Vocational Skills Training: Way Out of Poverty for Women in Ghana

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Abstract: Women, especially mothers have been disadvantaged for a long time; as such there is a strong gender gap between men and women. Women’s access to employment remains limited owing to this gender gap, mainly because women are the primary care givers of children. Accordingly, balancing formal work and women’s primary responsibility to take care of children has become a challenge especially in Ghana where there are no proper institutions to take care of these offspring. Furthermore, women rely on their family to be able to enter into the workforce. This challenge has led to a lot of women remaining unemployed and financially dependent on their spouses. There are many ways to eradicate poverty in Africa and in the world; one sure way of eradicating poverty is through vocational skills training for women which ultimately gives women employable skills for entrepreneurship. Various Policies on promoting vocational education and entrepreneurial skills has been enacted by international development organizations and governments to make these women economically empowered. In implementing these policies on vocational skills training, it was realized that there is a significant negative relationship between vocational skills training and high poverty levels. When vocational skills training goes up, high poverty levels reduces. Accordingly, the vocational skills training women provided women a means of sustainable livelihood. In addition, vocational skills training will help bridge the gender inequality gap in terms of employment and led to a drastic decrease in poverty levels.

Keywords: Gender, Vocational, Skills, Training, Women, Poverty, Reduction, Economic, Social Change.

1. Introduction
Poverty is the lack of basic necessities in life that is food, shelter and clothing (Sen, 1991). Social aspects of poverty cannot be overlooked as well. Thus, social aspects of poverty can be defined as people not being able to live the kind of lives they value and also the inability of people to develop meaningful relationships with people in society (Sen, 1991).
Ghana’s Poverty Reduction Efforts

Poverty reduction has been the central goal of every economy. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger by 2020 is one of the United Nations sustainable development goals. Among the poor, women are generally disadvantaged in terms of access to public benefits and sharing in household benefits (Ghana Statistical Service, 1999). Significant progress has been made in poverty reduction, improvement in economic development, good governance, youth and gender empowerment in Ghana (United Nations Development Programme, 2007).

Research into Gender and Poverty Issues

Research into gender and poverty activities implies that gender gaps are still an impediment to economic growth. Gender differences in employment and social security are impediments to growth and poverty reduction in Ghana, owing to the fact that men and women differ in their access to, and control over, these human, economic and social capital assets. A country’s development and poverty reduction strategy informed by a better understanding of gender gaps will promote social change.

The Need for Vocational Skills Training for Women to Reduce Poverty Levels

History /Background Information

Gender inequality continues to be the most pervasive forms of inequality in the world. In spite of some important progress to change this inequality by organizations, governments and groups the problem still persists. Accordingly, no country has been able to achieve gender equality with women and men (Oxfam International, 2017).

All over the world, women have been sidelined in developmental issues; this has led to women living in poverty more than men. In addition women’s access to formal employment is always limited based on the fact that women are the primary care givers of children. A study based on the experiences of mothers in formal employment in Korea ascertained the fact that women are not given fair share of access to formal employment and are lagging behind. The study delved further to reveal how women can work only when their family members feel she needs such support and are willing to support her (Oh, 2018).

Problem Statement

75% of women in developing countries such as Ghana, are in the informal sector and often receive fewer wage, do unpaid work in the form of child care and house work (Oxfam International, 2017). Owing to this, gender gaps in unemployment persists, although the gap is being bridged by social change activists, the gap still exists as more women remain unemployed because of child care (National Gender Policy, 2015). One reason for the inability of many interventions to achieve planned goals and objective for women is the fact that they focus exclusively on physical capital support without taking human capital into consideration (International Labour Office, 2017).

It is against this background that vocational skills training should be done for women to help bridge the gender inequality gap in employment. These vocational skills training focuses on human capital and tackles women in the informal sector since they form a large segment of the population with high poverty levels. In addition, these vocational skills training programmes will at the end of the day make women more economically empowered in order to reduce poverty to significant levels and boost economic growth.

2. Literature Review

Vocational skills education and training is a powerful tool against poverty by improving women empowerment considerably. Furthermore, women’s access to employable skills improves significantly owing to the fact that they can start their own businesses. India is handicapped with a very weak and narrow knowledge and skills base because it is predominantly poor. To escape poverty, India has resorted to vocational skills training to take women out of poverty. In addition the vocational skills training has been more effective in reducing poverty than providing basic needs to these Indian women ( Diwakar & Ahamad, 2015).
A study conducted on the impact evaluation of large scale training intervention in rural Egypt where marginalized women in treated villages were offered intensive vocational, business and life skills training. Accordingly, this training resulted in women engaging in more income generating activities driven by an increase in self-employment (International Labour Office, 2017).

**Policies that Govern Vocational Skills Training Programmes for Women**

The United Nations Education and Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) policy has promoted equal access of girls and women to vocational education. Accordingly, this policy has led to the improvement and living conditions of women (Diwakar & Ahamad, 2015). Furthermore, the implementation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) policy has improved women’s access to vocational and entrepreneurial skills all over the world (Diwakar & Ahamad, 2015).

