

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH COMMERCIAL DRIVING IN AKURE, ONDO STATE, NIGERIA: ISSUES CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Women constitute part of critical elements of development in any society, this is because of their numerical strength and special skills that enable them serve as pillar of development in most homes and significant agents of community development. But in most societies, the female sex places women in a subordinate position. Women have long suffered various problems of discrimination inequality and exclusion. The study examined the possibilities of empowering women through commercial driving in Akure, Ondo State. The study adopted both primary and secondary methods of data collection. Questionnaires were administered and interview conducted with respondents. The study observed that women in Akure were ready and willing to be empowered through commercial driving. The findings revealed that women can be empowered through commercial driving but with little challenges such as lack of fund to purchase vehicle, violent nature of drivers' Union and restraint from husband. The study concluded that intervention from Government, individuals and corporate organizations will position women for commercial driving and reduce their vulnerability

Keywords: *Driving, Empowerment, Exclusion Inequality, Women*

Introduction

Gender equality and women empowerment has continued to gain more momentum in global issues particularly, in conferences, treaties, declarations etc. This is based on the fact that women constitute part of the chains of development in any society. Aside the fact that women have significant numerical strength, they also have special skills that make them function as home builder and community development agents. In tandem with this notion, Jekinf (1999) described women as indispensable group in the development of any nation.

Women have great potentials necessary to evolve a new economic order to accelerate social and political development and consequently transform the society into better one (Egunjobi, 2015). Inferred from the foregoing is the notion that women empowerment is symbiotically connected to development. This conception has brought forward the need to tackle and reduce poverty among the women folk through empowerment by the public and private, individual organizations and non-governmental Organizations. In view of this, various programmes and policies have been initiated by successive governments, these programmes range from national Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Policy on Women, National Gender Policy, the Nigerian Women Trust Fund to women for change initiatives. In spite of an avalanche of programmes, not much has been achieved in terms of women empowerment, hence the need to also explore other critical and relatively new areas that could genuinely and practically empower women and enhance their development skills.

Although in the recent past, women all over the world have come into positive focus This is evident in the active role women are playing particularly in challenging inadequate and unjust public policies imposed by society, culture, religion and sundry constitutional and psychological impediments (Galligan, 1998). Consequently, there has been a tendency towards role equity role change and increasing professionalism and involvement of women in government and other public institutions and human endeavors (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993). However, in most societies, the cultural division of roles between the male and female sexes places women in a subordinate's position. Attendantly, women have for long suffered various forms of discrimination, inequality, exclusion and violence. According to Burnell and Randall (2008) lower wages, discriminatory job entry and or high unemployment levels leave many women dependent upon men. In most countries, the most common paid job for women has been domestic labor, working as servants in other people's household, or as maid, where they are miserably exploited.

In Nigeria, particularly in Ondo State, most women are unemployed, idled and without regular income, greatly depending on the meager income of their husband, thereby constituting cogs in

the wheel of progress and development of the family. This ugly phenomenon aptly informed the need for this study.

Objectives of the Study

The study is set out to achieve the following:

- i. To examine the possibilities of empowering women through commercial driving in Ondo state.
- ii. To determine women's interest in becoming commercial and professional drivers.
- iii. To identify the challenges of empowering women through commercial driving.
- iv. To suggest possible ways by which women can be practically empowered through commercial driving in Akure, Ondo state.

Research Questions

- i. Can women be empowered through commercial driving in Ondo state?
- ii. Are women interested in becoming commercial and professional driver?
- iii. What are the possible challenges of empowering women through commercial driving in Ondo State?
- iv. How can women be practically empowered through commercial driving in Ondo State?

Conceptual Explanation

Concept of Empowerment

Empowerment as a term has been viewed by various scholars in different expressions but similar meanings. Some of these scholarly definitions shall be considered for the purpose of this study.

Whitmore (1988) views empowerment as an interactive process through which people experience personal and social change, enabling them to take action to achieve influence over

the organization and institution which affect their lives and the communities in which they live. To Wallenstein (1992) empowerment is a social- action process that promotes participation of people, organization and communities toward the goal of increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of community life and social justice. The view of the lord and Hutchison (1993) was not far from that of Whitmore and Wallenstein in their description of empowerment as a process whereby individual achieve increasing control of various aspects of their lives and participate in the community with dignity.

Whitmore further came up with some underlying assumption on empowerment. According to her, individual are assumed to understand their own need better than anyone else and therefore should have the power both to define and act upon them; also, all people possess strengths upon which they can build; empowerment is also a lifelong endeavor; personal knowledge and experience are valid and useful (Whitmore, 1988). Flowing from the foregoing, empowerment means possibilities for the people to control their own lives. And the ability to control one's life is a function of wealth and opportunity which can easily be realized or achieve through empowerment.

