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Overcoming Socio-Cultural Barriers on Economic Empowerment of Rural Women Through Entrepreneurship in Agriculture in South East State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined socio-cultural barriers on Economic Empowerment of Rural Women through Entrepreneurship in Agriculture in South East State Nigeria. The objectives were to examine the effect of socio-cultural barriers on girl early child bearing on rural women entrepreneurship ability in South East Nigeria; the effect of lack of education and skills on rural women entrepreneurship; and the effect of government neglect on economic empowerment of rural women entrepreneurial activities. Random sampling method was employed in selecting 45 co-operative societies from three South-East states. The population for the study was 513 and this served as the sample size. A structured questionnaire prepared in 5-point Likert Scale was administered to the respondents for data collection. Chi Square (X^2) Statistical tool was used to test the hypotheses and SPSS Version 20. The study revealed that socio-cultural barrier on girl child early marriage affecting the rural women has significant effect on rural women entrepreneurship ability in South East Nigeria; this was true since the calculated value of $X^2(3476.870)$ is $>$ the critical value (9.49) of X^2 . I was also found out that lack of education and skills have significant effect on rural women entrepreneurship ability. This was shown in the calculated value of $X^2(3211.105) >$ critical value

(9.49) of X^2 . The study observed that to a very large extent government neglect on rural women economic empowerment in entrepreneurial activities significantly affects their capabilities. The calculated value of $X^2(531.413)$ is > the critical value (9.49) of X^2 .

Keywords: Barriers, Empowerment, Entrepreneurship Development, Rural Women, Socio Cultural

Introduction

Nigeria is a developing country with predominant rural settings. Agriculture is the major economy and about 80 percent of its people live in the rural areas. The women work hard all day long in the domestic sphere and sometimes outside the home. In some cases, they even undertake works culturally assigned to men in the household division of labour; nevertheless, their labour is generally not recognized by the male members of the family as well as the large society (Hossain, 2011).

Michalewska-Pawlak (2015) opines that social and cultural context of entrepreneurship development refers to the ideas, values, and social environment, which can stimulate or limit individual entrepreneurship. Culture imposes certain standards of behaviour, which are the values and opinions of the community manifestation.

Mazonde and Carmichael (2016) note that in many countries, socio-cultural factors do not act in favour of women, where their traditional role is subordination to men, often in patronising relationships in which the woman's place is in the home rather than the workplace. History shows that out of all deprived groups in the world women have suffered the most. Their suffering knows no bounds when it comes to culture, race, region or religion. Our society has not ceased from being dominated by the male gender. The effect is that women are not treated as equal partners with men both inside and outside the home. In fact, they are regarded and treated as weaklings that are dependent on men for survival. Rural areas tend to be more traditional in regard to the gender issue. The gender issue in rural areas is usually a much stronger hindering factor to potential female entrepreneurs than it is in urban areas; their self-esteem and managerial skills being lower when compared to urban women and access to external financial resources being more difficult than in urban areas (Ezeibe, Diogu, Eze, Chiaha and Nwokenna, 2013).

Women play an indispensable role in farming and in improving the quality of life in rural areas. Vakil and Mohammad(2014) maintain that rural women play a key role in agricultural sector production by working with full passion in production of crops right from the soil preparation till post harvest and food security activities in developing countries. The important role of women rural empowerment in promoting more agricultural productivity and development in rural areas is now widely recognized.

Usually, women show interest in establishing their own business both in the urban and rural areas in order to surmount the problems of poverty generated by family income and increasing standard of living. In this regard Faley (1999) cited in Manashi and Marjina (2015) argued that women's development is not merely about reducing poverty by increasing productivity, but also about women's liberation and empowerment. It includes both controls over resources and

ideology, greater self-confidence and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external challenges (Sharma and Varma, 2008). In today's competitive world, there are various ways by which women get themselves empowered; one these areas, is entrepreneurship in Agriculture. Entrepreneurship development and its concomitant income generating activities are a feasible solution for empowering women who needs economic independence, the opportunity to have control over their lives, self-reliance, self-determination, and self-actualisation.

Reynold, Hay and Camp (2002) on a report of Global Entrepreneurship Monitor assert that one in eleven (8.9%) women is involved in entrepreneurship across the globe and Nigeria occupies the second position among the 22 countries where 14.1% of women have ventured into entrepreneurship. In almost all the developed countries in the world, women are putting their steps at par with the men in the field of business (Saidapur and Saidapur, 2012 cited in Amutha, 2014).

Ola and Aladekomo (2013) state that the challenges of women's empowerment are more cultural than technological as well as more about people and systems than about digital tools. Greater percentage of the population of Nigeria is rural and agriculture is the mainstay of the impoverished people's livelihood. Nigerian women are considered to be at the lowest rung of poverty ladder, the reason being that their rights to own property are impeded by cultural practices. Male supremacist structures of authority, whether in kinship structures or traditional rulers, often act to systematically marginalize women restricting their access to and control over land and economic enterprises. The significance of such access and control is located in the relationship between land rights, property rights and the sustainability of livelihood. Although entrepreneurship is an individual feature, as the result of knowledge, competence, skill, courage, ingenuity and activity, social and cultural context can strengthen or weaken the entrepreneurial attitudes of individuals. With these in mind, it becomes a matter of urgency to empower women socially, economically and technologically thereby assisting them to overcome some socio-cultural barriers and enable them become self-assertive in the society.

