal education.

#### **VOCATIONAL SKILLS AND OCCUPATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS**

Considering the skills and occupational engagement, those who learnt catering skill, especially those running canteens, bukas, beer parlors, groceries and herbal drinks, were in the majority, scoring 34.29 percent, followed by those in civil service scoring 17.14 percent while those in trading were 15.71 percent, those in farming were 4.29 percent. Other professions of tailoring, textile and fabrics were 11.43, 11.29 and 4.29 percent respectively.

These various occupational involvement showed that the respondents were responsible, resourceful and capable of handling businesses and projects for adequate profitability in order to sustain themselves and their households if given enough financial support.

(Table 5) showed that 2.86 percent respondents and their households feeds on less than five thousand Naira in a month, (N5, 000) were those in the majority, 22.86 percent feed on between thirteen to fifteen thousand Naira (N13- 15,000) in a month. Those who feed on twenty one thousand (N21, 000) and above were 11.43 percent.

This result gave credence to the United Nation Development Programme reports (2004), which classified Nigeria as one of the poorest countries in the world. The study also showed that poverty in Nigeria is caused partly by low income earning capacity of people and the hyper – inflation on the economy.

(Table 6) revealed that the household that contain between 5 – 8 people were of the majority followed by those of 9 – 12, and 13 – 15 respectively where the household population is higher than income, this leads to a thin spreading of available scarce

resources inadequate diet intake and limited physical and social amenities among the populace. The implication for nutrition and health of the household is the occurrence of hunger and starvation among adults and children, more birth defects, disease, mental illness, and premature deaths etc

(Table 7), about the source of credit available to the women in their trade/vocation. The source available for the financing of their trades and vocations include banks institutions, Ogun state Employment Generation Programme (OGEGEB), finance agents, cooperative societies (ajo esusu), family and friends.

The result however showed that majority which constitute 64.29 percent obtained their capital to finance their trades from cooperatives, followed by 15.71 percent of those who obtained theirs from finance agents, 11.43 percent from relations. The beneficiary of Ogun State Employment Generations Programme were 5.71 percent. The bank institutions were the least patronized. The women attributed the cause to the stringent conditions for collateral usually demanded before a client is given loans.

Those who benefited from the state government Agricultural Programme loans specifically Ogun State Employment Generation Programme (OGEGEP) were 5.71 percent. The low percentage of beneficiaries was due to lack of education and insufficient enlightenment that could sensitize the women to the availability of such benefit.

(Table 8:) the feeding pattern of the respondents were not cheering as 71.43 percent confessed that they eat twice daily including children and adolescents. 14.29 percent eat once while 11.43 percent could not afford to eat the normal three times daily. The World Bank (1996) described this states as relative poverty characterized by individual or household being unable to cater for his/her basic needs of food.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The result of this study clearly indicated that

- A. A large number (91.43%) of the women in Ayetoro who are engaged in various trades

and vocational works rely mainly on non-formal sources; i.e ajo, esusu, finance agents and relations for the funding of their trades and businesses. The Government Agricultural loans facilities did not get to the majority due to inability to afford nor read news papers and radio which is the usual media by which government programmes are transmitted to people.

- B. the level of participation of the respondents in various occupation and vocational skills indicated that almost all were actively engaged in various forms of occupations and vocational skill, amounting to 98.6 percent.

The feed pattern of 85.72 percent respondents were nutritionally inadequate as they were unable to meet the nutritional needs of their households by eating once or twice daily with possibly predominantly high carbohydrate foods and less of protein and minerals needed for growth and body maintenance. Deng (1995) categorized these groups as poor households or individuals living below the poverty levels and whose income is insufficient to provide for their basic needs. The implications of inadequate feeding pattern of household results in malnutrition of various degrees, birth defects, mental illness, diseases and early death (i.e. short life span).

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made

1. Women in the rural communities especially Ayetoro are in dire needs of educational enlightenment programmes about various Agricultural and Vocational development projects and the financing facilities available, the procedures and the conditions by which they could benefit and finance their trades and vocational works. This enlightenment can best be undertaken by the Extension Department under the Ministry of Agriculture.
2. There is need to re-evaluate the coverage and the accessibility of rural women in

Ogun State and especially Ayetoro to the available international aids and government credit facilities for Agricultural and Vocational projects. Such bodies include United Nation Development Programme (UNDP). It has a global development network to help build a better life for the rural dwellers. One of its millennium development goals is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by the year 2015, UNDP (2003). Others are Nigeria Agricultural cooperative and Rural Development Bank and Ogun State Employment Generation Programme (OGEGEP).

3. Gender blind policies should be corrected to empower women to contribute more to household food security. Examples are in the areas of land ownership and accessibility to credit facilities in financial institutions.

4. Rural credit schemes should be established specifically for women farmers, food processors and distributors. This will encourage more women to go into farming and allied activities that will boost food production for their household and their communities.

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