

Analysis of Socio-Cultural Barriers to Rural Women Empowerment in North-Western Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study highlights the socio-cultural barriers to rural women's empowerment in North-Western Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted. The study utilized mainly primary data obtained through the administration of structured questionnaire, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The analysis of data using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Logit Regression) with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 20.0 reveals that family restriction on doing certain jobs, restriction on female education, early marriages and domestic work burden are the main barriers to rural women empowerment. On the other hand, male-centric barriers to rural women empowerment, Purdha(veiling), misinterpretation of religious injunctions, dependence on males, discrimination in family assets, restrictions on women's mobility, prevalence of gender discrimination in economic sector and condemnation of mixing boys and girls were rejected as socio-cultural barriers to rural women empowerment. Based on the findings, it is recommended that government at all levels should ensure improved gender equality in access to basic services (schools, health care, child care) in rural areas, by investing in their supply (infrastructure, staff, etc.) so as to reduce women's vulnerability and increase their capacity to access more remunerative jobs and opportunities. It is equally recommended that efforts to expand rural women's access to science, technical education, mobile phones, computers, and other information and communication technologies should be of utmost priority.

Keywords: Phurdha, Women Empowerment, Socio Cultural Barriers

INTRODUCTION

In most African societies, men are considered the head of the family and control their households including their women. Women are a “class” in the gender stratification system that is governed by shared norms and values, i.e., it has a cultural as well as relational and material component (Mason & Smith, 2003). In many African societies, there are some limitations for women to progress in development and to be considered outside their family roles, expectation and responsibilities. Reinartz (2002) argues that balancing work and family is a major hurdle for working women. Hence, family responsibilities influence the careers and education choices of women who mostly have disproportionate work in care of children and the home.

In Nigeria, traditions, customs, socio cultural values, ethics, motherhood instincts are major challenges facing women empowerment. Some cultures particularly in Northern Nigeria encourage early marriage of girls hence denying them education. This gives the social rationale among parents for investing in the education of sons rather than daughters, as daughters are perceived to be less valuable once educated, and less likely to abide by the will of the father, brother or husband. The plight of women, in terms of education is further compounded by the belief in certain areas that women's education or careers always end up in the kitchen.

The implication of poor education opportunity for women is their involvement in low paying ventures. It has been noted by Oladunni (1999) that because of societal stereotype and stigmatization on certain professions and subjects as the exclusive preserve of men, most Nigerian women have been forced into less paid jobs like teaching, nursing services, agriculture, small scale food processing, secretarial duties, clerical duties, note- counting in banks, cleaners and middle level professional occupations.

Culturally, there is a belief that women are supposed to be led but not lead. In fact, stereotyped notions about women constitute major barriers; assertiveness is frequently interpreted as aggression. In this respect, women find it difficult to exert authority over males since the society still suffers from the myth that women are too emotional and weak for senior management roles. When women face these stereotypes and accept them uncritically, it leaves them marginalized and with limited career effectiveness. Culturally, women who get into leadership are seen as trouble makers, more specifically as strong and assertive women (Daily Nation, 2009). In essence, girls are trained to

become mothers, while boys are prepared for white collar jobs like administrators.

The purdah (veiling) system in the North is also a major socio-cultural barrier that hinders women empowerment. The fact that it is believed that women are to be seen and not heard makes it almost practically impossible for them to function in a formal environment especially as they are covered up. This creates a situation where the women find it difficult to go out, mingle and engage in jobs that could pay more.

Over the years in Nigeria, considerable efforts have been made by government as well as non- governmental agencies to implement programmes aimed at the advancement of women. Such programmes include, the Better life for Rural Women (1987), Family Support Programme FSP (1994), Family Economic Advancement Programme FEAP(1997), Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative WRAPA (1997) and most recently the Women for Change Initiative WFCI (2010). However, despite these policies, the advancement of women particularly rural women in Nigeria is yet to be actualized. Azikiwe in Zuofa (2008) revealed that social norms, poor incentives, ignorance, poverty, illiteracy and cultural institution against women in most societies in developing countries are barriers to the advancement of women. However, certain cultural, religious and judicial biases remain major constraints to women enjoying their rights.

