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**Appraisal of Rural Women Empowerment through Skills
Acquisition in Anambra and Rivers States of Nigeria**

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Abstract

The paper was a descriptive survey which tried to appraise the Nigerian rural women empowerment through Skills Acquisition Programme (SAP). Skill acquisition is the process of acquiring or gaining effective and ready knowledge in developing ones aptitude and ability in a particular field. Skill acquisition is one among other policies embarked upon in Nigeria with the sole aim to alleviate poverty. The study was conducted in Anambra and Rivers States of Nigeria. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. The instrument for data collection was a 33 – item questionnaire developed by the researchers. The instrument was validated by experts in Curriculum and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability coefficient of internal consistency of 0.82 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha technique. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. While t-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Results showed that most rural women have not received loans to start small scale business and that they would prefer government empowerment in areas like garri processing, soap making, farming and hair dressings. Although the Anambra rural women did not prefer to be empowered in snailry instead trading was preferred to them, while the reverse becomes the case with the Rivers State rural women. The differences in choice might be due to the riverine nature of Rivers State and the dryness of Anambra land. Based on the findings, recommendations were put forward among which were that; the fund released for any type of skills acquisition should be properly monitored to avoid embezzlement and misappropriation and that the acquisition of basic computer skills should be encouraged and emphasized.

Introduction

The need for women empowerment and of course the empowerment of rural women came as a result of great poverty which has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigeria. Women empowerment could be viewed as the capacity of women to increase their self-reliance strategies through the inducement of education or skill acquisition. According to Chukwunke (2009), women empowerment through skills acquisition enables them to recognize the focus of power that oppresses and marginalizes them and chants a course of action individually and collectively aimed at disintegrating these foci. The empowerment of women has been recognized as a pre-requisite for achieving effective and people- centred development.

Poverty is simply the failure of an individual to meet basic requirements of a “decent life”. These basic requirements are not restricted to the economic spheres but extend to society and spiritual spheres of life (Ezeji, 2000). Erring his views, Ojo cited in Gbarabe (2009:83) opined that “poverty is as old and widespread as mankind. A majority of the human race has always suffered intermittent hunger. What is new is that people in all countries are demanding an improvement in their economic lot. It is this revolution in expectation that is creating such a ferment in the underdeveloped world. And these new attitudes are a political force that cannot be ignored”. In an attempt to reduce or minimize the prevalence of poverty in Nigeria, Anambra in South – East and Rivers States in South-South of Nigeria have embarked in poverty alleviation programmes mostly through Skills Acquisition Programmes (SAP) especially for the rural women.

Women constitute over half of the economically active population of rural Nigeria. Together with men, they share the responsibility of sustaining their families through participation in all aspects of rural labour, be it agricultural or non-agricultural. There are variations in the work input by women. Research has shown that Nigerian women carry significant proportions of the work load in food production, animal husbandry, food processing and distribution, in addition to child – bearing and home management roles (Uche and Nwanekezi, 2007). In Nigeria, women have traditionally participated actively in farming and other related rural development activities, though their contributions have remained largely unmeasured and underrated. The largest of the rural poor comprises the millions of women and girls who produce a large part of food consumed in the villages, towns, cities and processed in industries. Females in most rural sectors experience great disadvantages, and to ease them this burden, women empowerment, strategies need to be in place.

According to Uche and Nwanekezi (2007), women empowerment has become a global issue which has generated a lot of concern at all levels. In the Beijing Declaration, U. N. members states declared that “women empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society ... are fundamental for the achievement of equality development and peace”. The platform for action was meant to be “an agenda for women empowerment”. The Millennium Development Goals represent a global agenda for sustainable development; gender equality and women

empowerment are among the eight goals which international community and UN Member States have committed to achieving by the year 2015.

