

# **OBSTACLES TO AND STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN ANAMBRA STATE OF NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

Women have been described by Olawoye (1985) as crucial factors in production process and development. Women make their contributions to family and community well-being with unequal accesses and control over essential resources (including time). They have limited bargaining power to increase their control over resources both within their families and within their community. To expand their economic activities and earn more to support their families, women need access to more resources. This paper presents a survey, which is aimed at finding the major obstacles preventing women from seeking income-generating activities as well as identifying the intervention strategies to promote women's empowerment and their access to and control over economic resources. The sample was made up of 300 female senior civil servants randomly selected from the fifteen (15) ministries in Anambra State. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection and was formulated based on the research questions for the study. The data collected were analyzed using mean scores. The findings were that five (5) reasons were identified as major obstacles preventing women from seeking income-generating activities and secondly, the intervention strategies necessary to promote women's empowerment and their access to and control over economic resources were also identified. The paper therefore, calls for gender specific policies to ensure gender equality in all programmes.

## **Introduction**

Women constitute a large proportion of the population of Nigeria. According to 1991-population census, women constitute 59.7% of the total Nigerian population (Maisamari, 2002). Such a large group of people need not be undermined in a developmental process. Adedeji (1989) and Anenih (2002) opined that the question of definition of development cannot be without the contributions of women to such development. All these citations point to the place of women in national development. The women folk are in better position to provide leadership in any given socio-formation. As mothers, the women, from the onset, are closest to their children. They understand and understudy the mental and physical development of the child, and overtime, internalize the distinct feelings, perceptions and idiosyncrasies of their distinct children and subsequently the society at large. Leadership demands a good appreciation of self and others around you. The cosmic order favourably disposes the women folk to maximize their advantage, which gives them the rare and national opportunity to mould the citizenry and provide the lacuna in leadership. No wonder Vilas (1976) illuminatingly conceptualized female power thus: women are to the world what stockholders are to corporations... This is to say that women are the most important productive factor and an army of incredible substantial human resources needed for national development (Adewoye, 1997).

It is therefore, regrettable that women that are veritable means of economic and national development are of low economic status in Nigeria (Yahaya, 1999). This is supported by Walton's (1990) assertion that in spite of the crucial role of women in determining the quality and characteristics of subsequent generations and their contributing roles to national development; they suffer from lower status, less access to education...

The present economic base of Nigerian women is very poor. Azikiwe (2000) and others attest to the fact that Nigerian women are of low economic, political and social status. Ogbene (1998) observed that Nigerian women suffer from high rate of poverty. According to Okogie (1998) majority of Nigerian women that are employed are engaged in informal sector mostly agriculture. UNBSCO (1993) reported that few Nigerian women are employed in the civil service. The above indicate that actually, Nigerian women are of poor economic status. Most Nigerian women live in the rural areas with very low education qualifications and less access to education. This must be one of the reasons why Osezuah and Ibadin (2001) noted, that the Nigerian society should re-evaluate the contributions of women to national development.

## **Research Questions**

The study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the major obstacles preventing women from seeking income-generating activities?
2. What are the intervention strategies necessary to promote women's empowerment and their access to and control over economic resources?

## Method

The study was conducted using two hundred (200) female senior civil servants selected from various ministries in Anambra State. Out of the fifteen (15) ministries in the state, ten (10) ministries were selected using simple random sample. Twenty (20) female senior civil servants from each of the ministries, making a total of two hundred (200) were selected for the study using simple random sample.

## Instrument

Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection for the research questions. The questionnaire contains twenty (25) items, which are structured using a four point scale of strongly agree (SA), agree(A), disagree(D) and strongly disagree (SD).

## Validation

The instrument was validated by four (4) lecturers in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka and also by the Commissioner for Women Affairs in Anambra State for face, content and construct validation. To guide the lecturers in the validation exercise, the research purpose, scope, questions and hypotheses were given to them. They were asked to examine and scrutinize items in terms of content, relevance, item clarity, and suitability of language adequacy. Based on the experts' observation the questionnaire was modified by reconstructing some items while some were deleted entirely and new ones added.

## Reliability

The split-half method was used to ascertain reliability. The questionnaire was administered once to two hundred women in the various ministries in Anambra State. The Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient was computed and that gave a reliability coefficient at 0.83.

## Data Analysis

Mean scores were used for data analysis and the cut-off point was determined by finding the mean of the normal values assigned to responses. A mean score of 2.50 and above was regarded as 'Agree' (A) while a mean score less than 2.50 was regarded as "Disagree" (D).

## Results

Tables 1 and 2 summarise the analysis of data related to the two research questions.

