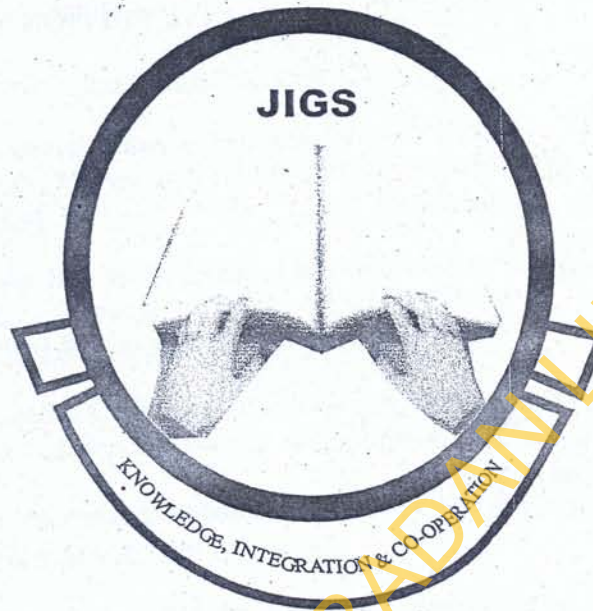


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CAPACITY BUILDING FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AMONG MUSLIM WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS IN ONDO STATE

Ibrahim, O.U. & Adigun, W.F.

Abstract

This paper attempts to find out some initiatives of Muslim Women Associations of Nigeria and assesses their effects in making life worth living for the downtrodden Muslim women in Ondo State. The study therefore focuses on the Federation of Muslim Women Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN) in Ondo State. The study adopts descriptive survey as it is designed to employ qualitative approaches in data collection. Thus, the survey consists of data collection from six thousand members of FOMWAN by interviewing or contacting a representative sample of one hundred and twenty of them to determine the effects of their initiatives in tackling and reducing poverty among themselves. Findings revealed that, capacity building has succeeded in promoting gender equality and women empowerment by equipping Muslim women with the required knowledge, skills, training and opportunity to access information for their meaningful contributions to effect positive change in their socio-economic status in Ondo State. Based on the findings, the study recommends among others, that if FOMWAN in Ondo is more empowered and mobilized by donor and government agencies, her efforts in enhancing capacity building will go a long way in fighting the scourge of poverty among women.

Introduction

Poverty constitutes a major obstacle faced by women in achieving their right in every country, especially in developing nations like Nigeria. The causes of prevalent poverty rate among the female population are multifaceted, some of which are illiteracy, semi-illiteracy, insufficient income which inhibits any support to the achievement of minimum living standard. Consequently, the women continue to occupy low socio-economic status, without minding their large population percentage, thus limiting them from enjoying good health condition, credit facility, education, job-placement and equal human right to social justice. As a result of gender role in family activities, poverty is a condition experienced by every affected family.

Women are the most affected since they bear the responsibility of the family's welfare to manage available meager resources in such prevailing condition, with the men at the head, although sometimes, the women bear such assignment without any opportunity to withdraw. Such condition subjects the women to role-reversal as breadwinners, thus decreasing their economic earnings. This is equally true of Muslim women in Nigeria, especially in Ondo State. Muslim women in Ondo State suffer more in the incidence of poverty as they constitute the least educated group in the State.

The desire to reduce or eradicate poverty has become the major concern of not only government but non-governmental organizations. The importance of this led to the campaign for gender equality and women empowerment (GEWE) which evolved as one of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). MDG 3 which dwells on the promotion of GEWE stands supreme among others in striving to achieve the entire MDGs. For example, an educated female stands a better chance of influencing the education of the children in her family. Thus,

one of the indicators for measuring the extent of goals' achievement is capacity building. However, capacity building is no doubt, one of the very important approaches that FOMWAN in Ondo uses to enhance gender equality and women empowerment among themselves.

Capacity Building

Various attempts have been made by scholars to define capacity building. According to Tayo (2010), it refers to one's ability to define and realize one's goals to do one's job more effectively. In this regard, capacity building targets the identification and development of skills and capabilities of individuals. For UNEP (2005):

Capacity building refers to building abilities, relationships and values that will enable organizations, groups and individuals to improve their performance and achieve their development objectives. It can also mean initiating and sustaining a process of individual and organizational change ... within a state, civil society or private sector as well as a change in processes that enhance cooperation between different groups

As a result of new knowledge and skills acquired in finding solutions to problems, the goal of capacity building is to further equip participating individuals and groups to achieve effective collaboration and maximize profit. However, the sustainability of capacity building rests on the essential human needs like "food, clean drinking water, basic education, health care and economic opportunities within a society" (Maiese 2005). In spite of this, capacity building is capable of achieving all round development in a given environment. It is a development for overall sustainability; hence Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR, 2005) sees it as development that is meant to uplift people's standard of living in all spheres. Based on the foregoing, capacity building suggests a planned development that aims at increasing "knowledge, output rate, management skills and other capabilities of an organization through acquisition, incentives, technology and or training" (Internet, 2005).