Statement of Problems

Traditional or tribal society in Nigeria expects women to be significant wage earners in the family. They labour in crop farming, fish farming, animal husbandry, snail and commerce alongside Nigerian men but are faced with many challenges which include accessing funding for new ventures and innovative activities, a lack of skills-based training, lack of education, poverty, girl early marriage/child bearing and limited family/government support. Women are not treated as equal partners with men both inside and outside the home. In fact, they are regarded and treated as weaklings that are dependent on men for survival. Rural areas tend to be more traditional in regard to the gender issue. The gender issue in rural areas is usually a much stronger hindering factor to potential female entrepreneurs

Objectives of the Study

The main objective was to examine socio-cultural barriers on Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in South East Nigeria through Entrepreneurship in Agriculture. The specific objectives were as follows:

- i. To examine the effect of socio-cultural barriers on rural women entrepreneurship ability in South East Nigeria;
- ii. To assert the effect of poverty on rural women entrepreneurship;
- iii. To determine the extent government neglect on rural women economic empowerment in entrepreneurial activities.

Concept of Rural Entrepreneurship

Rural entrepreneurship implies entrepreneurship emerging in rural areas. Rural entrepreneurship means rural industrialization. Industrialization cannot originate nor be sustained without entrepreneurship, whether rural or urban. Rural industrialization means encouraging location of large and small scale of production and services away from urban areas or planned shifting of units from urban areas to rural areas. Rural entrepreneurship can stop the increasing migration towards cities as it provides wide range of employment opportunities to the village people. Ezeibe, Okoroafor, Ngene, Eze, and Ugonabo (2013) opined that rural development is more than ever before linked to entrepreneurship. Institutions and individuals promoting rural development now see entrepreneurship as a strategic development intervention that could accelerate the rural development process. Entrepreneurship stimulates rural, economic and industrial development. It contributes to the development of rural and less developed areas. Entrepreneurship in rural areas is finding a unique blend of resources, either inside or outside of agriculture and it is usually community based, has strong extended family linkages and a relatively large impact on rural community. This is why entrepreneurship is considered as a prime mover in development.

Bisht and Sharma (1991) cited in Manshi et al, (2015) argue that the entrepreneurship of women is considered to be an effective instrument to the economic development and empowerment of women. Entrepreneurship is the only panacea to the growing unemployment among the rural women (Petrin 1992). The government, institutions and individuals promoting rural development now see entrepreneurship as a strategic development intervention that could accelerate the rural development process (Petrin, 1991). To accelerate economic development in rural areas as well as empower the rural women under the study economically, it is necessary to continuously promote entrepreneurship in these areas.

Chavda and Patel (2013); Mishra and Kiran, (2014) announce three basic principles of entrepreneurship which apply to the rural development as:

- i. Optimum utilization of local resources in an entrepreneurial venture by rural population – Better distributions of the farm produce results in the rural prosperity.
- ii. Entrepreneurial occupation rural population to reduce discrimination and providing alternative occupations as against the rural migration.
- iii. To activate such system to provide basic '6m': manpower, money, material, machinery, management and market to the rural population.

There are four types of Rural Entrepreneurship

- i. **Individual Entrepreneurship:** It is basically called proprietary or single ownership of the enterprise.
- ii. **Group Entrepreneurship:** This mainly covers partnership, private limited company and public limited company.
- iii. **Cluster Formation:** It covers NGOs, VOs, CBOs, SHGs and even networking of these groups. Cluster formation can be classified under formal and non-formal associations of a group of individuals formed on the basis of caste, occupation, income, etc.
- iv. **Cooperatives:** They are autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily for a common objective. An entrepreneur has to decide on a particular type of entrepreneurship based on the various options available.

The Concept of Socio-Cultural Environment

It refers primarily to man created intangible elements which affect people's behaviour, relationship, perception and way of life, and their survival and existence. Akhter and Sumi (2014), posit that socio-cultural environment in broad terms consists of both the social system and the culture of a people. In other words, the social-cultural environment consists of all elements, conditions and influences which shape the personality of an individual and potentially affect his attitude, disposition, behaviour, decisions and activities. Such elements include beliefs, values, attitudes, habits, forms of behaviour and life styles of persons as developed from cultural, religious, educational and social conditioning, (Bennett and Kassarian, 1972; Adeleke, Oyenuga and Ogundele, 2003). These elements are learned and are shared by a society and transmitted from generation to generation within that society. Thus, social-cultural environment, in relation to entrepreneurship, can be defined as consisting of all the elements of the social system and culture of a people which positively or negatively affect and influence entrepreneurial emergence, behaviour and performance, and entrepreneurship development in general. All such elements which condition the values, thinking and action of an individual with respect to entrepreneurship comprise the social-cultural environment of entrepreneurship.

The study of Akhter et al., (2014) reveals the impact of socio-cultural environment on entrepreneurship poses a challenge about the need for the Bangladeshi society to have new values and orientation favourable to entrepreneurship and emergence of entrepreneurs. The same author stated that socio-cultural factors can influence both positively and negatively entrepreneurial emergence in a society.

Concept of women Empowerment

The issue of 'women empowerment' is now a global phenomenon. Since the origin of the United Nations Organization, the issue of women's development has attracted the attention from the scholars worldwide, and the concept has come in the political agenda of a large number of countries. Women empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable and pro-poor growth and the achievement. It is about rights and equitable societies. There is no straightforward definition of women empowerment, because the concept of power cannot be streamlined internationally as

it differs from societal context (Snijders, 2009:23). Defining women empowerment process covers many influencing factors, meaning that any definition almost always captures part of the complete process. When defining women empowerment, one of the similarities in the literature is the concept of women's decision making power as an indicator of women empowerment (Snijders, 2009:16).