### Research Question 1

**Table 1:** Mean Rating of the Major Obstacles Preventing Women from Seeking Income-Generating Activities

S/No	ITEM	X	Remarks/Decision
	The major obstacles preventing women from seeking income-generating activities are:		
1.	High level of illiteracy and lack of entrepreneurial skills.	4.00	A
2.	Infringement on the fundamental human rights of women resulting from harmful traditional and religious practices.	3.80	A
3.	Lack of employment	2.20	D
4.	Lack of child care facilities to look after the children while working to improve on economic base.	3.00	A
5.	Gender mainstreaming policies e.g. gender specific policy and equal access to resources and opportunities.	3.60	A
6.	Lack of commitment on the part of government.	2.45	D
7.	High rate of poverty among women.	2.35	D
8.	Lack of self-esteem	2.20	D
9.	Male chauvinism and violence against women.	3.80	A
10.	Ignorance and poor health condition.	1.50	D

Table 1 above shows that the mean ratings of respondents on the major obstacles preventing women from seeking income-generating activities are higher than the cut-off point of 2.55 in 5 items. This implies that these items above present the major obstacles preventing women from seeking income-generating activities.

## Research Question 2

**Table 2: Mean Ratings of the Intervention Strategies to Promote Women's Empowerment and their Access to and Control Over Economic Resources**

S/No	ITEM	X	Remarks/Decision
	Strategies to promote women*' s economic empowerment and leadership are:		
1.	Advocate and promote women's role and contribution to social and economic development.	3.60	A
2.	Enhance women's economic participation in and benefit from economic activities.	3.50	A
3.	Improvement on inadequate access of women to education, training and science and technology.	3.65	A
4.	Promote technologies that reduce women work load e.g. labour and time saving technologies.	3.40	A
3.	Recognize the importance of" gender mainstreaming in all national economic development activities.	3.50	A
6.	Encourage the participation of women in development programmes	2.85	A
7.	Promote the formulation of women's economic organization and business groups.	3.75	A
8.	Promote skill training and credit service for women	3.40	A
9.	Denounce violence against women and girl child issue.	3.80	A
10.	Promote the political empowerment of women	2.80	A
11.	Promote women's legal and 1 luman Rights	3.55	A
12.	Improvement of women's health including reproductive health family planning and integrated population programme.	2,85	A
13.	Enhancement of women's poverty and insufficient food security.	3.00	A
14.	Promote women's relationship and linkage to Environment and Natural Resource Management.	2.80	A
15.	Eradicate harmful traditional practices which militate against women's-economic	4.00	A

Table 2 indicates that all the items got high positive responses from the respondents. This implies that -the items present the intervention strategies necessary to promote economic empowerment of women.

## Discussion

The findings of this study show that five (5) out of ten (10) in Table 1 above were indicated as the major obstacles preventing women from seeking income-generating activities. In other words, the items got high positive responses above the cut-off of 2.55. This indication is in agreement with Ogbene's (1998) observation that constraints to economic empowerment of Nigerian women include (not major), high rate of poverty among women, lack of self-esteem and lack of access to productive resources. Both the rural and urban poor women lack the necessary capital or easy access to credit to establish profitable micro enterprises. Lack of technology and skill upgrading are factors responsible for most women (*a* be engaged in less processed or unprocessed traditional items by using backward technologies denying them an opportunity to generate additional income with more processed goods. Moreover, lack of knowledge and skill has forced women to concentrate on few and similar activities with the effect of stiff competition and earned meagre income. Many of the women engaged in income-generating activities lack adequate market information and hence unable to speculate the market in the 'right direction. In sum, they lack appropriate marketing strategy mid creativity (Bogalach, 200'1).

Finally the study also revealed that women strongly agreed that the items present in Table 2 above present intervention strategies needed to promote women's needs for economic

empowerment and leadership. In other words all the responses on Table 2 got high positive responses. This is in line with the critical areas of concern for gender and development adopted and ratified by all UN member countries during the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing 1995. These global declarations and policies are concerned with improving the status of women. Among these priority areas, women's economic empowerment or leadership is a number one priority, and each member country has agreed to address women's needs for economic empowerment and improve their status. To expand their economic activities and earn more to support their families, women need access to more resources. Women usually have less income than men and it is harder for them to have enough for a bigger and more profitable investment. Even when credit is available, access requires collateral either as fixed asset or land; Most women have less control over marketable assets and thus may lack the opportunity to build independent business or investment.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. There should be gender specific policy. The policy that should ensure measures to economically empower women through legal support, provision of basic services, supporting grassroots women organizations, emphasizing education as a tool for women's economic empowerment, advocating for gender equality and for the eradication of harmful traditional practices which militate against women's economic empowerment.
2. Provision of credit extension and skill training of women, strengthening their capacity to establish income-generating activities.
3. Gender mainstreaming: This refers to making gender an integral part of development programmes and addressing issues of gender equality in all programmes.

### Conclusion

The study revealed major obstacles preventing women from seeking income-generating activities as well the strategies to promote women's empowerment and their access to and control over economic resources.

It is believed that adequate attention to promote women's economic empowerment consequently will enhance their control over their decision-making capabilities and thus results in change of society's perception of women so that they will be able to exercise more control over their lives, improving their status, widen their experiences, skills and exposure to the world outside their home as well as contributing meaningfully to national development.

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