

Empirical Extrapolation of The Effective Women Empowerment Policy Framework for Poverty Reduction in a Gender Divided Multi-Polar World: The Nigerian Experiment

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Abstract- Poverty remains one of Nigeria's most prevailing developmental issues, disproportionately affecting women folks as a result of structural imbalances and inequalities in access to education, economic opportunities, assets, and political power. In spite several policy interventions by different political administration in Nigeria since independence till date, women continue to witness upper altitudes of vulnerability, unemployment together with income poverty. Howbeit, this paper re-examines the role of women empowerment as a strategic policy instrument for poverty reduction in Nigeria. Anchored on empowerment theory and Gender and Development (GAD) perspectives, the study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach using secondary data from policy documents, national statistics, and empirical literature. The paper develops a comprehensive women empowerment policy framework that integrates economic, educational, legal, digital, and socio-cultural dimensions. Outcomes from the study depicts that sustainable poverty reduction in Nigeria is unattainable without deliberate, inclusive, and gender-responsive empowerment policies. The study thus concludes that effective implementation, institutional coordination, and robust monitoring mechanisms are critical for translating women empowerment policies into tangible poverty reduction outcomes.

Index Terms- Women Empowerment, Policy Framework, Poverty Reduction, Gender Divided Multi-Polar World

I. INTRODUCTION

In a multi-polar world that is tailored along ethnic, religion gender and sexism divide, myriads multi-

dimensional developmental issues exist of which poverty is one. Poverty itself varies from one economies to another. However, in less developed economies, the level of poverty is higher than those of the developed ones. Also, in this clime, that is, the less developed economies, the income inequality between the rich populace and the poor populace is very wide compared to the developed economies that have succeeded in bridging the poverty gap. Like any other developing economies in the multi-polar world, Nigeria as a sovereign entity also witness different levels of multi-dimensional poverty. Poverty in Nigeria remains widespread despite the country's abundant human and natural resources. As documented in the national and international development reports, women constitute a significant fraction of the poor, more especially in rural communities where access to education, finance, healthcare together with productive assets is limited (National Bureau of Statistics; NBS, 2022). Again, as chronicled by NBS (2022), Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) showed that about 63% of Nigeria's population is multidimensionally poor. Gender-based inequalities constantly inhibit women's economic involvement and hamper their capacity to escape poverty. Women empowerment has increasingly been recognized as a critical driver of poverty reduction and sustainable development. Globally, empirical evidence suggests that empowering women improves household welfare, enhances productivity and promotes inclusive economic growth (World Bank,

2020). In Nigeria, however, empowerment policies have often been fragmented, weakly coordinated, and inadequately implemented. Extant works by Aderinto & Akande, 2003, Ojobo, 2016 & Babalola, 2018, affirm that in spite of the various policy frameworks and initiatives launched by successive political regimes in Nigeria, most women in the country remain poor due to faulty implementation of such policy initiatives, schemes and programmes. Further still, irrespective of several national initiatives like National Gender Policy (NGP), National Women's Economic Empowerment Policy (NWEPP) as well as Social Investment Programmes (SIP), the country's women constantly face some challenges like partial access to education and skills acquisition, financial exclusion and restricted access to credit, poor land and property rights, cultural and social norms that constrain involvement in economic and political spheres of national life. All these aforementioned challenges weaken women's productivity and prolong intergenerational poverty. Again, the non-existence of an integrated and enforceable empowerment framework has limited the effectiveness of current interventions. In view of this foregoing, this paper examines the relationship between women empowerment and poverty reduction in Nigeria and proposes an effective policy framework capable of addressing structural barriers to women's socio-economic advancement.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Women Empowerment

Women empowerment refers to the process through which women gain the ability, resources, and agency to make strategic life choices and participate fully in economic, social, and political spheres (Kabeer, 1999). It involves access to education, income, assets, decision-making power, and legal rights.

2.1.2 Poverty Reduction

Poverty itself can be relative, absolute or multidimensional. Poverty reduction encompasses policies and strategies aimed at improving living standards, increasing income, and enhancing access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and housing. Poverty is multidimensional and extends

beyond income deprivation to include social exclusion and vulnerability.

