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Women's Empowerment and the Well-Being of the Unemployed Women in Yakurr, Nigeria

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Women's Empowerment and the Well-Being of the Unemployed Women in Yakurr, Nigeria

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Abstract

Issues on women's deprivation, marginalization and empowerment are well documented in literature. The impact of women's empowerment on the well-being of unemployed women in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria, is yet to receive sufficient investigation from scholars. Thus, this study explores the relationship between women's empowerment and the well-being of the unemployed women, aged 18-45 years in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. It specifically examines the types and access to available women's empowerment programmes, the nature of empowerment programmes that women have benefitted from, as well as areas of positive impact in the context of socio-economic well-being. The study adopted an exploratory design using quantitative and qualitative data, obtained from 660 unemployed women recruited via multi-stage sampling technique. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi square in testing the two hypotheses. Results indicate that 31.9% of respondents reported the provision of agricultural facilities as the most common women's empowerment programme, while 58.3% acknowledge that they have benefitted from any given women's empowerment programme. A total of 19.9% indicated that they have benefitted from micro-credit facilities, while 20.8% reveal that women's empowerment programmes have positively impacted their well-being. Findings further reveals a statistically significant relationship between education and the impact of women's empowerment programmes; and a statistically significant relationship between place of residence and the impact of women's empowerment programmes. Based on the findings, it was concluded that women's empowerment programmes have positively impacted the well-being of unemployed women in Yakurr, Nigeria. Thus, there is an urgent need for the Cross Rivers State Government to develop grassroot women's empowerment programmes that will enable these women to take advantage of available resources and to know that apart from non-governmental organisations and the government, women are endowed to actively help themselves and be drivers of their own destiny.

Keywords: Deprivation, Empowerment, Unemployed, Unemployed Women, Nigeria, Well-being, Women

Introduction

Unemployment is a socio-economic problem that has besieged the entire global community, with developing countries suffering the most (Adebayo, 2011; Agetue & Nnamdi, 2011). The problem of chronic unemployment is neither a yarn nor a myth, but a social reality evident in Nigeria. This problem does not discriminate based on sex, age, religion nor ethnic extraction (Akinboye & Ottoh, 2007). Moreso, the condition of economic crunch of the

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unemployed women in Nigeria is a common occurrence for all Nigerians due to the excruciating and biting experience it imposes on them (Attah, Audu & Haruna, 2013). Beyond the issue of unemployment, women have been subjected to various forms of social, economic, political and psychological deprivation. Even in the 21st century, women are subjected to false accusations as witches, lynched for sexual indulgence, tortured and raped; while male perpetrators of the same crimes move freely (Anne, 2011; Alese, 2013; Aroge, 2016). In order to ensure their perpetual enslavement, women are given minor roles to play, placed as second-class citizens and positioned as servants to their male counterparts. From a global perspective, Mandal (2013) observes that in India, women suffer cultural, racial, regional, economic, political and religious deprivation, stigmatization and abuse. They are susceptible to all sorts of abuse and molestation, such as violent attack, rape, poverty and malnutrition. In certain parts of India, women are not allowed to use mobile phones. In Pakistan, women are less educated compared to men; the women are disease ridden and they occupy the lowest social, political and economic status in the country. This scenario is akin to what is obtainable across the Arab world (Christine, Claire & Pooja, 2010; Field, Jayachandran & Pande, 2010; Khan & Bibi, 2011).

Across certain countries in Africa, such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Benin Republic, Osirike and Egbayebo (2012) assert that these societies do not give women the desired opportunities in the community they belong to. In Southern Nigeria, where Yakurr people are found, women have to be silent while the men talk and make all the decisions that would be binding for the women (Osirike and Egbayebo, 2012). Although the Islamic doctrine stressed equality of all before God in Northern Nigeria, yet women are not allowed to attend family meetings, let alone contribute to family matters. Young girls are exposed to early marriage; generally at the onset of puberty, in most cases, they are prevented from going out to shop, trade, or go to the market. Their socio-economic life is restricted to the domestic side of human relationships (Callaway, 1987). However, In Islamic law, women are afforded explicit rights and protections, particularly regarding inheritance, marriage, and support, but the general thrust of references to women in the Qur'an is that women are dependent on men and are fulfilled only through subordination to them (Callaway, 1987; Ibok, Ekanem & Umoh, 2015). In Ghana, the women are not allowed access to land; they are not entitled to credit facilities; they are not permitted to register membership with farmers organisations and they are not offered agricultural extension training and services (International Centre for Research on Women [ICRW], 2013). Women's empowerment is arguably the most important tool to facilitate the well-being of unemployed women (Koehler, 2013).

Due to the fact that women's socio-economic status tends to be low in almost all the rural areas in Nigeria; Blackden, Canagarajah, Klasen and Lawson (2007) and Quinsumbing and Malluccio (2003), argue that empowering women is key to overall improvement in their well-being. The past decades have seen an increase in empowerment programmes in most federating units in Nigeria. Nevertheless, in almost all the empowerment programmes, the participation rate of women is systematically lower when compared to their male counterparts. It is based on this premise that the need for an eclectic women's empowerment is gaining widespread acceptance (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010; Danjuma, Muhammad & Alkali, 2013).

