

Research Article

Assessing Rural Women's Empowerment Status in Enugu State Nigeria: The Women for Women International (WFWI), Renewing Women's Life Skill (RENEWLS) Education Programme

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ABSTRACT: *This study assessed empowerment status of renewing women's life skill (RENEWLS) education programme participants in Enugu State. Four research questions guided the study. A survey research design was adopted for the study and a sample of 1,049 out of a population of 10,484 was proposed for the study out of which 1,030 responded. The instrument used for the study was a structure 54-item questionnaire, which was validated by experts in the field of education. A reliability co-efficient of 0.74 was obtained using Cronbach alpha method of determining internal consistency of an instrument. The four research questions were analysed with mean and grand mean. Result revealed that participation in the RENEWLS programme improved Enugu State rural women's economic status, healthful living conditions, participation in decision making and social network status. Extension of the RENEWLS programme to other states in Nigeria, inculcating the RENEWLS programme into the National Policy on Women in Nigeria were some of recommendations made.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment has been an issue of concern for decades as a result of gender disparity against women globally. Women in many culture the world over are neglected, marginalized, discriminated against cheated and relegated to the background, yet they constitute a greater percentage of the human population in most countries.[1] This situation affects women's participation in life issues economically, socially and culturally.

In pursuit of women's advancement worldwide, the United Nations (UN) stressed the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women to acknowledge women's contribution to development at all level and to recognize their role in national peace.[2] The UN encouraged all national and international development agencies, policy makers, international organization non-governmental organizations to include women empowerment programme in all their activities. These

programmes should focus on women's education, access to economic resources and health care services, participation in decision-making and elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

The above statement explains why Nigeria in the past decade has initiated policy framework as enshrined in the National Policy on Women (NPN) (2000) on empowerment of women with a view of meeting up with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and poverty reduction which mainly prevail on women in Nigeria. The MDG's are development goals set-up by the U.N to promote development the world over particularly in the development countries [3]. The third MDG emphasizes promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women because of the enormous impact it will have on the well being of their families and the society in general.

Considerable effort have been made by Nigerian government past and present to implement programmes aimed at the advancement of women. Such programmes like the Better-life-for Rural Women (BLFRW) programme, Family Support Programme (FSP) and presently the Women for Change Initiative (WFCI) of the Wife of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Dame Patience Jonathan. However, the potentials of women are usually not fully actualized. Azikiwe in Ukwuaba and Igbo attributed this to the prevailing discriminatory social norms, poor incentives, poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and legal institutions against women in Nigeria[4].

In order to encourage women and help them to understand the need to assert their rights in the society, women need power to participate in societal affairs, hence the need for empowerment. Women's empowerment means giving women power over social, cultural, psychological and economic situations to enable them have knowledge to transform the world to their advantage [5]. In the context of this work, women empowerment is a process whereby rural women in Nigeria have sustainable income to enhance their economic status, maintain good health for self and family, participate in decision-making in the family and community and create social network for themselves both within and outside the community.

Empowerment of women would be effective, if it must embrace education. Non-formal education (NFE) is an alternative tool to formal education that will tackle the present situation of ignorance and illiteracy among rural women in Nigeria. NFE is an organized educational process outside the formal school system. This form of education is used to challenge the ways silenced people are made to conform to oppressive system. It is described as education for social change.

Many reports demonstrated that NFE and other organized interventions given to women have noteworthy results in their empowerment. In their separate studies Kwapong and Oladapo observed that participation in non-formal learning increases rural women's income-generating activities, increases their financial autonomy and enhances their social status [6&7]. This they attributed to their exposure to knowledge and skills which enhances their competence to access and manage their own resources. Rural women who participated in health education programmes promotes household and community wellness as they actively seek and utilize health options and illness prevention strategies particularly as it relates to proper nutrition, hygiene and sanitation [8]. This implies that rural women's participation in health education programme is linked to positive chances in their health practices.

Participation in NFE improves women's access to decision-making in the family and community. Knowledge acquired through NFE make them have basic skills, means of income other than the traditional domestic skills have greater advantages and are more likely to be consulted by their families and men in the household and community. This recognition both in their families and communities gave rural women identify outside their families. The programme gave women socially legitimate reasons to move about and associate with one another. This has helped women to become more confident and more skillful at interacting in public places. The empowering effect of NFE on Women can be summarized as increasing their income generating potentials, health knowledge and practices, ability to bargain for resources, household decision-making autonomy and control over own fertility and participation in public life.