In Anambra State which came into being on 27th August, 1991, women are known to be hard working, creative and enterprising. Observation shows that women earn their livelihood as farmers, petty traders, artisan, construction workers and professionals. However, those in rural areas concentrate on farming and petty trading (Onwuka, 2000). The economic role of women in Anambra State as revealed in the State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) in 2007 have been shaped by the socio-cultural and political; the literary rate for women and the general educational attainment; access to the factors of production, access to loanable funds or bank credit; laws governing employment opportunities. It is worthy of note that Article 4 of Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) prescribed that women shall have equal rights as men with respect to employment opportunities, promotion and remuneration, this is yet to be domesticated in Anambra State. Similarly, the Nigerian Constitution possess no discrimination on the basis of sex, despite all these provisions however, traditional and long standing perceptions about women have continued to hinder the contributions of women in particular areas while reinforcing their traditional roles of baby-breeding, home-making, and farming. This is especially true for majority of the women in the rural communities who are daily confronted with traditional and natural rigidities.

The Commissioner of Economic Planning and Monitoring in Anambra State noted that lack of capital and access to loanable funds made women over the years to be heavily involved in petty trading. Women are found selling their wares in the markets while in the urban cities, some engage in street hawking. Also, a negligible number of rural women are found in the industrial sector. This is because the medium and large scale industrial enterprises are so capital and investment intensive that women over the years lack the empowerment for such establishment (Okeke, 2007). The above mentioned situations have underscored the need for rural women empowerment through skills acquisition.

Skill acquisition is the process of acquiring or gaining effective and ready knowledge in developing ones aptitudes and ability in a particular field (Ihebereme, 2010). Skill acquisition is one among other policies embarked upon in Nigeria with the sole aim to alleviate poverty, youth restiveness,

sophisticated crime and corruption rate, rural-urban drift, unemployment and other society vices. To Ihebereme (2008), skill acquisition acts as a rehabilitator, re-orientator, motivator and empowerment to the under-privileged. There is need therefore to promote labour market relevant skills acquisition leading to self-reliant activities and empowerment. The skills acquisitions as shown in SEEDS (2007) include; (a) fashion design trade (b) hair dressing (c) photography skill, (d) industrial skills (e) food processing skills (f) cosmetics production (g) agricultural farming skills.

On the other hand, Rivers State was created on the 27th of May, 1967. Port Harcourt is the capital of Rivers State. The state lies at the base of Nigeria, forming a substantial part of Niger Delta. About half of the state is made up of water in form of rivers, creeks, lakes and swamps. The state is bounded at the South by the Atlantic Ocean, at the North by Imo and Abia State, at the West Bayelsa State and at the East by Akwa – Ibom State (Gbarabe, 2009). There is no doubt to the fact that Rivers State is blessed with lots of natural resources, including capable men and women having proven intelligence which can be used to exploit these resources and make life worth living for all women especially those in rural areas. This has made many people to believe that women in Rivers State are better off in terms of government provision of social amenities, provision of loans and infrastructural facilities to uplift the living standard of the rural populace. Supporting this statement, Governor Victor Attah of Akwa Ibom State in 2004 cited in Gbarabe (2009:100) asserted, “to create prosperity for our people and responsible exploitation of our natural endowments for growth and sustainable development.

Unfortunately, the situations are almost the same with those in Anambra State. Poverty has not been given adequate attention in Rivers State, and as such, many rural women are still suffering (Gbarabe, 2009). Writing on the recent efforts of the Rivers State government to alleviate poverty, the Non-Governmental Organization inform of humanitarian poverty alleviation has provided skills acquisition for rural women. The skills provided are as follows: (a) sewing (b) hair dressing (c) cosmetics production (d) snailry (e) catering (f) tie and dye (g) computer appreciation (h) fish farming (i) photography (j) television editing (k) painting, chalk and duster (l) bakery and (m) hat making. It was also stated as written in Gbarabe (2009) that the beneficiaries were also given soft loans. This calls for the need to investigate whether the rural women have actually benefited from those skills

acquisition, perhaps, some loans meant for the rural women skills acquisition might have been embezzled.

Chukwudolue (2000) in support of the just mentioned statement, observed that some criticisms have been levelled against SAP less than a year after its inception. One of the major criticisms has centred on the nature and scope of financing of SAP in the states under this study. Specifically, critics point to the smallness of the amount voted for the vis-à-vis the large number classified as poor, the untimely release of funds and the gross mismanagement and abuse of resources of SAP.