Another way of thinking about power is in terms of making choices: to be disempowered, therefore, implies to be denied choice. The notion of empowerment is that it is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such power. In other words, empowerment entails a process of change (Kaber, McFadden, Arnfred, Domínguez, & Saadallah, 2016). People who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be compelling, but they are not empowered in the sense in which the word is being used because they were never disempowered in the first place. Empowerment thus refers to the expansion in people's

ability to make important and strategic life choices in a context where this ability was initially denied to them. Changes in the ability to exercise choice can be thought of in terms of changes in three interconnected dimensions which make up a choice: resources, which form the conditions under which choices are made; agency which is the hub of the process by which choices are made; and achievements, which are the outcomes of choices. These dimensions are interdependent because changes in each contributes to, and benefits from, changes in the others.

Throughout South Asia in the 1970s, feminists have reacted against the government's top-down welfare approach to women and worked to break women's "shackles of the mind" (Kabeer, 2009). In India, feminists sought to transform the meaning of the word empowerment to that of a woman needing to be "given self-hood and self-strength" or "to be strengthened to be herself" rather than being a "beneficiary" who needed to be "dealt out cards—welfare and money—to make her feel better" (Jain, 2009). This has always been the nature of most women in Nigerian society before colonialism. Similar to what was happening concurrently in the battered women's movement in the United States, as feminists in South Asia organized against domestic violence, rape, dowry, and sati—reproductive rights, they recognized that empowerment necessitates an internal, subjective dimension that addresses a woman's positioning of herself relative to the world (Biewener & Bacqué, 2015). To them, "it was a process, that of acquiring a sense of identity that is couched in terms of self-worth and equality until women recognize themselves as worthy of rights, they are not going to get empowered" (Kabeer, 2009). Thus, throughout South Asia, feminist understandings of empowerment emphasized the importance of recognizing and developing a woman's sense of identity and agency through a process of consciousness raising or "conscientization."

Virtually all black women have experienced living in a society that takes them for granted and devalues them (Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016). Based on this, 'conscientization' becomes problematic to a large extent. In its efforts to determine and define Africa's futures, the African Union (AU) has come up with a document envisioning African futures known as Agenda 2063. Agenda 2063, among other things, is said to be representing a collective effort and an opportunity for Africa to regain its power in determining its own destiny (Nkenkana, 2015), including the womenfolk. Hence, gender equality, especially women's rights, occupy an increasingly important place in the global and African political discourse (Martin, 2013).

Women's empowerment is one of the available mediums through which women can access decision-making roles and thereby mobilize available legal, social, political and economic resources to make and take decisions that affect their lives and those of others around them (Christine, Claire & Pooja, 2010; Idike, 2012). Women's empowerment is transformative, having both an individual and a collective focus. Duflo (2012) sees women's empowerment as an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. Many self-empowered or collectively-empowered women have excelled in their various careers (Baldacchino, 2005; Clacherty, 2008). Women have become presidents, governors, senators, captains of industries and employers of labour and professionals in various fields of endeavour. Some women are very outstanding in Nigeria such as Grace Alele Williams, Dora Akunyili and Mrs. Lola Alakija, just to name a few.

However, these outstanding women figures have not expunged the majority of other women who are not so opportuned; hence, in a bid to alleviate the suffering of women and enhance their well-being in the Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria, government, community leaders and individual politicians have launched several empowerment programmes. These include, but are not limited to, the Community Women's Empowerment and Development (2007); the Livinus Ofem Foundation and Women's Empowerment (1999); the Save the Children and Women's Empowerment (2010); the Nkebere Women Community Development Association in Mkpani (2006); the Idomi Women's Empowerment Programme (2000), as well as, the Ekori Women Development Programme

(1997). According to Ifekwe and Kalu (2012), these programmes are meant to ameliorate the sufferings of women and others by providing them with employment opportunities, skill acquisition and access to credit facilities to enable them in developing and establishing themselves. Despite the noticeable improvement in women's empowerment programmes worldwide (Christine, Claire & Pooja, 2010; Khan & Bibi, 2011; Idike, 2012; Otu, Eja & Yaro, 2012; Osirike & Egbayebo, 2012; Ukwayi & Okpa, 2017; Okoi & Omang, 2018; Omang, Y Liu, Eneji, Makundi & Eneji, 2011), data on its impact on the well-being of the unemployed women have remained far from comprehensive.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), along the lines of Falola (2001) and Lugones (2010), argue that the major challenge in the context of achieving African reality is that, since the time of colonial encounters, Africans have not yet been able to pilot their affairs and take full charge of their fate in securing a healthy future. This scenario is replaying itself regarding some women folk today. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) further argues that the new postcolonial nation is historically a male-constructed space, narrated into modern self-consciousness by male leaders, activists, writers, in which women are often regarded as trophies and cast as symbols or totems (Nkenkana, 2015). Also, the patriarchal structure, which is found across power systems in Africa, poses a challenge about the necessary gender transformation. Bennet (2014), on his part, made an argument regarding the Rwandan genocide in 1994, where women have come to play a more critical role in the formal sector. Women occupy some of the most important government ministries and make up more than fifty per cent of the country's parliamentarians. Rwanda, which has a population of 11.4 million, usually has at least 30 per cent of parliament members as females. In the late 1990s, the Rwandan government passed groundbreaking legislation that gave women the right to own and inherit land, the right to open a bank account without the authorization of a male figure and afforded special rights and protections to children. However, it is essential to note that this resulted from the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda, making the country composed of 70 per cent women because the genocide had been mainly perpetrated toward men through death, imprisonment and exile. In any case, this sheer necessity clearly explains women's inherent ability to be leaders in every realm of the nation and take charge of their lives without any external support.