In line with these new realities and diversities in findings from previous works on the subject matter and because rural women empowerment is a critical component of regional development, there is a need to know the barriers that affect women empowerment, and promote new policies and measures to create new ventures so as to reduce gender gap in earnings and productivity. It is against this background that this study seeks to analyze the socio-cultural barriers to rural women empowerment in North-Western Nigeria.

Giving the foregoing, the main objective of this study is to analyse the socio-cultural barriers to empowerment of the rural women in North-Western Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Women Empowerment

Charmes and Wieringa (2003) view women empowerment as a process in which the following elements will be considered: awareness/consciousness, choice/alternatives, resources, voice, agency and participation. This dimension of women empowerment is linked to enhancing women's ability to make choices over the areas in their lives that matter to them, both the strategic life choices that Kabeer (1999) discussed and to choices related to daily life. These choices include indicators for measurement as women Empowerment matrix sketch, and the contours range from personal to global level, distinguishing between physical, socio-cultural, religious, political, legal and economic while access to resources is the overlapping zone.

Women empowerment is a flow rather than a stock variable manifesting into various outcomes and well-being is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the former, that is, well-being going through various pathways like gaining resources, autonomy and agency. These pathways denote expansion in capabilities in a way which brings changes in the lives of individuals; people who are previously denied power are now being empowered.

Kabeer (2005) defines it as a process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability. Meanwhile, Kletečki Radović (2008), view empowerment as an intentional process that includes the initiative and action of persons in gaining power, taking over control in their lives and gaining a greater access to social resources with the aim of achieving personal and collective goals. It involves helping users to become aware of and critically understand structural inequalities and obstacles, and support them in the development of those skills and actions through which they can more considerably expand their influence and power in society. An important aspect of the process of empowerment is the final results of empowerment that leads to changes in the approach to social resources and to an increased social power of deprived individuals, groups or communities.

Thus, empowerment is the process that allows one to gain the knowledge, skill-sets and attitude needed to cope with the changing world and the circumstances in which one lives.

Theoretical Review

Feminist philosophy has been utilized as a theoretical model for the present study. Feminism primarily focuses on gender equality and equal rights. But with the passage of time it emphasizes on women's rights and domination. The philosophy of liberal feminism as argued by Ritzer (2000) expresses that women may claim equality with men and augment that gender inequality is a result of patriarchal and sexist patterning of division of labor, and that gender equality can be produced by transforming division of labor through re-patterning of key institutions—law, work, family, education, and media. The liberal philosophy asserts that equality of male and female is possible through political and legal reforms. It mainly focuses on issues of women's ability as they could maintain equality with men through it (Naz, 2011). To them, women have capability of achieving equality with men, but such change needs alteration in structure of society. As supported by Bell (1984), liberal feminist mainly focuses on issues including reproductive and abortion rights, sexual harassment, voting, education, "equal pay for equal work," affordable childcare, affordable health care, and bringing to light frequency of sexual and domestic violence against women. In the light of such conception, same is the case in the area under study where women are almost thoroughly deprived from the mentioned rights and particularly right to cast vote and contest election. The founders of Liberal feminism mainly focus on eradication of institutional bias and implementation of gender-balanced laws (Naz, 2011).

Empirical Studies

Sultana (2010) studies the socio-cultural dimensions of women's inequity in rural society. In matters of marriage, divorce, maintenance and inheritance, women have traditionally been denied equal rights. Aggression against women within the family is not considered as breaking the rules or affecting their self-esteem (Akpor-Robaro, 2012). Ahmed et al (2011) reveal that rural women in Bangladesh have restricted access to income earning activities and less scope to contribute to the well-being of their families due to social, cultural and religious barriers. Rural women are not allowed to participate in economic activities outside their home and are, therefore, not able to assist their families in reducing poverty. They found that participation of rural women in income-generating activities has improved the economic well-being of the family. It has

also led to increased awareness of social injustice regarding dowries and violence (Rahman, 2001).

Akpor-Robaro (2012) presents an analytical and evaluative study of the impact of socio-cultural environment and found that Nigerian socio-cultural characteristics, in some ways, have provided impetus for entrepreneurial emergence among Nigerians, but in some other ways, have enormously hindered the emergence of women entrepreneurs. This disproves the general notion that the Nigerian society absolutely does not provide opportunities for women entrepreneurial emergence. The study concluded that, in general, socio-cultural environment significantly impact on entrepreneurial emergence in society. Beyond the negative or adverse socio-economic circumstances of individuals, the culture and value system of a people is a great determinant of the desire and capacity of people becoming entrepreneurs. Discrimination posed by cultural and religious belief reduces the chances of women education thereby making them less likely to be qualified for high income generating jobs as their male counterparts.