Empowerment can take place at different levels; it could be at individual, community, organizational, group and government level. Individual can empower himself with new discoveries capable of changing him/her life positively, so also community, organization, group and government.

Concept of Women Empowerment

Women empowerment entails not only positive changes in these critical respects but also the dismantling of the cultural norms and traditional practices that devalue, disempowered and dispossess women (Anifowose and Enemu, 1999). In their explanation, they are of the view that the process must necessarily also include expansion of women's access to educational opportunities, facilities for skill acquisition and position of authority.

It must be understood at this juncture that empowering women does not mean that women are to dominate men. It only implies that women will be accorded opportunities to develop their individual talent to attribute more meaningfully to societal development.

Theoretical Framework

The discussion and analysis of this paper will be situated within the ambit of feminist and patriarchy theories. This is because the study is predominantly on women. Feminist theory can be viewed from various perspectives, such as liberal, radical, Marxist / socialist etc feminist. However, feminist theories are united by their belief that women have been and are disadvantaged in both past and contemporary societies (Code, 1988). Based on this, the united belief of the feminist theories will be relied upon in this study. The three strands of feminist theory mentioned above emphasize the marginalization and exploitation of women at work, in the family and in the society at large. The three perspectives unanimously canvassed equal right for women and end to unnecessary discrimination against women and the elimination of the effect of past discrimination (Evans, 1997).

Feminists are of the opinion that nobody benefit from gender inequalities except inhibition of economy efficiency. They argue that greater equality, better employment and opportunities would promote gender equality and enhance women empowerment (Hook, 2000).

The theory believes that women are more disadvantaged than men by gender inequality, hence, the need to understand the nature of gender inequality and examination of women's social roles, experience and interest in different area of endeavors for possible promotion of women's interests. Feminist are of the view that men and women should be equal economically, socially and politically. Exploring opportunities in transport sector of the economy will further empower women and reduce their asymmetrical relationship with men.

Patriarchy theory is of the view that certain rules and practice of society have kept women in a subservient role and that institutions of society dominated and controlled by men, have unabatedly continued these practices over time. Several reasons were adduced for creating this embraced but pitiable condition. These are; religious ideologies, cultural assumptions about the nature of male-female relationships, social rules and laws and previous cultural

practices. Patriarchal is a social system in which the role of the male as the primary authority figure is central to social organization, and where fathers hold authority over women children (Tong, 1989).

The theory is relevant to this study because most of these rules and cultural practices debar women from being empowered, thereby keeping them in subservient level.

Empowering Women through Commercial Driving in Akure, Nigeria: Possibilities and Virtues

In Nigeria, particularly in Akure, Ondo state, despite unlimited economic potentials in transportation activities that could benefit women, this sector has remained exclusively male dominated. Company taxi, commercial buses, government buses and luxurious driving activities are all done by men. Although, there are women commercial drivers in Lagos, Benin, Abuja and Port Harcourt (Naira land forum 2018) .But these women drivers are relatively few in numbers. Unfortunately, in Akure, the capital city of Ondo state, no single women commercial driver has been seen. Women are mostly pre occupied with petty buying and selling which hardly bring much money and this has to a large extent responsible for high level of poverty among the women in Akure, Ondo state.

The paper is of the view that women in Akure have the opportunity of venturing into commercial driving in as much as women from other capital cities of Nigeria are steadily going to the profession. In the present Ondo state, particularly, Akure city, buses and taxis operate along fixed routes within the city with fixed fares. This makes it easy and convenient for women to drive safely as commercial drivers.

Today, most women in Akure are idled, jobless and looking for means of survival, especially those without husband, with jobless husband and with unserious and irresponsible husband. Essentially, engaging in commercial driving will definitely bring them out of poverty because they will be kept busy, provided with job, earn income and become useful to the society at large. Invariably, the women are systematically prevented from prostitution, trafficking and other social menace. Consequently, the level of their vulnerability will be greatly reduced.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Akure, Ondo state, Akure was selected because it is the capital city of Ondo state and well urbanized, where women empowerment through commercial driving can appropriately and adequately be researched.

The study utilized both primary and secondary method to source relevant data. The study covered Akure south local Government area, but attention was given to some selected areas that were purposively and randomly selected. These include Oba Adesida Road Axis, Oda Road Axis, Oluwatuyi Quarters, Oyemekun road axis, Ijoka Community and Aule Community. These six residential areas were purposively selected because they are relatively populated with average and low-income earner with some reasonable level of education and where semi-literate women can be appropriately and easily accessed for accurate and relevant information.

The sample frame for this study comprised of women, particularly, the petty traders, jobless, underemployed and members of women non-governmental organization, movement and association. These groups were selected because some are victims of discrimination and exclusions, while some are key figure and primary stake holder in women empowerment. As such, they are in a much better position to know the plight of women in respect of empowerment and development.