More studies have revealed that women are more active as economic agents in Africa than anywhere else in the world. They perform the majority of agricultural activities, own a third of all firms and, in some countries, make up some 70% of employees (African Development Bank Group, 2015; Hallward-Driemeier & Hasan, 2013). Over and above their income earning activities, they are central to the household economy and their families' welfare, and they play a vital — though sometimes unacknowledged — leadership role in their communities and nations. To rate equality of economic opportunity, the Gender Equality Index compares women's and men's labour force participation rates, wages and incomes, business ownership and access to financial services (African Development Bank Group, 2015). The figures show that, by global standards, African women are both economically active and highly entrepreneurial. They form the core of the agricultural labour force, and they own and operate the majority of businesses in the informal sector. However, they are predominantly in low-value-added occupations that generate little economic return, facing various barriers that prevent them from moving into more productive pursuits. In light of the above, this study provides empirical evidence on the relationship between women's empowerment programmes and well-being of unemployed women in the Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Empowerment theory

The origin of empowerment theory can be traced back to the Brazilian humanitarian and educator, Paulo Freire (1973), when he suggested a plan for liberating the oppressed people of the world through education. The empowerment theory was propounded by Solomon (1976). Other theorists such as Miley, O'Melia and Dubois (2001) made significant contributions in shaping the theory. Empowerment is a process by which individuals and groups gain power, access resources and gain control over their own lives. It enables people to gain the ability to achieve their highest personal and collective aspirations and goals (Uche & Uche, 2014). Solomon (1976) posits that the major assumption of the theory is that personal, interpersonal and environmental resources are needed to update the skills, knowledge and motivation of people in order to achieve their valid social roles. According to him, powerlessness and hopelessness come as a result of the inability to harness resources to support the attainment of set goals. Power blockages produce powerlessness which invariably usurps system energy (Miley, O'Melia & Dubois, 2001). Empowerment theory suggests an effective support system for individuals, groups and communities that have been blocked from achieving their collective goals.

Payne (2005) asserts that empowerment practice helps individuals and groups to overcome social barriers and attain self-fulfillment within existing social structures. By applying this theory to the study, the empowerment theory shows that when women are empowered on any platform or programme whether as individuals or groups, it will help them overcome social barriers, to attain self-fulfillment and further enable them to gain the ability to achieve their highest personal aspirations and goals. Critics of the theory, however, are of the view that it advocates for a radical change, which might become antagonistic or counterproductive among the groups and their administrative bodies. The theory is often focused on the "how to do it" issues and the analysis of the barriers rather than the analysis of the kind of changes that are expected to be achieved. as the objectives are not clearly defined (Barry & Sidaway, 1999). However, it is still a veritable research approach to human well-being and development.

However, another school of thought from the feminist perspective argues that women do not necessarily need to actualize their full potential by getting some benefit or financial support from men or other people. They think that women have an innate in-built system to empower themselves mentally, physically, socio-economically and otherwise. The language employed in the contemporary period about women's empowerment is highly de-politicized (Tamale 2006; Meer 2011). By presenting African feminist thought as a workable decolonizing force, it has been contested how feminism is understood as an inherently Western framework that is irreconcilable with or in fundamental tension with African indigenous thought and practices (Coetzee, 2017). According to Oyěwùmí (2004), a critical intervention in this regard is that African feminism has a crucial role in the decolonization of African societies through consistent awareness through social and print media, person-to-person outreach, and training/involvement of women groups in contemporary socio-economic societies.

Further, previous research has found that four factors were instrumental in instituting a new form of bias against women that pervades the African colonized states: Christianity, Western education, the adoption of Western marriage systems and alternative legal systems (Mikell, 1997). Christianity's emphasis on monogamy and its imputed message of female subjugation, obedience and domesticity redefined roles for African wives, mothers and daughters (Mikell, 1997), hence contributing to rendering women incapacitated in the first place. Western education privileged the scholarly advancement of men over women (Mikell, 1997). Male education was emphasized as men were expected to be later integrated into the labour market and formal systems of production. Additionally, in a concession to traditional

modes of social organization, colonial governments allowed for both Christian and traditional marriage systems (Mikell, 1997). Christian marriage, however, often gave property rights to women, something traditional marriage did not do. Alternative legal methods instituted by the British colonial governments acknowledged women's rights to independence in theory while substantively treating them as legal minors (Mikell, 1997). These preceding changes affected gender relations, progressively undermining the power, freedoms and positions women had traditionally held, while at the same time limiting their access to new forms of status, which were increasingly male-dominated, male-focused and patriarchal (Akin-Aina, 2011).

