



ESTABLISHMENT OF CREATIVE INDUSTRIES; A PANACEA FOR RURAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN ORU EAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract:

Women, from history, are known as active contributors towards the socio-economic development of any nation. From family units to the larger society, women are prominent in virtually all human activities that generate development. Rural women particularly constitute the bulk of the rural population however; they face lots of structural challenges which tend to limit their potentials in contributing meaningfully both to themselves and to rural development. Most of them are poor and voiceless because they lack access to education, finance, facilities and decision making. They may continue to be helpless unless their potentials are developed and harnessed through creative entrepreneurial skills and establishment of creative industries. This paper therefore x-rayed the need for the establishment of creative industries for the empowerment of rural women. It highlighted the plight of rural women, rural women empowerment and creative industries. It also discussed the challenges of women entrepreneurial efforts and suggested a way forward.

Keywords: creative industries, creative entrepreneurial skills, women empowerment

1. Introduction

Rural women simply refers to women who live in rural areas, that is, parts of the state not properly developed with social amenities, infrastructures and other facilities that make life worth living. According to Ngwu (2006), rural women constitute the highest percentage of the rural dwellers in Nigeria. It is imperative to note that most of these women are petty traders, subsistent farmers and illiterate house wives who have no reasonable source of income; yet, they are the busiest category of people in terms of

time burden. The potentials of these women can be harnessed and utilized for their self-improvement and for sustainable rural development through the establishment of creative industries.

The Plight of Rural Women

Rural women play prominent roles both at the family and community levels. They are instrumental in the achievement of food security, income generation, as well as improving rural livelihoods and over all wellbeing. Obidiegwu (2013) asserted that women are instrumental in achieving the Millennium Development Goal. This is because the impact of all their efforts is felt right from the family before it extends to the outside environment. This is in concord with the maxim *“educate a man, you educate an individual, educate a woman, you educate a nation”*. Rural women contribute not only to agriculture and rural enterprises but fuel local and global economies. Saleh and Lasisi (2011) observed that rural women are hard-working and resourceful group which if properly harnessed can provide the impetus required by the government to achieve its integrated rural development programme.

Rural women face persistent structural constraints that prevent them from fully enjoying their human rights, hamper their efforts to improve their lives as well as those of others around them. In rural areas, women’s participation in development activities is limited, as a result of culturally assigned roles coupled with inadequate infrastructures and services. A woman’s traditional duty is to keep the home, work in the farm, and teach her female children the rudiments of home keeping. This perception has led some of the rural women to resign to fate, believing that they cannot go beyond their culturally assigned roles.

A good number of rural women lack means of livelihood and opportunity for economic independence. According to Onyeagu and Essiet (2002, p.23) women are *“discriminated against in the employment field, poverty has assumed the status of their second nature. Ill health, inadequate shelter and blighted environment, malnutrition, inability to provide for their children are some of the features of their poverty-ridden life”*. Though this may not be applicable to the generality of women, the researcher is of the view that most rural women fit into Onyeagu and Essiet’s description. The UN population Information Network, (n.d) in recognition of the predicament of the rural women informs us that:

“In all parts of the world, women are facing threats to their lives, health and well-being. They receive less education than men and are over-represented among the poor and

powerless. Achieving change requires policy and programme actions that will improve women's access to the scarce and valued resources of their societies (particularly secure livelihoods and economic resources), alleviate their disproportionate household responsibilities, remove legal and social impediments to their participation in the public sphere, eliminate the specter of domestic and sexual violence from their daily lives and raise social awareness through effective programmes of education and mass communication."

This underscores the imperativeness of capacity building programme as an indispensable tool for empowering rural women and ensuring their optimal contribution to sustainable rural and national development.

Rural women empowerment

Empowerment can be seen as a process of 'giving power' to or strengthening the existing capabilities of an individual to be more productive in his endeavors. Akomolafe (2006) defined women empowerment as the development of mental and physical capacity, power and skills in women for them to operate meaningfully in their social milieu, thereby experiencing a more favorable level of social recognition and subsequently enhance their economic status.

The Federal government of Nigerian, in an effort to empower the rural women implemented programmes like Better Life Programme for Rural Women 1987, Family Support Programme 1994, Family Economic Advancement Programme 1997, National Poverty Eradication Programme 1999, and Poverty Alleviation Program in 2000. However, it is worrisome to note that the impact of those programmes is insignificant in relation to the poor status of the rural women.

