

**AN APPRAISAL OF THE IMPACT OF SUBSIDY REINVESTMENT PROGRAM (SURE-P) ON
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN KADUNA STATE**

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Abstract

The Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P), was inaugurated in Nigeria on 13th February, 2012, with the aim of ploughing back the savings from the reduction of subsidies on petroleum products into programs that will empower Nigerian women and youth. This paper examines impact of SURE-P on women empowerment in Kaduna State. The sample for the study comprised of 120 beneficiaries of the SURE-P and 40 community leaders drawn using stratified, purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The data was collected through interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The findings reveal that the program has succeeded in providing vocational skills training, materials and assistance. The findings of the study also indicate that a number of skills acquisition centers have been constructed and equipped across the state, which have increased the respondents income generation in the community. The findings of the study also reveal that a number of women have been trained in vocational skills: interior and outdoor decorations, cosmetology and beauty therapy, hair dressing, fashion designing and garment making, etc. Majority of the respondents agree that scheme has created self-reliance, and improved their socioeconomic activities. However, a relatively smaller percentage of them disagree with the notion that the program has created self-reliance among the beneficiaries of the program.

Keywords: Appraisal, impact, Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE –P), and women empowerment.

Introduction

A subsidy is an economic benefit or financial aid provided by a government to support a desirable activity, so as to keep prices low, maintain the income of the producers of critical or strategic products, maintain employment levels, or induce investment to reduce unemployment (Schrank, Keithly, and Thalassorama, 1999). The history of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria is rather a long one particularly with the negative effects it has on the polity. Specifically, the story of subsidy removal dates back to 1978, when, the then military government of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo reviewed upward the pump price of fuel which was at 8.4 kobo to 15.37 kobo. From this period, it had been from one subsidy removal to the other (Ering, & Akpan, 2012).

The Subsidy Reinvestments and Empowerment Program (SURE-P) was introduced in 2012 as an umbrella term for the Nigeria federal government justification of the use of the partially removed Petroleum Motor Spirit (PMS) subsidy. It was designed by the Federal Government to invest the subsidy money on projects categorized into different components. Component A: covers Social safety Net; Component B: Niger Delta Development Project; Component C: Road Infrastructure Projects; Component D: Rail Transport Project;

Component E: Water and Agricultural Projects; Component F: Selected Power Projects; Component G: Petroleum NNPC Projects; and Component H: ICT Projects.

The program was aimed at helping Nigerians cope with the impact of fuel price increase in their daily living. Certain areas which were prioritized in the Social Safety Net (SSN) component of the program include maternal and child health services; community services; women and youth employment; urban, mass transit; vocational development and graduate internship scheme. The SURE-P was perceived as government palliative measure to inherent mass suffering resulting from the fuel subsidy removal. According to the federal government the proceeds from SURE-P were intended to be adequately utilized on critical infrastructure, projects and social safety net programs in community service, women and youth empowerment programs, mass transit, roads and bridges (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2013). To realize this zeal fund for SURE-P was structured at Federal Government of Nigeria 41%, the 36 states and 774 local governments' areas 54% (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2013). In an attempt to spread the implementation of the SURE programs to all levels of governance in the country, the Federal Government of Nigeria as stipulated in the SURE document (2011:4) emphasized that:

This program is focused on utilization of federal government share of the subsidy. Every state and local government is expected to design its own program and utilizing its portion of the subsidy reinvestment funds. The subsidy reinvestment funds from the discontinuation of the fuel subsidy will be used for the implementation of the program and to reduce our borrowing needs. The federal government has decided to channel its own share of the resources into a combination of programs to stimulate the economy and alleviate poverty through critical infrastructure and safety net projects.

Statement of the Problem

The Subsidy Reinvestments and Empowerment Program (SURE-P) was aimed at empowering the Nigerian women in terms of the followings:

Skill Development: The process of strengthening the skills of women so that they know how to effectively make decisions, positively interact with their peers, and act as community advocates. **Critical Awareness:** The process of providing women with the information and resources necessary for analyzing issues that affect their lives and environments as well as strategize on ways to act as change agents in their communities.

Opportunities: The process of providing women with platforms for decision-making and encouraging their active participation in creating community change.

