

The Role of Women Empowerment Clubs in Poverty Reduction in Zambia

Flora Ngoma-Moono
University of Zambia
florangoma@ymail.com

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of women empowerment clubs in poverty reduction in Zambia. The study targeted some women empowerment groups in different parts of the country. The objectives of this study were as follows; to find out if women's clubs contribute to poverty reduction among women, to examine the challenges that women's club experiences and to determine measures that could be put in place to overcome the challenges.

The research design of the study was a survey design which used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A sample of 50 women was selected from 10 women empowerment clubs in various parts of Zambia which include Lusaka, Chinsali and Senanga. The data was collected using questionnaires.

The findings of the study revealed that women have been empowered by the clubs. They have acquired skills and knowledge that some of them have used to start small businesses. These small businesses help the women to earn an income that helps them to run their households and send children to school.

The study therefore recommended that the government and other stakeholders must help in financing the women empowerment clubs and a local and international market should be created to allow women to sell whatever they make and produce in their empowerment group or clubs.

Key words: Women, Empowerment, Club, Poverty, Reduction

INTRODUCTION

Women are usually at the centre of human, social, economic, cultural and political development. They are generally assigned a second class status in most traditional societies, especially in Africa. Women suffer all forms of discriminatory disadvantages both on account of their sex and class. Scholars explain that because of their productive and community management roles in society, the effects of poverty hit women particularly hard. This is in spite of the application of numerous strategies and several efforts by the United Nations, international donor agencies and individual countries, aimed at reducing minimizing or eradicating poverty (Mayoux, 2002).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Statistically the number of very poor women in the world has increased from 10-30 million at the end of 1999 to 69 million at the end of 2005. The increase represented additional 58.7 million poorest women

receiving empowerment in form of micro- loans in the last six years. Women are considered as preferred clients since their improved income benefits families' through improved nutrition, health, education and well-being. This is because women have higher repayment rates and work better in group based programmes (World Bank, 2004).

In Zambia various strategies aimed at addressing the needs of the poor women especially in rural areas are devised. Among the interventions are the public welfare (PWAS) under the Department of Social Welfare and WEP under the Department of Community Development. The national policy on Community Development focuses on poverty eradication through the empowerment of communities for sustainable human development. However, the capacity of these departments charged with the responsibility of dealing with the poor is almost non-existent (Chinguta et al, 1998).

The role of women's club activities are that they are extension oriented. That is to mean extension of something such as skills, knowledge, information and ideas from one person to another. Thus, extension is one of the main objectives of promoting any project through women's groups as a way of transferring power or resources to those who do not have. Given an economic and materialist framework, the term empowering seem proper. It entails that the have nots, the powerless or disadvantaged acquiring or being given more power, resources and knowledge than before. In this regard, women's groups function as bridges to receive packages of empowerment and to enable others to gain access to those invisible or hidden within poverty (Gboku and Lekoko, 2007).

Women empowerment clubs main goal is to reduce poverty, sometimes, the money earned by the male member of the family is not sufficient to meet the demands of the family. The added earnings of women helps the family to come out of poverty trap ensuring that all home demands are met. The clubs targets all women, divorced, married and single to be part of the increasing rise of women independence looking at programmes aligned such as the contributions of sum of money by all members which they are able to borrow to undertake their various projects such as paying schools and building projects (Ministry of finance and Economic Development).

Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in development activities (Hazarika, 2011).

Women empowerment clubs encourage women to participate in economic activities and this helps to bring about growth at household and national level. According to Department of foreign affairs and trade (2016) societies that make better use of the skills, talents and time of all members will more likely to prosper. Women are often more likely than men to use income to support development outcomes within their families.

Women's economic empowerment is a pre-requisite for sustainable development and pro poor growth and the achievements of all the millennium development goals. Achieving women's economic empowerment will directly enhance sound policies, holistic approach and long-term commitment and gender-specific perspectives integrated at the design stage of policy and programming. Gender equality and empowered women are catalysts for multiplying development efforts. Investments in gender equality yield the highest returns of all development investments. Women usually invest a higher proportion of their earnings in their

families and communities than men. A study in Brazil showed that the likelihood of a child's survival increased by 20% when the mother controlled household income (Narayan, 2002).

