An endogenous empowerment strategy: a case study of Nigerian women

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Introduction

Several studies have shown that women in private and public sector organisations generally participate very minimally in decision-making compared to their male counterparts (see, for example, Foner 1982; Muna 1991; and Odubogun 1995). Even when women do participate, their level of participation is shown to be insufficient to exert significant influence on the major decisions made by the bodies to which they belong. In a highly patriarchal context such as Nigeria, where men have always dominated the core decision-making organs of society, there is an obvious and pressing need for the empowerment of women so that they can meaningfully participate in processes whose outcomes will affect their lives. This need is made more acute, since the interests of men and of women are very likely to diverge. When conflict does occur, their empowerment may be women's only protection against attempts to subordinate their interests.

This article argues that the enhancement of women's capacity to influence and participate in making decisions that directly or indirectly affect their lives is a key issue in raising their standard of living and protecting their rights to full participation in the processes of development. In other words, empowering women is a means to an end; the end being to improve their lives and protect their rights to participate in decisions that affect them. Strategies for empowering women need to be evaluated for at least three reasons. The most obvious is that strategies are necessary to facilitate women's empowerment in order to improve their economic, social, and political status. Secondly, the observation

that most women do not participate as much as men in decision-making processes, despite attempts to empower them to do so, implies that these strategies need to be reviewed. And thirdly, the apparent failures of previous empowerment strategies mean that we need to seek more effective ones.

This article is in four parts. In the following section, we provide a conceptual clarification of the term 'empowerment', both to show that the way in which empowerment is conceptualised predetermines strategies to achieve it, and to develop the argument for an endogenous empowerment. Section three presents a critical review of empowerment strategies that have been implemented in Nigeria, with the aim of identifying the requirements for more effective ones. The structure of an endogenous empowerment strategy is then developed, and this is followed by a concluding section.

Basic issues in the empowerment process

Conceptual clarification

There are two dimensions of the empowerment concept with respect to women: the static, and the dynamic. The former defines the empowerment of women in terms of their capacities to participate in making decisions that directly or indirectly affect their lives, and to influence those decisions. This refers to the notion of women having an effective voice. Consequently, women are assumed to be disempowered when they cannot influence decisions that alter their lives (Odubogun 1995). This view may suggest that an effective voice could be given to women who do not have one, or that disempowered women could be exogenously empowered.

The dynamic concept regards empowerment as a process of developing the capacity of individuals (in this case women) to participate effectively in making and implementing decisions that directly or indirectly affect them. Viewed as a process, empowerment is something an individual or a group of individuals acquires over time. It is not something you can give to people, although the conditions could be created to increase their chances of acquiring it by themselves. Of course, this also means that it is possible to create conditions that block people's capacity to empower themselves.

The distinction between the static and dynamic concepts of empowerment is significant because it is likely to lead to different empowerment strategies. Specifically, the former may lead to exogenous

empowerment strategies while the latter may lead to endogenous ones. Exogenous strategies are those built on the premise that disempowered groups can be empowered by external individuals or groups. By contrast, endogenous strategies are those whose underlying premise is that external groups can only facilitate empowerment by creating enabling conditions for disempowered groups to empower themselves. The exogenous empowerment strategy implies a top-down approach while the endogenous strategy implies a bottom-up one.

Disempowerment is the consequence of some combination of social, cultural, economic, political, and historical processes. For instance, where individuals lack the capacity or competence to participate in decision-making, their disempowerment may be explained by humanly devised rules that foster inequalities and ordinate-subordinate relationships among groups of people within a society. A woman would be unable to contribute to the planning and design of development projects in her community if the prevailing rules of human interactions prevent her from being educated. Even an educated and highly skilled woman cannot contribute to the planning and design of development projects in her community if its culture and religion forbid women to sit and talk with men. A woman in purdah and/or seclusion [1] is usually not allowed to mix freely with the opposite sex even on a professional basis.[2] In other societies, social standards of wealth, preconditions for participation in professions, politics and government, and so on, are both cause and effect of societal structures that make some people superior to others in the same society, (Odubogun, ibid.). In Nigeria, as in many parts of the world, women do not enjoy the same privileges, opportunities, power, influence, and recognition, as men.