There is also need to assess the skills acquisition which might be preferable to Anambra and Rivers State rural women. It might be that Anambra rural women would prefer petty trading cosmetic production due to the fact that the majority of the populace seem to be traders. Perhaps also, the Rivers State rural women might prefer fish farming and snailry due to the riverine area. This uncertainty has again spurred the interest of the researchers in finding out which skills acquisition would be preferred to the rural women in the two states.

Nevertheless, many authors like Oloidi (2000), Ohia (2000) and Gbarabe (2009) were of the views that one of the strategies for effective poverty alleviation implementation is for the Federal and State Government to be committed sincerely to monitoring the funding policy with a high minded resolve to initiative people – oriented policies and programmes carried out alleviating poverty. The argument that an economic growth plus economic development would take place in all ramifications when the government and its people have resolve to alleviate poverty with transparent honesty and sincerity should be reinforced. In order to realize aim of government's efforts and objective of SAP, everybody should be concerned.

This study has therefore set out to assess the skills acquisition with which the rural women in Anambra and Rivers States have been empowered, the skills acquisition which would be preferable to them and their perception of strategies for effective implementation of SAP.

The Problem

Poverty and its symptoms are endemic in Nigeria since the vast majority of persons in the country are classified as poor especially the rural women. To further substantiate the prevalence of poverty in Nigeria, the transparency

international in 2009 ranked Nigeria as the most corrupt country in the world and with the worst index of human suffering. These characterizations might have informed the introduction of skills acquisition programmes (SAP) for the rural women as a way of reversing the acute incidence of poverty and its symptoms in Nigeria. At the state level, Anambra and Rivers States of Nigeria, what are the actual skills with which the rural women have been empowered? Has the SAP provided the type of skills needed by those rural women and in their own views, what are the strategies for effective implementation of SAP? Providing answers to these questions formed the focus of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study in general term is to assess the extent to which the rural women in Anambra and Rivers States of Nigeria are empowered through skills acquisition programme. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Assess the skills acquisition with which the rural women have been empowered.
2. Ascertain the skills acquisition which will be preferable to the rural women for their empowerment.
3. Determine the rural women's perception of the strategies for effective empowerment through skills acquisition.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the mean ratings of Anambra and Rivers State rural women on the skills acquisition with which they have been empowered?
2. Are there differences in the mean ratings of Anambra and Rivers State rural women on the skills acquisition which would be preferable to them for empowerment?
3. Are there differences in the mean ratings of Anambra and Rivers States rural women on the strategies for effective empowerment through skills acquisition programme?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. The mean ratings of the rural women in Anambra and those in Rivers State on the skills acquisition with which they have been empowered will not differ significantly.
2. There is no statistically significant difference between the mean ratings of the rural women in Anambra and those in Rivers State on the skills acquisition which could be preferable to them for empowerment.
3. The mean ratings of the rural women in Anambra State and those in Rivers State on their perceptions of the strategies for effective empowerment through skills acquisition will not differ significantly.

Methodology

Design of the Study

The study was a descriptive survey design.

Area of the Study

The study was carried out in two Local Government Areas (L.G.As.) in each of the two states (Anambra and Rivers). Three communities were involved from each of the L.G.A. in each state for this study. In Anambra State, the two selected L.G.As and the three communities were: Anaocha L.G.A. which had Akwaeze, Adazi-Enu and Aguluzigbo communities while in Njikoka L.G.A., the three communities involved were: Abba, Abagana and Nimo.

In Rivers State, Etche and Abua/Odual L.G.As and the three communities involved in the study were; Okehi, Okomoko and Umuaturu Etche while Abua/Odual L.G.A. and the three communities involved were; Dighiriga, Kugboh and Emilogbo.

Population of the Study

The target population consisted of 4,404 rural women. This population was made up of one thousand, eight hundred and fifteen (1,815) rural women identified in the six communities of the two L.G.As. of study in Anambra State (Anaocha and Njikoka). In Rivers State, the population was two

thousand, five hundred and eighty nine (2,589) rural women in the six communities of the two L.G.As. of Rivers State (Etche and Abua/Odual).