Today there is broader, albeit tacit, agreement in political and educational arenas that the women gender can no longer be ignored. While there is still resistance and overt hostility to feminist work in male stream institutions across the board, feminist critique has much greater legitimacy than it did half a century ago. As Pereira (2004) rightly argues in the context of Nigeria, while it was considered 'normal' that intellectual discourse should remain silent on the experiences, concerns and visions of women, or else address these in stereotypical and restricted ways, such a discourse is likely to be challenged today (Pereira, 2004). This change is evident in progressive intellectual circles like the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) network because it has always had strong feminists among its membership (Ahikire, 2014). Lastly, Oyewumi (2005) points to branches of Western feminism that posit African feminisms as singularly concerned with bread, butter, culture and power - a politics of subsistence and survival as it were (i.e., dishing out financial or other rewards to women) Oyewumi (2005) challenges this depiction of 'bread and butter politics' as not representing the multiplicity of concerns expressed, and struggles and ideological battles waged, by feminists on the continent.

Materials and Methods
Research Design
This study adopts a cross-sectional survey design, which involves the observations of a sample, or a cross section of a population or phenomenon made at one point in time (Babbie, 2010). The design is aimed at determining the relationship between the variables of the study and to discover information that reveals facts about the entire population of the study. The survey design uses questionnaire and interview as a means of data collection (Eboh, 2009). The study solicits, gathers and analyzes information from respondents on the relationship between women's empowerment and the well-being of the unemployed women in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Area and Scope of the Study
The area of the study is Yakurr Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State, Nigeria. It is one of the 18 local government areas that make up Cross River State. Yakurr LGA was created out of Obubra Local Government Area in 1987. Yakurr LGA headquarters is Ugep. Yakurr lies between latitude 5°40' and 6° 10' N and longitude 8°2' and 6° 10'E and is 120km North of Calabar. Geographically, Yakurr shares boundaries to the west with Obubra LGA, to the east with Biase LGA, to the North with Abi LGA and to the South with Akamkpa LGA. The people are predominantly farmers, and agriculture is the major economic preoccupation of the people in this area. The people of Yakurr have evolved a system whereby land, labour and other resources are maximally deployed for high productivity. The soil in Yakurr is fertile for the cultivation of all kinds of crops. The area consists of small and medium scale farmers who predominantly cultivate yam, cassava and intercrop them with fluted pumpkin, okro, beans, melons, plantains, sweet yams, cocoyams and water yams. Other cash crops available in the area are oil palm, cocoa, cashew and rubber. Others are coffee, kolanut and natural honey (Otu, Eja & Yaro, 2012). The major language spoken by the people is "Lokạa." The area comprises

13 wards and is inhabited by the people of Agoi, Ibami, Assiga, Mkpani, Ekon, Nko, Ugep and Idomi. The people of Yakurr LGA celebrate new yam crops with festivals. The most pronounced of the new yam festivals in Yakurr is the "Leboku" new yam festival.

Population

The target population consists of 158,674 women. The target population of the study is made up of unemployed young women from 18 to 45 years old who reside in Yakurr L.G.A. This group was selected because they were assumed to have been impacted personally or were familiar with other women who must have had their lives impacted by existing women's empowerment programmes in Yakurr L.G.A.

Sample size: The sample size is determined by using the Yamane (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)2} n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)2}$$

Where; n = sample size, N = target population of study, e = error limit $(0.04)^2$ or 0.0016, and 1 = constant. Applying the formula, we have:

n = $\underline{158674}$
     1 + 158674 (0.0016)

n = $\underline{158674}$
     1 + 253.8784

n = $\underline{158674}$
      254.8784

n = 622.54785

n = 622

A sample size of 622 women was selected as the sample size for questionnaire distribution, while six participants were purposively selected for In-depth Interview (IDI), and thirty-two participants were selected purposively for the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), giving a total of 660 study participants.

Sampling Technique

Respondents were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique that entailed the selection of community clusters, groups, streets, villages as well as housing units. Yakurr L.G.A is made up of urban and rural areas (Cross River State Diary, 2009). Ugep town is the only urban area in Yakurr, while the rural areas consist of six communities, namely Agoi, Asiga, Idomi, Ekori, Nko and Mkpani. The researcher purposively selected Ugep town as the only urban area, while simple random sampling (SRS) (balloting) was deployed to select four communities in the rural areas (Asiga, Idomi, Ekori and Mkpani).