Empowerment is unlikely to be granted to the disempowered because some individuals or groups benefit from the disempowerment of others and are unlikely freely to give up the resulting 'privileges'. Consequently, a quick-fix solution, which the static concept seems to suggest, is unlikely to be feasible or effective. The dynamic concept is more likely to lead to effective empowerment strategies because its perception of empowerment and disempowerment as the consequences of social processes, is more realistic. The endogenous notion of empowerment implies both that much of the effort to achieve empowerment depends on the disempowered and that exogenous forces can enable or accelerate the endogenous process, particularly if these do not treat empowerment as a gift. Thus, the exogenous enabling conditions for endogenous empowerment become the key point of reference in evaluating empowerment strategies for Nigerian women.

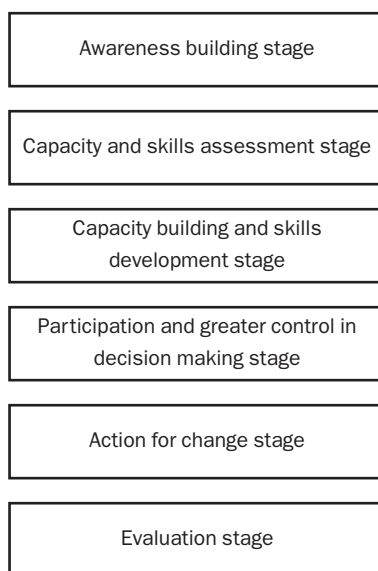## Exogenous enabling conditions for endogenous empowerment

Karl (1995) offers a useful framework for identifying the exogenous enabling conditions for endogenous empowerment, describing four stages in the empowerment process with respect to women: awareness; capacity-building and skills development; participation and greater control in decision-making; and action for change. The basic proposition is that the capacity for awareness and skills can be developed and will tend to increase the capacity to participate in, and exert greater control over, decision-making, while empowerment is realised by the use of the awareness and skills acquired.

We extend Karl's four-stage process in two directions. Firstly, we add two more stages in order to facilitate a more systematic analysis of the empowerment process, one that is more applicable to the empowerment of Nigerian women. Secondly, we explicitly recognise the significance of institutions in disempowering women. This implies that a more effective strategy would first target the capacity and motivation of women to break institutional barriers to empowerment and then provide a framework for changing those humanly devised rules that support women's disempowerment. The differences in the humanly devised rules of disempowerment can be significant and changing these would make endogenous empowerment easier.

Figure 1 shows a six-stage empowerment process namely: awareness; skills and capacity assessment; capacity-building and skills development; participation and greater control in decision-making; action for change; and evaluation. The capacity and skills assessment stage increases the chance that the requisite capacity and skills will be developed. It also has an important methodological implication, which is that a needs assessment must be based on the objective conditions of a specific problem of disempowerment. In other words, a general doctrine of empowerment would not work in all cases; nor would exogenously deduced approaches work. The sixth stage (evaluation) is a feedback mechanism.

Being aware of the current situation of disempowerment and of options for empowerment is a necessary condition for achieving it. It is easy to accept a situation if one is either not aware of it or of better options. Consequently, building awareness about discriminatory practices against women, about laws that undermine their interests, and cultural and traditional norms that perpetuate women's subjugation and subordination, are the necessary building-blocks of an endogenous empowerment strategy. Awareness of the rules of disempowerment is potentially conflictual.

Figure 1 A six-stage hierarchical empowerment process

Awareness building stage

Capacity and skills assessment stage

Capacity building and skills development stage

Participation and greater control in decision making stage

Action for change stage

Evaluation stage

Source: A modification of Karl (1995)

It is important to recognise this, and its implications for the empowerment process. The history of feminism shows that winning the vote in Europe and the USA after World War I was the result of a long struggle and sacrifice by women during the war. So being informed of the costs of empowerment is a key part of the process of awareness.