Gender equality and female empowerment are now universally recognized as core development objectives, fundamental for the realization of human rights, and key to effective and sustainable development outcomes. A growing body of researchers (Lahsaeizada, *et al.*, Emadi, 2010, Shariari, *et al.*, 2007, Shakori, 2010, White, 2010, Allendorf, 2007, Ali, *et al.*, 2010) demonstrates that societies with greater gender equality experience faster economic growth, and benefit from greater agricultural productivity and improved food security. However, much has not been achieved in Nigeria particularly in Northern part of the country and scientific researches that should be the starting point of such laud initiatives are scanty. From all the literature reviewed, none has addressed how socio-cultural factors limit rural women's economic participation in Northern Nigeria. Most of what has been done are either in the Southern or Western part of the country and often use traditional method of investigation found in the literature.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a survey research design which is found suitable for this study because it is a very valuable tool for assessing opinions and trends. It consists of a predetermined set of structured questionnaires built on 5 point

Likert scale to collect information from a representative sample of the population of rural women in North-Western Nigeria. The study utilized mainly primary data obtained through the administration of questionnaire, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). In order to collect the data, the research adopted a personal on the spot delivery and recovery during the administration of the instrument.

Population and Sample Size

The population for this study comprised of the total number of adult women in the rural areas of North-Western Nigeria, estimated at 17,893,473. In order to select respondents for the questionnaire survey, multi-stage sampling procedures were used to select a sample of 400 rural women for the study. In the first stage, to ensure an even spread of the study in the North West, the selected States were divided into three senatorial districts of North, Central and South. One local government was then purposively selected from each senatorial zone as study area. Based on this, the following Local Government Areas were chosen for study:

Kaduna State: Zaria, Igabi, and Zangon Kataf.

Zamfara State: Maradun, Tsafe, and Talata Mafara.

Kano State: Bichi, Kura and Kiru Local Government Areas.

Model Specification

Logit Regression was used to assess the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The model is presented as follows:

$$W.E = \beta_0 + \beta_1 loctn + \beta_2 educ + \beta_3 fear + \beta_4 mstus + \beta_5 restrcttrvl + \beta_6 restrctbus + \beta_7 emplymnt + \beta_8 erlymrg + \beta_9 techskl + \beta_{10} lndprprtylws + \beta_{11} lwsabt mrg + \beta_{12} inhrtnc + \beta_{13} dmstcwrk + \mu \dots eq \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

where;

W.E	=	Women Empowerment
mstus	=	Marital Status
loctn	=	Location
restrcttrvl	=	restriction to women travelling
restrctbus	=	restriction of women to certain type of businesses
emplymnt	=	employment
fear	=	fear of women exposure
erlymrg	=	early marriage
dmstcwrk	=	domestic work,

educ = basic education
 techskl = technical skills,
 Indprprtylws= land and property laws
 lwsabtmrg = laws about marriage
 inhrtnc = inheritance

The variables captured in the model specified for this study are measured as follows:

Women Empowerment is the Dependent variable of the study. It was regressed against the Independent variables.

The independent variables are as follows: Marital Status, Location, Fear of Exposure, restriction to women travelling, restriction of women to certain type of businesses, employment, fear of women exposure, early marriage, domestic work, lack of basic education, technical skills, land and property laws, laws about marriage and inheritance.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (Logistic Regression Model). The Model was estimated using Hosmer and Lemeshow Test Statistics at 0.05 level of significance. The computation of raw data was done with the aid of Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) 20.0

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Personal Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

S/N	Items	Items Categories	Frequency	Percentages (%)
1	Educational qualification	No Formal Education	206	54.9
		O'level	82	21.9
		Tertiary	30	8.0
		Above B.Sc	---	---
		Other Qualification	57	15.2
		Total	375	100.00
2	Age	16 – 25 years	159	42.4
		26 – 33 years	63	16.8
		34 - 41 years	63	16.8
		42 years and above	57	15.2
				Total
3	Location	Kaduna	120	32.0
		Kano	135	36.0
		Zamfara	120	32.0

		Total	375	100.00
4	Marital Status	Married	264	70.4
		Single	42	11.2
		Divorced	18	4.8
		Widowed	51	13.6
		Total	375	100.00

Source: Field Survey 2016.