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE)

Gender connotes assigned responsibilities arising from being male or female as seen by societal members in a particular historical and social economic context. This relationship cuts across other social relations, based on variable such as class, age, ethnicity and race (Awosika, 1998). To WEGE bill in the Republic of South Africa (2013), similar reference to gender is in association with "roles, duties and responsibilities which are culturally or socially ascribed to women, men, girls and boys" (Internet, 2013). Resultantly, gender usage now transcends normal male, female and neutral grammatical classification. Moreover, it is equally noted that,

the social relations of gender (also seek) to make apparent and explain the global (assignment) ... which appears in male/female relations in terms of sex roles in power sharing, decision making, division of labour, return to labour both within the household and in society at large (<http://na/enfermeria-comunitaria2.shtinimonografis.com/>):

Gender equality, as explained by UNICEF (2008), connotes the achievement of equal opportunities in all spheres of life for males and females of all ages to identify and develop their God-given potentials. In other words, this involves giving different equal attention/consideration to issues "...which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and

opportunities” (ILO, 2000). Examples of such issues include equality in access and continuing education as well as subject choices and related all school/learning activities and materials for males and females of all ages, without any sex discrimination at any level.

Empowerment ordinarily means giving authority, strength, confidence or power to someone to act. On the other hand, UNDP (n.d) notes that empowerment could mean power to control one’s own greed for wealth or material gain or “power to nurture, heal, care for others, power to fight for justice, ethics (and) morality, power to achieve inner growth leading to wisdom and compassion”. Empowerment, therefore, is a process which could be a political process which tends towards changing existing relationship (Ojo, 2012), hence individuals and groups are taken into consideration because it is through group process that organization experience and capability could be achieved in changing or altering existing procedures (Abdul Hamid, 2007). Simply put therefore, “empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building to greater participation and decision-making, power, control and transformative action” (Internet, 2011).

Empowering women involves increasing their opportunity and initiative to modify, and in some cases, totally alter the belief, norms, customs and practices, all of which continue to subject them to remain perpetually in the lower social and economic status (Lema, 1988). The achievement of these, no doubt enables the women to exercise more power and control over their own lives. Through these processes, women are equipped to have autonomy, self-respect and dignity, all of which ensure their self-concept and social image. This will lead the women to achieve upward social mobility in any environment they find themselves.

For rapid development, the empowerment of women is essential. They play multiple roles in nation building. Hence, in order to prepare them for the task of nation building, their condition should be improved through education and capacity building. Capacity building strategies through education are a vital component of collective and individual empowerment. Considerably, it contributes towards uplifting women’s challenges to progress and development. Seven outstanding requirements for empowering women which UN (Internet, 2014) identified include the following:

- Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality;
- Treat all women and men fairly at work - respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination;
- Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers;
- Promote education, training and professional development for women;
- Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practice that empower women;
- Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy;
- Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

Theoretical Background

This paper adopts the evolutionary theory of social change (ETSC). The concept of ‘Social change’ is popularly described by Wilmot (1985) as the alteration in the structure or organization of society or its component parts over time. This alteration, in the words of Wilmot, may be in size, complexity, direction or function. Since society is a product of interaction, and organized as a system, it is presumed that alteration in any part will affect the entire structure.

ETSC attempts to explain the various factors of social change which include education, technology and preaching (da'wah), all of which have assisted to facilitate significant changes in the life of Muslim women in Ondo. This theory has gained wider popularity and acceptance in this 21st Century.

The implication is that, Muslims must change their orientation and mentality that do not conform to the principles of Islam in terms of women education, equality and empowerment. They should embrace change through capacity building to educate and empower themselves, in order to be free from the shackles of poverty and illiteracy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify some initiatives of FOMWAN towards reducing poverty among them in Ondo State.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study:

What are the initiatives geared by FOMWAN towards reducing poverty among the impoverished Muslim women in Ondo State?

An Overview of FOMWAN

FOMWAN in Ondo is a non-governmental organization (NGO), established in 1988 with the assistance of Alhaji K. S. Apaokagi and late Alhaji Akorede. The mission of the Association is to give *da'wah* (disseminating the message of God for change of attitude) and provide succor for the less privileged among them. The organization, thus aims at providing humanitarian services to the needy, widows, orphans and vulnerable members of the society.