The second stage involves identifying the capacity and skills which are needed for effective participation but which the individual or group lacks. This assessment will realistically show what changes should take place before the targeted person(s) can be expected to participate effectively. A major disadvantage of not carrying out a needs assessment is that inappropriate skills and capacities may be given to a person who actually needs something else. For example, if a large number of women are represented in the lower echelons of an organisation and are, as a result, unable to influence major policies, a needs assessment may show that education is a key to their empowerment. If, on the other hand, the needs assessment shows that women are given low status jobs even when they do have the relevant education to occupy management positions,

educating women who are already educated is obviously a waste of resources. An efficient assessment of needs may show that artificial barriers, such as those created by the tradition and culture, are responsible for the problems identified; and this would require a different kind of capacity and skills development than giving formal education. In general, a needs assessment will reveal the enabling conditions for empowerment in any given case of disempowerment.

The third stage of the empowerment process involves taking deliberate steps to build capacity and develop relevant skills as suggested by a needs assessment. Programmes of enlightenment may require building capacity for planning, organising, coordination, and resource and personnel management. These and other relevant skills and capacities are frequently needed in order to participate more meaningfully in decision-making.

The fourth stage calls for the use of the skills and capacities that have been acquired to participate in actual decision-making and to exert a greater control over what happens in the home, the workplace, and in the larger society. Acquiring skills and developing capacities is meaningless if these remain unused. On the contrary, such skills and capacities should lead to more adroit decision-making as well as improving women's bargaining power and deterring the potential agents of disempowerment.

The fifth stage consists of deliberate action on the part of the empowered person(s) or group(s) to bring about change to redress the problems highlighted earlier. The entire process is successful only if the acquired skills and capacity built are used to bring about desired changes in the lives of the individuals or groups concerned, and in the lives of others in their communities.

The last stage, evaluation, is important to assessing the success or failure of the entire process, the results of which can be used as feedback into the next cycle of the empowerment process. In other words, empowerment is not seen as a 'once and for all' activity but one that is gained over time and frequently updated. New information fed back into the awareness stage often means building new and fresh capacities and skills in order to gain more decision-making power for positive action. A woman is never fully empowered but must continue to update the skills and capacities necessary to be an effective participant in ongoing decisions that surround her. It should also be emphasised that evaluation is a continuous process in a dynamic scheme of enabling endogenous empowerment.

The scheme shows that empowerment assumes concrete forms in stages four and five,[3] and that stages one, two, three, and six are points of exogenously enabling or accelerating empowerment.[4]

Assessing the strategies used in empowering Nigerian women

This section presents an historical review of the general problem of empowerment in Nigerian society, and evaluates some empowerment strategies that have been used.

Historical origins of disempowerment

Nigerian women had a long history of empowerment before colonial rule. In fact, women were far more empowered (politically, socially, and economically) before colonialism — the alien culture and beliefs brought in by colonialism negated most of the rights and privileges hitherto enjoyed by them. Alongside men's political association, in most parts of Nigeria, women also had their own well-organised political groups which were solely managed by women leaders in the various communities. For instance in Yoruba land (one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria), an *Iyalode,* or woman leader, is appointed to the *Ala'afin* or *Ooni's* (the king's) council of chiefs to represent women in the community. In most southern Nigerian palaces, women, just as men, had their own governing and chieftain councils headed by the Iyalode, which administered the needs of women and made representation to the various king's institutions. The Iyalode works to protect the interests of women and to ensure that their dignity is maintained. Although this arrangement still exists in Nigeria, the powers of the Iyalode have been substantially reduced because of, and since, the colonial period. Although they still function in their areas of the palaces, more of the women's problems for which they were once responsible are now dealt with by the modern law courts. It is debatable whether these have been as effective as the Iyalode system in dealing with women's issues. Men did not consider the arrangement a threat. Moreover, it minimised social conflicts and offered protection to women and children.

The unique (centralised and totalitarian) administrative structures of the colonial period destabilised the otherwise well-established culture and structures. Not only did the colonial administrative structure result in the politics of class and the identity of individuals taking on new meaning, it also stripped women of most of their basic rights to administer their own affairs and protect their own future. In other words, the Nigerian people, and especially women, lost their autonomy and most of their rights.[5]

Alongside the traditional structures of governance and administration, there is a long history of very active and effective and autonomous women's organisations, particularly in the south. Ibo women, a dynamic trading group in the south, have always had (before and after the colonial period) appreciable political and economic influences through established associations that are well managed and solely run by them. Their power and influence goes beyond issues that affect their trade to issues of governance at the state level. Despite the problems brought about by the colonial administrators, Ibo women's movements and some others in southern Nigeria, have struggled to maintain some respectable level of power and influence in their communities.