In as much as there are reports that NFE enhances the empowerment of rural women, in rural women face significant challenges in accessing income, taking decision concerning self and children, access to healthcare and freedom of association [8]. There are situations where rural women do not have freedom to control even the simplest personal affairs such as what to wear, when they talk to, when and where to go outside their homes, who they build relationship with outside the home and how they engage in work outside the family.

Rural women are rarely consulted in household decision such as children's education, employment, trade; marriage and what they can inherit. In the Nigeria patrarchial society, rural women suffer marginalization, lack financial autonomy and do not participate in important family meeting called to take decisions [11&7]. Rural women were only informed of the decision made by their husbands or male relatives or in-laws where necessary. These limitations to participation in decision-making and social-networking are as a result of women's secondary status in the family and community as well as influence of religion [12].

The situation of Nigeria rural women made many international and non-governmental organization like, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Funds for Women (UNITEM) Women for Women International (WFWI) among others to organize programmes for rural women in Nigeria to improve their lives. This quest to empower rural women motivated WFWI through its NFE programme titled: Renewing Women's Life Skills (RENEWLS). The RENEWLS programme package runs for 12 months and combines right awareness and vocational skills education. WFWI is an international non-governmental organization that provides learning empowerment support programme for rural women in Nigeria and other developing nations. These learning programmes help rural women achieve self-sufficiency through direct and, education, job skill training and small business development. WIFWI started as activities by distributing cash as direct and to rural women in Bosnia and Yugoslavia in 1993. The financial assistance which was not enough to create the desired change in the lives of rural women led to the development of the non-formal learning programme. The main objectives of the programme was to ensure that rural women who participated in the programme would have sustainable income, maintain good health, participate in decision-making and have good social-network status [8].

Women for Women International have been educating rural women in 23 rural communities Enugu State using the RENEWLS programme. There were success claims by the country director of WFWI but no independent assessor has given any report on the output of the programme. As a result of the unconfirmed result of output of the RENEWLS programme in the state, it became necessary to assess participants empowerment status in Enugu State.

The following research questions were answered in the cause of this study;

1. To what extent has RENEWLS programme improved the economic status of rural women in Enugu State?
2. To what extent has RENEWLS programme enhanced healthful living conditions of rural women in Enugu State?
3. What is the level of participation of Enugu State rural women in decision-making as a result of their involvement in RENEWLS programme?
4. To what extent has participation in the RENEWLS programme improved the social networking status of rural women in Enugu State.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

The research design adopted for this study was a survey research design. The population for the study was 10,484 rural women who participated in the RENEWLS programme in Enugu State out of which 1,049 was sampled using proportionate sampling and 1,030 responded to the study.

The instrument for data collection was a 54-itemed four point response option questionnaire with format of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) and a numerical value of 4,3,2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was validated by three experts in the field of education. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha formula and internal consistency reliability co-efficient of 0.74 was obtained.

The questionnaires were administered to the RENEWLS programme graduate during their monthly group meetings in the communities with the help of trained research assistants. The questionnaire served as an interview schedule where respondents experience difficulty in reading and writing. Data collected was analysed using mean and grand mean. A decision rule of 2.50 was adopted for the study.

Therefore, the items with 2.50 and above were accepted which implies that RENEWLS Programme empowered rural women in Enugu State to a high extent; while those below 2.50 were not accepted which shows that the RENEWLS programme empowered rural women in Enugu to a low extent.

III. RESULTS

Table 1: Mean response of rural women in Enugu State on the extent to which RENEWLS has improved their economic status.

n = 1,030

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	Decision
	Because of my participation in RENEWLS Education programme		
1	I now own a personal income generating business	3.02	HE
2	I now manage my income myself	2.91	HE
3	I now take care of my financial needs	2.68	HE
4	I now contribute towards my children's education	2.88	HE
5	I now help my husband in bearing family financial burden	2.91	HE
6	I now obtain loan from outside the family without my husband's help	2.87	HE
7	I am consulted by other women on financial matters	2.85	HE
8	I now execute major family project alone	2.84	HE
9	I now take over some of my husbands financial responsibilities from him	2.87	HE
10	I am now actively involved in family business	3.08	HE
11	I now make financial contribution to community projects.	3.03	HE
12	I now have some savings from my personal business	3.11	HE
13	I no longer depend solely on my husband for financial needs.	3.12	HE
14	I no longer get financial assistance from my husband for economic ventures		
	Grand Mean	2.91	HE

HE = HIGH EXTENT

TABLE 1 shows that the participants had high mean scores of 3.02, 2.91, 2.681, 2.88, 2.91, 2.87, 2.85, 2.84, 2.87, 3.08, 3.03, 3.11, 3.12 and 2.69 respectively for items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14. Also a grand mean of 2.91 was obtained for all the 14 items that dwelt on the influence of RENEWLS programme on the economic status of the participants. This shows that participation in the programme has improved the rural women's economic status to a high extent.

