

# Role of Men in Women Empowerment: A Study of Ijesa in Osun State, Nigeria

Sunday Kolawole, ALONGE

Social Sector Group, Social and Governance Policy Research Department, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER), P.M.B. 5, U.I. P.O. Ibadan.

\* E-mail: [alongesk@yahoo.com](mailto:alongesk@yahoo.com)

## Abstract

Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action. In addition, empowerment is a process that is both individual and collective. Despite important advances towards equality, differences in the socioeconomic outcomes of men and women persist both in the developing and developed world. Recently, policy makers and social scientists have begun to emphasize the role and responsibility of men and boys in promoting gender equality and women empowerment. To achieve women's empowerment, the role of men can never be overemphasized because the lives of men and women are intertwined such that whatever affects one directly or indirectly affects the other. Further, government also has major roles to play in order to empower women. This paper therefore examined the roles of men and government towards women's empowerment in Ijesaland. In order to achieve this, the paper examined the traditional position of women in the study area, which sometimes determine the action and reaction of men toward women empowerment. Examining the role of men and that of the government in women empowerment is important because without the participation of men and government, empowering women may not be achievable. A cross-section sample survey was used to collect data using questionnaire and interview guides to elicit information from the respondents. The study found out that the majority of the respondents see women as husband helper in the study area. The role of men in women's empowerment according to the respondents should include allowing them to exhibit their God given potentials, as well as allowing them to mix with the society at large to gain access to positions of authority within the society. Government on the other hand, should provide enabling environment for the empowerment of women, equal rights and privileges to men and women, provision of micro-finance for business, more investment in the education sector (vocational education), giving attention to affirmative action, and government should embrace the concept of women's empowerment. The study concludes that women empowerment will not materialise without the participation of men and the government in the process.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Men, Women's Empowerment, Government, Ijesaland

## 1. Background

Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action. In addition, empowerment is a process that is both individual and collective. The concept of empowerment has a long history in social change work. Feminist consciousness-raising and collective action informed early applications in international development in the 1970s (Cornwall, 2016). Women's empowerment came to be articulated in the 1980s and 1990s as a radical approach concerned with transforming power relations in favour of women's rights and greater equality between women and men (Batliwala, 2007). For all practical purposes, the concern of gender equity has graduated to the level of a policy objectives (Sharma, 2000). Two perspectives have emerged in the contemporary discourse on the modalities of gender equity; women's development and women's empowerment. Globally, women make substantial contribution to human labor force and economic development (World Bank, 2007). Nevertheless, women's economic rights, contributions and priorities have been largely overlooked (Ajinkya 2012).

For a long time, a commitment to promoting gender equality in economic outcomes, as in other areas of social development and human rights, has emphasized women's empowerment. There is evidence that expanding woman's opportunities particularly in health, education, earnings, rights, and political participation drives down gender inequality and accelerates development (Duflo, 2005). Despite important advances towards equality, differences in the socioeconomic outcomes of men and women persist both in the developing and developed world. Recently, policy makers and social scientists have begun to emphasize the role and responsibility of men

and boys in promoting gender equality. Women's lack of decision-making power, the unequal distribution of household tasks, the care giving role assigned to women, cultural, gender-based violence, and the constraints imposed on women's socio-economic mobility and labor market barriers; all act as contributory factors which cause and compound women's deficiency (Malhotra and Mather, 1997). On the other hand, gender equality so often is equated with women alone despite being an issue of concern to both women and men (Mayoux, 2002). As such, little attention has been given to men in influencing gender equality (Ajinkya, 2012). While there is growing interest of men provision of capital, contribution in household income, participation of in women's economic activities in empowering women yet women continue to suffer in several ways towards their economic empowerment (Kabeer, 2005). Even though women contribute a major proportion of their income to the needs of the households, men tend to have considerable autonomy (Ahmed, 2008).

According to Baker (2007) some men compel their spouse not to work outside the household as well as take the money they earned. Again, patriarchal system has affected women's power in alleviating poverty since they cannot make decision in allocation or distribution of resources at the household level (Mosedale, 2005). While social norms can vary drastically from one place to another, the global trend has generally put women in a disadvantaged position (World Bank, 2011). Patriarchal social systems operate against the economic interests of women through informal networks (Esplen and Brody, 2007). Men - as community, political or religious leaders - often control access to a large variety of resources such as health and educational services, but also transportation and finances. As heads of states and government ministers, as leaders of religious and faith-based institutions, as judges, as heads of armies and other agencies of force, as village heads, or indeed as husbands and fathers, men often wield enormous power over many aspects of women's lives. Therefore, the role of men's attitudes and behaviors should not be ignored in the debate and the design of gender related policies (Farre, 2012).