Many of the pre-independence struggles of Mrs Fumilayo Ranson-Kuti in Western Nigeria, of Margaret Ekpo and the Aba women riot of 1949 in Eastern Nigeria, and Hajiya Gambo Sawaba, targeted the colonial assault on women's rights. Historical documents reveal that women were political leaders and led war campaigns of their people.[6] Thus, there is little doubt that colonialism did not improve the rights of Nigerian women. This is hardly surprising, since colonialism could only thrive under a regime of extreme and general violations of human rights and divide and rule tactics; and considering that women in Britain were themselves marginalised by their society at the time.[7]

Evaluation of dominant strategies for the empowerment of women

The strategies fall into two groups. The first attempts to empower women by improving their entrepreneurial capacity to become more self-reliant. This is approach is common among development agencies and government. The approach assumes the form of:

- economic interventions, i.e. improving women's economic status by providing them with employment, improving their capacity to be involved in income-generating activities, and improving their access to credit facilities;

- integrated rural development which, in addition to improving the entrepreneurial self-reliance of women, focuses on the satisfaction of basic needs, education, literacy programmes, and reproductive health issues (such as family planning programmes).

The latter approach targets individuals and their capacity to become self-reliant. The Better Life for Rural Women programme (BLRW) of

Mrs Maryam Babangida (Nigeria's first lady from 1985 to 93) which was under the supervision of the National Commission for Women (NCW), and the family support programme (FSP) of her successor, exemplifies this approach.

Women's and non-governmental organisations mostly use the second dominant approach. Empowering women is conceived as awareness-building, particularly about gender inequities in their societies, building capacities and developing skills necessary to ensure that women effectively participate in present and future decision-making, and then organising women into groups which take action to bring about desirable changes, focusing on greater equality between men and women in all decision-making. So, rather than targeting the capacity of an individual to become more economically self-reliant, this approach actually attempts to empower women to participate not only in policy implementation but also in policy formulation, design, implementation, control, and evaluation. Rather than being recipients of development policies, this strategy enables the process of empowering women to participate in shaping development policies.

The NCW was established to oversee the activities of all women's groups in Nigeria, and was funded by the government during the Ibrahim Babangida military administration. The NCW was, however, never adequately funded, which raised doubts as to how genuine was the desire to protect the interests of women. Even the real benefits of the BLRW, a strategic area of the NCW, were never known. What were known were its most advertised attributes: glamorous meetings that celebrated the elites that made up the national, state, and local leadership. The real benefits in terms of the empowerment of rural women, whom it was expected to target, were never recorded in relation to the level of public funds used to finance it.[8] [9] This may explain why the programme did not survive after the Babangidas 'stepped aside'.

The Country Women's Association of Nigeria (COWAN) stands in sharp contrast with the BLRW and the FSP, both of which were set up, funded, and managed by the federal government. Though initiated by an individual (Mrs Ogunleye) in 1982, COWAN approached the empowerment of rural women using a 'bottom-up' approach. 'It is the only organisation in the country where the Board of Directors are rural women with Mrs Ogunleye as the secretary' (The Guardian, 28 September 1996). Its main goal, according to Mrs Ogunleye, is to 'empower rural women towards achieving self-sufficiency'. The success of COWAN in empowering rural women tends to confirm the basic

proposition that 'using a "bottom-up" approach, where the rural people are allowed to say what they want and do the planning themselves, is a more feasible and effective strategy of empowering women than top-down programs which assume that rural women and men are too ignorant that you have to teach them everything'.[10]

Several other women's organisations of different origins have been engaged in engineering some kind of empowerment of women. These include the Nigerian chapters of international women's organisations and those originating in Nigeria. The latter could be classified into four categories: (a) professional groups (e.g. NAWIB, NAWOJ, SWAN); (b) activist women's groups (e.g. WIN); (c) research-driven groups (e.g. WORDOC); and (d) women's religious groups. The Nigerian chapters of international organisations concentrate mainly on philanthropic activities and the basic philosophy underlying most of their activities is that of 'trickle-down'. The Nigerian office of Soroptimist International is possibly one of the few attempting to extend its activities to the problem of women's voice, but it is, unfortunately, as elitist as other 'Nigerian chapters' of international women's groups. As a result, they are not representative of a large percentage of the female population of Nigeria, especially since their ways of working are fashioned around the conventions of their parent organisations. As a result, though these bodies do improve opportunities for some less privileged individuals (children, women, and men), they are unlikely to be the tools for empowering Nigerian women.