First, the urban area was divided into two wards. In each of the wards, the first street was selected using the SRS by balloting and then every street was selected until the required number of streets for the study were attained. In the second stage, the first compound from each of the selected streets was selected using SRS by balloting and then every subsequent compound was selected until the required number was obtained, which allowed every compound in the community an equal probability of being chosen. Stage three involved the selection of women (who serve as respondents) from each compound. In each selected compound, the availability sampling method was adopted, and the eligible women were chosen from each compound. This was done until the needed number for each ward was attained (155-156 per ward), totalling 311 women. Any available woman who fell within the chosen age bracket was selected to fulfill the required number of participants within this study. This gave

us a total of 311 women in the urban area. When the selected streets did not produce the required number, an additional street was randomly selected from the wards to complete the number. Given the sample size of 311 women from the communities, the researcher selected 78 women from each of the three communities (78 * 3 = 234) and 77 women from one community, giving a total of 311 women from all of the communities combined. This was done with the expectation that at least every household would most likely to contain an adult female member that would be present and easily accessible. This was added to the 311 women from the urban area to give the researcher a total of 622 women (who serve as respondents) for the questionnaire distribution.

Six participants were purposively selected for the In-depth Interview (IDI). They included three women leaders and three chairpersons of cooperatives. These categories of people were selected due to the vital positions they occupy in the area and so that their experience can enrich the study. For the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), four FGD sessions were conducted with young women who were 18 years old and older. The FGD is made up of four groups. Sixteen female participants were selected purposively from the two wards in the urban area and 16 female participants were also selected purposively from the rural areas of Idomi and Mkpani. The women gave the researcher a total of 38 adult women for the IDI and FGD. Adding them to the 622 respondents for the questionnaire distribution gives the researcher a total of 660 women for the entire study.

Instruments for Data Collection

The researcher utilized the questionnaire schedule as the instrument for quantitative data, while the In-depth Interview (IDI) guide and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide were utilized as instruments for qualitative data.

Methods of Data Analysis

This study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. The quantitative data from the questionnaire is coded, computer processed and analyzed using version 20 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency tables are used in presenting the results. The qualitative data is transcribed first in the local language and then translated into the English language. Each local language version carries the same original meaning with the English Language version. In going through the transcription, phrases with special meanings are selected to serve as illustrative quotes which complement the statistical data.

Ethical Considerations

The study observes all known ethical regulations which guide social science research. These include disclosure policy, informed consent, safety protocols, anonymity and confidentiality. The ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Results and Discussion

A total of six hundred and twenty-two (622) copies of the questionnaire were distributed in selected communities of the study area (Yakurr L. G. A.); 612 copies of the survey instrument were appropriately completed and submitted, yielding a 98.4% response rate. A total of 1.6% of the questionnaires were unusable because they were either not completed or not returned. A total of 50.2% of the respondents were from Ugep community. Other communities sampled included Mkpani (12.6%), Asiga (12.6%), Idomi (12.4%) and Ekori (12.3%). The majority of the respondents sampled are from the Ugep community, the only urban area sampled. Their location made it easier to distribute and retrieve their questionnaires.

Also, most urban women have had access to empowerment programmes. Of the respondents, 52% are 45 years old and older and 19.9% are within the age bracket of 36–44 years old. This is followed by those aged 27–35 years old (17.8%), while those aged 18–26 years old (10.3%) produced the least number of respondents. This implies that the majority of the respondents sampled are matured (45 years old and older). The distribution of the marital status of the respondents showed that married respondents accounted for 55.7% of the sample, followed by singles at 20.4%. Divorced women made up 3.3% and those who were separated composed 2.6% of the respondents. Data carrying the educational qualification of the respondents revealed that 33.8% of the respondents completed their tertiary education; 27.1% obtained their secondary education certificate; 25.3% completed their primary education; and 13.7% had no formal education. This finding infers that the majority of the respondents were literate enough to make adequate and meaningful contributions to the relationship between women's empowerment and well-being of the unemployed women in the study area.

Types of Women's Empowerment Programmes Available in Yakurr Local Government Area

The women are asked to choose the type of empowerment programme available in their respective communities. Data in Table 1 reveals that the most commonly mentioned empowerment programme is the provision of agricultural products (31.9%), followed by skill acquisition/development with 29.4% of respondents. Of the respondents, 25.3% point out clearing of farm roads as another type of empowerment programme. Furthermore, 24.5% of respondents identified the establishment of small-scale businesses renovation of market stalls (21.7%) as other types of women's empowerment programmes. Respondents supported the provision of adult literacy programmes (14.5%), awarding scholarships to the children of widows (12.9%) and creating availability of micro-credit facilities (5.9%); only 1.5% held other views. As previously mentioned, the majority of respondents feel that the provision of agricultural products is the most available empowerment program and through it, the well-being of the unemployed women have been enhanced by creating access to fertilizers, chemicals and farm seedlings, among others.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by the Type of Women's Empowerment Programmes Available in Their Community

Available programmes	Mentioned	Not mentioned	Total
Micro-credit facilities	5.9 (36)	94.1 (576)	100.0 (612)
Renovation of market stalls	21.7 (133)	78.3 (479)	100.0 (612)
Clearing of farm roads	25.3 (155)	74.7 (457)	100.0 (612)
Establishing of small-scale businesses	24.5 (150)	75.5 (462)	100.0 (612)
Scholarships for children of widows	12.9 (79)	87.1 (533)	100.0 (612)
Provision of agricultural products	31.9 (195)	68.1 (417)	100.0 (612)
Skill acquisition/development	29.4 (180)	70.6 (432)	100.0 (612)
Adult literacy	14.5 (89)	85.5 (523)	100.0 (612)
Others	1.5 (9)	98.5 (603)	100.0 (612)