The study administered questionnaires to 150 women purposively selected for the study from the various group identified in the sample frame. This was done to sample the views and opinions of the women in the 6 selected communities. Out of 150 questionnaires distributed, 125 were returned. Simple percentage analysis, were employed for data interpretation and analysis. The discussion was also descriptive in nature. See table I for the outlay

Table I - Administration of Questionnaires in the Selected Areas

Resident Areas	No of questionnaires distributed to each area	No of questionnaires retrieved from each area	Total Retrieved
Oba Adesida Road	30	26	26
Oda Road	20	15	15
Oluwatuyi Quarters	25	22	22
Oyemekun Road	25	20	20
Ijoka Community	30	29	13
Aule Community	20	13	13
Total 6	150	125	125

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Oral interview was also conducted with some of the members of identified groups in the sampled areas. The indepth interview was carried out to enable researcher elicit information on the research issues. For the interview, 24 participants were selected from the 6 selected Areas. 4 participant per residential area were pick to represent their area. The use of combined method of data collection was informed by the fact that data that is available through one of the methods may not be available through any other approach. It also ensures that different views of stakeholders are sought and based on this, accurate and valid finding are guaranteed. See table 2 for interview participation.

Table 2

Selection of interview participants in the six residential area of Akure.

Resident Areas	No of participant selected	Total
Oba Adesida Road	4	4
Oda Road	4	4
Oluwatuyi Quarters	4	4
Oyemekun Road	4	4
Ijoka Community	4	4
Aule Community	4	4
Aggregate Total	24	24

Source :Field Work, 2019.

Table 3: Data Presentation and Analysis

Demographic Analysis of the Respondents

Characteristics	Oba Adesida Road		Oluwatuyi Quarters		Oyemekun Road		Ijoka Community		Oda Road		Aule Community		Sample Average	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Age														
18-20	6	23.0	6	27.3	4	20.0	9	31.0	2	13.3	3	23.1	30	24.0
21-30	14	53.9	10	45.5	11	55.0	12	41.4	10	66.7	8	61.5	65	52.0
31-40	3	11.6	4	18.2	3	15.0	4	13.8	2	13.3	2	15.4	18	14.4
41 and above	3	11.6	2	9.0	2	10.0	4	13.8	1	6.7	-	-	12	9.6
Occupation														
Public service	1	3.9	2	9.0	-	-	3	10.3	3	20.0	1	7.7	10	8.0
Private service	3	11.6	1	4.6	2	10.0	3	10.3	1	6.7	-	-	10	8.0
Self employed	10	38.4	12	54.6	10	50.0	13	44.9	6	40.0	7	53.8	58	46.4
Unemployed	12	46.1	7	31.8	8	40.0	10	34.5	5	33.3	5	38.5	47	37.6
Education														
Primary	13	50.0	6	23.3	8	40.0	12	41.4	6	40.0	5	38.5	50	40.0
Secondary	10	38.4	12	54.6	9	45.0	11	38.0	7	46.7	5	38.5	54	43.2
Tertiary	1	3.9	2	9.0	3	15.0	4	13.8	2	13.3	1	7.7	13	10.4
None	2	7.7	2	9.0	-	-	2	6.8	-	-	2	15.4	8	6.4
Income														
High	2	7.7	2	9.0	1	5.0	4	13.8	2	13.3	1	7.7	12	9.6
Medium	5	23.0	8	36.4	8	40.0	10	34.5	5	33.3	4	30.8	41	32.85
Low	18	69.3	12	54.6	11	55.0	15	51.7	8	53.4	8	61.5	72	47.6
Marital Status														
Married	20	77.0	22	100	18	90.0	25	86.2	11	73.4	10	77.0	106	84.8
Single	4	15.3	-	-	1	5.0	3	10.3	2	13.3	-	-	10	8.0
Divorce	2	7.7		-	1	5.0	1	3.5	2	13.3	3	61.5	9	7.2

Source: Field Survey 2019

Table 3 above shows that age 21-30 have 52% and age 18-20 have 24% the leading percentages. This implies that 76% of the respondent is still within the productive age. It therefore indicates that a good number of respondents are likely to give valid and reliable information.

It can also be observed from the table that the majority of the respondents were self-employed, while 57.6% were low income earners. This shows that more women will be interested in exploring another veritable source of income through empowerment. About 37.6% were employed and absolutely relying on their husband. The implication of this is that the unemployed would be glad to have empowerment that could provide sustainable means of income and reduce dependency and vulnerability.

The table shows that 40% of the respondents had primary education, while 43.2% had secondary education. This implies that about 83.2% of the respondent had formal education and could effectively respond to questions.

From the table, it is observed that highest percentage of respondents was married. It therefore shows that the respondents are responsible and matured minds who could express their interest on gender issues without external influence.