Azikiwe (as cited in Mbara, Anurugwo & Alatare, 2015) described an empowered woman as a woman who can and has transformed herself into a subject rather than an object, the one who has access to and control over resources such as land, money and assets. An empowered woman has power over economic, social, psychological, health and cultural situations. Rural women's empowerment in this context therefore entails equipping the rural women through capacity building programmes so that they can contribute meaningfully both to themselves and the rural community. The aim of women economic empowerment is to enhance the socio-economic status of women through creating an economic culture that will address the technical know-how in the pursuit of women's multi-faceted roles, retooling them with various economic ventures as well as enhancing the emancipation of women from

poverty (Danjuma, Muhammad & Alkali, 2013). This 'retooling' entails the acquisition of entrepreneurial and vocational skills through capacity building programmes which will equip them in involving in various income generating ventures to make them financially independent. The capacity building programmes to empower rural women when focused on creative entrepreneurial skills and creative industries will in no small measure equip them to deal with the dynamism of modern society.

Creative Industries

Creativity can be seen as the ability to use one's imagination to generate new ideas, produce new things or come up with better solutions to existing problems.

United Nations Development Organization UNIDO (2013) defined creativity as the untapped and innate human resource, whose potential economies are yet to harness. UNIDO noted that it is the inspirational energy and knowledge that spurs one to undertake new industrial ventures. This implies that the creative ability of an individual motivates him to involve in productive ventures like industrial and or entrepreneurial activities. It is imperative to note that rural women are endowed with unharnessed creative potentials which can only manifest when they are empowered through creative industries.

UNIDO (2013) defined creative industries as those industries that have their origin in individual creativity, skill, and talent, and have potential for job creation through the generation and exploitation of ideas or imagination. Similarly, British Council (2011) defined creative industry as the socio-economic potential of activities that trade with creativity, knowledge and information. Other names associated with creative industries are cultural industries and creative economy. Creative industries include a broad spectrum of subsectors – art, crafts, design, textiles, leather, furniture, (slow) food, and even community-based tourism related services – that allow for innovative and expanded opportunities for income generation (UNIDO, 2013).

This offers the rural women ample opportunity to develop and utilize their talents in the multifarious vocational skills in order to be self-reliant as well as improve their status in the society. Vocational skills are empirical skills that individuals acquire in a specific area of interest. Individuals learn vocational skills from hands-on experience. In other words, attention and emphasis in this context is on the acquisition of practical skills.

Creative Industries and Rural Women Empowerment in Oru-East LGA

Creative industries cover a wide range of income generating activities capable of liberating the rural women in Oru-East from abject poverty. Oru-East rural women are known for being very industrious in their respective endeavors which include; subsistent farming, petty trading, palm oil processing among others in addition to domestic chores and home management. It is no gain saying that they will perform creditably when involved in non-formal training programmes in the wide scope of creative industries which include art, craft, design, textile, fashion, music, and advertising. These sub-sectors of creative industries when established could metamorphose in to non-formal education programmes for training the rural women in acquiring skills in the following income generating activities; hair dressing, tailoring, interior and exterior decoration, embroidery, fashion designing, pedicure and manicure, cake deigning, bead making, weaving with wool, crochet work, soap making, local disinfectant making, air fresher and perfume making, bakery among others.

Rural women in Oru-East have the potentials and capabilities to learn, acquire and develop these skills only that they are incapacitated by structural challenges. Hence, the acquisition and utilization of creative skills by these rural women will equip them to start up small and medium enterprises and subsequently advance to full-fledged creative entrepreneurs.

Creative entrepreneurship can be seen as an act of is setting up a business or being self-employed in one of the creative industries. Creative entrepreneurs invest in either their own talents or those of other people. Howkins (2001) opined that creative entrepreneurs use creativity to unlock the wealth that lies within them. In other words, effective management of creative ventures 'unlocks' wealth. He further identified three unique characteristics of creative entrepreneur as creativity, collaboration and entrepreneurship.

Creativity skills involves the generation of new ideas, evaluating them effectively and taking action to turn them into new products and services. It enables one to use insight in generating solutions to problems. It also involves the development of new methods, procedures and rules rather than using the existing standards. Rural women when properly guided will apply same creative skills used in solving domestic problems in art, design, craft or whatever training programme they are exposed to. Collaboration has to do with connecting and working with partners, clients, and other significant players in one's network. This will in no small measure encourage team work among the rural women. Such training can be organized for them through their various women organizations. Entrepreneurship implies identifying opportunities in

the marketplace and using business skills to turn ideas into products into profits (Howkins, 2001). It is imperative to note that a lot of opportunities and ideas exist, hence the need to train these rural women in the vocational skills enumerated above so as to turn their ideas in these skills in to 'products' and 'profits'. This will in turn equip them financially to contribute to both self and rural development.