Source: *Fieldwork (2020)*

An indication of the availability of women's empowerment programmes as reported in the study is evident from the response of this woman who said,

> "I have heard of many women's empowerment programmes such as micro credit facilities (loan). It is an empowerment programme by Ugep community bank designed to help women access loan in order to build their small-scale businesses. Also, Livinus Ofem foundation is a religious organization saddled with the responsibilities of empowering women, especially, widows by giving scholarships to their children *(IDI/Female/30/Urban/ Chairlady of Cooperative society)*."

An excerpt from a participant's point of view regarding the availability of women's empowerment programmes is transcribed below:

> "As a farmer I have suffered a lot, especially during the raining season. Anytime I harvest my farm products like yam, cassava, potatoes, maize, etc., it is always difficult to transport them to the market because the only road to the market is bad and this affects not only me but other farmers in this community. But recently, the Cross River State Government in partnership with the Niger Delta Development Commission have remembered us by not only renovating the farm road but also reconstructing bridges that were broken down. Now traders often ply the road to get their product directly from the farm. I can tell you that as a farmer, before we finish harvesting, the traders are already there to buy off their produce and convey them to the market and this has boosted the economy of this community. Both the farmers and the traders are happy now because of the profit they get *(FGD with a 43-year-old farmer in Mpkani community)*."

Access to Women's Empowerment Programmes

The results in Table 2 reveal that a significant percentage of the respondents (58.3%) indicated that they have benefitted from women's empowerment programmes. Unfortunately, only 39.5% said they have not benefitted from women's empowerment programmes, while 2.1% report that they do not know if what they have benefited from in the past can be identified as an empowerment programme or not. This finding suggests that a significant number of the unemployed women have benefitted from the available women's empowerment programmes in their communities.

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of the Respondents on Whether They have Benefitted from Women's Empowerment Programmes

Benefited	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	357	58.3
No	242	39.5
Don't know	13	2.1
Total	**612**	**100.0**

Source: *Fieldwork (2020)*

Congruently, the FGD with the women of Ijom ward reveals that there are a few empowerment programmes women benefit from. She said,

> "As for me, the only women's empowerment programme I have benefitted from is that of the micro credit facility sponsored by the Micro finance bank. As I am talking to you now, I collected fifty thousand naira with very low interest rate of one hundred naira per month. I used that money to open a restaurant where I sell food like garri and soup, rice, beans, etc. And I have been making a lot of profit out of the business. In fact, that money has helped me take care of my children, especially, as regards their feeding, education and health matters (FGD with a 41-year-old trader in Ijom ward)."

Additionally, data from the FGD has a contrary view. Three participants indicated that they have yet to benefit from any women's empowerment programmes in their community. Below are excerpts of their responses:

> "These programmes when they come, are only shared among the women executives and their friends. We have not benefitted from any free skill acquisition or any other type of empowerment programme. We only hear about these things on the television but in reality, I have not seen or benefitted from any of these programmes. The last time they asked us to pick up forms from the secretariat for skill acquisition programmes I did but no one called me. Even my application for loan to help my business has not been attended to (FGD session with a young woman; A 39-year-old trader in Idomi community)."

A woman participant during the FGD session stated that,

> "Although I have not benefited from any empowerment programmes directly but there is a woman close to my house who has benefitted from this empowerment programme, 'There is a woman in our street who has benefitted from the loan facility that was given to women on our community and today this woman is doing very well' (FGD with a 37-year-old self-employed woman in Mkpani community)."

Types of Women's Empowerment Programmes which the Unemployed Women have Benefitted From

In Table 3, the various types of women's empowerment programmes mentioned are provision of micro-credit facilities (19.9%), the renovation of market stalls (16.3%), the clearing of farm roads (10.3%), the establishment of small scale businesses (10.0%), the awarding of scholarships to the children of widows (6.5%), provision of free skill acquisition/development training (5.2%), provision of agricultural products (4.1%), others (2.5%) and finally adult literacy (0.8%). Although the majority of the respondents initially indicated that they were aware of women's empowerment programmes, many of them could only mention a few types of empowerment programmes they have had access to.

