

## Creativity and Innovation for Women Empowerment in Nigeria

<sup>1</sup>Yabrifa Bumein and <sup>2</sup>Dr. Comfort E. Mbachu

<sup>1</sup>Department of Vocational and Industrial Education, Faculty of Education, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State

<sup>2</sup>Department of Teacher Education, Faculty of Education, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State  
NIGER

*Abstract – Self empowerment through creativity and innovation has been one of the major outcries of late and most recently. The need to empower women through educational programmes and skills acquisition in this 21<sup>st</sup> century is highly critical and can never be over emphasized. Women empowerment enhances women’s capacity to influence and participate in taking decisions which directly or indirectly affect their lives and their total wellbeing. Invariably, for women to contribute and enhance their self-worth, family and the society at large, they need to be very creative and innovative in practical terms. Being creative and innovative entails exploring better ways of empowering women with skills and educational programmes for sustainable development. This paper therefore looks into the concept of creativity, innovation and empowerment. It discusses on the efforts so far made in empowering Nigerian women with educational programmes and skills. It equally looks into the benefits of empowering Nigerian women with functional education programmes and skills. It as well discusses on the strategies to empower women with functional education programmes and skills. It also looks into the challenges of empowering Nigerian women with functional education programmes and skills. The paper concludes with recommendations on women empowerment through functional education programmes and skills acquisition.*

**Keywords** – Creativity, Innovation, Empowerment, Functional education programmes, Skills acquisition, Entrepreneurship.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of innovation for economic development has been seriously emphasized of recent. Functional education programmes especially for women is really very important as it inspires and motivates them to pursue their dreams. Innovation and creativity is very vital as basic tips and skills through the entrepreneurship activities that paves way for self reliant which enhances self and societal development. Invariably, meaningful development can only be

achieved through positive contribution of all irrespective of sex, race or creed.

Generally, in Nigeria and Africa in general, women face a lot of problems as they live in a patriarchal society. They had and still have found themselves under domination by patriarch in different ways and they face the burden of production, reproduction as well as domestic chores. Infact in most traditional set-ups, women are expected to be seen and not heard. In Badjan-Yang (1995) word, “Despite 10 years of Nairobi forward looking strategies and Beijing’s platform for action, there are still deep-seated attitudes and mindsets among men and women’s rights. We still have cultures, ethnic groups and religions that see women as property, chattels and objects, whoshould neither be heard nor seen”. Nwagbara (2003) agrees that some widows are still victims of wicked and barbaric customs that expose them to untold and indecent hardships at the demise of their husbands. In so many societies, women cannot enjoy better/comfortable life different from the culturally sanctioned shackles in which they find themselves. They are controlled by men who enjoy unfair privileges at their expenses. All these unfortunate experiences are not fault of theirs that they are created to be women.

However, recently, greater percentage of women have started shaking off the shackles of the bones of cultural roles and beliefs about what they are supposed to be, they are now to some extent competing with men in areas exclusively dominated or reserved for men or as men prerogative.

All the same, in spite of the remarkable improvement in the development of women, a lot still need to be done. There is still a yawning gap. About two thirds of the world’s illiterates are women. It is therefore very important that the issue of women both in terms of their biological differences (sex) and of their issues that concern women and other related matters be emphasized in our educational system in order to bring about a positive change. Women are an important part of the development process of every nation. Obviously, for Nigerian women in particular to be empowered and contribute their quota, participate fully

in national development, empowerment through functional education programmes, creativity and innovation becomes a necessity.

## **II. Concept of Creativity, Innovation & Empowerment**

Creativity, as the name implies is the art of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality. It is the process of bringing something new into being. Creativity is a skill that can be developed and a process that can be managed. Creativity is defined by the New International Webster's comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (2004) as the quality of being able to produce original work of ideas in any field. It is all about having the power to create and produce things which did not exist before. Creativity is defined by Yvonne (2012) as a habit of work, persistence to achieve, and mastery of a particular discipline. Creativity involves two processes: "Thinking and producing." Creativity is a skill that can be developed and a process that can be managed. Creativity is defined by the New International Webster's comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (2004) as the quality of being able to produce original work of ideas in any field. It is all about having the power to create and produce things which did not exist before. Creativity is defined by Yvonne (2012) as a habit of work, persistence to achieve, and mastery, of a particular discipline. Creativity involves two processes: "thinking and producing" creativity is a skill that can be developed and a process that can be managed. Creativity is a process through which we can continuously improve ideas and find unique solution to problems. Creative people as explained by Yvonne (2012) are curious, self-confident, optimistic, flexible, visionary and have a sense of humor.