The components of the programs also include - Maternal and Child Health, public works, employment schemes, mass transit programs, vocational training and skill acquisition schemes. The project seeks to increase utilization of Maternal and Child Health services by Nigerian women through antenatal care, presence of a skilled birth attendant at delivery, 2 day post-natal care and use of family planning. The program was launched in Kaduna State on the 26th November, 2013; and its activities were coordinated by the ministry of women affairs and social development. Trainings in skills and vocations were conducted in the three zones of the state. Local government areas community development sections and women empowerment officers supervised trainings and disbursements of empowerment kits/ trainees settlement funds. This paper examines the impact of SURE-P on women empowerment in Kaduna State.

Literature Review

According to Schuler (1986) empowerment refers to the capacity to mobilize resources to produce beneficial social change. Schuler identified three critical dimensions of the empowerment process such as, individual consciousness raising, collective consciousness development, and mobilization. The third dimension builds on the first two and it is where collective skills and resources are translated into political and legal action. Conger and Kanungo (1988) define empowerment as a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information. They view empowerment as a motivational construct, i.e. enabling and not simply providing.

However, Solomon (1976) defined empowerment as a process whereby individuals are made to engage in activities that aim at reducing the powerlessness that has been created through negative valuation based on membership in a stigmatized group. This theory is very important to this study because women as a group have been marginalized and are a stigmatized group in the society. Empowerment theory proposes

strategies of reducing the marginalization and inequity in society. It demands for capacity building, awareness building and skill development to improve the status of the marginalized.

Batliwala (1994) in support of empowerment theory argues that empowerment should center on the control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. The material asset over which control can be exercised may be physical, human, or financial such as land, water, forest, people's bodies and labor, money and access to money. Intellectual resources include knowledge, information, and ideas. Control over ideology signifies the ability to generate, propagate, sustain and institutionalize specific sets of beliefs, values, attitudes and behavior, virtually determining how people perceive and function within given socio-economic and political environment. According to Batliwala, these can be achieved by challenging the patriarchal ideology, male domination and women's subordination; to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality. The process of empowerment must thus address all relevant structures and sources of power. Since the causes of women's inferior status and unequal gender relations are deeply rooted in history, religion, culture, laws and legal systems, social attitudes and political institutions, the solution to women's subordination must therefore penetrate deeply into the relevant structures and ideologies. Keller and Mbwewe (1991) defined empowerment with a development focus. According to them empowerment is "a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination". Carr et al. (1996) in their research on women's economic empowerment in South Asia came up with a definition of empowerment in which the focus was on "economic change/material gain plus increased bargaining power and/or structural change which enables women to secure economic gains on an on-going and sustained basis". Rao (1996) in her study of women in the informal sector has described the "process of empowerment involving not just an improvement in physical and social conditions, but also equal participation in decision making processes, control over resources and mechanisms for sustaining these gains". In other words both the practical and strategic needs of women need to be addressed in the process of empowerment.

However, women empowerment means giving women power and helping them face the challenges of the society. According to Acha (2009), women empowerment is a measure of sustainable good governance. No proper development planning can be successfully made without the use of proper social and economic planning. This has always remained a challenge and cannot be conquered except the women population, their welfare and contributions are significantly put in place. Aderant, (2002), Annekova (2001), Iheduru (2002), Lewis (2006), Mansor (2005), Peters (2010, 2011) have confirmed that women development is very useful in the areas of revenue allocation, determination of per capital income, the labor force etc. According to Longwe (1997), empowerment involves the transformation of patriarchal societies through a process of enlightenment, conscientization and collective organization. Empowerment in this context means assistance which may be in form of cash, materials or training provided to women to enable them influence changes in their socio-economic status and to use their capacities to harness the hidden potentials in material and human resources. Women can be empowered through provision of education and training opportunities to improve their skills and enhance their access to credit facilities. According to Longwe (1997), when women are given equal opportunity with men, they will be able to contribute to the overall development of their communities. Women need well packaged empowerment programs to enable them participate fully in economic activities. However, cultural norms, inadequate government policies for women up-liftment are the hindrances to women empowerment (Ocholi, 1999).