Saraswathy, et al. (2008:186 as cited in Snijders, 2009) defined women empowerment ideally as "(...) a continuous process where the powerless people become conscious of their situation and as well organize themselves to improve it and access opportunities, as an outcome of which women take control over their lives, set their own agenda, gain skills, solve problems and develop self-reliance". Women empowerment is a process of women gaining more access to a steady income and economic power or security (Malhotra, Schuler and Boender, 2002:9). Rhaman (2013) noted that the decade of 90s witnessed the rise of women's empowerment perspective which shot into prominence at Beijing Conference. Empowerment is more than just participation in decision -making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions. As feminist and other social theorist have shown, societies ascribe a particular set of abilities to social categories of people.

Empowerment is a process of positive change that improves women's fallback position and bargaining power within a patriarchal structure, and identify different causal pathways of change; material, cognitive, perceptual and relational. In short, empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action. Derera (2015) posits that Economic empowerment is not the sole protective factor that reduces the chances of gender violence, other factors such as education and modified cultural norms are important for the overall wellbeing of an individual.

Concept of Rural Women Entrepreneurship

Rural woman constitutes the family that leads to society and Nation. Overall development of women is necessary for the development of society and nation. The emergence of women entrepreneurs and their contribution to the national economy is quite visible in India. Sharma et al, (2012) noted that entrepreneurship development among rural women helps to enhance their personal capabilities and increase decision making status in the family and society as a whole. Entrepreneurship among rural women, no doubt improves the wealth of the nation in general and of the family in particular (Mishra et al, 2014).

Rural development (Bayero; 2013) is the process whereby concerted efforts are made in order to facilitate significant increase in rural resources productivity with the overall objectives of enhancing rural income, Increase employment opportunities and upgrade rural communities. It is concerned with the improvement of the living standards of over 70 percent of the population of the country living in rural areas. Women entrepreneurship is necessary for sustainable rural development because, despite the fact that women make up more than 50 percent of Nigerian population, they encounter many constraints when trying to take part in the transformation process.

Olawamimo, (2011) noted that women entrepreneurship involves women empowerment which means raising the awareness and consciousness of women towards act and laws that are detrimental to their progress and survival. It also means giving women the authority and legal power to participate without any hindrance. Karl (2006) affirms this when he noted that it is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation in decision making process, control and transformation actions, so as to enable them perform better towards improving themselves, their families and society as a whole.

Poverty and Women

There are widespread gender gaps in access to and control of resources, in power, voice, economic opportunities. Women bear the largest and direct costs of inequalities. The report of Beijing Platform for action, (1995) clearly stated that the gender disparities in economic power sharing are important contributing factor to the poverty of women.

The feminization of poverty is characterized by cultural conceptions of women as dependents of men; the gender division of labour within families, widespread discrimination in private and public realms, dichotomous labour market and pervasive discrimination that women and girls still face in schooling, housing and at work (Simon, 1988). All over the world, women are at the centre of poverty. Women specifically find it more difficult, if not impossible, to have access to loans from financial institutions, in which their male counterparts can easily get the same help.

Entrepreneurship and Economic Development

Stam and Spigel (2017) opine that Entrepreneurship is a process through which an individual creates opportunities for innovation leading to additional and novel contributions to society. The role of entrepreneurship in economic development varies from economy to economy depending upon its material resources, industrial climate and the responsiveness of the political system to the entrepreneurial function (Amrita, 2016).

The economic history of the presently advanced countries like USA, Russia and Japan supports the fact that economic development is the outcome for which entrepreneurship is an inevitable cause (Amrita, 2016). The author emphasized that the crucial and significant role played by the entrepreneurs in the economic development of advanced countries has made the people of developing and under developed countries conscious of the importance of entrepreneurship for economic development. In the views of Amrita (2016), the role of entrepreneurship in economic development of a country can best be put as “an economy is the effect for which entrepreneurship is the cause”.

Rural Women Entrepreneurs Development

A UNIDO report of (2003), states that people living in rural peripheries, especially women, shoulder the burden of the worlds’ poverty particularly in the Least Developed Countries and Sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, the development of rural women entrepreneurs is a path out of poverty. The interest and capacity of women to engage in entrepreneurship has the two-fold effect, empowering them economically and contributing to the equitable and inclusive economic growth of their countries. Women entrepreneurship development is the instrument of women empowerment. Mishra et al (2012) asserts that empowerment through entrepreneurship leads

to self-fulfilment and makes women aware about their status, existence, right and their position is in the society.

In modern era, women are becoming socially empowered, and economically empowered through business ownership. Manjunatha (2013) stated that the participation of women in the field of economy not only improves the nation but also improves that of women. Nigerian rural women entrepreneurs become part and parcel of the development of the nation. As rural women is one of the major human resources and opened to all natural resources. They even assist men in all walks of life along with agriculture and by participating in business, they can lower the concept of “brain and drain” within the nation by finding employment in their own rural area.

Importance of Rural Women Entrepreneurship

People living in rural peripheries, especially women, shoulder the burden of the worlds’ poverty. Women play a significant role to ensure their families’ well-being. They are regarded as the backbone of rural economies in developing countries like Nigeria and specifically in Africa (Abdi, 2014). Rakesh (2016), notes that there is a substantial contribution of rural women entrepreneurs in the growth of developed rural areas but the development of women entrepreneurship in rural areas is very low due to the fact that the rural women are faced with more challenges and problems. Kapinga and Montero (2017) assert that women entrepreneurs have significant contributions to the economies of sub-Saharan Africa. The report of OECD (2004) states that women create jobs for themselves and for others, they come with different solutions to current problems than their male counterparts and they exploit the entrepreneurial opportunities in directions that men could not.