### **Innovation**

Innovation is defined as the ability to make change or alteration in anything established. It is the ability to bring in new ideas, methods into an existing thing. Innovation is the implementation of a new or significantly improved products, service or process that creates value for business, government or society. Yvonne (2012) is of the opinion that creativity is the most crucial factor for future success, and as such no innovation without creativity. Innovation as defined by Oteh and Akuma (2010) is a deliberate, specific change which is thought to be more efficacious in accomplishing the goals of a system. Innovation is a change that is deliberate, purposeful and can be on a small or large scale. Innovation is a departure from an existing practice that can be sustained for some time,

and is situational and relevant to a group in time or place.

Innovation in this context is a deviation from the old practices of women finding themselves under domination by patriarch in different ways such as the burden of production, reproduction as well as domestic chores, where they are only expected to be seen and not heard, a deviation of being accorded inferior status, being dominated by the men folk.

### **Empowerment**

Empowerment means given power or authority to act or do something. Empowerment is a process or a way of improving the quality of lives of women at the same time meeting their basic needs. It is a means of helping or encouraging them to have the means of finding their own solutions especially through economic empowerment. Women empowerment as defined by Mbachu and Diepiribo (2013) means the process by which women collectively come to recognize and address the gender issues which stand in the way of their advancement.

A woman is empowered when she is able to make the best of her own life. In patriarchal society like Nigeria, these gender issues are the practices of gender discrimination which are entrenched in customs, law, ideological productive skills, access to capital, confidence in herself. Women empowerment entails throwing off the habits of female subordination and patriarchal message which were unconsciously internalized during schooling. Women empowerment as explained by Duyilemi (2006) entails identifying gender inequalities and discrimination which were previously accepted as 'natural' or 'normal' and learning how to take action to end gender discrimination.

Maduewesi and Maduewesi (2006), explain that empowering women ensures the development of a sustainable and equitable society-no society can reach this goal without taking both women's productive and reproductive roles into account. Both aimed to ensure that policies and programmes at all levels incorporate a gender perspective and address women's lives and their needs. Obviously, Nigerian women can be empowered through functional education programmes, skills acquisition or both.

### **Efforts so far made to empower Nigerian Women with education programmes and skills**

As a result of the centrality of education of women in the development of the nation, the government and even the NGOs have made various attempts to improve

the lot of women. Various national and international communities have addressed women's issues and taken various efforts to empower them so as to enhance their social and health status and involve them in developmental activities. Nwagbara (2003) in Mbach (2010) buttressed the point that the government produced blue print on women education in 1987. The objectives of the blue print include: to provide more educational opportunities for girls from primary to tertiary levels; to re-orientate the attitude of all females irrespective of age towards education and; to promote the education of girls and women in the field of Science, Technology and Mathematics. In accordance to the adoption of the Blue print on women education, women education branches were established in the Federal, State and Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Ministries of Education, Model centres were established and equipped in the states and the Federal capital. The centres provide training for women in traditional skills. The Girl-Child Education clubs have been launched in some schools to raise awareness about the Girl-child and early marriage and sexual harassment. There is a national awareness campaign on women Education (in all the states and local Government Area including Abuja). Sanctions were given for withdrawing girls from schools especially in some of the Northern states of Nigeria.

The third world conference on warren held in Nairobi 1982 as explained by Braide (2006) in Mbach (2010) reviewed the progress made during the united nations declared for women and adopted the forward looking strategies for the advancement of women-a list of actions for government and individuals to implement in order to achieve the advancement of women. In 1983, the commission on the status of women carried out a review of progress on the implementation and the forward looking strategies formulated in Nairobi. In 1986, fourth world conference on women was held in Beijing to assess how much of the Nairobi forward looking strategies had been implemented, how much advancement of women had been achieved and what more needed to be done. Two consensus documents as pointed out by Nwagbara (2003) came out of the meeting; the Beijing Declaration and the plat-form for action (PFA), A 135-page document of 361 paragraphs containing action statements and ideas capable of creating equality, development and peace if implemented. Twelve areas of concern were identified and addressed as needing further attention. One of them is on "promoting women's access to education at all levels."