Women's empowerment is therefore vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all. Women empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, is fundamental for the achievement of equality, peace and societal development.

Methods

Study Site

Kaduna State was created on 27th May, 1967 out of the former Northern region. The state shares boundaries with Niger State to the west, Zamfara, Katsina and Kano states to the north, Bauchi and Plateau States to the east and FCT Abuja and Nassarawa state to the south. Kaduna State occupies 46,053 square kilometres. Kaduna State is mostly populated by Hausa, Gbagyi, Adara, Ham, Atyap, Bajjuu, Nikyob and Agworok ethnic communities. According to 2006 Population and Housing Census, the State has a population of 6,066,562. Kaduna State also comprises of 23 local government areas – Birnin Gwari, Chikun, Giwa, Igabi, Ikara, Jaba, Jema'a, Kachia, Kaduna North, Kaduna South, Kagarko, Kajuru, Kaura, Kauru, Kubau, Kudan, Lere, Makarfi, Sabon Gari, Sanga, Soba, Zango-Kataf and Zaria. The State is

endowed with mineral resources such as clay, serpentine, asbestos, amethyst and gold. The diverse socio-cultural and economic realities in the state intertwined to produce both favorable and unfavorable social condition, in which women occupy unique position, owing to the influence of both cultural religious and more significantly social conditions.

Sampling Procedure

The sample for the study comprised of 120 beneficiaries of the SURE-P and 40 community leaders drawn using stratified, purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The 23 LGAs of Kaduna State were stratified in to urban and rural, and two LGAs were randomly selected from each of the two strata (i.e., Kaduna North and Kaduna South LGAs from the urban strata; Soba and Kajuru LGAs from the rural strata). Snowball sampling technique was used in selecting the 100 beneficiaries of the SURE –P from each of the four LGAs; while purposive sampling technique was used in the selection of 40 community leaders from the four LGAs (10 in each LGA).

Data Collection

The data for the study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source were the interviews and FGDs. The interviews were conducted with 10 community leaders in each of the four selected LGAs; and the FGDs were conducted in the four LGAs (two in each of the four selected LGAs). Each of the FGD session comprised of 15 omen beneficiaries of the SURE-P. The focus of the FGDs sessions was on the beneficiaries assessment of the SURE –P with respect to empowerment. The FGD sessions were tape recorded and transcribed. The secondary source involved the examination of official document of the SURE-P blue print and Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development of Kaduna State.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected was analyzed using content analysis. Asika (2006), defines qualitative descriptive analysis to mean summarizing the information generated in the research verbally so as to further discover relationships among variables. The adoption of the foregoing analytical method becomes necessary as more information will be sourced from the respondents. The choice of this technique of analysis was informed by the nature of the data required and the objective of the research.

Findings

Benefits of the SURE-P

The findings of the study reveal that the SURE - P has had an impact on the lives of the people particularly in the area of skills acquisition, a discussant in FGD in Kajuru LGA notes: “The money these women earn really help greatly by putting it into general family upkeeps such as augmenting feeding, payment of children school fees and general home keeping.” Another was more lucid as he observes: “there are gains in the sales of the detergents and home fragrances but the issue is the little market demand and efforts required to sale such resources are challenges to family, especially the children’s moral upkeep. Often, it became frustrating to have the product in the room without sales”.

Accordingly, opinion from most of the discussants tilted toward agreement on improvement on the self-reliance capabilities and status of women. A discussant notes: “among the important status symbol here is the ability of one to pay and go for the holy pilgrimage”. Another corroborates: “Women trading in clothing and other businesses now own shops and have gone to perform the mandatory pilgrimage and are able to buy three to four shops to expand their business.” The discussant also opines: “In general, women are striving and are making progress in being self-reliance. The women’s abilities and self-sufficiency are translating into being able to lend us monies as farming loans” (FGD Kajuru L.G.).

In Soba local government, similar views are ascended. A discussant posits: “Most of what the women are doing have changed and improved a lot. For example “my wife now can go to Kano and buy merchandise, sell them directly to customers or give them out on wholesale.” While, another discussant in the same session narrates: “You will find out that these women now have to use other women to help them in providing services to their clients like during events and festivals. In that sense you can see that they are doing very well.” In the same parlance another discussant expatiates: “In terms of productivity, it is a level of movement to mop up resources to arrange productive venture. Sometimes it may take a whole week for a woman to get things together for productive ventures” (FGD Soba).