In order to promote gender equality and women empowerment, FOMWAN initiated a lot of programmes to improve the welfare of Muslim women through the promotion of more and better jobs for women, under the condition that leads to progressive reduction of poverty. Having realized that poverty manifests itself in the form of illiteracy, unemployment, inability to change habits, tap and utilize the resources in the environment they belong, FOMWAN sees education as the first key asset when seeking employment and personal development. Resultantly, capacity building and skill acquisition for women have been the first set of weapon which FOMWAN uses to equip their vulnerable members to acquire relevant knowledge, skills and habits for surviving in Ondo State.

The educational Centres of FOMWAN is divided into four sub programmes as follows:

- (i) Provision of training opportunity for children, including those who never attended School and are above the primary School admission age.
- (ii) Provision of training for out of school children (drop-outs) aged of 9-15 years, especially the girl-child by giving them a second chance to develop acceptable literacy competences.
- (iii) Training of young adults women between the ages of 16 and 24 years. The focus on this category is to improve their literacy competency.
- (iv) Provision of classes for Qur'an literacy. This centre takes care of boys and girls, drop outs and women who are not able to read the Qur'an fluently.

The programme highlights the importance of making Qur'an learning easily accessible, taking into consideration other responsibilities and priorities adults may have that form barriers to learning. For instance, different study schedules were arranged: Monday to Friday, 8.00a.m. - 2.00p.m., for quality education for children under age 6-16 years and for gender equality, while 4.00p.m. - 6.00p.m. is provided for Qur'an literacy. Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays are different classes which adults could select for convenience.

FOMWAN initiatives also focus on farming through joint efforts, time and resources. This activity includes training in mechanized farming to develop the skill of the poor women who work as farmers among them. Improved skill not only repositions them to become skilled workers but equally increases their total income to achieve and sustain their daily livelihood. The training consists of two weeks training programme to transplant cocoa, rubber, Indian Spinach (Amunututu) known as *Basella rubra*, sweet pepper, plantain and the like. Apart from farming, the women equally received essential primary education on life skills like in the areas of adequate health and good healthy living, safe and secured life as well as good simple accounting. In all these, the aim is for them to become self-reliant and skilled labourers.

FOMWAN is also involved in the production of cosmetics, soap-making, tie and dye (adire). This programme has managed to enhance fifty widows to increase their employability. Health talks and demonstrations are also conducted regularly on subjects such as mixing oral dehydration therapy and preparation of nutritious food including soya bean recipes. Health education also provides women with a variety of information including cleanliness, nutrition, maternal and child health. Through the assistance of SACA, Muslim women are mobilized for promoting the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Methodology

This represents the structural framework that guided this study in the process of data collection, data analysis and interpretation of observations.

Research Design

The study adopted the descriptive survey as it attempted to be fairly representative of the population of interest in its sample of study, thus, the survey consists of data collection from a large number of six thousand registered members of FOMWAN in Ondo State by interviewing or contacting a representative sample of one hundred and twenty of them to find out the initiatives geared by FOMWAN towards reducing poverty among the impoverished Muslim women in Ondo State. Thus, useful information was collected about a large number of Muslim women from relatively small number (representative sample) for easy generalization of the findings to the larger populations once representativeness of the sample was assured. Initially, one would think it implied that all Muslim women in Ondo State were expected to be possible respondents to this study. Although the results of this study were to be generalized, the study was not designed that all Muslim women in Ondo would participate, given the nature of the topic. The target population was therefore limited to the management committee of FOMWAN and selected beneficiaries in the major towns of Ondo State.

From the forgoing target population, simple random sampling techniques were used to select samples for the study. Hence, one hundred and twenty respondents were randomly sampled. The age of the respondents ranged from 15 years to above 90 years consisting married, divorced, separated, widowed and singles. The level of education of respondents ranged from elementary

to tertiary education with majority being illiterates. The occupation of the respondents included teaching, office attendance, petty trading and many were unemployed.

For more qualitative information, data collected were from primary and secondary sources. In the primary sources, data were gathered through direct contacts with people who possessed the desired information. Thus, the researcher personally visited the offices, houses and workshops of the group concerned as their contact addresses were collected and traced within Ondo State. The method was adopted to allow freedom of expression and enable the researcher obtain accurate and elaborate information. Participatory observation was equally used in assessing the productive activities operated by FOMWAN where applicable, and in observing the general environment. Thus, unstructured interviews and observations were used to augment and authenticate the information gathered from secondary sources, such as book materials, magazines and journals, reports, seminar papers and programme of events with additional internet sources.

