

Empowerment of Women in Wage Employment in Nigeria: The Relevance of Workers Education

Adebayo Olatunde Akinsanya

*College of Social and Management Sciences, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun,
P.M.B.2118 Ijebu Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria
Telephone: 08055115047, E-mail: akin30000@yahoo.com*

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ABSTRACT Women are active partners in the development of any economy. However, several factors impinge on the contributions of the women folk to inputting their roles maximally. This global issue has generated reactions from both genders thus making attempts to give the women required platform for effective inputs. This paper considers labour education as important tool in bringing empowerment to women in the face of challenges that are encountered in working and achieving their other social roles and avenues to impact on women positions in work matters particularly in national development. It suggested ways that could be adopted to remedy misconceptions about the status of women.

INTRODUCTION

Womenfolk are involved in various aspects of work, as professionals, artisans, etc. The demand of work on both male and female workers alike in the face of increasing global technological quest requires effective functioning and updated knowledge achievable through workers education. The pressure on women as the weaker sex makes their adjustment to the demand of work related education stronger so that they can be well positioned through awareness against several discrimination rooted in religious sanctions, social and cultural taboos and superstitions, behavioural training, discrimination in food and little decision making power (Adams and Castle 1994). Going through statistics, it was observed that women were negatively impacted upon for example in illiteracy rate, in labour force participation rate, and in income (Amali 2007).

The influx of women into the workforce has social and economic consequences on the society. Mathis and Jackson (1994) recorded the percentages of women of working age in the workforce rising from 43.3% in 1970 to 57.5% in 1990. It was projected that 62.6% of all women from 25-40 years will be seeking jobs by 2000. The indication of the above is that women will constitute 47% of the total workforce by 2005 (Mathis and Jackson 1994). The projection of Mathis and Jackson above indicates that women must be adequately equipped with education to rightly occupy and execute their functions in every ramification since about half of all working

women are either single, separated, divorced, widowed or otherwise heads of households, they need to continue to receive workers education.

The importance of education has been emphasized by several international conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. The women conference held in Beijing in 1995 admitted that education is important to empowering women's role in socioeconomic development of the economy. This has been re echoed in the United Nations articulated Goals (Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam 2003). The major objectives of Millennium Development Goal are improved education, gender equality, and women empowerment. Education and training are great contributors to the growth of national economies by improving the capacities of the labour force. Countries with high rates of illiteracy and gender gaps in educational feats tend to be less competitive because investors seek labour that is skilled and less expensive. Thus, women empowerment is important to raising levels of women involvement in every segment of national economy, this is achievable by creating access to education for women.

The Concept of Workers' Education

Workers are the core of production in work institutions and are usually engaged in interaction with non-human materials as well as other human beings. This in essence requires conti-

nuous development of skills and knowledge to meet up with the ever increasing demand of updated knowledge to enhance productivity, peace and cooperation, development for personal and institutional successes. This type of education is meant to reduce conflict through the interaction of employees in a positive manner. It enables employees to be able to identify their rights and obligations as well as their limits in the organizations. This kind of education is referred to as labour education or workers education.

Workers education introduces the labour force in taking active participation in trade unionism at all levels of the polity. Through workers education, workers identify common problems and create solutions to them. It thus brings development and awareness to them with a strong sense of solidarity between them in achieving recognition and strength as a group. Abu (2000) defined workers education as intended to educate the workers on the contract between employers and employees, particularly the various laws that establishes the relationship of work. Workers education according to Hopkins (1985) is....that sector of adult education which caters for adults in their capacity as workers and especially as members of workers organizations. Its immediate aims are usually to increase the ability of workers to assume more responsibilities in their own organizations... their work places and in local and national decision making bodies.

Access to quality education, skills training and entrepreneurship development tools not only represents a way out of poverty, but also provides them with opportunities of empowerment in the world of technology, as this ILO Online report from central India shows (International Labour Organisation ILO 2009). One of the key objectives of the programme is to empower women in all phases of life through skills training thus building self-confidence and developing leadership. It reflects a double divide in the access to quality education, training, and technology between the formal and the informal economy, but also between women and men. It helps to overcome gender barriers preventing women to take advantage of emerging economic opportunities, to increase productivity of enterprises and to access higher income and value added jobs. It shows that broadening skills and promoting entrepreneurship, especially for women, promotes gender equality in the world of technology. In many countries, the fact that women have a great

likelihood of missing out on quality education and training adds a gender dimension to the divide between technological 'have' and 'have-nots'

The perception of workers education by various stakeholders such as government, employer, workers and the society reveals its importance. Each of the identified stakeholders in the socio- economic sphere of the nation sees and understands labour education differently. The perception of government and employers in Omole (1995) expresses workers' education as that type that can improve employee skills and knowledge to be more productive. It should also help increase employers control over the workers. This opinion of employers' control of labour through workers education portrays employers of labour as being opposed to workers/labour awareness and development. This view was upheld by the Indian Central Board for Workers' Education as cited in Kakkar (1973) that

The essence of workers education is that it should teach the workers to be dutiful and should inculcate in them a sense of duty and reverence.

