

## **Empowering Rural Girls through Education: Way of Reducing Vulnerability and Improving Family Economic Wellbeing in Rural Northern Nigeria.**

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**Abstract:** *There is perceived decrease in standard of living among some families in the rural area of Katsina State in Nigeria. This was seen to be the result of the inability of some rural families in the area to allowing their daughters to utilize the opportunities of education empowerment program for the rural girls in the State. There is historical evidence that majority of rural girls do not complete primary school talk less of secondary schools and tertiary institutions. These indicate that the rural girls are lagging behind educationally. The issue is the need to educate the girl-child and young women in the rural areas of the country because rural women are the largest and vulnerable group. There are four key elements identified for empowering rural girls and young women; cognitive, resource control, social capital, and awareness or access to information. These important elements have been examined on the wellbeing of women among the families of the empowered rural girls through quantitative study using structured questionnaire. Analysis of these questionnaires shows strong positive correlation between the education empowerment and their economic wellbeing level and significant difference ( $p < .005$ ) in their lives. This study adds light to understanding impacts of educating girls and women for family and community prosperity and neglecting these can lead to the backwardness. It is also part of growing body of literature from rural sub-Sahara Africa on gender issue. It contributes to the future study on similar topics.*

**Key words:** *Empowering Rural Girls, Education, Improving Economic Wellbeing, and Reducing Vulnerability.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Gender stereotyping in girl-child education seem to be a global phenomena. But women in rural areas of the developing countries are the most victims, faced with difficulties in their sphere of life. This is confirms as due to their poor educational opportunities (Gulma and Lawal, 2010). In Africa, women for long have been faced with poverty and lack of education (UNPF, 2009). The family with high level of educational achievement has more likelihood to send their children to school; in addition, the children of educated parents are also more likely to have access and positive outcome in many areas including pro-social activities like participation. Many researchers have found the important of high educational level and its influence on the individual and family values. Azad, and Maleki (2007), recognized that, poorly educated people are concerned more about traditional values. In consensus with the Azad and Maleki, (2007), Rooster, (2006), studied attitude of young people toward family values and found that, there are strong relationship between educational level and family values. In the view of Kaldi (2006), there is relationship between educational style, identity crisis, and family values.

Furthermore, Mahdavi, and Saburi, (2003), confirmed that, increasing both male and female education level makes the structure of the family in the household more democratic. Straus and Gelles (1986) since attested that, family with poor educational attainment are mostly violent. Violence is the most common in less educated, low income, and low job status individual and family (Warner, 1981). Although Ehzazi (2004), believed that family violence happen in all the class of people even with high level of educational attainment. But Kani (1997) disputed that but seen low level of education as the most leading factor to the family problems such as violence. In recent time, Edalati (2010) confirmed that education increases the values of many families. The primary function of education is the individual and societal development. This is yet to be understood by many Nigerian rural societies. Due to this type of problem most parents in the rural Northern Nigerian refuses to send their children to school. Even though, the phenomenon affects more girls than boys. Poor conceptual awareness and proper education empowerment appeared to be the most hindering factors for many Nigerian, particularly in rural areas.

### **Theoretical framework**

The theory of education empowerment as described by Nikkah, (2010), increasingly remain as a tool for understanding what is needed to change situation in rural poor and marginalized groups. In other word education empowerment concept is a lift the individuals and societal used toward cultivating resources and strategies that help to achieve goals of life. The view on education empowerment was supported by Lawson and Garrod, Lyonos, Smuts and Stephens (2001), Weisberg (1999), Somerville, (1998) and Simon, (1994). The foundation of this work is built by Bolton (1976) on the similar approaches, because it identified the need for the poor and the marginalized vulnerable groups to have changes in their situation. It emphasizes on the acquisition of knowledge and skills as mandatory requirement to move out of poverty trap. Considering the points lay down by Bolton (1976) and supported by many scholars in the field, shown that, poverty and those suffering from its worse effects are mostly women. This research finds it relevant to discuss the gender role approach highlighting the situation of women in relation to their education. Gender role refers to how women and men are expected to behave within the society (Zumilah, 2010). In many Nigerian communities, women are considered as weak, while men are hardworking in term of resource control. The issue is confirmed by the Little (2003) that, the men are seen by the society as very hardworking in controlling the environment, while women are view to be left with care giving and nurturing children and old age at home and beyond.

This no doubt, may not necessarily be the right perception though it differs from one society to another. However it exists in different forms and in different part of the world. But it is important to bear in mind that, any development processes and programs are doomed to fail if the women are not involved (Jariah, Zumilah, and Linda, (2009). In another occasion, Jariah (2012) ascertained that beside every successful man there is a woman. What the society expects women to be in households and communities is an issue that increases the family conflicts (Zumilah, 2010). Empowerment as a process of changing the state of existing power in the family, it gives two parties involved chances to gain greater control over the resources (Batliwala, 1993). Therefore in a practicing development in field of social sciences, long ago the interest has been developed that conditioned empowering vulnerable groups. The evidence is that, gender issue is a very vital long ago in economic development and poverty alleviation and improves human wellbeing (Smith, 2003).