Since interviews constituted the major methods for data collection in this study, the data collected especially those in form of responses from interviews were collated and presented through self-explanation and discussion.

Results and Discussion

Based on the earlier research question, the following table of responses show the extent of how capacity building and skill acquisition programmes of FOMWAN have managed to enhance the participation of vulnerable members into various income generating activities.

Responses of Members and Beneficiaries on the Initiatives Geared by FOMWAN in Ondo Towards Reducing Poverty among Themselves

Initiative	Respondents	Percentage (%)
The Training Centres of FOMWAN provide training opportunity for children who never attended school and are above the primary school age in Ondo State	80	66.6
FOMWAN's capacity building trains dropouts girl-child in Ondo State	60	50
FOMWAN provides Qur'anic literacy for women who are not able to read the Qur'an fluently	90	75
The activity of FOMWAN to enhance the skills of Muslim women includes training in mechanized farming to develop the skills of the poor women	100	83.3
Skill enhancement of FOMWAN brought about socio-economic change in the life of vulnerable members in the State.	100	83.3
The provision of small scale investment machines enhanced the incomes of the vulnerable widows among FOMWAN in Ondo State	60	50
FOMWAN in Ondo gets support from international NGOs and Donors	10	8.3
FOMWAN is faced with fund problem as it mainly relies on monthly contribution of members, fund-raising events, production and selling of farm produce	120	100

The respondents reported that the capacity building of FOMWAN by enhancing the skills of Muslim women brought about some advances in their socio-economic status, hence providing them more opportunities for higher profits to close the inequality gaps as development partners in Ondo State. For instance, one hundred (83.3%) of the respondents stated that, the programmes improved the employability, earning capability and literacy competency of the poor and unemployed women by empowering them with literacy proficiency, giving them market-oriented vocational and entrepreneurial skills, and providing access to decentralized financial and business counseling services. The achievements facilitate their integration into the local and national labour market, reducing the economic dependency on their families and increasing opportunities to upgrade their skills. The respondents also reported that, as a result of their involvement in the basic skills and literacy programmes, they set more time on constructive things rather than their usual past when they used to engage in gossiping, backbiting and unnecessary fighting over household consumptions. They also reported that the vulnerable widows among them now contribute more to the management of their homes, unlike before when they used to be the complete affairs of their husbands' family members. They cited the example of using part of the money generation programmes of FOMWAN for increased family food quality and welfare services. One of the respondents stated as follows:

Since I have been empowered by FOMWAN, with the skill of fish production and marketing, apart from the fact that it provides me with an important income-earning activity and some control over my household spending, it serves as vital component of our diet as it complements the carbohydrate based diet of my home.

Another finding that emanated during the course of study is that, all the respondents from confirmed that, in the past, they used to buy their soap and pomade but, with the combination of literacy and job skills of soap, pomade and body cream making, they are now manufacturers of their domestic needs in terms of cosmetics and food. In addition, they go to market with these items to sell to others.

Findings

It was discovered that, in the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment for poverty reduction among women in Ondo, FOMWAN has facilitated capacity building as it:

- (i) Trains women in organization skills;
- (ii) Trains women in business management and entrepreneurship skills;
- (iii) Assists Muslim women in the establishment of functional classes for those who cannot read or write;
- (iv) Enhances awareness of Muslim women on poverty reduction strategies;
- (v) Selects group of poor women among themselves for social and economic empowerment to have decent viable and manageable income generating activities;
- (vi) Improves access to business skills, marketing and adequate credit opportunities;
- (vii) Provide ability for poor women, widows and vulnerable young adults to meet family requirements.

The capacity building and skill acquisition programme of FOMWAN have managed to enhance the participation of Muslim women into various income generating activities whereby the vulnerable among them could presently send their to acquire education, improve nutritional

status of their families and successfully manage the micro projects designed by the group. It was also found that, very little support has been received from international NGOs and donor agencies as the Association relies on personal efforts to reduce poverty among women in the state.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is established that, capacity building of FOMWAN, through their increased knowledge acquisition of skills results to positive socio-economic changes, thus increases their daily profits and drawing them closer to equalize in societal development efforts.

Challenges and Recommendation

This study observes that, FOMWAN in the face of various constraints such as capital still manages to raise income and reduce poverty among themselves in their little way. However, if members of this group are mobilized financially, they will do a lot more in empowering women and reducing poverty considerably. Consequently, the study recommends that policy makers, international NGOs and donors should intervene in the areas of support for FOMWAN's activities and attempts to empower women and reduce poverty among women in Ondo.

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