It is necessary for the working class to acquire the habit of cheerfully undertaking the task entrusted to them.

This statement explains the Nigerian employers' attitude particularly in the days of the military dictators.

Objectives of Workers Education

Industrial relations practice centre on the activities of some key players in the work environment who are employers, employees and the government. Labour and management are the most active with their objectives and goals, yet their activities affect others and the society generally.

Omole (1995) citing Data (1979) listed some objectives of workers education as:

- (i) making a responsibly committed and disciplined operative,
- (ii) understanding the basic economic and technical aspects of the industry and plant where he is employed so that he can take an intelligent interest in its affairs,
- (iii) making him aware of his rights and obligations,
- (iv) understanding the organization and functioning of the union as well as develop qualities of leadership, loyalty and devotion towards trade and union work,

- (v) living a clean and healthy life based on firm ethical foundations ; and
- (vi) being responsible and alert citizen.

Omole (1995) stated that to appreciate the function of workers education is to understand each stakeholder's behaviour as it affects one another. Both the workers and employers need to be educated in workers psychology particularly in reducing friction and tension that is a normal feature between the parties. It is meant to serve the interest of workers and their unions by making them aware of their rights and the avenues of pursuing their interests. It is to help the employer interest by ensuring high productivity through committed employees who are ready to observe the rules of the game with all stakeholders of the industry.

The government performs the dual role of employer and executive arm of the state. It initiates and implements policies through its organs and functionaries. Events have revealed some government actions or policies to affect the well-being of workers. Labour education could give government functionaries knowledge in labour management relations which will be of immense help in taking decisions. The example of collective bargaining tactics will make them aware of desisting from taking unilateral decisions. The general public is also required to have knowledge of workers education to understand the psychology of workers, their goals and objectives, particularly their responses to issues.

Kester (1999) is of the view that workers education must serve the interest of the working class and the society at large, no matter its orientation. Its concept is to intractably connect with the struggle for the elimination of illiteracy. He further stated that the comprehensive and highly integrated new facet of workers education addresses the challenges of globalization of the production process, communication and technologies. Workers education must be able to remove all barriers to learning of all categories of workers in the society thus bridging the gap of educational inadequacies in the changing world of globalization.

Vayrynen (2000) stated that the functions of workers are impeded by economic barriers as poverty, malnutrition and inadequate education. He opines that workers education as a process of retraining and reinvigorating is able to address the diversity of workers needs and ensure they achieve economic and social life in a culturally

diverse and changing world. In the view of the foregoing, it is evident that there is need to facilitate the wellbeing of workers since development in all ramifications rest on their activities in the nation, particularly the women. Women's role is significant in the sense that they perform roles of professionals and house keepers. The second aspect of this paper thus wants to examine how their roles can be improved upon through means of empowerment.

THE CHALLENGES OF WORKERS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Nigerian workers, particularly women are faced with myriad of problems. These include issues of inadequate wages, uneasy access to education, harsh conditions of work and depleting economic values. Other challenges women face related to work issues are: Access and retention in schools; threat to women human rights, sexual reproduction health; gender imbalance; and deprivation through socio cultural sanctions (Amali 2007).

In Nigerian workplaces, several training programmes are organized for workers. These are either through the human resources department or in conjunction with other organisations. The resentment about the total success of most of such has been impeded by several factors. These factors include: insincerity and viability of some of the programmes; no separate training programmes for women; accessing finance to pursue post training development; weakness of the women group to challenge some organisational policies that malign women in work employment; and the global economic recession greatly which has many people out of job through close down of many industrial organisations.

These challenges have caused reactions from workers in several forms ranging from lack of commitment to work, engaging in other activities and engaging employers and government in strikes which have continued to affect national production by loosing man hours to strikes and other forms of workers resentments.

The Meaning of Women Empowerment

Social scientists identified education as a tool to uplift the underprivileged, the marginalized, the migrants and other special groups within the society (Graham-Brown 1991). Graham-Brown

further contends that for women as a special group, education gives a better chance to control their lives, to earn money, to be better mothers and to have improved relationship with their spouses.

Feminists have also advanced the issue of empowerment of women through education as a means of challenging patriarchal ideology of male domination and women subordination, transforming the structures and institutions (laws, social practices, political processes etc.) that perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequity as well as equal opportunity for women at all levels in all spheres of human endeavour.