Women access to education at all levels is relevant to the goals of Forum for African women educationists (FAWE).

Also a unit for women education was set up and launched. This followed women education enhancement intervention and there is now the ministry of women Affairs at the national and state levels. A few years ago, the former Nigerian first lady, Hajiah Turai Yar'adua launched her pet project for women and youth empowerment, which was a non-government project aimed at empowering women and youths on health and education. First ladies in so many of the states in the country today have the empowerment of women and the girl-child with functional educational and skills empowerment as their number one priority pet project.

Federal Government of Nigeria having realized the importance of education for both males and females stated that "education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change since any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an education revolution" (NPE 2004:8).

### **Benefits of empowering Nigerian women with functional education programmes and skills**

Knowledge they say is power, and the lack knowledge as opined by Gbolipoure and Rahimain (2010) is poverty and misery. Therefore the main factor in emancipating women from poverty is knowledge. The key aspects in empowerment process are education and capacity building. It is very glaring that women all over the world including Nigeria enjoy the benefits that accrue from functional education programmes for women can be classified under:

- **Economic benefit:** A woman with functional education according to Mbach (2010) makes a better mother and wife than her illiterate or semi-educated counter-part. When a woman acquires functional quality education as explained by Maduwesi (2005) in Ofoefuna (2006), she is more able to understand and appreciate her children's needs, able to a help her children in their school work, she is better equipped to practice hygienic living habits in her home. Most of the women today are the bread winners of their families. By virtue of the quality level of education they have acquired, they are no longer looked upon as subservient partners but as equal partners, in fact in many cases as senior partners. Functional quality education will definitely go a long way to enhance women

economic productively as well as enhancing their income yearning activity.

- **Social benefits:** Functional equality education to a large extent ensures that women use their newly acquired knowledge, skills to serve society better and to push for social equality and recognition. It will go along way to build and enhance their self-awareness and self-esteem and sense of belonging in the society.
- **Intellectually:** It awakens and sustains reasoning and knowledge acquisition skills in women.
- **Politically:** Ensuring that they too can be seen, heard, that their civil rights are recognized as essential human rights that they also become fully involved in governance and decision making at all levels.

Functional education to build skills and abilities that an individual needs to feel competent is critical for enhancing psychological empowerment.

Nwagbara (2003) summarizes the benefits of women empowerment through quality education programmes and skills which include: improving women's access to and control over production factors and services; reducing women's workload (as household chores can be done by another person while the women go to do some other productive work outside the home); making them aware of the women's rights as human rights; increasing the involvement of women in decisions that affect them domestically, locally, nationally and even internationally; improving the organization of women at all levels; encouraging female cohesion or bonding and change the stereotypical image of women; improving women's knowledge and self consciousness; fighting against violence and sexual abuse; and engendering self-confidence and self-fulfillment.

### **Strategies for empowering Nigerian women with functional educational programmes and skills.**

As a result of the central position of education in the development process and for the fact that it has been accepted as the surest means of women empowerment, it is therefore very necessary to ensure that every female acquires functional education programme that will enable them function well and fulfill their roles as full members of the society.

Nwagbara (2003) is of the opinion that another strategy that should be adopted to empower women educationally is to reach out to women on "second chance" community participation at the grassroots is an effective strategy for a fast acquisition of functional education. For the adult female, the non-formal system

of education is the best option for acquiring education in this age. She explains that what is important for the illiterate adult female is to be able to acquire functional education, therefore sensitization and formal teaching methodologies are relevant. This can be done at different points.