Sample and Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling due to location was used to select two states (Anambra and Rivers), two local government Areas for the study. Also, simple random sampling technique with replacement was used to select thirty registered rural market women from the market register in each of the three communities in each Local Government Area of the study. The first ten registered rural market women in the first three lines of the market were interviewed. Again, individual consent was respected. Only those who were willing were interviewed. Therefore, the sample size from the six communities in the two selected L.G.As in Anambra State was 222. Also, 138 respondents were selected from Rivers State following the same technique. In all, this gave a sample size of three hundred and sixty (360) respondents.

Instrument

The instrument for data collection was developed by the researchers. The instrument was a 33 – item questionnaire made up of two sections. Section A was on personal data while Section B sought information on the degree of agreement with the item statements presented in the questionnaire title “Rural Women Empowerment Through Skill Acquisition” (RWETSA). The modified likert type scale was used for research questions 1 and 3. The weightings were: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4; Agree (A) = 3; Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. For research question 2, the weightings were; Most preferred (MOP) = 4 points; Preferred (PRF) – 3 points; Less Preferred (LPRF) – 2points; Not Preferred at all (PFRFA) – 1 point. The average of these points is 2.50 ($4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10$ $4 = 2.50$). This will be used ion data analysis as the cut off point.

Validation of the Instrument

The instrument was content validated by two experts in the Department of Curriculum Studies and one in Measurement and Evaluation University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Rivers State. They validated the instrument in terms of relevance of the items to the topic, ambiguity of the statements, clarity of language and adequacy of the items to the level of the respondents.

The experts, after examining the instrument made some corrections which were effected in the final draft of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was trial – tested on 50 rural women in two Local Government Areas that were not part of the study. The reliability co-efficient of internal consistency of 0.82 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha technique. This is because the items were none dichotomous. The value was deemed appropriate for the study.

Method of Data Collection

The researchers went to the selected communities on their exact market days. On reaching each market, a courtesy call was made to the market leaders who gave their consent and also helped in identifying the registered rural women in the first three lines visited in each market. A token fee of ₦2,000 was paid to each market leader who really helped in assisting to identifying the respondents and who also helped in interpreting the native language where necessary. Interactive mode based on the explanations of the items on the questionnaire and their weightings were used for data collection. The interactive mode lasted a day for each market. In all, twelve different days were used for the interaction and data were collected from three hundred and sixty respondents (222 from Anambra State and 138 from Rivers State).

Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive data analysis (mean) and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A mean of 2.50 or above indicated with the item statement while the mean of 2.49 or below indicated disagreement with the items in research questions 1 and 3. For ease of analysis in research question 2, the mean of 2.50 or above was regarded as preferred (PRF) and the mean of 2.49 or below was regarded as not preferred (NPRF). The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test statistics.

Results

The results are presented in line with the research questions and hypotheses in table 1 - 6.

In table 1, it was revealed that in the case of rural women from Anambra State, items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 were rated high above 2.50 while

items 5, 11 and 12 were rated below 2.49. In the same vein, on the side of rural women from Rivers State, items 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 were rated above 2.50 while items 2, 10, 11 and 12 were rated below 2.49. This indicated that the women were variously empowered in some skills while they were not empowered in some.

Table 1: Mean Rating on the Skills Acquisition with Which the Rural Women Have Been Empowered