The term empowerment can be seen as being flexible and elastic. It is used loosely by professionals and academics. It has different meanings, interpretations, forms and understanding thus requiring it to be analyzed in the context of a broader organizational practice which has given rise to questions and doubts. Is it different from the earlier forms of employee involvement or is it meant to get the most out of the people or another term for delegation?

Zuibanda (1997) defined empowerment as a strategy that seeks to transform the structures of subordination through changes in legislature, property rights and all other institutions that reinforce and perpetuate total male domination.

Sherma (1991) also stated empowerment to be a process of challenging power relations and gaining greater control over the sources of power as well as the consequences of that process which may take the form of individual self-assertion, protests, collective resistance or mobilizations that challenge basic power relations. The process of empowerment according to Zuibanda (1997) is rooted in women struggles to improve their status globally and in the third world particularly.

Empowerment is a liberating grassroots concept. This relates to confrontation and liberation. It is rooted in the political ideology; 'power by the people'. It is a political process with a socio-economic intention. It is a balance of power and basic rights where people who seem to be deprived are equipped with power.

It is often perceived as a process by which people gain control over their lives, demonstrative participation in the life of their community. Empowerment is seen as the pinnacle of employee involvement and at the end of a chain in social participation.

Mills and Friesen (2001) explained empower-

ment as the authority of subordinates to decide and act. It is something people do for themselves which involves solidarity and participation in the struggle for greater control over their lives. The turn of the new millennium has re-directed the focus of the world to the position and importance of women and their vulnerability to poverty, hardship and social deprivation in all ramifications. This has propelled human beings and the women folk to desire a channel of emancipation called empowerment. It is a process by which disadvantaged people, women, work to or as individuals to increase control over issues and events that determine their lives.

Empowerment is about transformation of power relations between men and women in societies at four clear levels which are family, community, market and the state. The transformation, though viewed in different levels, includes access to and control over resources which are economic, social, legal and institutional brings a measurable change in self perception and confidence (Akinsanya and Akinsanya 2008).

Empowerment is a means to an end thus incorporating the improvement of the quality of everyone in the society through demographic outcomes. It brings direct improvement on women's rights and status in societies. Empowerment connotes providing information, and exchange of ideas between developed and developing communities to allow women to participate in decision-making to improve the life of people. Women empowerment is a veritable mechanism to increase women skills and abilities, their control over the resources and decisions affecting their lives. The objectives of empowerment in the female perspective are enunciated below:

- i) creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them realize their full potential;
- ii) enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres-political, economic, cultural and civil;
- iii) equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation;
- iv) equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational

guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office;

- v) changing social attitudes and community practices by active women participation and involvement of both men and women;
- vi) mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process; and
- vii) elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child among others.

Elements and Process of Empowerment

Singh and Titi (1995) identified some elements as necessary conditions for empowerment. They are access to skills training; problem solving techniques, best available appropriate technologies and information; participation in decision-making processes by all people, particularly women and youth; democratization and sustainability are as well important features of empowerment. Lashley (1995) listed four empowerment initiatives as;

- empowerment through participation - the act of delegation of decision-making in traditional organization is the domain of management,
- empowerment through involvement - management's concern to gain from employees experiences, ideas and suggestions,
- empowerment through commitment - this is through showing commitment to organizational goals and through improvement in employee job satisfaction,
- empowerment through delayering- this is reducing the number of tiers of management in organization's structure.

From the managerial perspective, as opposed to Lashley (1995), Morris et al. (1995) concluded that empowerment is a function of management in giving examples of the way empowerment can actually set people free to do jobs they are capable of. Empowerment in simple words means the enhancement, creating the opportunity for betterment. It is ensuring the avenue for women to be actively involved in the development of themselves and the nation in all ramifications. By implication, women education could have a great effect on the social well being of people, if the ideals of the programme are objectively implemented. They may be more productive in the work place and in the home. Their roles at workplaces and the home front contribute to the socio economic development of the nation.

Feminist Empowerment Theory

This view of empowerment sees women as agents of the change process and not beneficiaries as they ask questions about power in decision making. Rowlands (1998) in analyzing the literature of empowerment classifies power as:

- *Power over-* this means controlling power over someone and something. The response to it can be compliance, resistance or manipulation.
- *Power to-* this is generative or productive power that creates new possibilities and actions without domination.
- *Power with-* power generating a feeling that the whole is greater than the sum of individuals and action as a group is more effective.
- *Power from within-* this is a sense that there is strength in each and every individual. The recognition of one's own self acceptance and self respect enables the acceptance of others as equals.