- (i) **School premises:-** The school environment for adult education classes gives recipients, the emotional and psychological satisfaction that they are acquiring education, this will make them feel they are actually not missing out on anything because they have access to formal school environment.
- (ii) **The market square:-** This is a very practical place for enlightening women who need literacy and numeracy skills that will enable them run their business. This is convenient for them because of lack of time.
- (iii) **The church or mosque:-**This is another avenue for reaching out to many illiterate women. Activities carried out in such places of worship are taken seriously because of the reference given to such places of worship. For best results, fellow members of these places of worship who have been trained to reach out to women should be used.
- (iv) **The mass media:-** This is another strategy to reach the illiterate urban women as well as some rural ones. The radio is common both to the city and the rural areas. It is useful in the dissemination of information and for the acquisition of knowledge. The television has very great impact both on children and adults and should also be used as a means of education. Nwagbara (2003) advised that it is important to create the awareness in the women and the girl-child so that they can get maximum benefits from relevant and useful programmes on the electronic media. She explains that these various strategies for ensuring efficient and effective education for women calls for new curriculum packages that will be tailored to the needs of these women.
- (v) **Restructuring of the school curriculum for functionality:-** Our school curriculum from the basic level including the non-formal education curriculum ought to be restructured. Mbachu (2012) is of the opinion that restructuring the school curriculum will entail incorporating content functional life-skills, income generating, poverty eradication, knowledge and innovation particularly in the following subject areas; cultural and creative arts, agriculture. In essence,

“the curriculum should be made gender sensitive by incorporating entrepreneurial skills programmes such as home economics, food and nutrition, Textile Trades, Beauty culture etc. These subjects should be made compulsory for the girls because such programmes will equip them to be self reliant and economically viable in the future” (Mbachu, 2012).

### **Challenges of empowering Nigerian women with functional education programmes and skills acquisition**

Women are arguably half of the nation’s population, and most of these women are illiterate and as such cannot contribute to the progress and development of the society. Some of these women have remained illiterate and over dependent because they are not being empowered through functional education programmes/skills, thus they cannot enjoy the benefits that accrue. Akunyili (2006) laments by saying that we live in an environment controlled by rich but sometimes constrained cultural and traditional norms and values some of which include:

**Preference for male child:** Despite the modernism/Civilization and globalization in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, still due to the patrilineal culture of most Africans, Nigeria inclusive of some ethnic groups, the male child is preferred because he carries on the family name. This preference to male child results in a host of attitudes which translates into neglect of the girl-child. Preference for the male child means that the girl may be denied of good/quality education and fundamental human rights because she does not have worth value compared to the boy child. The girl-child and women are made to do most of the work in such a society yet such work is neither paid for nor accorded recognition.

**Childhood marriage/Dowry:-**In some parts of the country (Nigeria), girls are given away in marriage between the ages of 11-13 and are expected to start producing children at such tender ages. They are neither physiologically nor psychologically matured for reproduction and child bearing at such tender age. This poses serious health risks for the girl-child, the women and the entire society. Akunyili (2005) opines that the main reasons for early marriage are the bride price (which is higher in young virgins), and the escape from the responsibility or training the girl. Early marriage robs the girl-child the opportunity of acquiring quality education and adequate skills acquisition.

Most of the Nigerian women, especially the girl-child are scared of facing the challenge of venturing into science related courses assumed to be reserved for the boys, courses like sciences, technology and mathematics. These are courses meant to ignite the spirit of creativity, innovation and problem-solving. Ezekwesili (2006) agrees that a balanced diversity of women in educational disciplines will produce graduates at different levels that respond to the labour market. Inventions, patents and intellectual property rights are crucial to empowerment. It is an indisputable fact that India today has become the largest country in the development of computer soft ware and outsourced ICT personnel because parents encouraged their children. Ezekwesili (2006) attests that many of the ICT engineers/technicians there are females.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

One of the things that prevent so many women from transiting from poverty and raising their standard of living through creativity is their lack of access to quality functional education. Obviously, innovation and creativity is very vital as the basic tips and skills through the entrepreneurship activities that pave way for self reliant. Empowerment no doubt leads to creativity. When women are empowered through functional education and skills acquisition in small and medium enterprises, they can contribute to their well being and that of their family and the development of the society in general.

### **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is an adage that says, “when you educate a woman, you educate a nation”. Obviously, for Nigerian women to live and fulfilled their God-giving roles, they need to be creative and innovative. Being creative and innovative will entail being empowered with functional education programmes and skills acquisition. Parents are encouraged to invest in female/girl-child education. More girls and women irrespective of age are encouraged to take the bull by the horns and venture boldly and courageously into science, mathematics and Technology (SMT) programmes that can generate steady supply of skilled workers. Women especially rural women to be encouraged and supported by government, NGOs and finance micro banks by giving them loans and probably a time-frame on when to pay back. School curriculum at the primary secondary and the non-formal to be restructured and make them gender friendly by incorporating and making gender programmes compulsory for girls and women. Law

prohibiting early child marriage to be enacted and enforced.

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