| S/N | Items on Skills Acquisition of the Rural Women | Anambra State Rural Women | | | Rivers State Rural Women | | |
|-----|--|---------------------------|-------------|----------|--------------------------|-------------|----------|
| | | \bar{X} | SD | Decision | \bar{X} | SD | Decision |
| | The women development centre or any other arm of your state have empowered you in any of the following ways: | | | | | | |
| 1 | Trained you in sewing and have provided you with sewing machines. | 2.59 | 0.57 | A | 2.51 | 0.64 | A |
| 2 | Have provided you with sewing materials and machine without training. | 3.65 | 0.98 | A | 2.41 | 0.88 | D |
| 3 | Have given you fund to start garri processing industry. | 2.78 | 0.74 | A | 3.03 | 1.13 | A |
| 4 | Farming | 2.80 | 0.99 | A | 3.86 | 1.04 | A |
| 5 | Snailry | 1.00 | 0.11 | D | 3.75 | 1.07 | A |
| 6 | Petty trading | 3.12 | 1.45 | A | 2.52 | 0.75 | A |
| 7 | Fish farming | 2.62 | 0.99 | A | 3.50 | 0.94 | A |
| 8 | Bakery industry | 3.75 | 0.82 | A | 3.25 | 0.85 | A |
| 9 | Soap/detergent industry | 2.82 | 0.88 | A | 2.73 | 0.54 | A |
| 10 | Hair dressing | 2.69 | 0.69 | A | 2.21 | 0.75 | D |
| 11 | Plantain processing industry | 1.66 | 0.49 | D | 2.79 | 0.97 | D |
| 12 | The loan giving to you is enough to start the small scale business which you want to do effectively. | 1.12 | 0.41 | D | 1.21 | 0.84 | D |
| | Grand Mean | 2.55 | 0.76 | | 2.81 | 0.85 | |

Table 2 showed various skills with which different women would be empowered. But some are preferred by rural women and some are not preferred. Item 14 was not preferred by both Anambra and Rivers States rural women. Item 17 was not preferred by Anambra State rural women while items 18, 22 and 24 were not preferred by Rivers State rural women. This meant that most Anambra State rural women would not prefer government empowerment on tailoring while only Rivers State rural women would not prefer government empowerment on trading, cosmetic production and catering business.

Table 2: Mean Ratings on the Skills Acquisition Preferable to Rural Women for Empowerment

| S/N | Items on Skills Acquisition preferable to the Rural Women | Anambra State Rural Women | | | Rivers State Rural Women | | |
|-----|--|---------------------------|-------------|----------|--------------------------|-------------|----------|
| | | \bar{X} | SD | Decision | \bar{X} | SD | Decision |
| | Indicate the items which are "preferred" and those "not preferred" to you for skill acquisition. | | | | | | |
| 13 | Garri processing | 2.87 | 0.77 | PRF | 2.90 | 0.84 | PRF |
| 14 | Tailoring | 1.36 | 0.66 | NPRF | 1.65 | 0.85 | NPRF |
| 15 | Soap making | 2.71 | 0.99 | PRF | 2.96 | 0.81 | PRF |
| 16 | Farming | 2.88 | 0.95 | PRF | 3.90 | 0.99 | PRF |
| 17 | Snailry | 1.10 | 0.49 | NPRF | 3.85 | 0.92 | PRF |
| 18 | Trading | 3.00 | 0.81 | PRF | 1.26 | 0.74 | NPRF |
| 19 | Fish farming | 2.68 | 0.63 | PRF | 3.02 | 0.65 | PRF |
| 20 | Bakery | 2.66 | 0.78 | PRF | 2.58 | 0.88 | PRF |
| 21 | Hair dressing saloon | 2.98 | 0.63 | PRF | 2.58 | 0.93 | PRF |
| 22 | Cosmetics production | 2.85 | 0.88 | PRF | 1.42 | 0.78 | NPRF |
| 23 | Tie and dye | 3.65 | 0.93 | PRF | 2.62 | 0.98 | PRF |
| 24 | Catering business | 3.77 | 0.71 | PRF | 2.02 | 0.91 | NPRF |
| | Grand Mean | 2.71 | 0.81 | | 2.81 | 0.85 | |