From the table 4.1 above, 54.9% of the respondents have no formal education and only 21.9% representing 82 respondents have initial secondary education, while about 8.0% have tertiary education and the remaining 15.2% claim to have Islamic education.

In terms of age grouping, sampled respondents between the age of 16 to 25 years constituted the majority of the respondents accounting for about 42.4%, follow by respondent of age between 26 to 33 years and 34 to 41 years which representing 16.8% and then 43years and above which accounted for about 15.2%.

A total of 120 respondents representing 32% of the sampled size are from Kaduna and another 120 respondent indicated that they are from Zamfara. The remaining 135 respondents representing 36% of the total validly returned questionnaire were from Kano state. Furthermore, from the total respondents, 264 respondents representing about 70.4% are married and 13.6% are widow, only 4.8% were divorced and the remaining 11.2% were single

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Table 4.2 Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for	
							EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Location			9.208	2	.010			
Location(1)	-.431	.463	.865	1	.352	.650	.262	1.611
Location(2)	-1.155	.425	7.392	1	.007	.315	.137	.724
Maritalstatus			8.362	3	.039			
Maritalstatus(1)	.931	.417	4.989	1	.026	2.537	1.121	5.741
Maritalstatus(2)	.336	.583	.332	1	.564	1.400	.446	4.393
Maritalstatus(3)	1.773	.761	5.432	1	.020	5.889	1.326	26.157
certainkindofbus			33.172	4	.000			

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certainkindofbus(1)	-3.241	.827	15.358	1	.000	.039	.008	.198
certainkindofbus(2)	-2.006	.445	20.289	1	.000	.134	.056	.322
certainkindofbus(3)	19.875	15119.271	.000	1	.999	428338170.716	.000	.
certainkindofbus(4)	-2.055	.408	25.411	1	.000	.128	.058	.285
Fearofexposure	-.043	.150	.081	1	.776	.958	.714	1.286
womencannottravel	.343	.117	8.623	1	.003	1.409	1.121	1.772
employment	.297	.156	3.618	1	.057	1.346	.991	1.828
Earlymarriage	-.100	.146	.473	1	.491	.905	.680	1.204
domesticwork	.617	.120	26.291	1	.000	1.853	1.464	2.346
lackofbasicedu	-.017	.160	.011	1	.916	.983	.718	1.346
technicalskills	.114	.188	.368	1	.544	1.121	.775	1.622
landandpropertylaw	-.669	.146	21.119	1	.000	.512	.385	.681
lawaboutmarriage	-.170	.138	1.524	1	.217	.843	.644	1.105
inheritance	.292	.135	4.655	1	.031	1.339	1.027	1.744
Constant	-.626	1.505	.173	1	.678	.535		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Location, Maritalstatus, certainkindofbus, Fearofexposure, womencannottravel, employment, Earlymarriage, domesticwork, lackofbasicedu, technicalskills, landandpropertylaw, lawaboutmarriage, inheritance.

Table 4.3 Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	373.602 ^a	.298	.402

Table 4.4 Hosmer and Lemeshow Test

Step	Chi-square	Df	Sig.
1	26.832	8	.001

From table 4.2 above, the coefficients of location were all negative, indicating that issues of locations negatively affect women empowerment in Zamfara and Kano states (Sig. 0.01 and 0.007 respectively), while in Kaduna State, the location do not significantly affect women empowerment (Sig. 0.352). this might be due to multicultural setting that exist in Kaduna State. The coefficients of Marital Status are all positive and significant (0.039, 0.026 and 0.020) except for single (0.564), which means marital status affects women empowerment positively with the exception of single ladies which their status