Conceptually, judging from Figure which shows the flow patterns among key concepts that eventually bring about effective women empowerment framework in any economy. A sound policy framework embedded in economic empowerment, education and skills development, legal and institutional empowerment, digital and technological inclusion, social norms and transformation together with governance, monitoring and evaluation could translate into effective women empowerment across the globe irrespective of cultural differences and religious affinity.

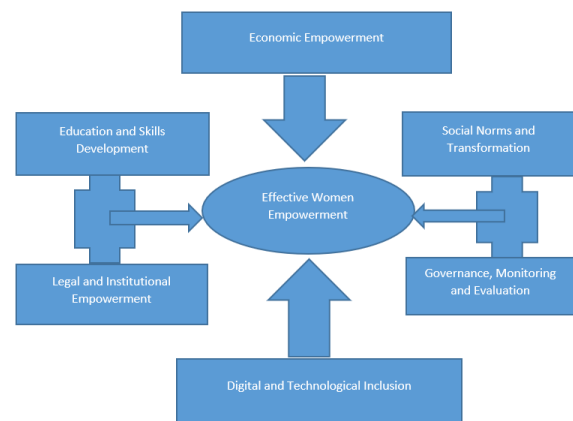


Figure 1: Effective Women Empowerment Policy Framework

Source: Author's Computation, 2026.

2.2. Theoretical Review

Within literature contexts and more importantly among social work scholars, controversies arises among scholars on whether or not the concept of 'empowerment' is a 'process' or 'theory' as chronicled by Carr (2003) and Carroll (2004). On one hand, first school of thoughts argues that the term 'empowerment' is a 'process' which starts with the identification of the nature of marginalization nature an individual is encountering and then accompanied with the level of consciousness and awareness. On the other hand, the second school of thought considers 'empowerment' as a 'theory' whose frameworks help individuals to be in full charge of their lives as documented by Almaseb & Julia (2007). Furthermore, the third school of thought were of a

neutral opinion that the term 'theory' but a conceptually consistent social work techniques and practicable framework as reported by Gutierrez (1990), Gutierrez & Lewis (1999) and Lee (2001).

Nonetheless, feminism theories have different colouration ranging from the radical, liberal, socialist or Marxist and cultural forms of feminism. Based on the extant work by Lewis (2024), the radical feminism expresses the need to liberate women from the conventional domestic duties. In another sense, this theory criticized the age-long laid down gender roles, creates consciousness of sexual harassment, reproductive rights together with sexual objectification by women. Similarly, Zhang & Rios (2021) maintained that liberal feminism advocates the upliftment for gender equality via legislative and political reforms as embedded in the present social structures. Liberal feminism theory considers women as being equal to men with key emphasis on women liberation via access to education. More so, the cultural feminism school of thought according to Lewis (2025) hinges on the abandoned values and inborn personality traits embedded in women which in turn pave way for coexistence and nonviolent human enclave. Lastly, the Socialist (Marxist) feminism school of thought stretches the economic premise for gender inequality as it attests that capitalism or free market enterprise subjugates women and as such women requires empowerment to bridge the inequality gap so as to be liberated from labour exploitation as chronicled by Guy-Evans (2024). Regardless, this paper is anchored on Empowerment Theory (ET) which emphasizes capacity-building and agency as pathways to social and economic transformation as well as the Gender and Development (GAD) Theory which focuses on addressing structural gender inequalities embedded in institutions, policies, and cultural norms. These frameworks highlight that poverty reduction is unattainable without transforming gender relations and empowering women as economic actors. Based on to the development theory of poverty reduction, most economies of the world thrive to reduce poverty by moving through comparable phases of development (Potterovich & Popov (n.d.)).

Consequently, the hypothesis on gender role in the 50s elucidate the several roles that masculine and feminine carry out in the human clime. In other

words, this translates that all these roles are not biologically-induced rather they are socially fashioned and designed by social bonds and expectations. Meanwhile, the underlying idea behind this critiqued that gender roles are obtained via processes of socialization processes (family, school, and media). They further argued that it differs across economies as well as historical antecedents. In addition, the gender role theory stresses the need to acknowledge power relations together with the inequalities that surfaced in all these roles which might strengthen gender stereotypes and hamper persons' drives for personal advancement and self-actualisation. Howbeit, it is unarguably acknowledged among disciples and advocates of the conventional gender role school of thought that the principal duty of the woman is deeply rooted in the household chores (child bearing and rearing, taking care of extended family relations as well as other dependants) regardless of whether or not the woman is formally engaged as an employee in a paid job or she is self-employed at that point in time.