**Ghana in Focus**

Ghana has made considerable efforts towards reducing poverty levels by promoting girls’ enrolment into vocational schools to learn vocational skills. Ghana was able to achieve this goal through providing scholarships for girls from extremely poor households (National Gender Policy, 2015).

Government’s efforts at promoting the issues of women and men are evident in the enactment of laws, development of policies, strategies and commitments to international conventions. However, Ghana’s multicultural background makes generalization about women’s access to resources challenging, which leads to high poverty levels.

In addition, most social change activists resort to vocational skills training intervention methods especially for women in the informal sector, however, unemployment is still rife. Therefore a study was conducted to reveal the challenges that were causing a rise in unemployment despite the intervention methods. The study found out that the main reason was lack of entrepreneurial skills for the participants of the vocational skills training to be self-employed (National Gender Policy, 2015).

Moreover, other reasons were lack of guidance and counselling for the participants to know what skills were appropriate for them. Moreover, low level of instructor competency; the instructor had not acquired the appropriate skills and knowledge to teach. The study also realized that the training curriculum were outdated and needed to be improved on. Furthermore, poor infrastructure and weak management system were also a contributing factor for the unsuccessful vocational skills training programme (National Gender Policy, 2015).

**3. Methodology**

- All women in predominantly poor areas who do not have access to formal jobs will have to be trained in vocational skills for entrepreneurship.
- Furthermore, the informal sector (entrepreneurial businesses) which employs a large number of women will be identified.
- The training instructors will be trained in vocational and entrepreneurial skills and other related topics relevant to the training.
- Participants will be guided and counseled to determine the type of skill appropriate for them.
- In addition, skills development for self-employment will be the focus, so that work will be readily available once the participants complete the skills training.
- Moreover, training modules will be reviewed and revised and also incorporate the use of technology to help the participants to be abreast with time when they start their entrepreneurial businesses.
- Accordingly, there will also be vocational skills linkage with industry for the programme to be effective and ensure continuity.
- Management structures and infrastructures will be developed and strengthened to ensure proper delivery of the vocational skills training.
- Moreover, the delivery of the skills training will be flexible to incorporate child care for the mothers.
4. Results

Population: All unemployed mothers in Ghana. Sample size: 100 mothers in the Nungua municipality in Ghana using random sampling approach. Methodology: 100 Mothers were trained in groups of twenty each for a period of three months in entrepreneurial skills such as hair dressing, soap making, batik and bead making. There was a day care available at the training center to cater for the young ones of these mothers.

Post training review:

- Participants (100) of the training were interviewed on the aftermath of the training and a significant negative relationship was established between vocational skills training and poverty levels.
- The study concluded the fact that mothers were more attentive in learning the skills, owing to the fact that their children were safe and sound and close to them.
- The study also concluded that after the training programme, mothers were now financially independent and they had high self-esteem.
- The women learnt quickly and faster since the training instructors were well trained in the course and they adopted a participatory approach which was engaging.
- After the learning period, the women started an entrepreneurial entity within a period of six months lowering poverty levels.
- There was a decline in groups of women idling about as more women were now in the labor force.
- The complaints of mothers having to stay home to cater for young ones also reduced drastically because they could go to work with their young ones since they were now entrepreneurs.

5.0 Conclusion

From the research conducted, it was found out that there is a significant negative relationship between vocational skills training and poverty levels. When more women are trained in entrepreneurial skills it bridges the gender inequality gap hence reducing poverty to significant levels.

Moreover, the driving force of any economy is access to knowledge and skills. In addition, vocational education and skills will equip the mothers to be economically empowered and boost the economy. Therefore, the economy becomes more productive, innovative and competitive through the existence of more skilled human potential (Ghana Living Standards Survey, 2008).

Countries with high level of gender equality tend to have high levels of income, therefore closing the gender gap by implementing vocational skills training will lead to reduction in poverty. Moreover, supporting women to have access to quality and decent work and improving their livelihoods is crucial for fulfilling women’s rights, decreasing poverty and achieving broader developmental goals in an economy (Oxfam International, 2017). Thus the vocational skills training could go a long way in policy formulation in poverty reduction strategies in an era where poverty eradication remains one central goal of the government of Ghana and in the world.

6. Recommendations to Improve Social Change

- There should be equal access to opportunities to both men and women to promote economic growth significantly by giving women more opportunities in areas where they are lacking.
- More developmental efforts by the government should be tailored towards equal access to skills development and employability for women to be more productive in society.
- There should be proactive measures by non-governmental organisations, not for profit organization and groups for women to provide funding for such trainings to help the women to be economically empowered.
- There should be continuity of vocational skills programme to ensure economic sustainability. Accordingly, the vocational skills training programme should be run every quarter for a long period of time for long term effect on women.
7. References
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