Table II: Mean response of rural women in Enugu State on the extent RENEWLS programme has enhanced their healthful condition.

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	Decision
	My participation in RENEWLS programme has made me to:		
15	Insist on eating balanced diet in my family	2.93	H.E
16	Practice general hygiene	3.15	H.E
17	Practice family planning	3.25	H.E
18	Know the importance of rest	2.90	H.E
19	Plan out my time to reduce stress	2.88	H.E
20	Know about all the infectious diseases in my environment	3.18	H.E
21	Take appropriate measures to avoid contacting the infectious diseases.	3.24	H.E
22	Know about different sexually transmitted diseases	3.08	H.E
23	Attend anti-natal clinics when am pregnant	3.19	H.E
24	Discuss reproductive issues confidently with my husband	2.90	H.E
25	Keep my surrounding clean	3.28	H.E
26	Ensure that every member of my family observe general hygiene rules.	3.15	H.E
27	Enlighten my children on reproductive health issues.	3.09	H.E.
28	Give my children sex education.	2.94	H.E
29	Always go to qualified medical personnel for health issues.	2.81	H.E.
30	Stop self medication	2.80	H.E
	Grand Mean	3.05	H.E

TABLE 2 shows that the mean of the 15 items were 2.93, 3.15, 3.25, 2.90, 2.88, 3.18, 3.24, 3.08, 3.19, 2.90, 3.15, 3.09, 2.94, 2.81 and 2.80. Also a grand mean of 3.05 was obtained from the 15 item which is indicative that RENEWLS programme to a high extent has improved the healthful living conditions of the participants in Enugu State.

Table 3. Mean response on the level of participation of rural women in Enugu state in decision-making.

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	Decision
	Because of my participation in RENEWLS Programme:		
31	My husband now respect my opinion on family matters	3.32	HE
32	My husband now seeks my opinion before taking decision	3.12	HE
33	Family members now consult me for advice on various issues.	3.13	HE
34	I now make meaningful contributions during decision-making in my family.	3.35	HE
35	I now belong to women's group that takes major decision in the community.	2.88	HE
36	I now take decision about my children's education	3.11	HE
37	My children now rely on me for decision about their future.	2.83	HE
38	I now participate in decision on household finances.	2.89	HE
39	My views are taken into account in taking decision on how many children to have and when to have them	2.95	HE
40	I now participate in family meeting to discuss inheritance matters	2.28	HE
41	I now take decisions on behalf of my husband in his absence.	2.38	LE
42	I have effected reversal of decisions taken without my consent.	2.46	LE
	Grand Mean	2.89	H.E

TABLE 3 above shows that the responses had high mean of 3.32, 3.12, 3.13, 3.35, 3.38, 3.11, 2.83, 2.89 and 2.95 respectively. On the other hand the last three items had a low mean of 2.28, 2.38 and 2.46. Generally, a grand mean of 2.89 was obtained indicating that participants in the RENEWLS programme in Enugu State agreed that they now participate to a high extent in decision-making.

Table IV: Mean response of rural women in Enugu State on the extent participation in RENEWLS improved their social network status.

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	Decision
	Because of my participation in RENEWLS programme.		
43	I now belong to social groups in my community	3.23	HE
44	I now discuss with elders and leaders of my community	2.91	HE
45	I now have access to sources of loan through social group	2.93	HE
46	I am now opportune to share experiences, ideas and opinions with other women outside my community.	3.06	HE
47	I am now opportuned to make new friends	2.80	HE
48	I have visited different places outside my community.	3.21	HE
49	I have been able to express myself before other women from different places	3.13	HE
50	I am protected from any impending harm by social group	3.10	HE
51	I now discuss women's rights through social group	3.02	HE
52	I now belong to different co-operative societies in the community.	2.59	HE
53	I now have access to women empowerment agencies	2.85	HE
54	I have advices other women on the importance of education particularly the girl-child.	3.02	HE
	Grand Mean	2.99	HE

TABLE 4 shows 2 high mean of 3.23, 2.91, 2.93, 3.06, 2.80, 3.21, 3.13, 3.10, 3.02, 2.57, 2.85 and 3.02 respectively. A grand mean of 2.99 was obtained for all the 12 items, indicating that participation in the RENEWLS has generally improved the social network status of the participants in Enugu State.