Education empowerment is the most important means of empowering individual and group, and given knowledge, skills increase confidence necessary to be full partner in development (Vijayanthi, 2002). Empowerment as both the process and the results of the process was manifested as a result of power redistribution. The goal of women education empowerment is to challenge patriarchal ideology (UNDP, 2000). On the other words, to plant new gender ideology that suggests that where women come out and actively to contributes, there is no much need to renegotiate housework (Morris, 1998). The concept is very vital in studying the rural situation; particularly as it involved women and poverty alleviation. This is critical and unavoidable in gender discussion. Because rural poverty is a gender issue, most women in rural areas are vulnerable physically, socially and economically (Malaysia, 2007). The effects of women empowerment according to Czuba, (1999) create powerful influence on family, community, norms and values and finally to the laws that governed these communities. Kabeer, (2005) sees the concept of empowerment to be best explored using three closely related dimension; agency or cognitive, resource and achievement. Agency or Cognitive refers to the process through which choices are made and put in to effects. It is hence central to the empowerment concept. Resources are the medium through which the agency is exercise while achievement refers to outcome.

### **Procedure of this study**

This study employs correlational research designs. The correlations study, examines the impacts of education empowerment on economic wellbeing of family using scores of male and female respondents differently. This study uses only quantitative research techniques, which according to (Shiraz, 2010), enables researchers to administer questionnaires for primary data collection. The questionnaires were used to identify the trend in the opinion, feeling, perception, and characteristics of the population (Creswell, 2005).

### **Data collection**

A cross-sectional primary data was collected from 355 respondents in rural areas of Katsina state through administered questionnaire. The selection of the respondents from three local government areas (LGAs) was randomly made out of ten rural LGAs in Katsina central zone. The names of ten LGAs were written on pieces of paper in alphabetical order; enclosed and thrown. The three pieces of the papers were picked at random by neutral person. The names of the selected LGAs were Batsari, Dutsin-ma, and Safana. Equally, the sample in the study was drawn from these three selected LGAs with total population of 542,428 people. From this defined population, 384 respondents are chosen as sample in this study. They represent the voice and the population concern (Eng &Parper, 1994). According to krejcie & morgan (1970) table of determining samples size in the research, these 384 respondents are representative sample in this study. But to curtail the problem of

low return rate of the completed questionnaires, the numbers of questionnaires were increased to total of 400 units. However, the respondents were selected in a systematic random sampling using the lists of staff and students collected from the schools.

### **Population and Sample of the Study**

The populations of this study were the rural dwellers from three LGAs in Katsina state. They are among beneficiaries of GEEP in Katsina state. Ma'aruf, (2011) sees the entire members from which the research sample were selected as research population. The sample in this study was drawn from the three selected rural LGAs with total population of 542,428 people. The schools with GEEP girls as teachers were identified and all were taken for this study. As in Table 3.1, there were 13 schools from Batsari, 15 schools from Dutsinma and 12 schools from Safana LGAs. In total there were 40 schools identified and five names were selected randomly from each school. Each name selected represent couple respondents- male and female; therefore two questionnaires were allocated to each name selected in the sample. The respondents were the stakeholders whom are benefiting from GEEP, such as parent, teachers, and head of primary schools. In the event were name of school's pupil was selected, the two parent of the child are the respondents. Where teacher's name was selected he or she and their spouses or working partners are the respondents. Fine et al (2003) encourages and shows the importance of involving all the stakeholders in the research as an appropriate method for measurement.

### **Instruments development**

The empowerment is an independent variable in this study. Therefore, to evaluate the impact of empowerment, this study considered using this empowerment scale. This scale was previously used and recommended by (Nikkah 2010, Kabeer, 2005, and Malhotra et al, 2003). Considering the suitability of this instrument based on previous empowerment studies, this study also adopted and adapted this scale according to the need of the research and respondents' culture. The empowerment scale focuses on; intellectual or cognitive, resource for meaningful life, self-concept, and social relation. The authors reported reliability coefficient of .93 for the entire scale. They did explain the instrument's validity; this could be a limitation of the instrument. The economic wellbeing instrument focuses on four elements of economic wellbeing. The elements are life satisfaction, economic hardship, infrastructural asset, and family perception. This economic wellbeing instrument used in this study was developed by Laily, in Malay Language (*Bahasa Malayu*). This instrument was used in Asian context by the author and other researches. The previous used of the instrument revealed high degree of reliability and validity. The instrument was adopted and adapted in this research to suit the cultural need of the respondents and the research. Both the empowerment and economic wellbeing instruments used in this research was translated into native language of the respondents for proper understanding of the questionnaire. Both the instruments were used on 5- Points Likert Scale.

### **Pilot Study**

To ensure the reliability of the instruments after adoption and adaption, a pilot study was conducted using the instruments before the proper data collection. A pilot study is a small scale trial of the proposed instruments and procedure, with aims of detecting any problem, which can be corrected before the actual proper study is carried out (Fraenkel and Wallen 2003). One of the purposes of pre-testing the instruments is to identify any ambiguity, misunderstanding, or other inadequacy in the instruments (Ary, Jacob, Razavieh, and Sorensen 2006). It is also very important for checking internal consistency. Subsequently, through the reliability testing, a researcher is able to know how well the instruments can work on a given sample. Based on the feedback from the pilot study, the lists of items in the questionnaires were reworded, change and others were combined or deleted, were necessary to improve the quality in the reliability of the instruments.