does not influence their empowerment, this might be due to the fact that single ladies are mostly below the working age hence their economic empowerment depends largely on the economic status of their parents and guardians. The coefficients of restriction of women to certain businesses are all negative and perfectly significant (0.000) which means restriction of women to certain kind of businesses negatively affects the empowerment of women in these states. It is not statistically significant at (3) because it represents the undecided group in the analysis. Fear of exposure do not significantly affects the empowerment of women in the selected states (sig. 0.776), while restriction of women to travelling has significant influence on the empowerment of women in Kaduna, Zamfara and Kano States (sig. 0.003). Women employment does not influence their empowerment positively and significantly (sig. 0.057) early marriage also does not influence their economic empowerment (sig. 0.491). Domestic work absolutely influences empowerment of rural women in Kaduna, Kano and Zamfara States (Sig. 0.000), but lack of basic education and technical skills is not a barrier to the women economic empowerment (sig. 0.983). Land property laws also have significant influence on the women's economic empowerment (sig. 0.000) while laws about marriage do not have significant influence on their empowerment (sig. 0.217). Lastly, inheritance system has significant influence on the women's economic empowerment in the selected states (sig. 0.031).

Table 4.3 shows the percentage of the changes in women empowerment that are influenced by the factors captured in the model, which shows that 29.8% to 40.2% of the changes in women empowerment are influenced by changes in Marital Status, Location, restriction to women travelling, restriction of women to certain type of businesses, employment, fear of women exposure, early marriage, domestic work, lack of basic education, technical skills, land and property laws, laws about marriage and inheritance based on the Cox & Snell R Square and Nagelkerke R Square respectively.

Table 4.4 shows the adequacy of the model, which test the overall significance of the model. The sig value (0.001) means the model is adequate and significant at even at 99.9% level of significance.

Hypothesis Testing

Further analysis of data using Hosmer and Lemeshow Test to establish whether Marital Status, Location, restriction on women travelling, restriction of women to certain type of businesses, employment, fear of women exposure,

early marriage, domestic work, lack of basic education, technical skills, land and property laws, laws about marriage and inheritance collectively are barriers to rural women empowerment reveals that these factors have statistically significant influence to rural women empowerment among the states of North-Western Nigeria, $\chi^2 (2) = 26.832, p = 0.001$.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study found that issues of location negatively affect women empowerment in Zamfara and Kano states, while in Kaduna State, the location do not significantly affect women empowerment. This indicates that the location or place of residence of the women has influence on their empowerment opportunities. Some the research areas like Zamfara are known to be very strict on women's freedom, which might have hindered their access to some empowerment programmes. Marital status affects women empowerment positively with the exception of single ladies which their status does not influence their empowerment. Restriction of women to certain kind of businesses negatively affects the empowerment of women in these states. Fear of exposure do not significantly affects the empowerment of women in the selected states, while restriction of women to travelling has significant influence on the empowerment of women in Kaduna, Zamfara and Kano States. Women employment also influences their empowerment positively and significantly while early marriage does not influence their economic empowerment. Domestic work absolutely influences empowerment of rural women in Kaduna, Kano and Zamfara States, but lack of basic education and technical skills are not barriers to the women economic empowerment. Land property laws also have significant influence on the women's economic empowerment while laws about marriage do not have significant influence on their empowerment. Lastly, inheritance system has significant influence on the women's economic empowerment in the selected states. The hypothesis tested revealed that Marital Status, Location, restriction to women travelling, restriction of women to certain type of businesses, employment, fear of women exposure, early marriage, domestic work, lack of basic education, technical skills, land and property laws, laws about marriage and inheritance collectively are barriers to rural women empowerment across the states of North Western Nigeria. This finding contradicts the work of Imran, Muss war, Gulman, & Ahmad (2012) who found that early marriages, lack of peace, vested interest groups, and

society disfavor for females' employment serve as barriers to women economic empowerment. But in conformity with the same study which pointed out that undue religious injunctions and Purdha (veil) also serve as barriers to women economic empowerment.

However, there are pocket of this social realities in some part of Northern Nigeria as some conservative religious leaders of traditional rural society believe that when women become educated they become disrespectful and no longer adhere to male dominance. During the in depth focus group discussion sessions, majority of the key informants reported that conservative religious groups never believe in the concept of *Girls' Education* as well as '*Women Empowerment*' (Hashmi, 2000). One of the participants narrated: No doubt, we respect our own religion but there are some people in our area who are engaged in misinterpretation about religious sentiments...and position of women in Islam. Actually, in the name of religion their motive is to confine women within the homestead. They also claimed that NGO's functions deteriorate religious harmony. When we participated in NGO skill acquisition programme... senior influential persons of our village threatened us... they also whispered that NGOs are against the religious sentiments... and they frustrated and subjected all the child participants to punishment of 60 lashes (Field survey, 2016).