Another analysis from Kenya suggests that giving women farmers the same education and inputs as men increases yields by as much as 22 percent. For Burkina Faso analysis of household panel data suggests that farm output could be increased 6–20 percent through a more equitable allocation of productive resources between male and female farmers.

Rural Women and Entrepreneurship in Agriculture

The Federal Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development emphasized that women account for 75 percent of the farming population in Nigeria, working as farm managers, and suppliers of labour. Though women constitute a large portion of the farming population, women’s possibilities in agriculture are hindered by formal and traditional rules. According to Fabiyi, Danladi, Akande and Mahmood (2007), women supply most of the needed labour in agricultural activities in Nigeria and this is the most important factor of production to farmers, as it is needed at the stages of agricultural production. Even women in seclusion (Purdah) generate substantial income through food crop processing (Yahaya, 2002).

Women produce 60-80% of the agricultural food in the country (Ogunbameru and Pandey, 1992; Buckland and Haleegoah, 1996). Ironkwe and Ekwe (1998) assert that more than 60% of the agricultural production is carried out by women in the Nigerian traditional setting. These women also get involved in other agricultural aspects like fisheries, rabbitry, poultry and as well as sheep and goat rearing other than crop production. Tumi (2016), notes that *studies have indicated that*

if women were empowered, fully supported, and had equal resources with men, they would boost the total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5% to 4% - enough to reduce the number of undernourished people in the world by between 100 and 150 million. The report further warned that there are still challenges in this sector in most parts of the continent and emphasized the importance of acknowledging some of the positive efforts that are effecting change.

Ayevbuomwan, Popoola and Adeoti (2016) notes that Agriculture plays a focal point in this development because it is a central source of employment and a catalyst in the GDP and wealth creation process in many African countries including Nigeria. The National report for 2004 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development indicates that at least 40% of Agricultural production activities and 85% of agricultural produce, processing and marketing are performed by women.

Women make up to 60 to 80 % of the agricultural labour force in Nigeria and produce two third of the food crops (Mahmood, 2001, World Bank, 2003; Ogunlela and Muktar, 2009). The results of the studies conducted by Ogunlela et al., (2009), show that women are most times ignored, underestimated and voiceless in influencing production and management decisions even within the household. When women lack access to land, they are not eligible for credit, membership of farmers' organizations, extension training and services (ICRW, 2013), their heavy workloads and lack of improved inputs also hinder them (Ayevbuomwan et al, 2016).

Socio-cultural barriers of Rural Women Empowerment

Social Barriers

The traditions and customs prevalent in Indian societies towards women sometimes stand as an obstacle before them to grow and prosper. Castes and religions dominate with one another and hinder women entrepreneurs too. In rural areas, they face more social barriers.

Family ties

Women in our country are very emotionally attached to their families. They are being very less practical. They are supposed to do all the household work, to look after the children and other members of the family. They are over burdened with family responsibilities like care of children extra attention to husband, and in laws which take away a lots of their time and energy.

Lack of family support

This has been suggested to have a negative impact on women's entrepreneurial behaviour (Inman, 2000). Iliya, Abdullahi, Adama and Audu (2017), note that the support of the husband in fulfilling family responsibilities can be extremely helpful for these females. Jamali, (2009), lamented that a study conducted in the UAE shows that husbands do not lay an active role in the daily household responsibilities – the fact that females need to leave their children in order to pursue entrepreneurial activities is not appreciated. Studies of (Halkias, 2011) and (Jamali, 2009) respectively reveal two opposing pictures in this respect. In some cases, families are very supportive and play an important and supportive role in helping female to develop business ideas whereas families are regarded as constraint by female. They receive no appreciation for their work and in most cases they are discouraged (Itani, Sidani and Baalbaki, 2011).

Lack of education

Even in 21st century, most rural women in Nigeria are lagging far behind in the field of education. Most of the rural women are illiterate. Women in rural areas who are educated are provided

either less or inadequate education than their male counterpart partly due to poverty, early marriage, low socioeconomic status, partly due to son's higher education. Lack of education is one of the biggest obstacles for rural women who want to start an enterprise. Due to lack of proper education, women entrepreneurs remain in dark about the development of new technology, new methods of production, marketing and other governmental support which will encourage them to flourish.

Girl child early marriage

Culturally, and especially in the rural setting, the girl child was not given equal opportunity to study like the boys; hence they had limited education and training which tended to affect effective performance in later life. This results to early marriage of a girl child and it is one of the major obstacles in the rural areas for women empowerment and education. In some parts of the nation, guardians and parents think that girls are their burden. So, they always try to marry them.

Male dominated society

In our constitution there are equal rights for men and women but in real sense equality does not exist in rural areas. Women are being neglected in many spheres of life. Women are not treated equal to men. As far as rural areas are concerned, people have a set attitude that women are only for household work. Their entry to business needs the approval of the head of the family. Entrepreneurship has traditionally been seen as a male preserve and male dominated. All these put a break in the growth of women entrepreneurs. Thus male entrepreneurs become hurdle in the success of women entrepreneurs.