Key: PRF - Preferred

NPRF - Not Preferred

Table 3: Mean Ratings on the Rural Women on Strategies for Effective Empowerment through Skills Acquisition

| S/N | Items on the strategies for effective empowerment. | Anambra State Rural Women | | | Rivers State Rural Women | | |
|-----|--|---------------------------|-------------|----------|--------------------------|-------------|----------|
| | | \bar{X} | SD | Decision | \bar{X} | SD | Decision |
| | The following strategies if adopted would lead to effective empowerment. | | | | | | |
| 25 | The government should disburse the funds for skills acquisition through the town unions to the actual beneficiaries. | 2.70 | 0.81 | A | 2.84 | 0.88 | A |
| 26 | Favouritism should be removed in giving loans to rural women. | 2.81 | 0.80 | A | 2.83 | 0.71 | A |
| 27 | The fund given to rural women should be for support and not to be refunded. | 2.72 | 0.72 | A | 2.79 | 0.73 | A |
| 28 | The money provided for skills acquisition should be increased to at least a million naira for effective performance. | 3.30 | 0.83 | A | 3.51 | 0.86 | A |
| 29 | Rural women fund for farming given individually and not in group and should be monitored for effective use. | 3.30 | 0.83 | A | 3.57 | 0.86 | A |
| 30 | There should be a continuous monitoring of the skills acquisition programme for more effectiveness. | 2.83 | 0.85 | A | 2.58 | 0.72 | A |
| 31 | Computer literacy should be included as skill acquisition for the rural women. | 2.51 | 0.81 | A | 2.64 | 0.99 | A |
| 32 | There should be orientation on how the fund should be utilized before disbursement. | 2.84 | 0.85 | A | 2.78 | 0.74 | A |
| 33 | The fund for skills acquisition should be inform of grant rather than revolving loan. | 3.25 | 0.96 | A | 3.12 | 0.90 | A |
| | Grand Mean | 2.88 | 0.84 | | 2.93 | 0.85 | |

Table 3 revealed various strategies for effective empowerment of rural women by the government. All the items from 25 – 33 are perceived as effective strategies to empower rural women. Such strategies include government to disburse money for skill acquisitions through town unions to

the actual beneficiaries and favouritism should be removed when giving loans to rural women. In order to make decision on skill acquisition empowerment, the null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test statistics.

Table 4: t-test Statistics on Skill Acquisition for Rural Women Empowerment

| Source of variation P<0.05 | N | Mean | SD | Df | t-cal | t-crit |
|-------------------------------|-----|------|------|------|-------|----------------------|
| Anambra rural women | 222 | 2.55 | 0.76 | | | |
| Rivers rural women | 138 | 2.81 | 0.85 | 3.58 | -2.95 | 1.96 Not significant |

Table 4 showed that t-calculated is -2.95 against t-critical which is 1.96 hence the null hypothesis is not rejected. There is no significant difference between the response of Anambra State rural women and Rivers State rural women on skill acquisition empowerment.

Table 5: t-test Statistics on Skills Preferred by Rural Women Empowerment

| Source of variation | N | Mean | SD | Df | t-cal | t-crit | P<0.05 |
|---------------------|-----|------|------|------|--------|--------|-----------------|
| Anambra rural women | 222 | 2.71 | 0.81 | | | | |
| Rivers rural women | 138 | 2.81 | 0.85 | 3.58 | -0.719 | 1.96 | Not significant |

Table 5 revealed that t-calculated is -0.719 while t-critical is 1.96. The null hypothesis of no significant difference was not rejected. All the rural women responded to the various skills they would prefer to be empowered.

Table 6: t-test Statistics on Strategies for Effective Empowerment by Government

| Source of variation | N | Mean | SD | Df | t-cal | t-crit | P<0.05 |
|---------------------|-----|------|------|-----|-------|--------|-----------------|
| Anambra rural women | 222 | 2.88 | 0.84 | | | | |
| Rivers rural women | 138 | 2.93 | 0.85 | 358 | 0.775 | 1.96 | Not significant |

In table 6, the t-calculated (0.775) is less than the t-critical (1.96). This indicated that there was no significant difference between the responses of rural women on strategies for effective empowerment by government.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings in table 1 revealed that most of the rural women have not been empowered in sewing and have not been provided with sewing machines, soap/detergent, hair dressing and any type of support. Item 2 indicated that some of them have been provided with sewing materials, although without training. However, majority of the respondents agreed that they have received loans to start farming, snailry, trading, fish farming and bakery industry although the loan was not enough to start their small scale business effectively. The null hypothesis 1 in table 4 revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of Anambra and Rivers women on skills acquisition. This findings is in line with the observations of Zanna (2000) who rightly pointed out that inadequate and in consistent funding has been the problems and constraints of skills acquisition of poverty alleviation initiatives in Nigeria. This situation may have risen for the fact that the agencies entrusted with skills acquisition on programmes have wrong conceptualization of the suffering of the rural women. It therefore goes without argument that the targeting of the poor has been inaccurate; consequently, there is a high degree of leakages of benefits to the poor.