These evidences indicate that in effect of varieties of initiatives, over the decade, some positive changes and progress have been made in dismantling socio cultural barriers to women education and empowerment in Northern Nigeria but in reality the picture of access as well as completion of girls' education in secondary level is very much awful especially in the context of patriarchal social setting where traditional gendered norm is maintained strictly. For example, in a *Purdabound* society like rural Zamfara and Kano, girls' education has never been equally accessible, specifically, for disadvantaged parts in the population.

Girls' education is still inaccessible for many marginalized families across the countryside. In a highly conservative social setting like rural Northern Nigeria, girls are considered to be burden and boys are treated as resource to the family. Girls of marginalized families are mostly deprived of education and their parents rather pay more attention on marring off their daughters as early as possible because of varieties of factors linked to socio-cultural gendered norms. Girls are also considered too valuable as household

workers to be able to fulfill household responsibilities. Thus parents are rarely sought to pay for girls' education and are rather willing to invest for boys' education.

In rural Northern Nigeria, specifically in the marginalized poor families, female children are usually engaged in household responsibilities that plausibly limit their chances to be attached with educational institutions. Therefore, children's contribution to household activities such as tending livestock, rearing and caring for siblings, while the mother goes for income earning activities, can make significant difference in the household economy but this is not the case in Northern Nigeria. It has been a traditional fact for the rural poor households that the older the girl gets, the more responsibility she will have to take in helping in the house keeping tasks. Since the society of rural Northern Nigeria is highly male dominated and gender stratified, the birth of a daughter is viewed as a burden because women's socio-economic and educational status is lower than that of men in every sphere of life. These days, at primary level, girls' enrolment rate has been increased. But small number of them continues their education up to the tertiary level in rural Northern Nigeria. Patriarchal social structure and subordinated position of women are highly responsible for this vulnerable situation. The work of Ojobo, (2008) and Karim, (2006) share this view.

This is further revealed by the statistical significant result of domestic activities as burden to rural women. This is in line with the findings of Iman, Mussawar, Gulman and Ahmad (2012) who found that domestic activities are main occupation of the rural women and an area where gender misbalance is most pronounced. Rural women spend most of their time on domestic activities, which constitute a form of unpaid work, while rural men compensate by spending more hours doing paid work, although not entirely as they are left one extra hour which they spend on free time activities. Rural men and urban women have more time for socializing than rural women. Social involvement and participation by rural women via membership in various organizations is very limited. Rural women remain to be in disempowered position in household in regard to decision making and for the monthly neither budgeting decisions, neither education, age, nor working status influences significantly women's power in family decision making.

CONCLUSION

In this study, it was understood that the quest for dismantling the barriers to rural women empowerment is highly critical and strategic in nature, particularly on the war against women poverty, marginalization and achievement of sustainable development goal. Generally, the study found that conscious women focus risk mitigation policies are very important to the development of Northern Nigeria as it will help to bridge the earning gap between men and women thereby reducing inequalities, improve standard of living and thus, foster the much-needed economic growth for national development.

The study concludes that there is sufficient evidence to show that to some extent socio-cultural barriers such as male-centric barriers, family restriction on doing certain jobs, restriction on female education, negative effects of early marriage and domestic work burden; weak institutions regarding inheritance and corrupt judicial practices significantly limit rural women empowerment in North-Western Nigeria. Most of the findings of the research are consistent with previous normative and empirical works as it provides empirical evidence pertaining to barriers to rural women empowerment.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made in a bid to proffer far reaching solution to the challenges of women empowerment, gender gap, feminization of poverty and underdevelopment in North-Western Nigeria:

Government at all level should ensure improve gender equality in access to basic services (schools, health care, child care) in rural areas, by investing in their supply (infrastructure, staff, etc.) so as to reduce women's vulnerability and increase their capacity to access more remunerative jobs and opportunities. Expand rural women's access to science, technical education, mobile phones, computers and other information and communication technologies.

Encourage ratification and support implementation of key equal rights in International Labour Standards especially Convention no. 100 on Equal remuneration (1951), and no. 111 on Discrimination in employment and occupation (1958).

Ensure that rural small producers and workers, particularly agricultural workers, are covered under national labour and other relevant laws and regulations, and are protected in practice.

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