Economic empowerment is the only way to help women's social status to change. Economic empowerment is an important component of human survival, individual development and potential change for the better in terms of social status. It has also been noted that income generating programs allow the poor to be more self-reliant and substantially encourage women to engage in economically productive activities (Nanyunga, 2010).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out if women's clubs contributed to poverty reduction among women.
2. To examine the challenges that women's club experienced.
3. To determine measures that could be put in place to overcome the challenges.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do women empowerment clubs contribute to poverty reduction among women?
2. What are the challenges that women empowerment clubs experienced?
3. What are some of the measures that could be put in place to overcome the challenges?

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a plan or strategy of investigation used to obtain evidence to answer research questions. It describes the strategy for conducting the study, including when, from whom and under what conditions the data will be obtained (Kagan, 2012). The study used a descriptive survey design in which both numeric and non-numeric data was collected. McBurney (1994:170) define the survey assessing public opinion or individual characteristics by the use of questionnaire and sampling methods.

POPULATION

Polit and Hungler (1999:37) define the population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. In this study the population was women's clubs/groups in Zambia.

SAMPLE

A sample is a subset of a population selected to participate in the study. It is a fraction of the whole, selected to participate in the research project (Brink 1996:133; Polit & Hungler 1999:227).

SAMPLING PROCEDURE

Researchers normally use two major sampling procedures to select a sample and these are probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling gives everyone or everything an equal chance of being

selected. Non probability sampling on the other hand is used in situations where the population is not clearly defined. The study used purposive sampling procedure.

DATA COLLECTION

Questionnaires with open and closed ended questions where used to collect data from the respondents.

FINDINGS

Distribution of respondents’ age group

Age	Frequency	Percentage
15 to 25	7	14
26 to 35	7	14
36 to 45	14	28
46 to 55	16	32
56 and above	6	12
Total	50	100

The table above showed that 14% of the respondents were between the age group 15 to 25, another 14% were in the age group between 26 to 35, 28% of the respondents were in the age group between 36 and 45, 32% of the respondent were between 46 and 55 and 12% were 56 and above.

Distribution of respondent’s level of education

Grade	Frequency	Percentage
Grade 7	14	28
Grade 9	13	26
Grade 12	15	30
Other	8	16
Total	50	100

The table showed that 28% of the respondents had gone up to grade 7, 26% of the respondent had gone up to grade 9, 30 % of the respondents had gone up grade 12 and 16% of the respondents had other education qualifications.

Have women empowerment clubs empowered participants

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	45	90
No	5	10
Total	50	100

The table above showed that 90% of the respondents said that empowerment clubs empowered participants while 10% said that empowerment clubs don’t empower participants.

The majority of the respondents agreed that women's clubs have empowered them with skills and knowledge. These skills and knowledge are applied in real life situation and have enabled them to be able to support their homes financially with the money they earned from these skills. The majority of the respondents have been able to start small business and become self-employed. They respondents stated that some of the skill they have learnt include making feed from soya beans, keeping chickens and goats, growing vegetables, tailoring, and financial skills.

Some of the benefits of participating in women's empowerment clubs have been stated by the majority of the respondents to include, being able to start a business, they can able to take their children to school and they are able to become self-reliant and reduce on the dependence syndrome.

The respondents indicated that women empowerment clubs face a lot of challenges in their operations. Some of the challenges are as follows, lack of proper funding from Government or private organisations, the women lack market to sell their goods, some club do not have qualified instructors to teach the women skills and some of the clubs members do not commit fully to their clubs.

Some of the measures that must be put in place to overcome the challenges that women empowerment experience have been stated as follows government and other stakeholders like Non-governmental organisations should help in funding the women empowerment clubs. The respondents also suggested that women should be given loans so that they can start up business, government should find ways to promote products that are made by the women's clubs and a market must be created for women to be able to sell their products.

CONCLUSIONS

From the finding it is very clear that there are a lot of benefits that women find in participating in the empowerment clubs. These clubs help the women to acquire skills and knowledge that they can use to empower themselves. However there is more that can be done by the government and private organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following were the recommendations;

1. The government and other stakeholders must helping in financing the women empowerment clubs.
2. The government should help women in the empowerment groups or clubs to access loans.
3. More women should be encouraged to take part in the empowerment clubs for their own benefit.
4. A local and international market should be created to allow women to sell whatever they make and produce in their empowerment group or clubs.
5. It is important that more women empowerment club are established in all the province in Zambia.

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