Until the 19th century, women accepted their mediocre status in society as they lacked the educational and economic resources that would enable them to challenge the prevailing social order. Attempts to right the inequalities between men and women necessitate the empowerment of women economically, socially, politically, and culturally. Women must be given the educational and economic. Once feminists, advocates, activists and women in general view men everywhere as inherently part of the problem, efforts at empowering women must involve and engage men, hence the proliferation of an interest in men and masculinities in recent years (UK Essays, 2013). The lives of men and women are interdependent and any benefit from women empowerment will go a long way to benefit both (Bayeh, 2016). Hence, there was a call on countries in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) to promote men's support in the struggle for gender equality and encourage their involvement and shared responsibility in all areas of family life and reproductive health. Research has shown that, collaborating with men is an important strategy for advancing women's empowerment. Again, the need for the involvement of men has been precipitated by a series of global processes such as the 48th session of the United Nations Commission on the status of Women (CSW), which discussed the role of boys and men in achieving women's empowerment and gender equality (Cornell, 2003).

To achieve women's empowerment, the role of men can never be overemphasized because the lives of men and women are intertwined such that whatever affects one directly or indirectly affects the other (Shaikh, 2015). It is worth noting that men even in the most traditional and patriarchal societies believe and support women's empowerment and would want to see their mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives live in a society where equity and justice is paramount. Considering the significant role women play in the development agenda, it is only proper men get involved irrespective of how some women activist view it. Women have the primary task of child rearing and therefore need all the resources to execute this task in order to break the cyclical transmission of poverty from generation to generation. Consequently, the empowerment of women is very crucial for the development of any society considering the roles they play in society and the fact they form more than half of the human resource of a nation, but their empowerment cannot materialize without men being involved (UK Essays, 2013). Men have been at the center stage of the issue of societal inequalities and hence remedying the situation requires their involvement. Some feminists are advocating for the involvement of men as a way of addressing gender inequalities and mobilizing resource for women's empowerment. Accordingly, there is the need for those who work in the field to reach, encourage, empower, and mobilize men to become part of the fight to achieve greater success (Matekere, 2015).

However, working to improve the status of women, the government has taken several measures to address the issue of economic empowerment of women (TGNP, 2005). These include provision of credit facilities which are accessible by women, engendering macro-economic framework such as the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP), providing Gender Budget Guidelines directing sector ministries to mainstream

gender budgets in their sector ministries as well as revision of sector policies to facilitate gender mainstreaming in the policies and plans (URT, 2000). Yet in the sphere of economic power at the household level, gender gap between men and women has been increasing which has resulted into high poverty among women (URT, 2010). Globally, promoting gender equality and empowering women has remained a priority of numerous government and non-government agencies including the United Nations (UN), World Bank, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) (UNIFEM, 2004). Strategies to address poverty and problems among women globally and in Tanzania particularly have been linked to women economic empowerment initiatives. Different program uses various approaches to empower women economically (Garry, 2012). Such programs have been extensively promoted as a way of empowering women and alleviating poverty (Makombe, 2006). The approaches used by different program to empower women economically include: Financial self-sustainability, which provides microfinance services to many poor women, using groups; it is based, on the assumption that bringing women together in groups will be more empowering than individual lending. Further, poverty alleviation focusing on small savings and loan provisions to aid in consumption and production is an approach used by development actors. Other approaches include the Feminist empowerment based on some of the earliest microfinance programmes. Feminist empowerment has been found to be a very successful strategy for alleviating poverty because it enhances the productivity of women's own small enterprises and income-generating activities in which they invest (Kabeer, 2009).

As in many developing countries, for example Tanzanian, poverty reduction programmes have adopted the self-sufficient sustainability model which is associated with solidarity groups to address the issue of women economic empowerment (Mbilinyi, 1997). According to Nyamsogoro (2010) various INGOs has also been adopting different WEE programs including the savings group model under financial self-sustainability approaches. For instances CARE has been using the Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA), Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has been using the Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) and PACT has been using WORTH savings group model which specifically target women. The PACT financial self-sustainability (WORTH) approach has been focusing on mobilizing women into groups where they save, and use the accumulated savings as loans to start economic activities.

This paper therefore examined the roles of men and government towards women's empowerment in Ijesaland. In order to achieve this, the paper examined the traditional position of women in the study area, which sometimes determine the action and reaction of men toward women empowerment. Examining the role of men and that of the government in women empowerment is important because without the participation of men and government, empowering women may not be achievable.