The focus of the various professional women's organisations is limited to the struggle to empower women in their respective professions. Most professional women use these groups to have a voice and to boost women's capacity to influence decisions that affect their careers and their professions. Any success is thus limited to the women in the respective associations. This notwithstanding, the chances of success are higher given that it is consistent with endogenous empowerment.

Formed in the early 1980s, Women in Nigeria (WIN) is an organisation that has struggled for the total emancipation of Nigerian women and has remained committed to the eradication of any form of class inequality and oppression (Imam 1994). Through participation in public debates, organising seminars, workshops, and conferences, and using all available legal, political, and social processes, WIN appears to have a uni-directional goal of struggling for the economic, social, and political conditions for women's autonomy without placing limits on such autonomy. However, its successes are limited to: prosecution of

incidences of abuse of 'child-wives'; raising awareness about discrimination against women, and about early marriages and its negative consequences; and, rendering financial assistance to indigent females wanting to be educated.

Other attempts at empowering Nigerian women have come from such organisations as the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC) which is the coordinating body for most research and documentation efforts of many women research groups in the country; and from women's religious groups such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), both active in empowering women to understand more about themselves, their roles as women, and how they can use their position to influence decisions, especially in their families.

Overall, the empowerment of women is a complex and difficult process. But while a single group or programme is unlikely to bring it into being, the adoption of a bottom-up strategy is more likely to facilitate the process. A programme that purports to empower women must begin by listening to them and allowing them to determine what they want and how they think it they would be empowered, because the 'empowerment buck' stops on the crown of each disempowered woman. Of course, widening the information content of a woman's choice (through awareness programmes) and enhancing her capacity to make her own choices (through skills and capacity assessment, capacity-building and skills development programmes, and evaluation) would enable to her to make better choices and to act on them.

Endogenous empowerment strategy for women's effective participation within organisations

The basic tenets of this article are firstly that the effective participation of women is necessary if they are to protect their interests within their organisations, and, secondly, that empowerment buck stops at the desk or on the head of each woman.

The first proposition justifies more effective participation of women in organisational decision making while the second, which was deduced from a dynamic conception of empowerment, suggests that the enabling conditions for endogenous empowerment offers a reference point for any external intervention. Consequently, the strategy outlined below focuses on the enabling conditions previously discussed, where we stated that a potentially effective intervention is one that seeks to enable endogenous

empowerment by raising awareness, developing the skills and building the capacity which a needs assessment reveal as constraints to empowerment, and conducts regular evaluations. We also noted that that organisational environments differ. Hence, the barriers to female participation may also differ. Some of the barriers that may constrain the full participation of women in organisations include: hostility of men, family or domestic constraints; lack of access to information; cultural constraints; lack of education and skills; established societal stereotypes; and, lack of self confidence (Garba 1997). These barriers could be relaxed by awareness building; skills acquisition and capacity-building; and, socio-cultural changes.

Awareness building

Three types of problems call for an awareness programme, namely inadequate information about the objectives of unions or other organisations, male hostility, and domestic constraints.

Awareness programmes could be undertaken by the various women's organisations, some of which have been discussed above, to enlighten women through workshops and seminars designed to encourage discussion, question and answer sessions, and case study analyses. Issues arising could be thrashed out at the relevant fora. In general, the focus of the awareness campaign would be determined by the problems facing women in any given organisation.

Issues of men's hostility and domestic constraints are particularly problematic in Nigeria because they have their roots in the rules of disempowerment. Therefore, the basic awareness issue with respect to male hostility is to make women appreciate that this is intended to undermine their own interests and that it generates from insecurity among the men who perpetrate it. In an awareness programme, the benefits of asserting women's rights need to be explicitly balanced against the costs of accepting male domination.