Most discussants in Kaduna North LGA agreed that scheme has created self-reliance, reduced the vulnerability of women through exposure to income support opportunities in their communities. Also, it has improved socioeconomic activities in the communities and enhanced societal access to quality socioeconomic infrastructure and services across the country and has eliminated social vices that are associated with unemployment and poverty in the community. However, some of the discussants in Kaduna North, seem to be divided on the issue of self-reliance the program has created. Some of respondents disagree with the notion that the program has created self-reliance among members of the community. While some of them explained the impacts and benefits of being empowered by the as follows: “In this regards women’s productivity often entails taking other women as assistants or helpers whom will be paid after rendering services for the processing of the being cake.” A discussant in Soba concurs: “There are a lot of influences such women have in the community. “My wife for example teaches other women her skills. She also gives goods on credit and gives cash as loans to women and men.” Similarly, another discussant elucidates:

Yes in the areas of influences such women are doing well, especially in transferring their knowledge and skills to other women in the locality. Additionally they counsel and support women in terms of marital difficulties e.g. lack of what to eat or money to take children to hospital (FGD in Kaduna South LGA).

In Kaduna South a discussant emphasizes:

Some of the women use their children and relatives as assistance; in that process they transfer skills to such children and relatives. One important feature of influence is their ability to support other women; for example, by giving them their old tools or machines as in the case of my wife whom gave another woman her old machine base on hire/purchase (FGD in Kaduna South LGA).

A discussant in Kajuru explained election participation by women: “Within the Hausa community election participation by women is mostly voting. Though for the other communities some of the women attempt vying for ward offices e.g. councillorship”. Another discussant observed empathically:

The role of women is increasingly guided by religion. So, leadership and election role with the Hausa women follow such dictates, although the women are trying in the areas of increasing awareness and general assistance of fellow women and men (FGD in Kajuru LGA).

In Soba LGA, all the FGD discussants shared similar opinion to the above. A discussant elaborates: “The roles of women in politics must be aligned to the wishes of their spouses. What the communities need is economic empowered women and not women as threat or challenges to men.” Others cited structural challenges as follow:

On the issue of election roles in the community, there are two issues involved. The first is the lack of strong economic footing of the women, specifically resources. Secondly, is the issue of lack of administrative capabilities and nature of women as generally weak creature compared to men. These factors made the elective political roles of women minimal (FGD Discussant in Soba LGA).

Most discussants contend that the role of women in the election process remains voting though; there are signs of improvements in other aspects like mobilizing other women for elections.

Challenges of SURE – P

Although the beneficiaries have listed some of the benefits of the program to their communities, they have identified a number of challenges inhibiting their overall success in their area. A discussant in Kajuru explains as follow:

The issue is about magnitude i.e., the number of women who benefited from the programs, are always few. For example, of recent some women were trained and supported with poultry, fisheries and bees. Secondly, it is the issues of purpose and direction. Here, women mostly are engaged in business and trading and for the majority of the men (Hausa/Fulani) it will be difficult to embrace trades bee rearing, hair dressing etc., for most of the women which such of the equipment were given sold them and used the money for other businesses (FGD, Kajuru).

Another discussant corroborates such views as he posits:

As for us the Fulani in this locality, our women are not like the Hausa women whose trades could be carried out at home. Our women sell the milk from our cows, which we collected for them or which they bought in case of those who don't have the cows to milk. From the proceed of these ventures our women feed, clothe and help in all aspects of family life, but is ironic that despite the number of our women in this locality we are not assisted by the government as if we are not indigenes of the state. What came as empowerment is not in tandem with what people need or could be beneficial to them.

For example the community leaders in Kaduna North and South are of the views that the packaging and outcome are adequate, discussants in the FGDs observe differently. A discussant in Kaduna South elaborates in detail:

Most of the programs especially the SURE-P is not well packaged compared to what we learnt from the media of Kano, Niger and other states. We learnt from such states that participants were given complete relevant kits and a sum of N150, 000.00 (one hundred and fifty thousand Naira) as take-off. This is a complete variance from what was obtained here which are for those trained in husbandry two underfed animals worth less than N2000 and a paltry sum of N10, 000.00 was given as start off grant.