Government Policies

Abdullahi et al, (2017), state that one of the major challenges of female entrepreneurship development in developing countries, particularly Nigeria, is government policies. These range from infrastructure to tax policies. The country lacks infrastructures like good roads to ease the transportation of products, poor electricity supply which forced entrepreneurs to use other sources of power generation like generators.

Lack of entrepreneurial aptitude

This kind of lack is a major concern for rural women entrepreneurs. They have no entrepreneurial bent of mind. Sometimes even after attending various training programmes on entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs fail to tide over the risks and troubles that may come up in an organizational working.

Inadequate information about improved technologies

It has been reported by different authors that inadequate information about the improved technologies was one of the constraints in agricultural production. Women do not have adequate access to agricultural information and innovations (Saito and Surling, 1993).

Lack of social awareness

Although the Nigerian government has initiated some policies to empower the women through education, it is very sad that their guardians and parents are not aware of sending their female

children to the educational institutions. They think that women education is not essential. So, for their lack of awareness some women still remain uneducated in the rural areas.

Inadequate security measures

Another challenge is that of security, the life of the people are not secured, insecurity has led to the destruction of investment properties. In Africa, self-employed females mostly operate in a hostile environment which is not suitable for business purposes (Halkias, Nwajiuba, Harkidakis and Caracatsanis, 2011). When there is insecurity it will be difficult for women to participate in entrepreneurship. Loss of human life, property, displacements of large segments of the communities, disruption of socio-economic activities and livelihoods, increased hatred between communities, environmental degradation and threat to water catchments areas, increased economic hardships as a result of loss of business. Insecurity shatters the comfort of predictable daily routines and expectations (United Nations, 2000).

Lack of access to finance

Overtime, researchers have been emphasizing that lack of access to finance is also one of the major barriers that female entrepreneurs face (Jamali, 2009; Roomi and Harrison, 2009). A majority of the females rely on family funding (Halkins, 2011) or personal savings (Itani, Sidani and Baalbaki, 2011). A study conducted in Nigeria discovered that after family funding, these female entrepreneurs rely on donations, bank loans, governmental schemes and charity by church (Halkias, 2011) which oftentimes are not granted.

Credit Discrimination

This is one of the social cultural factors that may hinder women participation in entrepreneurial activities which invariably affect their economic empowerment. Women report that bank officials tend to ignore them in meetings and prefer speaking to their male business partners. The fact that banks engage in gender bias prevents many women from even approaching them for financial assistance. Some women get so discouraged that they do not bother to seek bank financing and turn instead to informal savings groups. Often time, these women are requested, by the bank officials, to pay a certain percentage of the loan they apply for, present some cartons of beer and other items. Sadly, this does not guarantee that they will eventually receive the loan. Some are forced to open an account with the bank with a specific amount of money. They are threatened that they will not get the loan if they do not have an account with the bank. It is really sad. With this kind of attitude, how will poverty be alleviated and these women reasonably empowered economically?

Women Economic Empowerment

The term “empowerment” means to give somebody the power or authority to do something (Oxford Dictionary). Malik and Lugman (2005) describe empowerment as “the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them”. Among the different disempowered groups like: poor, ethnic, minorities etc, women are the ones which are cross-cutting category with all these groups.

Women empowerment implies that women have power and ability to engage in activities as their male counterpart but they have the least authority to do something at their own initiation. It necessitates the endorsement of various national Programmes and policies which ensures their right and authority to involve in all the developmental as well as economic activities carried out in a society, or in a nation.

The benefits of women's economic empowerment are well-known and documented in the development literature (Slegh, Barker, Kimonyo, Ndolimana and Bannerman, 2013). Investing in women's economic empowerment sets a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth (United Nations Women, 2015). Women's economic empowerment is central to economic growth and development of any nation (UNIDO, 2010). Women entrepreneurship is one avenue which can be used to economically empower women (Nachimuthu and Gunatharan, 2012).

Effect of Socio-cultural barriers on Rural Women Entrepreneurship

Cultural values make a significant impact in shaping the institutions in a country. Values and beliefs shape behaviour and, accordingly, may be assumed also to influence the decision to become self-employed (Mueller and Thomas, 2000). Abdi (2014), emphasized that cultural values can also be linked to entrepreneurship.

Rural women have less personal autonomy, fewer resources at their disposal, and limited influence over the decision-making processes that shape their societies and their own lives. Nchimbi (2002) and Maziku, Majenga and Mashenene (2014) conducted some studies on the relationship between women entrepreneurs and socio-cultural factors and they found that women entrepreneurs are constrained by normative factors including social dishonour or digress of women especially in rural areas. Also, Tundui (2012) investigated gender and small businesses involving 310 owner-managers in Tanzania. She found that, women are unlikely to aim high as compared to men due to different socialization experiences. However, most of these studies have concentrated on establishing on how socio-cultural factors affect women entrepreneurial behaviour.

Felicia, George, Owoyemi and Adegboye (2013) specified that, social and cultural values and beliefs regarding entrepreneurship have an important influence on motivational antecedents of entrepreneurial intention and business performance. This may have significant effects on their self-confidence; achievement-motivation and even their willingness to take risk, qualities that are closely linked to success in business (Rutashobya, 1995). OECD (2004) maintains that, women are faced with specific obstacles (household work, family responsibilities, child rearing, etc.) and unless these are overcome, they cannot have access to the same opportunities as men. Other obstacles are related to the lack of role models in entrepreneurship, weak social status, gendering of entrepreneurship, access to finance, maternity and child care policies (Riobu et al., 2016).