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Access to Women's Empowerment Programmes

Available programmes	Mentioned	Not mentioned	Total
Micro-credit facilities	19.9 (122)	80.1 (490)	100.0 (612)
Renovation of market stalls	16.3 (100)	83.7 (512)	100.0 (612)
Clearing of farm roads	10.3 (63)	89.7 (549)	100.0 (612)
Establishing of small-scale businesses	10.0 (61)	90.0 (551)	100.0 (612)
Scholarships for children of widows	6.5 (40)	93.5 (572)	100.0 (612)
Provision of agricultural products	5.2 (32)	94.8 (580)	100.0 (612)
Skill acquisition/development	5.2 (32)	94.8 (580)	100.0 (612)
Adult literacy	.8 (5)	99.2 (607)	100.0 (612)
Others	15 (2.5)	597 (97.5)	612 (100.0)

Source: *Fieldwork (2020)*

Additional data from an FGD session on various types of women's empowerment programmes accessed by the unemployed women in Yakurr, a 25-year-old resident of Ijom community had this to say:

> "I have benefitted from one, or two women's empowerment programmes. For instance, there was this loan scheme for rural women called "Sharp-Sharp" by Idomi community micro-finance bank, as well as, skills acquisition and development programme for women, which I benefitted from. I have benefited from the loan; in fact, I got thirty-five thousand naira to set up a small business in the market. I sell tomatoes, onions, maggi cubes, as well as, crayfish. I have been in this business for about five years and now as I am speaking to you, I am the highest supplier of this product in this community now I have been able to expand the business. Now from this business I have trained two of my siblings in the university, built a 3-bedroom flat and I have also made adequate provision for my needs. As I used to say if I was not privileged to access that loan, I wonder where I would have found myself, so I am urging people of goodwill, especially, those who have the capacity to always render help to other people especially women who are unemployed and vulnerable (FGD with a 29-year-old woman in Idomi community)".

Another participant, while explaining how she had access to an adult literacy programme, described how such empowerment has helped her to learn how to read, speak and write in the English language. Below are excerpts from her speech:

"I have never attended any formal school in my entire life because my parents died when I was still very tender and there was nobody to train me. Although, I am the youth female leader in this community, I could only manage to communicate through the local dialect or 'Pidgin' English. But years ago, a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Richard Foundation organized an adult literacy programme for rural women. I was a part of that programme for about five years; they taught us how to read and write. It is one of the greatest achievements in my life, because as I am today, I have improved so much that I can read and write, as well as, communicate effectively. If not for this programme, I would not have been able to freely express myself to you (IDI with the women leader in Idomi community, 39 years old)."

Areas of positive impact

Elicited data on the positive impact of women's empowerment programme on the unemployed women revealed that 20.8% of the respondents indicated that it improved their finances; 17.3% indicated that it developed their skills; 15.2% of the respondents said it helped in improving their farming career, 11.3% had other opinions, 7.8% indicate that it has improved the opportunities of their children; 6.7% stated that it has improved their business; while another 6.7% testified that it helped to improve their children's education.

Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Respondents on the Areas the Programmes Impacted Positively in Their Lives

Positive impact	Mentioned	Not mentioned	Total
Developed my skills	17.3 (106)	82.7 (506)	100.0 (612)
Improvement in my farming	15.2 (93)	84.8 (519)	100.0 (612)
Improvement in my business	6.7 (98)	84.0 (514)	100.0 (612)
Improved opportunities for my children	7.8 (48)	92.2 (564)	100.0 (612)
Improvement in my education	6.7 (41)	93.3 (571)	100.0 (612)
Others	11.3 (69)	88.7 (543)	100.0 (612)
Improvement in my finances	20.8 (127)	79.2 (485)	100.0 (612)

Source: *Fieldwork (2020)*

All participants who have benefitted from the empowerment programme during the qualitative study affirm that the programme has had a positive impact on their well-being. While some of the participants maintain that the empowerment programme improved their finances in terms of increased capital base, increased savings, and increased profit margin, others confirm that their farming career has been repositioned as a result of having access to mechanised farm tools, fertilizers and improved seedlings that have resulted in increased harvests.

Test of Hypotheses
Hypothesis one

Substantive hypothesis (H$_1$:   Women with a higher level of education are more likely to feel the positive impact of women's empowerment programmes than those with a lower level of education

Null hypothesis   (H$_0$):   Women with a higher level of education are less likely to feel the positive impact of women's empowerment programmes than those with lower level of education

Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Level of Education and Impact of Women's Empowerment Programmes

Level of education	Feelings/impact of women's empowerment programmes		Total
	Positive impact	**Negative impact**	
Lower education	64.4%(154)	35% (85)	100.0% (94)
Higher education	54.4%(203)	45.6%(170)	100.0% (373)
Total	**58.3%(357)**	**41.7%(255)**	**100.0%(612)**

χ^2**= 6.007^a df=1, p∠ .014 critical/table value=3.841**
Source: *Fieldwork (2020)*

To test hypothesis one, the level of education is cross-tabulated, with the feelings of the respondents to test the impact empowerment programmes have on the unemployed women. The result presented in Table 5 reveals that the majority (64.4%) of the respondents with a lower level of education felt that the empowerment programmes have positive impacts on them, while just 35.6% of those with low education feel that the empowerment programmes have negative impacts on them. Furthermore, 54.4% of respondents with higher education indicated that the impact on them was positive, while slightly below half (45.6%) of the respondents maintained that the impact on them was negative. The Chi square test result shows that computed χ^2 is 6.007 while the critical/table χ^2 value is 3.841 and df = 1. The test shows that there is a statistically significant relationship (P <.014) between education and the impact of women's empowerment programmes. From the decision rule, since the chi-squared calculated (6.007^a) is greater than the chi-squared tabulated (3.841) we accept the substantive hypothesis, which states that the unemployed women with a higher level of education are more likely to feel the positive impact of women's empowerment programmes than those with a lower level of education. The null hypothesis, which states that the unemployed women with a higher level of education are less likely to feel the positive impact of women's empowerment programmes than those with a lower level of education, is rejected.