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results in table one revealed that participation in the RENEWLS programme improved the economic status of rural women to a high extent. Participants in the programme affirmed that they engage in income generating activities, manage their own income, contribute to family finances and have some savings for the up keep of the family. The findings is in line with the earlier views of Kwapong and Oladapo observed that participation in non-formal learning increases rural women's income

generating activities, financial autonomy and enhances their social status [6&7]. This may be attributed to their exposure to survival skills and knowledge, which enhances their competencies to access and manage their own resources. Participants in the RENEWLS programme acquired economic power by generating and sustaining income due to new ideas information, knowledge and skills of improving their economic activities. These participants involved timelessly in the programme to acquire these skills and their husbands and relatives encouraged them in the programme in order to improve the families economic status.

Result from the second research question revealed that participation in the Renewls education programme has to a high extent enhanced rural women's health in Enugu State. They study revealed that there is improvement in the health status of participants in the State. The participants agreed that they now practice hygiene, eat balanced diet, practice family planning, know about different diseases and their prevention. The skills acquired in the programme gave rural women confidence to discuss reproductive health issues with their husbands and children. This findings is in line with the earlier views of WFWI that rural women's enabled them to promote household and community wellness[8]. Invariably, women who participated in health education programme of WFWI in Enugu State have improved health knowledge, practices and positive changes in their reproductive health practices and feel empowered.

The findings in TABLE 3 indicated that participation of rural women in RENEWLS programme increased their involvement in decision-making to a high extent. This findings agrees with Pants who revealed that rural women who participated in NFE are now involved in decision-making in their household because they contribute to family expenditure like children's education and household purchases [9]. These women who have some basic skills, some means of independent income or skills other than the traditional domestic skills have greater advantage and are more likely to be consulted by their families. Their opinion are being respected by their families. Their opinion are being respected by their husbands and in-laws some of the decisions may be, financial decisions, children's education and health care.

On the contrary, reversal of decision made by husbands, taking decisions in husband absence and decisions on inheritance are agreed to be the prerogatives of men. This implies that there are some aspect of decision-making, which culture and tradition could hinder women's participation in decision-making. It was to this fact that WFWI maintained that traditions assigns roles of decision on education, marriage, trade, reproduction and inheritance on women [10]. Women do not take part in decisions on inheritance but are only informed of decisions taken by their husbands, male relatives or in-laws where necessary.

The result from the fourth research question revealed that RENEWLS education programme has improved the social network status of rural women in Enugu State. Rural women now participate in social activities make new friends both within and outside their communities, share ideas and express themselves. This is in agreement with an earlier of view of Pants that participation in NFE programme made rural women to interact with outside their families, share ideas and form groups to work collectively to protect themselves in a patriarchal society[9]. Participant agreed that their involvement in the

programme has helped them to achieve personal goals, self confidence, new health behavior, increased income and increased involvement in family and community activities.

Summarily the RENEWLS programme of WFWI have a positive impact on the Enugu State's rural women, economic status, health, power in decision-making and social networking. This is in agreement with Ngwu who revealed that when women participate in non-formal learning programmes they acquire skills that will enable them to take control of their lives, participate in the society and thus become socially and economically empowered [13].

V. CONCLUSION

The findings show that participation in the RENEWLS programme improved the economic status, healthful living conditions, involvement in decision-making and social-networking of rural women in Enugu State. This invariably indicate that empowerment of rural women was achieved through RENEWLS programme.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- RENEWLS education programme should be extended to rural women in other states in Nigeria to ensure that majority of rural women in Nigeria are exposed to the programme. This will facilitate the realization of the third Millennium Development Goal, which emphasized gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Non-governmental organization working towards women's empowerment should take a leaf from WFWI by introducing NFE programmes into their women empowerment and development programmes.
- NFE programmes that can break the excesses of culture and tradition are necessary for positive development of both men and women in the rural community.
- Programme grandaunts should be used as resource persons to facilitate the programmes in other committee.
- The RENEWLS programme should be inculcated in the women's education programme of the National Policy on Women in Nigeria.

However, in the course of this study it was not possible to reach all the respondents. Some of the illiterate respondents refused to make themselves available for interview. Also, the management of WFWI in Enugu State gave only a measured assistance to this researcher. This necessitated more extraneous efforts being made in obtaining information on their activities and accessing the programme graduates who constitute the respondents.

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