Empowering the Nigerian "Rural-Rural" Women for Economic Development: Leveraging Small-Scale Technical and Vocational Training in Relevant Tools

Abstract

The mention of rural women depicts women in rural locations facing numerous challenges and who need to be aided to contribute optimally to their nations' economic development. Oftentimes, what policymakers intend is not what those who implement policies operate. The rural women conceived by policymakers differ from the rural women during policy implementation, and it could be said conveniently that there are two categories of these women – urban-rural women and "rural-rural" women - the latter is the focus of this research. The problem is that these rural-rural women are committed workers who need basic technical support and empowerment to boost their contributions to the economic development of Nigeria but are denied in the policy implementation process. They need the intervention of genuine organisations through effective monitoring to rid the policy implementation of corruption, which is the real issue in this discourse.

Keywords: Rural women, Policy implementation, Economic development, Technical and Vocational Training

Introduction

Women, no doubt, are stakeholders in the economic development of their nations. However, their location may hinder their contributions significantly, especially in Africa, particularly Nigeria. In its general assembly in August 2015, the UN adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. The first ten (10) of the goals are all relevant to the plight of rural-rural women, and no one should shy away from this; they are:

1. Zero poverty,
2. Zero Hunger,
3. Good Health and Well-being,
4. Quality Education (in this case, vocational and technical education that will meet local needs),
5. Gender Equality,
6. Clean Water and Sanitation,
7. Affordable and Clean Energy,
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry,

9. Innovation and Infrastructure, and
10. Reduced Inequality.

Every person must be actively involved and supported to contribute to the economic development of their nation. Incredibly genuine rural dwellers whose contributions to economic development are not often empowered to contribute optimally. The rural-rural women laboured stressfully to contribute their quota to the economic development of Nigeria, which would have been more if they had been empowered through basic technical and vocational training with basic equipment. Acknowledging their importance and appreciating these rural dwellers' significant role in developing our societies is crucial. This paper will focus its discussion on who the rural-rural women are, why they should be empowered and what leveraging small-scale technical and vocational training could help them achieve if they are equipped with basic equipment and relevant tools in a more conducive environment. The issue of faulty implementation of policies that have to do with them will also be discussed. The researcher's observation of the plight of these women actually prompted this paper to seek genuine assistance from credible organisations to assist them.

Who Are Rural Women?

When we mention rural women, we are talking of women in a location, and in this case, women who are dwelling in rural areas, facing numerous challenges, such as poverty, health issues, limited social support, and not having a direct say in the affairs of their country (Science Direct (2024). In many nations in Africa, including Nigeria, the rural women, tagged rural-rural women in this discourse, hardly get involved in the policies that affect them and are oftentimes not aware of the policies, thereby keeping them in perpetual poverty by excluding them from the implementation of such policies. This urgent issue needs immediate attention and intervention by development agencies and organisations.

Unfortunately, when empowerment policies are developed for them, it is becoming difficult to say that empowerment programmes meant for rural women reach them because connected and influential urban women and policymakers have hijacked them. This set of people who live in urban centres sometimes determines who the rural women to empower are; they may be their sisters, siblings and friends who are comfortable and gainfully employed in the cities. The rural-rural women need basic small-scale technical and vocational training to improve their skills and brush up on their indigenous knowledge, which will lead to improvement in their economic income and reduce the stress they pass through in their bid to survive and contribute to the economic growth of Nigeria.



Figure 1: Picking palm kernel with hands before processing for palm oil.



Figure 2: Drums for boiling the picked palm kernel



Figure: Boiling and straining the red oil into containers manually.

At this age, one would expect all these processes to be done mechanically if the necessary tools are provided with relevant technical and vocational training in the use of the equipment that may be provided.

The "Better Life for Rural Woman" Programme

The "Better Life for Rural Woman", simply called Better Life Programme (BLP), was launched in 1987, by the Late Maryam Babangida when she was the First Lady of Nigeria between 1985-1993. The programme emanated from her deep feelings for the plight of rural women and the rigour they pass through while contributing to the nation's economic development. However, the programme was hijacked by the urban women who were involved in the implementation, leaving out those women who are in the rural areas and whom the programme is meant to benefit. According to Akanbi (2010), "the observers of events between 1987 and 1994 almost renamed it "Better Life for Royal women" (p. 12). After almost four decades of envisioning a better life for rural women, they still labour stressfully to contribute to the economic development of Nigeria. The figures shown below are just samples to show what women in rural areas go through in their attempt to contribute their quota to the economic development of Nigeria.

National Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy and Action Plan

Nigeria has the National Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy and Action Plan, which, according to the policy document, "is a holistic and robust plan that leverages diverse approaches and perspectives across the Federation to redefine the Federal Government of Nigeria's approach to women's economic empowerment" (p. i), but interestingly, while the former president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was accenting the policy, he said:

> I am proud that over 100,000 Nigerians - including grassroots women, government actors, captains of industries, traditional rulers, religious leaders, technology entrepreneurs, members of the diaspora, and technical experts have participated in the National WEE Policy Dialogue that birthed this blueprint document and helped us to understand better what works to drive women's economic empowerment in Nigeria (p. 2).