Factors such as Childcare, household work, cultural beliefs, social isolation, and unsafe neighbourhood environment are regarded as socio-cultural barriers preventing females from attaining recommended levels of physical activity, Lack of social support from family, living in

extended families, living in rural areas, absence of culturally appropriate facilities. Former President Bill Clinton while addressing the annual meeting of the Clinton Global in September 2009 lamented that women perform 66 percent of the world's work, produce 50 percent of the food, but earn 10 percent of the income and own 1 percent of the property (World Bank, Women, Business and the Law, 2012 Report). Globally women are more active in the Agricultural sector than men – 38% vs. 33% (SOFA Team and Doss, 2011). The women rural areas are more vulnerable than the women in urban areas and have less access to social facilities. The socio-economic structure, lack of education and social networks in the villages usually impede women from having their own ventures.

Although Nigeria has formulated several policies and laws supporting gender equality, but it is appalling that these policies have not translated into better living and working conditions for women. National development is being hampered by excluding the perspectives, skills, capabilities and dynamism of half the population seeing that women constitute a crucial group in the productivity equation (Emansion, 2012). The Nigerian government has implemented some plans through cooperatives to encourage entrepreneurial activity in rural areas but most failed due to corruption. Despite rural women's major role in agriculture and other rural activities, higher barriers in education and training limit their participation in more productive and remunerative work, perform managerial and leadership roles and participate fully in the development of their communities. Targeted action is needed to dismantle these barriers.

Enhancing entrepreneurship among women in villages would generate income, increase women's economic participation, improve resource utilization and reduce poverty. This would drastically reduce migration to urban areas and, as a result, make rural areas more sustainable places to dwell. Women's entrepreneurship in rural areas is considered an important factor in changing social attitudes towards women. Co-operative societies are the main empowering institutions in rural areas. They are the main players in creating and developing job creation and entrepreneurship in villages. Azkia (2011) has emphasized that many women in rural areas have entered entrepreneurship through co-operatives. Incidentally, the performance of these societies in rural areas has not been as satisfactory as expected. Jamshidi et al., (2013) noted that socio-cultural, economic, educational, managerial, psychological, technical, and regulatory factors to be the main barriers to female entrepreneurship in Miankuh village in Iran. According to the same author, the misconception of women's presence in the labour market and in business, lack of belief in the ability of women in entrepreneurship, lack of organizations for supporting women's entrepreneurship and family constraints have also been considered as the main barrier with respect to socio-cultural factors in Mian Kuh village.

Overcoming Socio-Cultural barriers affecting Rural Women through Entrepreneurship

Zuofa (2008) reveals that social norms, poor incentives, ignorance, poverty, illiteracy and cultural institution against women in most societies in developing countries are barriers to the advancement of women. Women particularly those in the rural areas need education, economic and social power to actualize their advancement, hence the need for a comprehensive women empowerment through entrepreneurship. To promote entrepreneurship we need to know the barriers that affect entrepreneurship to overcome the barriers and promote new policies and

measures to create new ventures that will empower the rural women economically. The barriers are not the same for all the individuals in society (Abdi, 2014).

Specialized business development institutions are often not available or their services are not affordable for rural entrepreneurs. For women entrepreneurs, specialized support institutions hardly exist to cater to their specific needs. Thus, entrepreneurial and technical training, advisory and information programs often have to be carried out within a non-conventional set-up. As a guiding principle, the RWE Program seeks to work with existing organizations on the basis of an assessment of their absorptive capacities and initiatives. Through training of trainers, advisors and managerial staff as well as the development of practical and effective methodologies and tools, projects strengthen the technical and managerial capabilities of the partner institutions to deliver specialized services to women and rural entrepreneurs.

Education and training are essential components of any strategy to improve agricultural and non-farm productivity and pull households out of poverty. Learning about improved production technologies and methods, new products and markets, business and life skills (such as health management, decision-making, self confidence, or conflict management) can make a big difference.

Supporting the initiatives of groups, private sector associations and communities to develop their self-help programs is important in view of scarce service institutions in rural areas and weak advocacy capacity of rural and women entrepreneurs. Self-help groups empower micro- and small entrepreneurs to identify their needs, plan and implement their own projects, share the benefits of their collective efforts and evaluate their programs and projects. Rural and women entrepreneurs can establish common projects such a collective marketing, bulk purchasing, common facilities, e.g. to share machinery and equipment, a warehouse or a vehicle or office facilities; group-owned enterprises; group lending.

Research Methodology

The random sampling method was used to select 45 co-operative societies from three South-East states. The population for the study was 513 and this served as the sample size. A structured questionnaire prepared in 5-point Likert Scale was administered to the respondents for data collection. After collecting the questionnaire, the researchers sorted them and used only 381 which were the ones valid for the study. Chi Square (X^2) Statistical tool was used for the testing of the formulated hypotheses.