Creative industries are instrumental to the improvement of national economy. For instance, craft as a sub-sector of creative industry contributed 33.2% GDP in Indonesia in 2010. This sector consists of thousands of SMEs in Indonesia and is a major source of new entrepreneurship among the youth of the country (Santi, Rucita, Ummu & Ilma, 2012). Similarly, Oru-East rural women when trained in various craft activities will equally advance to full-fledged creative entrepreneurs.

Creative industries are vehicles of cultural identity that play an important role in fostering cultural diversity. Cultural identity includes cultural activities uniquely associated with a particular social group. In Oru-East, this ranges from traditional wears, costumes, adornment to cultural display, music and food types and habits. Cultural identity is important in linking social groups in communities and contributing to social cohesion.

According to Creative Economy Report (2010) the manifestations of a people's culture - customs, rituals, artifacts, music and so on - permeate the daily lives of men, women and children and constitute a significant element in providing for their education, culture, happiness and well-being. Every society is denoted with specific material culture; similarly, the production of such materials in creative industries will help in reinforcing the values of such materials in relation to cultural identity. Rural women's involvement in the production of traditional costumes used for adornments in cultural festivals and ceremonies for instance, will instill in them a sense of responsibility as stake holders of community's cultural development.

The involvement of rural women in creative industries is instrumental in achieving the millennium development goals especially in the following areas; eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, improvement of maternal health , ensuring environmental sustainability and development of a global partnership for development. These are the challenges of this generation and should not be addressed without the involvement of rural women who constitute a significant percentage of the country's population. Hence, their empowerment in the creative industries will place them in a better position to contribute to the solutions of national challenges. The Creative Economy Report (2010) noted that the creative industries have a multitude of dimensions and contributes to economic, social, cultural and sustainable development in a number of ways. It

promotes economic diversification, revenues, trade and innovation, contributes to employment, particularly for women and the youth and fosters social inclusion.

Challenges of Rural Women's Creative Entrepreneurial Efforts

Rural women in spite of their potentials and capabilities to excel in entrepreneurship and creative industries are faced with structural and socio-cultural constraints which make it difficult for them to realize their potentials as leaders in business. Mbara, Anurugwo and Alatare (2015) observed that the following challenges are associated with women entrepreneurship; traditional gender roles, access to finance and respect, women as low risk takers and inability to achieve growth.

Entrepreneurship is still considered as male dominated field, and it may still be difficult to surpass these conventional views. In fact, the manifestation of the gender phenomenon is often reflected in the size of the business, product line, growth composition and management of women owned enterprises. Similarly, successful entrepreneurship requires access to financial support. To this effect, loans are obtained from banks to lending institution at the presentation of collateral which in most cases is landed property. But the traditions of most communities prohibit women from owning land. This severely limits their capacity to start their own business.

Women generally are low risk takers probably as a result of their primary responsibility for dependents. More often than not women perceive risk as involving loss, danger, ruin and hurt, and therefore involve to a low extent in taking business risk. Most women entrepreneurs are unable to achieve growth especially sales growth. Since women have problems in assembling external resources, they start less ambitious firms with their own available resources, which definitely affect the future growth of the firm.

Adegoroye and Adegoroye (2008) observed that low literacy level of the rural women denied them access to vital information that can improve their lots economically. Similarly, Izuagba, Nwigwe and Nwamuo (2014) noted that illiteracy keeps women marginalized and is a major obstacle to the reduction of extreme poverty in a technology-driven world. For the fact that most rural women are illiterates they find it difficult to cope with activities that require functional literacy skills in creative economy.

Malami (2008) identified lack of proper funding as one of the fundamental problems blocking the chances of women from attaining economic empowerment and that if provided, it will assist to empower the economic position of women and consequently reduce their level of poverty.

The Way Forward

Based on the envisaged challenges of rural women creative entrepreneurial efforts the researcher therefore suggests that the following strategies should be adopted to ensure the empowerment of rural women through the establishment of creative industries.

1. The traditional gender role of women which limits them to domestic duties should be discouraged through awareness/enlightenment programmes. Women should be encouraged to compete with their male counterparts in all facets of life including economic ventures.
2. Government micro credit as well as private micro finance programmes should assist rural women in starting up Small and Medium Enterprise after their training in the creative industries.
3. Women are encouraged to enroll in to adult literacy programmes to update their knowledge and acquire the necessary skills and knowledge that will help them in life ventures. This will make them to be functionally literate as well as engage in activities that require literacy skills in the creative industries. Besides, literacy skill will equip them with the courage require for risk bearing in business ventures.
4. More representation of women in decision making positions in government, non-governmental organization and financial institutions, would undoubtedly promote change and help in the gender sensitization process needed to make financial support readily available for women entrepreneurs.

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