Table 4

The Responses Frequencies and Percentages of the Respondent

S/N	Question	Frequencies			Percentages		
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
1.	Can you do other work apart from the present one in your possession?	105	20	125	84	16	100
2.	Can you go into commercial driving as a means of livelihood	98	27	125	78.4	21.6	100
3.	Do you think it is acceptable in our society for women to be commercial driving?	100	25	125	80	20	100
4.	Are you interested in commercial driving?	93	32	125	74.4	25.6	100
5.	Will you support any move or initiative to empower women through commercial driving?	120	05	125	96	4	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

The table above shows that most women were willing to do other lucrative jobs aside the petty trading that consumes time without much gain. As shown in the table, 84% agreed to do other work if made available.

The table also indicates that women in Akure were ready to go into commercial driving as a means of livelihood. Larger percentage indicated their intention as shown in the table. It is clearly indicated that women commercial drivers would be acceptable in Akure to drive taxis and buses for business and commercial purposes. About 80% of the respondents agreed that such gesture would be welcomed.

The table shows that 74.4% of respondents comprising majority women were keenly interested in commercial driving. In similar vein, 96% agreed to support any move or initiative to empower women through commercial driving

From the interview conducted with the respondents, a question was raised on whether commercial driving can serve as a good source of empowerment to women in Akure metropolis?

The respondents agreed that commercial driving will surely provide sustainable means of livelihood to women who are jobless or underemployed according to the respondents, commercial driving is a lucrative job because one makes money on daily basis, and women like making money on daily basis.

Another question was raised whether women are really interested in commercial driving the respondents said that a lot of women were looking forward to see when women would come to the open and drive a commercial taxi or bus in Akure to show that what a man can do, a woman can do better. They all agreed that women were keenly interested. According to one of the respondents, some women pick passengers on their way to office and collect fare from them, but these women were public servants who cannot go into commercial driving based on her employment status. But the jobless women can be encouraged to engage in commercial driving.

A critical question was raised on the possible factors that could debar women from becoming professional commercial drivers? The views of the respondents on this were the same. The respondent mentioned lack of fund to acquired vehicle, the thuggery and violence that usually characterize driver's union, domestic work at home, restraint from husband, possible harassment from passengers, discrimination i.e. women are seen as less capable, verbal abuse, minor and basic repairs on vehicle are difficult for women. The respondents insist that the aforementioned problems would definitely prevent women from commercial driving.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that women can be powered through commercial driving in Akure, Ondo State. It was observed that women in Akure were willing to go into commercial driving if

opportune to do so. According to one of the respondents “what a man can do, a woman can do better. The implication of this is that women can be empowered through commercial driving.

The findings also revealed that many women have interest in becoming commercial drivers to make ends meet. It is therefore canvassed that stakeholders in transportation business particularly, in Ondo State should see the entrance of women into the sector as necessary and exigent. Further findings revealed that women commercial drivers were not found within Akure metropolis but women were earnestly waiting to be introduced to commercial driving to enable them compete favorably with men. It was obvious from the study that empowering women through commercial driving might be confronted with some challenges ranging from violent nature of drivers unions, which can scare women from joining the profession, lack of capital to purchase vehicle, possible harassment from passengers, restraint from husband, verbal abuse, to inability to do minor and basic repairs on vehicle at any moment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that women empowerment through commercial driving in Akure, Ondo State would be a timely initiative and relief to unemployed women who are ready to be employed and empowered practically. Such gesture will address high level of poverty among the women in Ondo State, new opportunities will be created, level of discrimination will be reduced and economic advancement of women will be ensured. To adequately achieve these, the following recommendations are put forth.

Driving schools must be created especially for women who are interested in commercial driving this will afford them the opportunity to learn smartly how to drive in congested roads or heavy traffic. Women require boldness to drive commercial vehicles particularly in heavy traffic, where manipulations of all sorts are greatly required. This school will also help them to acquire knowledge on minor and basic repairs and caution tricks like changing a spare tyre, checking water and oil level etc

Government individuals and corporate organizations should assist women who cannot afford to buy vehicle. This can be done through loan or vehicle leasing programmes. The women can be asked to form cooperative society and link such society to various poverty alleviation schemes in the state or country. Vehicles can be given to them on installment or loan for purchase of vehicle with low interest and moratorium to encourage and promote women inclusion and participation in economic and developmental activities.

Education and enlightenment. Seminars, public lectures, workshops symposium etc should be organized regularly for women in commercial driving on the need to be friendly with passengers and tolerate them for the short period of transit.

Women must also learn to design and plan their time schedule so that working hours will not have effect on domestic duties. Significantly, government must design a policy that will insulate women from driver's unionism because of the usual violence in the union, if this is done the fear of being attacked during crisis will be removed and many women would sign in for commercial driving.

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