Table 1: Socio-Cultural barriers affecting by the rural women economic empowerment

S/NO	Statement	Response (Likert Scale)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Lack of education is a factor that affects the economic empowerment of rural women	SA	190	49.87
		A	175	45.93
		U	11	2.89
		SD	5	1.31
		D	0	0
		381	100	
2	Lack of entrepreneurship training also causes a barrier to effective economic empowerment of the rural women.	SA	145	38.06
		A	164	43.04
		U	28	7.35
		SD	15	3.94
		D	29	7.61
		381	100	
3	Male dominated societies hinder the economic empowerment of the rural women.	SA	79	20.73
		A	53	13.91
		U	120	31.51
		SD	87	22.83
		D	42	11.02
		381	100	
4	Family ties affect entrepreneurial development of the rural women.	SA	103	27.03
		A	34	8.92
		U	42	11.02
		SD	96	25.21
		D	106	27.82
		381	100	
5	Lack of effective family/spousal support affects your economic empowerment through entrepreneurship.	SA	279	73.23
		A	65	17.06
		U	10	2.62
		SD	15	3.94
		D	12	3.15
		381	100	
6	Inability to have access to credit facility is one of the major factors that affect the economic empowerment of the rural women.	SA	287	75.33
		A	46	12.07
		U	4	1.05
		SD	23	6.04
		D	21	5.51
		381	100	
7	Early girl child marriage is a socio-cultural factor that stands as a barrier against the economic empowerment of the rural women.	SA	156	40.94
		A	142	37.27
		U	7	1.84
		SD	42	11.02
		D	34	8.92
		381	100	

S/NO	Statement	Response (Likert Scale)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
8	Lack of social awareness of the entrepreneurial abilities of the rural women makes people to look down on them and this attitude affects their economic empowerment.	SA	186	48.81
		A	144	37.80
		U	23	6.04
		SD	17	4.46
		D	11	2.89
		381	100	
9	Poor quality road network affects the ease of the transportation of products.	SA	286	75.07
		A	75	19.69
		U	0	0.00
		SD	10	2.62
		D	10	2.62
		381	100	
10	Corrupt practices by the officials of agencies such as financial institutions, entrepreneurial agencies, and other related agencies cause a hindrance to the economic empowerment of the rural women.	SA	286	75.07
		A	95	24.93
		U	0	0.00
		SD	0	0.00
		D	0	0.00
		381	100	

Source: Authors Field Survey; 2017

Table 2: Find out how to overcome these socio-cultural barriers for economic empowerment of the rural women.

S/NO	Statement	Response (Likert Scale)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
11	Gender equality can be solved to a great extent through considerate policy regimes favouring women empowerment and entrepreneurship.	SA	210	55.12
		A	156	40.94
		U	7	1.84
		SD	3	0.79
		D	5	1.31
		381	100	
12	Rural women can be empowered economically through the creation of economic groups such as entrepreneurship clubs, self groups, co-operatives.	SA	198	51.97
		A	164	43.04
		U	6	1.57
		SD	8	2.11
		D	5	1.31
		381	100	
13	Developing knowledge of and functional co-operatives, social and low-investment enterprise as these forms may have most scope for assisting the target groups of poverty	SA	176	46.19
		A	182	47.77
		U	7	1.84
		SD	7	1.84
		D	9	2.36
		381	100	
14	Self-help groups empower micro and small entrepreneurs to identify their needs, plan and implement their own projects, share the benefits of their collective efforts and evaluate their programs and projects	SA	186	48.82
		A	149	39.11
		U	26	6.82
		SD	16	4.20
		D	4	1.05
		381	100	
15	Regular monitoring and implementation of policy regulations related to women entrepreneurs at the national and sub-national levels is very important in order to ensure consistent application for rural women economic empowerment.	SA	225	59.06
		A	115	30.18
		U	22	5.77
		SD	12	3.15
		D	7	1.84
		381	100	
16	Developing supportive networks can lead to the empowerment of rural women economically through entrepreneurship	SA	216	56.69
		A	147	38.58
		U	6	1.57
		SD	4	1.05
		D	8	2.11
		381	100	

17	Ensuring that all entrepreneurship-focused agencies and officials understand their role in supporting women's entrepreneurship.	SA	190	49.87
		A	164	43.04
		U	11	2.89
		SD	5	1.31
		D	11	2.89
			381	100

Source: Authors Field Survey 2017

Table 3: To evaluate the extent to which government has gone in promoting entrepreneurship for economic empowerment of the rural women.

S/NO	Statement	Response (Likert Scale)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18	The government has undauntedly promoted awareness campaign among rural women, communities, and training institutions, about the benefit of training women in non-traditional trades, in using new technologies, and in traditionally male occupations.	SA	169	44.36
		A	126	33.07
		U	30	7.87
		SD	17	4.46
		D	39	10.24
			381	100
19	The government has made credit facilities available and accessible for rural women entrepreneurs	SA	69	18.11
		A	52	13.65
		U	62	16.27
		SD	89	23.36
		D	109	28.61
			381	100
20	Government ensures that all the agencies instituted for women are monitored to ensure that they comply with the mandate.	SA	54	14.17
		A	78	20.47
		U	27	7.09
		SD	96	25.21
		D	129	33.86
			381	100
21	Government has provided adequate security for protection of products and plants used in entrepreneurial activities.	SA	45	11.81
		A	23	6.04
		U	27	7.09
		SD	100	26.25
		D	186	48.81
			381	100
22	Government has embarked on aggressive campaign on girl education.	SA	286	75.07
		A	75	19.69
		U	5	1.31
		SD	5	1.31
		D	10	2.62
			381	100

23	The Government has established entrepreneurial training centres for rural women.	SA	46	12.07
		A	4	1.05
		U	23	6.04
		SD	21	5.51
		D	287	75.33
		381	100	

Source: Authors Field Survey 2017

TEST OF HYPOTHESES

Hypotheses

The main objective was to examine socio-cultural barriers on Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in South East Nigeria through Entrepreneurship in Agriculture. The specific objectives were as follows:

- i. To examine the effect of socio-cultural barriers of girl early child bearing on rural women entrepreneurship ability in South East Nigeria;
- ii. To assert the effect of lack of education and skills on rural women entrepreneurship;
- iii. To determine the effect of government neglect on rural women economic empowerment in entrepreneurial activities.