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. A multistage sampling technique, which involved purposive selection of four Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Atakumosa West (346), Ilesa-East (448), Ilesa-West (450) and Obokun (350) with the predominance of the Ijesa was used. A random selection of 17 enumeration areas and 1,594 ever-married women of childbearing age was carried out. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. In-depth interview guide and focus group discussion guide were used to collect qualitative data. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and qualitative data was analysed using content analysis by thematic area.

## 2. Findings

### 2.1. Traditional Position of Women

This section expatiates on the traditional position of women in the study area. Examining this is important in that the attitude of men may primarily depend on the way the society; especially men perceive the position of women in the society.

Table 1 indicates that the majority of the respondents (81.2%) agree that women are traditionally seen in the study area as helpers to their husbands. Next, is the view that women are seen as home keepers with 14.3 per cent of the respondents sharing this view. Only 2.9 per cent of the respondents alluded to the fact that the traditional position of women in the study area is that of procreator/ child rearing. It is interesting to note that women are generally not seen as the head of family in the study area. The table shows that only a little above one per cent of the respondents were of the opinion that the traditional position of women is the head of the family.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by their Perception of Traditional Position of Women and their Decision- Making Power

Characteristics	N	%
<b>Traditional Position of Women</b>		
Husband Helper	1284	81.2
Head of Family	21	1.3
Procreator/ Child Rearer	46	2.9
Home Keeper	226	14.3
Others	4	0.3
<b>Total</b>	1581	100

### 2.2. Role of Men towards Women's Empowerment

The roles of men in women's empowerment cannot be over-emphasised. Although the respondents have diverse views on the roles of men with respect to women's empowerment in the study area, it became clear through the qualitative data that men have important roles to play if women are to be empowered. While some respondents believed that men should support the issue of women's empowerment, they also expressed the notion there should be a limit to this support. Some respondents expressed the expected roles of men and their attitude to empowerment in the study area as follows:

*The role of men in women's empowerment is that men should give chances to women to go out and mix with the society, to have access to position. Men must encourage women to improve their social, economic, and political status, to join politics and be given opportunity to hold positions. (IDI, Male Pastor)*

*The best thing men should do is to encourage women and gear them up to have equal rights with men. Men should not have biased mind towards women. What a man can do, a woman can also do it better. Women of nowadays need to be enlightened to hold or organize seminars and workshops for women to boost their morale and to enlighten them on the fact that they have equal rights with men. (FGD Female Age 15-34)*

*Some men are playing their role to empower their women, most especially when we are talking about the Godly home. For example, my husband, before I contributed anything in this school, he did almost everything here and I am acting as the proprietress. So he contributed his own quota toward my empowerment. (IDI, Head Mistress)*

*The people who give women appointments and make this women's empowerment programme possible are men. They should continue to encourage the women. (IDI, Male Principal)*

*Men need to contribute positively to women's empowerment and if women are submissive enough there is nothing men cannot do to assist them. Men should be able to make necessary provision to empower women so that iron can easily sharpen iron because two are better than one. Men can easily look for job for women and get them empowered; it can be through political involvement and all the likes. (FGD Male 41 & above)*

In summary, the role of men in women's empowerment according to the respondents should include allowing them to exhibit their God given potentials, as well as allowing them to mix with the society at large to gain access to positions of authority within the society. Further, men should make necessary provisions for women in the area of access to gainful employment. In addition, the respondents asserted that encouragement from their counterparts is a necessary condition for women's empowerment.

### 2.3. Roles of Government and the Society in Women's Empowerment

One of the objectives of this study is to explore the roles of the government and the society towards ensuring women's empowerment. The qualitative data show that the respondents have various suggestions on what the government and the society can do to enhance women's empowerment. One of the suggestions given by the respondents is the need for government to enlighten women through organising pertinent seminars and workshops. Others are the need for government to support business women with micro - finance, provision of

education for women, giving women equal rights and privileges, encouraging them to be more visible in the political arena, establishing of skill acquisition centres for women, organising vocational training and government should subsidise female education at higher institution level amongst others. The issue of soft loan was paramount to the respondents as a major help from government to enhance women's empowerment. The respondents put these in their own words as follows:

*My suggestion is that they should have passion toward schools whereby those people who are not enlightened can be trained on many issues, including this issue of empowerment... (IDI, Headmistress)*

*My suggestion to the government is to set up small scale industries and small scale enterprises that will expose women to various techniques of generating funds. Government should employ them into their own cottage industries in partnership with private sector, this will empowered them more. (IDI, Male Principal)*

*Government should help more women especially those who did not have any business or they are in one business or the other. Those who have petty trading should be given loan. (IDI, Male Pastor)*