### **Data analysis**

The correlation analysis between the empowerment and economic wellbeing of the respondents was conducted. Pearson correlation coefficient was used in the analysis. The essence is to investigate the impacts of empowerment on economic wellbeing of the family. The R positive or negative value shows the strength and direction of the correlation, n value indicates the number of cases while  $p \leq$  value shows significant.

### **Findings**

The data was analyzed to investigate the correlation between the elements of empowerment on the economic wellbeing of the family. To this end, correlation analysis was performed between empowerment elements and economic wellbeing of family. To determine the impacts of empowerment on economic wellbeing; the empowerment elements were correlated with elements of economic wellbeing. Life satisfaction was first correlates with elements of empowerment. The correlation shows strong positive correlation for female

respondents ‘scores. In cognitive ( $r=.522$ ), resource control ( $r=.449$ ),social capital ( $r=.305$ ) and awareness ( $r .325$ )  $p<.005$ , (mean=41.01, S.D=8.94).

**Table 1.0: correlation between empowerment elements and economic wellbeing for female respondents (n=178)**

*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
*								
- 1	<b>1.0</b>							
- 2	<b>0.7</b>	1.0						
- 3	<b>0.4</b>	0.4	1.0					
- 4	<b>0.5</b>	0.5	0.7	1.0				
- 5	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.3</b>	1.0			
- 6	-0.0	-0.0	0.0	-0.0	-0.0	1.0		
- 7	<b>0.3</b>	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.0	1.0	
- 8	<b>0.2</b>	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.4	-0.1	0.4	1.0

Note: 1) cognitive; 2) Resource control; 3)Social capital; 4) Awareness; 5) Life satisfaction; 6) Economic hardship; 7)Infrastructural asset; 8) Perception on family

Equally, the scores of infrastructural asset for female respondents, show moderate positive correlation with all the elements of empowerment; cognitive ( $r=.365$ ), resource control ( $r=.339$ ) social capital( $r=.219$ ) and awareness ( $r=.229$ ),  $p<.005$  (mean=40.91, S.D=9.30). Economic hardship scores of female respondents reveals no correlation with empowerment ( $r>.005$ ) and family perception scale has only one item therefore it was not captured.

**Standard Multiple Regression**

Standard multiple regression, was use in order to assess the highest predictor ability among four elements of empowerment scale; (cognitive, resource control, social capital and awareness) in predicting the level of economic wellbeing. The preliminary analysis was conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions in normality, linearity, and multicollinearity. Female Respondents Model (FRM1), explains 19.0% of the variances in the economic wellbeing. The cognitive makes largest unique contribution (beta=.32), followed by social capital with less contribution (beta= .17). In this model these two components were making a statistical significant (  $p<.005$  ) contribution to economic wellbeing.

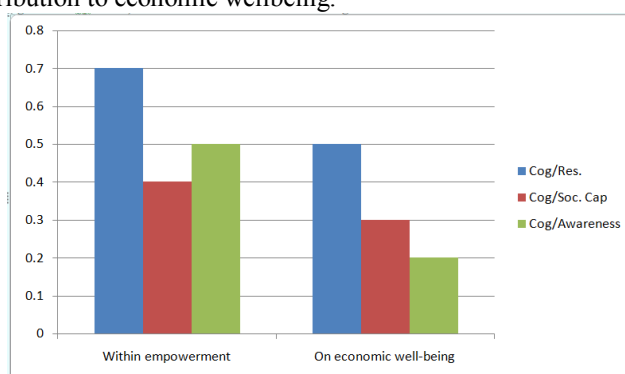


Fig. 1: cognitive impacts within empowerment and economic wellbeing of the respondents

**II. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the results of the analysis allow this research to answer two good questions, as far the model. These includes empowerment variables - cognitive, resource control, social capital explained 19% of the variance in the economic wellbeing of the respondents of this study. From the four variables cognitive makes the largest unique contribution (beta=.32 ), although resource control also made significant contribution (bête=.17). The beta value obtain in this analysis may be used in more practical purpose/ situation then the theoretical model testing. Example, for highest contributor (cognitive) in FRM, it entails if cognitive (education) of female respondents is increased, by one unit standard deviation, this would followed by 0.316 standard deviation increase in economic wellbeing of the female respondents. This research reveals that, if cognitive (more education to the rural girls) will be increase, by one unit standard deviation (8.94), the economic wellbeing scores would be likely to increase by 32 standard deviation units. This finding can be supported with popular saying that “Educating a girl is educating the family and educating the family is educating the society.” Furthermore, the overall study of Sultana (2006) suggests that improvement in female access to education (high level in particular), increases women’s employment, and income level. The increased in women income

improves family economic wellbeing. Therefore tradition of society should not override the fact that, women opportunity to education is a backbone of societal development.

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