In Nigeria, the grassroots women the document discusses are not the rural-rural women this presentation discusses. In Nigeria's political settings, grassroots women often live in urban areas; they do not live in remote villages where one must trek almost six (6) kilometres from

the last bus stop to the village. The rural-rural women are hardworking and do most of the jobs manually; this set of women needs their careers to be mechanised in the simplest form, and they will positively impact their economic environment. They need simple vocational and technical training in mechanised tools, some of which they can improvise in their villages, enabling them to be more productive and leading to economic development.

Little's (2009) and Federal Republic of Nigeria's (2023) submissions on the plight of rural women still subsist. They lack access to essential resources necessary to enhance opportunities for sustainable development. They encounter problems that stem from a lack of access to seeds, credit, extension services, and technology. They are disadvantaged in double ways; "as rural residents, they suffered the problems of remoteness and poor services, but these problems were exacerbated by gender and the fact that, as women, they were responsible for the domestic reproduction of the household" (Little, 2009, para. 1).

The 50 Million African Women Speak (50maws)

The 50 Million African Women Speak (50maws) Networking Platform Project in Nigeria, spearheaded by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, is a digital platform that aims to include women at all levels, rural and urban. It targets the less privileged and privileged women to enable them to access trade finance and trade opportunities between urban and rural areas and cross-border and transnational opportunities. The platform allows women to share their experiences, learn from each other, and access resources to help them in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

However, it is a digital platform that can be accessed on the following platforms:

1. *SIGN UP ON* www.womenconnect.org
2. *Facebook handle* Ecowas50million women https://www.facebook.com/groups/406968006807952/?ref=share (10,000 women on the page)
3. *Instagram handle*Ecowas50mw https://www.instagram.com/invites/contact/?i=4433l9ospfb8&utm_content=95hmbia (1,854 women on the page)
4. *TWITTER HANDLE*EcowasN https://twitter.com/EcowasN?s=08
5. *TELEGRAM PAGE* https://t.me/joinchat/SwTT71iTyuFh2-4GFIA89g (25,290 women)
6. *WHATSAPP PAGE* (ABOUT 12,002 WOMEN)

It then becomes legitimate to wonder how the rural-rural women who are not on social media will benefit from these platforms as it claims the project is inclusive and targets the less privileged and privileged women. Ahmed et al. (2021) summarise all the above observations and discourse on policies for rural women in Nigeria. There are enormous gaps between policy formulation, implementation, and reality in the level of development among the rural populace, and this must be urgently addressed for sustainable economic development.

What is Technical and Vocational Education and Training

According to UNESCO (2024), "Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) helps youth and adults develop the abilities, knowledge, values, and attitudes they need to find decent work and contribute to building a peaceful, healthy, just and sustainable world". (p. 1). This definition of TVET might be too comprehensive for what the presenter has in mind for the rural-rural women. However, it is essential to note that vocational training has the potential to equip these women with practical life skills and knowledge geared towards their daily trades or careers, offering a hopeful solution to their challenges.

The submission of an Editorial Staff member of TVET Journal on what TVET stands for is relevant to the discourse. TVET is technical education or training aimed at providing skills related to a profession so that a person can get a job and provide a livelihood, and in this case, rural farming and food production by rural women are examples. Also, UNESCO's (2025) skills for work and life could be adapted to empower rural women since they involve "a range of learning experiences relevant to the world of work … and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge that help individuals live healthy and fulfilling lives". Enough of the deception of talking about rural women without them benefiting from all the bogus policies claimed to be meant for them but not touching their lives.

Why Leverage Small-Scale Technical and Vocational Training for Empowerment of Nigerian "Rural-Rural" Women

Small-scale technical and vocational training (TVET) can indeed be crucial in empowering Nigerian rural women, especially those in remote areas, by providing them with practical skills and knowledge. TVET programmes can help them become more self-reliant, improve their livelihoods, and contribute to sustainable community economic development.

It can enhance their skills, increase employment opportunities, and promote sustainable development. (AI Side Fussion). Such training programs can empower women by equipping them with the necessary tools to start their businesses, improve their agricultural practices, and

foster community development. By focusing on localised needs and incorporating traditional skills with modern techniques, these programmes can create self-sufficiency and reduce the rural-urban migration trend.

TVET can stimulate and motivate rural women to achieve better living standards, stir up collective mobilisation to improve the air lot, and help them become conscious of their rights, the availability of opportunities and facilities, and their social, political, and economic responsibilities.

However, to be truly effective, it is essential to ensure these training initiatives are accessible, culturally relevant, and supported by local infrastructure and policies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the submission of Ahmed et al. (2021) may suffice, as in many cases, development is not achieved in rural areas because of a lack of understanding of rural people's context of life and projects. Nigeria is very good at formulating policies. However, there is always a missing link between these policies and the implementation of the programmes to achieve development, especially in rural settings. In most cases, rural dwellers are side-lined during rural development policies and programme formulation, planning, and implementation, which rubbishes all efforts to improve the lives of rural dwellers.

Therefore, an adequate skilled workforce is needed to manage the policy and programme to bring about rural development and, more importantly, to make the sustainable developmental goals as envisaged by national and international organisations a reality. To this end, the ‘real’ rural women must be involved in all the developmental processes of those policies meant to affect them.

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Acknowledgement

This paper reflects the researcher's genuine concern to seek intervention from credible organisations to assist these rural women in Nigeria. It is hoped that if discussions are raised, it may bring out something positive that will alleviate the suffering and stress of the women to contribute economically to their communities.