*What the government can still do to empower women the more is...lift us up and give us more opportunity politically... and to boost and empower women economically through soft loans for small scale business to improve and better the lives of the women in our society and to make them more creative through vocational training. (IDI, Women Community Leader)*

*Government can help in giving loans as capital to operate a particular business, but we need much enlightenment (IDI, Female Principal)*

*Government can as well give women soft loans for small scale businesses. They can still be more empowered through the provision of job, to get them employed, to award contract to them and to help them to finance it and to ask them to supply certain goods and commodities without delaying their payment. (IDI, Female Community Leader)*

Apart from helping women with loans in order to enhance women's empowerment, a respondent added that government should enhance the general living status of women:

*Government can still help to empower women by giving them loan facilities to trade and for business purposes and many other things that could better our lives economically and improve our living status. Society can empower women by organizing cooperative societies with the aim of collecting soft loan from such co-operatives, and organizing training workshops, vocational training to train women on how to be self financed and self reliance and to be creative without depending on anybody for livelihood. (IDI, Nursing Mother)*

Another important way by which the government can help empower women as expressed by the respondents is by organising vocational training and literacy classes as well as encouraging them to go to school:

*Government should try to organize vocational training for women and give them soft loan for small scale businesses, and organize adult literacy class for their educational attainment. (Male FGD 40 Years & above)*

*They should organize seminars to enlighten women and encourage them really in terms of advice, in terms of finances, and in all other areas they can be encouraged to be empowered in the society. They should encourage them like my colleagues as rightly said to give them soft loans for business, to stabilize them economically, to organize skill acquisition training for them to be creative and self-employed and self-dependent. (FGD Female 15-34 years)*

*Government should be able to encourage the women to go to school. They should encourage them as well to go into politics and other jobs that men do so that they can be fully empowered. (IDI, Male vice Principal)*

A respondent emphasised that government as well as the society should embrace the concept of women's empowerment. He asserts thus:

*Government should try to sensitize women on how to start doing something profitable and the way to go about it is to group them into cooperative societies and give them loans with no or little interest to boost their economic status. Government should also organize literacy class for illiterate among women and vocational training for women to be creative. They should*

*organize workshops and seminars to give them orientation on how to have a sustainable means of livelihood. And the society at large should embrace the concept of women's empowerment and there must be unity among the women and the society, while the society or societal groups stand as the link between the women and the government to enable them achieves this noble objective of women's empowerment. (IDI, Male Pastor)*

The issue of giving equal rights and privileges to men and women by the government was elaborated upon by a respondent in the following words:

*Government can help women by giving them equal rights and privileges as men, and provision of jobs for learned ones among them. Government can update women with necessary information that has to do with women to influence their lives positively. Government can organize skill acquisition workshops for women to be creative. Government can also help to subsidize school fees in all higher institutions for women to access quality education. (FGD, Female 15-34 years)*

A respondent alluded to the issue of affirmative action as a way by which the government can support women's empowerment in the study area. She put it in her own words as follow:

*Some of the factors contributing to women's empowerment in Ijeshaland are civilization, exposure and government involvement in women's empowerment, such as the promised 35% quota of all political appointments to be given to women. (IDI, Female Pastor)*

In summary, the respondents are of the opinion that government can do a lot to enhance women's empowerment in the study area. What the government should do include the provision of enabling environment for the empowerment of women, equal rights and privileges to men and women provision of micro-finance for business, more investment in the education sector (vocational education), giving attention to affirmative action, and government should embrace the concept of women's empowerment.

### 3. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to examine the role of men and that of the government in empowering women. The role of men in women's empowerment according to the respondents should include allowing them to exhibit their God given potentials, as well as allowing them to mix with the society at large to gain access to positions of authority within the society. Further, men should make necessary provisions for women in the area of access to gainful employment. In addition, the respondents asserted that encouragement from their counterparts is a necessary condition for women's empowerment. The respondents are of the opinion that government can do a lot to enhance women's empowerment in the study area. What the government should do include the provision of enabling environment for the empowerment of women, equal rights and privileges to men and women provision of micro-finance for business, more investment in the education sector (vocational education), giving attention to affirmative action, and government should embrace the concept of women's empowerment.

Considering the significant role women play in the development agenda, it is only proper men get involved irrespective of how some women activist view it. Women have the primary task of child rearing and therefore need all the resources to execute this task in other to break the cyclical transmission of poverty from generation to generation. Consequently, the empowerment of women is very crucial for the development of any society considering the roles they play in society and the fact they form more than half of the human resource of a nation, but their empowerment cannot materialize without men being involved

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