The findings in table 2 indicated that the rural women preferred garri processing, soap making, farming, snailry, hair dressing, cosmetic production, tie and dye and catering to tailoring, trading, fish farming and bakery for their empowerment. The null hypothesis 2 revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of Anambra and Rivers States women on the skills acquisitions preferred for their empowerment. Although the Anambra rural women did not prefer to be empowered in snailry instead trading was preferred to them while the reverse becomes the case with the Rivers State rural women. The differences in choice might be due to the riverine nature of Rivers State and the dryness of Anambra land. The null hypothesis 2 revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of Anambra and Rivers States women on the skills acquisitions preferred for their empowerment. This is an indication that the rural women in the two states are eager to be empowered to improve their standard of living, train their children in schools and elevate their status in the society. Ohia (2000) was of the view that it is possible to use it to mobilize more and more people out of poverty so as to usher in a

more stable social environment for the rural women. Corroborating this statement, Sodangi in Enemu (2000) opined that their economic advancement and empowerment will enable them achieve their personal and family goals, such as participating in partisan politics, educating their children, owning landed property etc. The rural women should therefore strive for more economic empowerment through bigger business ventures so as to command respect based on their personally achieved socio-economic distribution.

The respondents in table 3 agreed that all the listed strategies should be adopted for effective rural women empowerment. The null hypothesis in table 3 revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of Anambra and Rivers State rural women on the strategies to be adopted for effective empowerment. Actually, the strategies provided are laudable but the researchers are skeptical about their implementations especially in the area of provision of fund for those activities. This fact is in line with the findings in Chukwudolue (2000) who noted that one of the criticisms of skills acquisition initiative in Nigeria has centred on the nature and scope of financing of their programme. In his findings, critics pointed specifically to the smallness of the amount voted for the fund vis-à-vis the large number of Nigerians classified as poor, the untimely release of funds and the gross mismanagement and abuse of resources of poverty alleviation initiatives. It is therefore important to emphasize that adequate provision of funds and appropriate utilization are cardinal to effective adoption of the strategies to improving skill acquisition programmes in both Anambra and Rivers States.

Conclusion

The present concern to alleviate the suffering of Nigerians especially the rural women has resulted in skills acquisition initiatives. The available skills acquisition programmes were listed which were capable of curbing unemployment crisis. The rural women gave their preferences to the listed items. The skills acquisition programme is laudable but the question of effectiveness of their implementation is in doubt. However, adequate provision of fund and monitoring of loans given to the beneficiaries are imperative for effective skills acquisition. No doubt, effective skills acquisition is cardinal for rural women empowerment. Their economic advancement and empowerment will enable them engage in bigger economic activities so as to contribute their quota to nation building, achieve their

personal and family goals, such as participation in partisan politics, educating their children and owning landed property.

Recommendations

Based on findings, the following recommendations are put forward for improved skills acquisition for rural women empowerment:

1. The Federal Government should increase fund for poverty alleviation in Nigeria as a whole and in the rural areas in particular.
2. The fund released for any type of skills acquisition should be properly monitored to avoid embezzlement and misappropriation.
3. The acquisition of basic computer skills should be encouraged and emphasized.
4. Non-governmental organizations in our countries should focus more on sustainable national development.
5. The rural women should be encouraged to form cooperative societies so that they can borrow money to solve their problems.
6. There should be equity in the distribution of our resources, goods and services.
7. More industries should be cited in both urban and rural areas to address the problem of unemployment and rural – urban drift.
8. The federal, state and local governments should join hands together in empowering women more in areas like garri processing, soap making, farming, snailry, hair dressing, cosmetic production, tie and dye and catering business.

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