Most definitions on empowerment imply the dimension of 'power over', i.e. access to decision-making, etc. In comparism, power with relates to a notion of collective power, this explains the women group as a force in within the society. Medel-Anonuevo (1996) agrees with this understanding where changes are brought about by a sense of togetherness with others. On power within, Kabeer (1994) sees it as strength within oneself that needs to be strengthened. This means empowerment is a process of change from powerlessness (I cannot) to a state of collective self –confidence (we can).

This theory places emphasis on holistic strategies rather than separating economic interventions from social or welfare concerns with problems facing individual women. The emphasis is on collectivity in production purchase of raw materials and marketing. This addresses economic needs as well leading to wider socio political empowerment.

The Role of Workers Education in Women Empowerment

Labour /workers education is knowledge acquired by stakeholders to enhance individual and organizational performance and productivity. This is beneficial to the worker, unions, organization and the economy of the nation. Workers education could be acquired through

individual, union and corporate efforts in training, symposia, academic institutions, etc. It brings improvement to situations where there are deficiencies or lack of required competence. Women's need for labour education stems from the multiplicity of roles played by women. They are professionals, members of workers unions', mothers' and home keepers, community members who are equally stake-holders in the polity. These roles are significant to the development of any people and nation. Literature reveals that two thirds of the world's 876 million illiterates are female. Of the world's one billion poorest people, an estimated three-fifths are women and girls (United Nations Development Programme 2009).

The emphasis on gender equity by the international community particularly in the 21st century requires women development in every ramification. This development can only be achieved through the introduction of empowerment programmes to women who are either engaged as professionals or farm workers. Some of these empowerment programmes are educational empowerment, economic, political and social empowerment.

Women should be able to exploit their potentialities to the fullest. An avenue to facilitate this is the provision of quality education to women. Education is known to be a vehicle for progress. Education helps in doing away with women involvement in crude labour which down-grade their status. Statistics put women as constituting sixty percent of the population and twenty-five percent of the actual workforce (Osiruemu 2004), yet their activities in labour union matters and particularly in leadership roles are underscored. Parpart (1988) explains that appointments and nominations in public service have shown women being continually undermined.

In any industrial organisation, conflict is a major issue within the functionality of the system, with its consequences grievous if not well handled. Labour education transforms the worker into a mature, wise and responsible person who is able to play his part well in his union as in the society (Omole 1987).

Workers education serves the interest of workers and their union by making them aware of their rights and ethically sound means of pursuing their interest. The employers could also benefit from labour education resulting in high productivity through committed employees who are always ready to observe the rules of the game as stakeholders in the industry. The nation also

benefits in labour education as it serves the interest of all by ensuring economic growth through well the women who want industrial peace as a prerequisite for increased foreign and local investments.

Workers education is important for personnel and officials of the Ministry of Labour and related departments. They need to be well groomed in labour education to be informed of acceptable industrial practices and policies to be veritable and effective partners with workers/ unions to ensure congruent industrial relations environment.

CONCLUSION

The issue of workers education and women empowerment has been the focus of this paper. It has discussed the concept, functions, importance and the hindrances of women in labour practice. It discussed how workers education could empower women development and participation in work and labour matters. Finally, it must be emphasized that more improvement is required for absolute women positioning in labour issues through the cooperation of all, male and female alike.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nigerian Constitution does not forbid women in public employment and appointments yet their (women's) percentage in such positions is low. The right of women to employment and equal pay for equal work with men is constitutionally guaranteed and reinforced by the federal civil service rules 03201. What is needed is psychological re-orientation. In the opinion of Williams (2002), to collectively confront this problem, women must be better informed and organized in a way that there can be enough interaction between rural and urban women. This will bring about women empowering themselves. Though women professional associations such as Federation of Women Lawyers, National Association of Women Journalist, Women in Colleges of Education could link up with the National Council of Women Societies to facilitate this urban-rural women tie for empowerment and emancipation, it could encourage the women folk to break the conception about women as reserved physical and mental resources in terms of emergency.

There should be a means of re- educating the

male to accept women as equal partners in progress rather than being substitutes where there are no men. Husbands and colleagues to women should duly give the deserved support and encouragement.

There is need for workers education/trade union education in the form of seminars, workshops and conferences to highlight and showcase successful women leaders and unionists as models who are enlightened and are able to know her rights and obligation without undue confrontation with authorities. Women should be actively appointed and nominated into various positions as members of delegation to national and international meetings as International Labour Organisation conferences, equitable representation of women labour leaders alongside their male counterparts to both government and non-governmental functions such as the National Industrial Court, Industrial Arbitration Panel and other boards are important.

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