Skills acquisition and capacity-building

In general, a successful programme of skills development and capacity-building must begin with a proper assessment of what skills and capacities women already have, what they lack, and the relative importance of the skills to be imparted. Needs assessments would ensure that only identified gaps are filled. Failure to undertake these may result in duplication of existing skills and capacities, or offering those not directly relevant to the

case at hand. Usually, there is a dire need for training programmes that will help increase the political and management skills of women in organisations. Being politically skilful means, among other things, being able to understand and assimilate diverse political opinions, participate intelligently in political debates, express one's own views coherently and effectively, and being able to use different viewpoints to analyse issues and to make useful decisions. Obviously, a woman who lacks good communication skills, the capacity to listen effectively, and to work well in groups, cannot to be an effective participant in any political organisation. It is not enough for women to attend meetings. If they are thought to be deficient in some way, they should be trained to have the self-confidence to participate effectively through active speaking and listening. They should, like every other participant, rise above their shyness and timidity so that they can, without trepidation, contribute to debates and decision-making processes.

Changing discriminatory traditional and cultural norms

Most of the problems confronting women would not exist in the first place but for the very conservative, traditional and cultural norms of most societies, such as those of Nigeria. For instance, most societies are hostile to women's involvement in political activities. Women are seen as weak, fragile, and should not be involved in 'men's work'. Women who do attempt to get involved are considered over-aggressive, which is not tolerated in many societies. The hostility of men to the participation of women in 'gender-neutral' organisations, and the imposition of a trade-off between participation in such activities and domestic duties, are rooted in the rules of disempowerment of the society. For instance, a male participant at a workshop where an earlier draft of this paper was presented, justified his resentment of women workers or managers and their participation in economic activities, with the following words:

> They have no business competing with men. In fact, I have allowed my wife to work only reluctantly, and very soon she would want to be an active member of a union in her company. I think women should stay in the roles that God meant for them instead of competing with their husbands and leaving their own domestic duties unattended to.

Most of other men at the workshop shared his perceptions, essentially the use of sex abuse as a means of domination. However, what was most disturbing was the fact that women participants in the seminar seemed

to have lost the will to fight against this form of mental abuse and the demeaning analyses of what their presence in the world really is about.

This example of how some men view women justifies the need to focus not only on women but also on men in raising awareness about undesirable behaviour towards women, and the harm such behaviour has on the proper development of both men and women in society. Gender sensitivity training can assist people to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate social behaviours, and to show how appropriate behaviour can lead to the development of individuals and groups. It can also help to give suitable management skills for eradicating various forms of undesirable behaviours, and promoting gender equality.

Most forms of domination against women in Nigeria will only be eradicated through enforceable laws. All rules of disempowerment ought to be changed. But changing these rules requires political action which only a broad-based women's rights movement could bring about. Though this is difficult under the general state of disempowerment that prevails in Nigeria now, women must be active participants in the struggle for constitutional rule, and then use their leverage to outlaw discriminatory practices and to provide for its effective enforcement. Active participation in the struggle for constitutional rule could be facilitated by political education.

Unfortunately, even women frown at other women who attempt to change the status quo, reflecting many years of 'brain washing' and submission to the rules of disempowerment. A long-term solution to the problem of women's poor participation in political activities rests in awareness that the culture of disempowerment is unjust and unfair. Further, that submission to this culture is to believe, erroneously, that one human being is inferior to another because of gender, ethnic origin, religion, and so on. Levelling the playing field and respecting the humanity of women becomes the primary focus of struggles for emancipation. This implies that changing the discriminatory culture of treating women as inferiors, is necessary to their empowerment.

Conclusion

This article has sought to show the ineffectiveness of the exogenous methods that are currently being used to empower women. Using Nigeria as a case study, it argues instead for an endogenous strategy that sees empowerment as a dynamic concept, and as a process of developing the capacity of women to participate effectively in making and implementing

decisions that directly or indirectly affect them. This, we have shown, is more likely to generate an effective empowerment strategy. The dynamic concept leads to a proposition that the empowerment buck stops at the head of the disempowered woman herself. In other words, an external agent cannot grant empowerment as a gift. However, the conditions within which disempowered women could endogenously empower themselves can be fostered. Even then, however, the content of any enabling conditions must be determined by the objective realities of the disempowerment in question. Thus, a bottom-up, rather than a top-down, strategy is to be preferred.