Hypothesis two
Substantive hypothesis (H$_1$:   Women in urban communities are more likely to feel the positive impact of women's empowerment programmes than those in the rural communities

Null hypothesis (H$_0$):   Women in urban communities are not more likely to feel the positive impact of women's empowerment programmes than those in the rural communities

Table 6: Place of Residence and Impact of Women's Empowerment Programmes

Place of residence	Feelings/impact of women's empowerment programmes		Total
	Positive impact	Negative impact	
Urban area	147(47.9%)	160(52.1%)	307(100.0%)
Rural area	210(68.9%)	95(31.1%)	305(100.0%)
Total	**357(58.3%)**	**255(41.7%)**	**612(100.0%)**

χ^2= 27.680ᵃ df=1, p∠ .000 critical/table value=3.841
Source: *Fieldwork (2020)*

To test hypothesis two, place of residence was cross-tabulated with the feelings of the respondents to test the impact empowerment programme have on the unemployed women. The result displayed in Table 6 showed that 47.9% of respondents who resided in the urban area felt that the empowerment programmes had some positive impact on them, while the majority (52.1%) of them felt that empowerment programmes were negative in impact. Furthermore, 68.9% of the respondents who resided in the rural area felt the empowerment programme was positive for them while a few of them (31.1%) asserted that the impact was negative for them. To gain clarity on the data presented in the Table 6, given the computed χ^2 = 27.680ᵃ and critical/table χ^2 value of 3.841; df = 1, the test shows that there is a statistically significant relationship (p∠=.000) between the place of residence and the impact of women's empowerment programmes. This suggests that one's place of residence impacts the perception of benefit one has towards an empowerment programme.

Discussion

In terms of the types of available women's empowerment programmes, the study reveals that the respondents are aware of micro-credit facilities, building of pipe borne water, renovation of market stalls, clearing of farm roads, establishing of small scale businesses, award of scholarship to children of widows, the provision of agricultural products, skill acquisition/ development and adult literacy programmes. FGDs and IDIs also support the quantitative data by revealing that the women have benefitted from micro-credit facilities, scholarships and the provision of infrastructural facilities. Mandal (2013) in his study also found that the issue of women's empowerment is a central point in the programmes and activities of the United Nations and most Government and Non-Government Organizations. The study reveals that more than half (58.3%) of the study respondents have benefitted from various women's empowerment programmes. Also, 79.6% of the respondents agree that these programmes they have benefitted from have had a great impact on them.

Furthermore, a majority (95.4%) of the respondents agree that the women's empowerment programmes they have benefitted from have had positive impacts on their lives, in terms of increase in capital base, savings and profit margins. The positive impacts are also evident in farmers having access to mechanised farm tools, improved seedling, and increase harvest. This finding agrees with Gates (2015) who opined that, empowering women leaves positive marks on the women folk and the society at large. Women's empowerment is seen as a central issue in sustainable development (Gates, 2015). The various positive impacts women's empowerment programmes create are: skill development, improved farming outputs,

improved business, improved opportunities for children, improved education and improved finances.

Conclusion and recommendation

Women are faced with a great challenge, especially because they make up the poor and illiterate majority. Men are still responsible for the key management decision-making processes even though women constitute about 60 to 80 percent of the agricultural labour force in Nigeria, and they produce about two thirds of the food crops for the family. These women who occupy a critical place in our economic development equation are in most cases ignored, underestimated, relegated to the background and rendered voiceless within the household when production and management decisions are made. Women's empowerment is arguably the most important method through which the well-being of unemployed women can be enhanced. Women's empowerment programmes are necessary because women are considered to be better managers of economic, social and political resources if empowered and given the right platform to function. The study, therefore, concludes that there is a relationship between women's empowerment and the well-being of unemployed women.

Thus, investing in women and girls is one of the most effective ways of promoting development; and as it has long been recognized that investing in the human development of women reaps a double dividend in such a way that it improves the quality of life of the women in question, enabling them to be more productive, independent members of society and ennobles them to become champions of human development for their families and communities. The resulting improvement to their children's welfare and life opportunities has multiplier effects that expand with each new generation (African Development Bank Group, 2015). When the above is not the case, social problems that disproportionately affect women, such as high maternal mortality, abuse and violence against women, ensues; concomitantly, when women are illiterate, with low economic standing, poor health/environmental living condition and little control over their fertility, their children also pay the price. These are not just women's issues; they are studies on Nigeria's development. In view of the foregone, the study therefore recommends that the Cross River State Government should, as a matter of urgency, develop grassroot women's empowerment programmes that will enable rural dwellers to know that apart from Non-governmental organisations, and the government, women are endowed to actively help themselves and be drivers of their own fate.

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