2.3. Empirical Review

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that empowering women has a multiplier effect on poverty reduction. Women tend to invest income in education, health, and nutrition, thereby improving household welfare (UNDP, 2021). However, Nigerian women's economic participation remains constrained by low labor force inclusion, limited access to finance, and unpaid care responsibilities. Based on the work by Ogididi & Okonkwo (2021) on the impact of the entrepreneurial development on reducing poverty in Nigeria in Jos North Local Government of Plateau State, Nigeria, it was observed that small-scale enterprises' growth reduces poverty in the sampled area. In the light of this, Agbalajobi, Olayemi, & Okonji (2018) conducted a research on the female entrepreneurship impact in combating poverty in Nigeria and then found that women not only make substantial contributions in declining poverty but also contributes to employment creation, acquisition of skills together with economic transformation. In the empirical studies by Handy & Kassam, (2006), it was discovered that the empowerment models that feminists advocate for is built on the premise of returning an individual to the original value position as an independent rational

thinker that can solve her own problems. The underlying motive of advocates of feminism is to wrestle unequal power chains between masculine and feminine together with the forces that maintain it over time. Existing policies have yielded modest gains but lack coherence, adequate funding, and institutional synergy. Consequently, the impact on poverty reduction has been limited.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study is anchored on Empowerment Theory (ET) which emphasizes capacity-building and agency as pathways to social and economic transformation as well as the Gender and Development (GAD) Theory which focuses on addressing structural gender inequalities embedded in institutions, policies, and cultural norms. These frameworks highlight that poverty reduction is unattainable without transforming gender relations and empowering women as economic actors. The study adopts a qualitative research design based on secondary data analysis. Data sources include government policy documents, reports from international development agencies, academic journals, and statistical publications. Content and thematic analysis techniques are employed to synthesize findings and develop the proposed policy framework.

IV. RESULTS AND EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The study found that in terms of proposed effective women empowerment policy framework, an effective women empowerment policy framework for poverty reduction in Nigeria should integrate the following components which include; economic empowerment which embraces access to affordable credit and financial services tailored to women entrepreneurs, support for women-owned micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and inclusion of women in agricultural value chains and productive employment., education and skills development which envelopes universal access to girl-child education, technical and vocational training aligned with labor market demands and digital literacy and financial literacy programmes., legal and institutional empowerment which encompasses enforcement of women's land and property rights, legal literacy programmes to increase rights awareness and also

strengthening gender-responsive institutions at national and subnational levels., digital and technological inclusion which covers expansion of digital infrastructure for women, promotion of women's participation in the digital economy together with the use of digital platforms for financial inclusion and market access., social norms and cultural transformation which incorporates public awareness campaigns to challenge harmful gender norms, community engagement involving traditional and religious leaders as well as promotion of shared household responsibilities and lastly, governance, monitoring, and evaluation which incorporates gender-disaggregated data collection, clear performance indicators and accountability mechanisms together with periodic policy evaluation and feedback systems. Nonetheless, the key challenges likely to affect implementation include inadequate funding, weak institutional coordination, cultural resistance, and poor monitoring systems. Addressing these challenges requires political commitment, stakeholder collaboration, and sustained public investment. Again, it was observed from the study that poverty reduction is achievable if and only if there is a conscious effort and proactive move in drafting and enforcing an all-inclusive gender achievable empowerment policies in the Nigerian economy.

V. CONCLUSION

Women empowerment remains a powerful instrument for poverty reduction in Nigeria. However, its effectiveness depends on the design and implementation of integrated, inclusive, and gender-responsive policies. This paper demonstrates that poverty reduction efforts will remain incomplete unless women are systematically empowered through education, economic inclusion, legal rights, and social transformation. The proposed framework offers a strategic roadmap for policymakers and development practitioners seeking sustainable and inclusive poverty reduction outcomes.

VI. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Government should adopt a unified national women empowerment framework with clear implementation guidelines. Increased budgetary allocation should be

made to women-focused empowerment programmes. States and local governments should mainstream gender empowerment into development planning. Continuous monitoring and impact evaluation should guide policy refinement

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