To illustrate this, we modified Karl's four stages of empowerment to a six stage process in order to pinpoint ways in which the empowerment process could be enabled or accelerated, and explicitly recognising the constraints posed by the rules of disempowerment that are entrenched in societal norms and laws. One of our modifications of Karl's empowerment model locks in programmes that are designed to develop capacity and skills to needs revealed by a prior assessment. The strategy we suggest is influenced by the actual problems that are revealed by earlier studies. Thus, the strategy requires enabling conditions that would enhance the capacity of women to overcome the barriers, as well as to participate more effectively in removing them. Consequently, we recommend a three-pronged strategy consisting of: interactive and family-oriented awareness programmes; skills and capacity development programmes, especially in the areas of communication and organisational and political management; and, political action to change the rules of disempowerment that are the underlying cause of most of the disempowerment of women in society.

Notes

1   Women in purdah are usually Muslim married women whose bodies, except for the parts required to see (and sometimes smell), are totally covered. This is usually done to prevent men apart from their husbands from looking at and desiring them. Women in seclusion are those who are usually confined to parts of their husbands' homes where other persons, particularly men, apart form their husbands, are neither allowed to see nor communicate with them. This is so even when such women are educated and highly skilled.

2 For instance, the Taliban-led government of Afghanistan has decreed against females being educated or working. In the short term, the decree disempowers women, notwithstanding their competence and potential contributions to their families and to their societies. In the long term, even when the decree is abrogated, women will lack the competence to participate effectively in making decisions that affect them and their societies.

3   At both stages, the disempowered group is the active agent. Unless the group participates and induces desired change, empowerment is not achieved.

4   External agents can facilitate endogenous empowerment at these stages by improving awareness and facilitating the development and acquisition of requisite capacity and skills.

5   Prior to the colonial period, there was a structure of collective decision-making among representatives of all groups (men, women, and children being represented by their parents). People's views were seen as crucial to all decision-making processes in order to maintain peace. No one individual or group dominated others as there was no benefit attached to — nor the incentive for — dominating other people. However, the colonial administration changed this. With the appointment of Nigerian colonial officers, who received incentives and power to dominate other members of their society, some individuals felt for the first time superior to others. Power, once experienced by a few, corrupted the laid-down norms and rules of behaviour which before had promoted reasonable levels of equality, and assumed that every person's views were important to decisions affecting all. With the new power structure, everyone who was too weak to be appointed a colonial officer was seen as inferior. Since the colonial 'masters' never felt that women were important enough to be appointed officers, women were automatically seen as inferiors who had to be dominated by the superior officers — men. Every man had a chance of being made an officer, so all men were, by extension, perceived as superior to all women. Along the way, not only did many traditional male organisations lose their powers, but women were almost totally disempowered. Class and power struggles began then, and have remained since.

6   For instance, Efunsetan, Madam Tinubu and Moremi (Western Nigeria); Queens Amina and Kambasa (Northern Nigeria); Om. Owe (Eastern Nigeria) and so on.

7   For instance, British feminists convened for the first time in 1855; female property rights were legalised in 1870; and women won the right to vote after World War I. The marginalisation of women's rights in the colonies was thus consistent with the practice in the centre.

8   The funding of the programme was not reported in government budgets or other such documents, nor was any account rendered. This prompted Chief Gani Fawehinmi to sue the government and the First Lady for abuse of office and misuse of public funds.

9   While a few rural people actually had access to and enjoyed the benefits accruing from BLRW resources, many only got promises, which were never fulfilled. In many cases, production machines were purchased for small-scale rural producers without training given on how to use and maintain them efficiently. Many faulty machines were not repaired which, in most cases, created additional burdens for the rural dwellers (women and their husbands) whom the programme was meant to relieve. In fact, the various problems faced by many rural dwellers as a result of the programme led people to the conclusion that the benefits accrued more to the urban wealthy women who were closer to the resources intended for the programme activities.

10 That the food we eat is produced by these so-called, ignorant farmers suggests that much of the ignorance lies, ironically, with those who assumed them to be ignorant. Consequently, factual and logical fallacy underlies many of the observed failures of 'top down' programmes.

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