Another discussant in the session summarized as follows: "The empowerment programs are good on paper but their implementations have a lot of shortcomings like training people and not giving them the necessary tools to work with." In Kaduna North most discussants hampered on the inability of the beneficiaries to get the SURE-P settlement kits or beneficiaries being trained a particular skill like fish process and given inadequate tools or none at all or given tools for other form of trades or skills not trained in. The above are the kinds of comments at the FGD in Soba. In Kajuru discussants are more apt, as one expresses:

What the government is doing (by skills acquisition, equipment donation from SURE-P and others) is an attempt to bring obstruction in social life of the people. The radical change in the trade and life of the people here is not a welcome idea. This in my view, goes to spoil rather than improve women productive capacities. Instead the government should ask what the jobs or duties of the Hausa, Fulani and other tribes are after which they can assist them accordingly. For the Fulani women, the trade and skill will remain sells of cow milk, grains and cloths.

Discussion of major Findings

The findings of the study has revealed that the program has succeeded in providing vocational skills training, materials and assistance; and has promoted gender equality for sustainable development; and increase in women's representation in governance. The findings of the study also indicate that a number of skills acquisition centers have been constructed and equipped across in the state, which have increased the respondents income in the community. The findings of the study reveal that a number of women have been trained in vocational skills: interior and outdoor decorations, cosmetology and beauty therapy, hair dressing, fashion designing and garment making, etc. which have helped in boosting the respondents economic activities their communities.

Despite the numerous benefits accruing from implementation of SURE -P, the findings of the study revealed that lack of funding was the major challenge in the implementation of the program. Another constraint has to do with the leadership. Since independence, leadership in Nigeria appears to be deteriorating. Many reform programs had been undertaken before this, but the society lacks political leadership committed to implement them. Though the Nigerian leaders seems good in prescribing solutions to economic problem but are worse for not providing the institutional framework to make it grow. Since continuity in government policies is the bane of Nigeria growth, SURE - P should have been executed seriously that the next government embrace continuation. Nigeria leaders should learn to know that continuity is better than 'dump and start afresh'.

Despite several attempts by successive governments at empowering women in Nigeria, little success has been recorded. Yet huge sums have been expended by government and non-governmental agencies in this direction. However, this cannot be unconnected to wanton corruption, income inequality, political instability, conflicts and ineffective public policies. In addition, poverty eradication drive, has suffered

huge setbacks as a result of institutionalized hypocrisy in the guise of poverty alleviation and economic empowerment interventions. Going through the history of attempts by government to arrest the soaring rate of poverty in the country, one cannot but see the disconnection between the schemes on the one hand and solutions to poverty on the other, which unarguably lies in women's active participation in the process. As pointed out by Enemu (2001:26) that "an effective and sustainable process of women empowerment must necessarily include the expansion of women's access to educational opportunities, skill acquisition and positions of authority".

However, as stated earlier, the failure of these schemes is tied to corruption and political instability, stemming from lack of stringent monitoring of government expenditures, to diversion of funds meant for schemes in exchange for political patronage and loyalty.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper concludes that the beneficiaries of women empowerment program - SURE-P in the sampled LGAs of Kaduna State have mixed feelings on its delivery and benefits. In the four local governments sampled the feeling is positively tilted towards, sensing that with proper adjustment, such programs are a relief to families, communities' socio-economic needs. Considering the current poverty incidence in the country, one can conclude that the past poverty alleviation programs have not achieved much. This is perhaps due to the problems identified as hindering the effective implementation of the programs. However, lack of involvement of the target beneficiaries in identifying the right projects coupled with administrative and operational failures were among the problems identified as hindering the achievement of the objectives of the programs.

Therefore, this study recommends the need for involvement of the local people in the identification and design of projects so that sufficient participation can be achieved. Programs such as SURE -P, should be geared towards provision of sustainable employment so that in the long run, their impacts trickle down to the grassroots.

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