Hypothesis One

Ho: Socio-cultural barrier of girl early child bearing have no significant effect on rural women entrepreneurship ability in South East Nigeria;

H₁: Socio-cultural barriers of girl early child bearing have significant effect on rural women entrepreneurship ability in South East Nigeria;

Table 4: Observed and expected frequencies of Socio-cultural barriers of girl early child bearing have significant effect on rural women entrepreneurship ability in South East Nigeria

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Strongly agree	310	722.0	1275.0
Agree	55	722.0	271.0
Undecided	0	0	0
Disagree	10	722.0	-456.0
Strongly Disagree	6	722.0	-613.0
Total	381		

Source: SPSS Version 20

Table 5: Test Statistics

	Observed and expected frequencies of socio-cultural barriers affecting the rural women economic empowerment
Chi-Square	3476.870 ^a
Df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Source: SPSS Version 20

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 722.0.

Decision Rule

Reject Ho if the calculated value of X^2 is greater than the critical value of X^2 read from the data. Do not reject if otherwise.

Decision:

Since the calculated value of $X^2(3476.870)$ is greater than the critical value (9.49) of X^2 we reject the null hypothesis (Ho) and accept the alternate hypothesis (H_1) which states that the socio-cultural barrier on girl child early marriage affecting the rural women has significant effect on rural women entrepreneurship ability in South East Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

H₀: Lack of education and skills have no significant effect on rural women entrepreneurship ability;

H₁: Lack of education and skills have significant effect on rural women entrepreneurship ability;

Table 6: Lack of education and skills have significant effect on rural women entrepreneurship ability

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Strongly agree	345	533.4	867.6
Agree	15	533.4	543.6
Undecided	0	0	0
Disagree	5	533.4	-484.4
Strongly disagree	6	533.4	-478.4
Total	281		

Source: SPSS Version 20

Table 7: Test Statistics

	Observed and expected frequencies of Lack of education and skills have significant effect on rural women entrepreneurship ability.
Chi-Square	3211.105 ^a
Df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Source: SPSS Version 20

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 533.4.

Decision:

Since the calculated value of $\chi^2(3211.105)$ is greater than the critical value (9.49) of χ^2 we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternate hypothesis (H_1) which states that Lack of education and skills have no significant effect on rural women entrepreneurship ability.

Hypothesis Three

Ho: To a very large extent government neglect on rural women economic empowerment in entrepreneurial activities significantly has no affect on their capabilities

H₁: To a very large extent government neglect on rural women economic empowerment in entrepreneurial activities significantly affects their capabilities.

Table 8: Observed and expected frequencies for testing to an extent government neglect on rural women economic empowerment in entrepreneurial activities significantly affects their capabilities.

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Strongly agree	303	457.8	211.2
Agree	45	457.8	99.8
Undecided	0	0	0
Disagree	20	457.8	89.2
Strongly disagree	13	457.8	23.8
Total	381		

Source: SPSS Version 20

Table 9: Test Statistics

	Observed and expected frequencies for testing to extent government neglect on rural women economic empowerment in entrepreneurial activities significantly affects their capabilities.
Chi-Square	531.413 ^a
Df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Source: SPSS Version 20

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 457.8.

Decision:

Since the calculated value of $\chi^2(531.413)$ is greater than the critical value (9.49) of χ^2 we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternate hypothesis (H_1) which states that to a very large extent the government neglect on rural women economic empowerment in entrepreneurial activities significantly affects their capabilities

Findings

- i. Socio-cultural barriers of girl early child bearing have significant effect on rural women entrepreneurship ability in South East Nigeria; the calculated value of $X^2(3476.870)$ is greater than the critical value (9.49) of X^2 .
- ii. It was revealed that lack of education and skills have significant effect on rural women entrepreneurship ability; the calculated value of $X^2(3211.105)$ is greater than the critical value (9.49) of X^2 .
- iii. The study observed that to a very large extent government neglect on rural women economic empowerment in entrepreneurial activities significantly affects their capabilities. The calculated value of $X^2(531.413)$ is greater than the critical value (9.49) of X^2 .

Conclusion

Rural women have many socio-economic barriers that affect their economic empowerment through entrepreneurship in agriculture and that they can possibly overcome them, make impact in their environments and equally be empowered economically.

Recommendations

The study recommended that:

- i. It ensuring that all the agencies instituted for rural/urban women entrepreneurs are monitored to ensure that they comply with the statutory mandate, provision of adequate security for protection of agric-products and plants, aggressive campaign on girl education, establishment of entrepreneurial training centres for rural women by the government assist the rural women to overcome the effect of socio-cultural barriers on the economic empowerment of the rural women.
- ii. There is the need to create economic groups such as entrepreneurship clubs and developing supportive networks to assist these rural women for their economic empowerment through entrepreneurship in Agriculture.
- iii. Developing a community-based training for rural women will go a long way to encourage them to overcome those socio-economic barriers. Also, developing knowledge of and functional co-operatives, social and low-investment enterprise as these forms may have most scope for assisting the target groups of poverty while also offering benefits to the wider communities within which the target group live.
- iv. There is the need for gender-responsive policy approaches that support women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship in Nigeria.
- v. The issue of gender equality can be solved to a great extent through considerate policy regimes favouring women empowerment and entrepreneurship.

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