Women Empowerment Through Access to Information: The Strategic Roles of Non-governmental Organizations in Nigeria

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In the last few decades, there has been steady increasing awareness of the need to empower women in order to improve their socioeconomic status to be able to cope and also contribute effectively in this period of economic crisis. ATI (access to information) provision is a vital factor in empowerment, thus, many organizations, such as library, resource centres, and NGOs (non-governmental organizations), have been involved in empowering women in Nigeria. The paper examines the various programmes/services of the libraries, resource centres, and NGOs in meeting the socio-economic and political information needs of women. It ascertains how women actually access the information provided by the NGOs (especially those that have information or documentation centres) and its impact on their socio-economic status. It also identifies the challenges of the NGOs face in providing information to empower the women. The case study research method was adopted and data for the study collected from the women (users) and management and staff of the NGO centres through questionnaire and interview, while qualitative data gathered were reported. Majority of the women using the centres had to be taught how to use new technologies like computers, laptops, ipads, and smart phones. The most used means of accessing information by the women was the radio and television, and person-to-person communication either by word of mouth or by telephone. The NGOs were discovered to be slowly but steadily gaining ground in educating the women and creating awareness among them of their potentials to do better, to be empowered, and to stand up for their rights and themselves anywhere. Constraints faced by the NGOs were mostly funding and getting enough materials, equipment, and other media needed to further empower women. They were found to be a great source of inspiration to the women especially in the rural or less urban parts of the country. Gendered information was provided in the documentation units of the NGOs and efforts were ongoing in a few of them to translate some relevant materials to local languages.

Keywords: women, ATI (access to information), information centres, women empowerment, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), resource centres, gendered information

Introduction

An old adage says "If you think knowledge is unimportant, try ignorance". A state of not knowing is one which is not desirable for anyone and is more devastating when a woman does not know. This because she/he is most likely to transfer this ignorance to her/his offspring and then there results more ignorant women and men. The African Continent is favoured with abundant natural, human, and cultural resources, yet Africans remain

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poor and most of the poor Africans are women. In almost all the countries in Africa, women's empowerment poses a major challenge (ADF (The African Development Forum), 2008). Several efforts to tackle this challenge gave birth to initiatives, such as the NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development), Africa Network of Gender Machineries, and AISI (African Information Society Initiatives) by the AU (African Union)—the former organization of African Unity (Economic Commission for Africa, 2005; Africa Partnership Forum, 2007).

About half of the world's population is women who are ideally supposed to contribute half of the world's economic, social, and political input. This does not occur, however, as research indicates otherwise. In Nigeria, it was revealed in a comprehensive report presented by the British Council Lagos on Gender in Nigeria 2012 that only 15% of Nigerian women have bank accounts, and yet, of the 162.5 million people in the country, 49% (80.2 million) are girls and women (Nwiro, 2012). Furthermore, other researches confirm that many women live in ignorance, poverty, and with little hope of getting to know what is happening in the outside world. Meanwhile, women are increasingly being forced to seek alternative avenues for generating an income to be able to keep their families going.

Since there are many more female-headed households, and therefore, more than ever before, women are in need of information that will lead to economic empowerment. NGOs (non-governmental organizations) have sought to find ways and means of empowering women in order to assist them to stand up for themselves and achieve economic, social, and political independence. The strategic roles of NGOs in their effort to provide ATI (access to information) to Nigerian women in the process of empowering them are presented here.

Statement of the Problem

The level of women's ATI is rather low and therefore the women are not as empowered as their male counterparts, or are totally disempowered. The NGOs have put in intervention strategies in various ways and to various ends, the greatest of which is to empower the women and girls, give them a voice and improve their lives. An attempt is made to highlight the success stories of the NGOs identified in this study and discuss the challenges faced by them in the empowerment bid. In spite of the tremendous prospects for growth and development by women for their empowerment, the ATI of the women is advancing at a less than desired slower pace.

Objectives of the Study

This study was designed to investigate the level of ATI that NGOs provide for their women clientele. The specific research questions in the study were:

(1) What is the mission of the NGOs?

(2) What are the specific objectives and programmes of the organisation geared towards achieving women empowerment?

(3) What are the strategic roles the NGOs perform to help women access information for development?

(4) What are the impacts of provision of ATI to the women so far?

(5) What are the challenges faced by the NGOs in achieving their ATI provision mission?

Literature Review

Women Empowerment in an African Context

Although African countries have adopted a number of universal declarations and commitments but little

has been done in translating those declarations into national policies (Economic Commission for Africa, 2005). Even where commitments have been implemented, nevertheless, African women are persistently marginalized in accessing information and ICTs (information communication technologies) due to problem of illiteracy, socio-cultural attitudes, and lack of understanding of the resources and situational impediments experienced by women (ADF, 2008). This is perhaps as a result of low access to productive information resources and wide gap between commitments and implementation (Economic Commission for Africa, 2005).

In this information society, whatever area of empowerment, ATI is very crucial and the African Union Gender Policy realized this, thus, one of the policy frameworks is to:

> Promote equitable access for both women and men to resources, knowledge, information and services including basic needs. Also facilitate the implementation of corrective measures to address existing inequalities in access to and control over resources, as well as other empowerment opportunities. (Department of Trade and Industry, 2011, p. 25)

The promotion of women's empowerment in Africa in areas, such as education, politics, and economics has been slow and much remains to be done. ADF (2008) averred that empowering women to participate in the information economy would bring about benefits, such as increased creativity, expertise, and competitiveness in technology sector and thus assist the information economy thereby lead to economic growth. The government in African countries cannot do this enormous task alone, this is the reason that NGOs in Africa have stood up to the responsibility of empowering women in different areas. In fact, the Economic Commission for Africa (2005) commended the efforts of the NGOs in the development and adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter of Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

Friedmann, as cited in Lennie (2002), however, had earlier purported that empowerment cannot be conferred by external agents and suggests that such agents can play a role in providing "support in ways that encourage the disempowered to free themselves of traditional dependency". Empowerment, therefore, becomes an effort to achieve social, political, and psychological well-being. Looked at from the perspective of people in households, these various states of power can be achieved and further sustained with education and proper information acquisition.

Information Access and Use by Women

Information remains a very crucial commodity for any person or groups of persons and its use in making decisions has been noted. Though everyone needs information, women particularly need information on issues affecting their health, that of their babies during and after pregnancy, and for their businesses. ATI for women is often limited due to cultural, religious, and sometimes sociological factors. As noted by Olutunla (2008), myriads of difficulties are faced by women in developing countries in gaining ATI (e.g., unawareness of microfinance institutions), resulting in much of the resources available to them remaining untapped. Women even face discrimination policies of society at large when sourcing for financial aid from financial institutions despite research proving that women are more reliable in refunding of loans (CTA (Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation), 2001). Brush et al. (2004) found that there is no gender discrimination in the issuing of loans but rather some banks are more concerned with the owner's credit risk and prospect rather than gender, and if any gender differences exist, it is because of women's disadvantaged status in lacking assets. A contradictory result was recorded from a study conducted by Adesua-Lincoln (2011). The result of her study showed that many of the women entrepreneurs (76.0%) lacked information and advice on how to access finance and this was a very serious constraint affecting their business start-up. In addition, 61.0% of the female

entrepreneurs stated that lack of avenues for business networking was a very serious constraint on firm growth. Information networks that are supposed to make ATI easier for women remain out of their reach especially in rural areas where physical access is difficult due to bad roads and poor infrastructure.

Atinmo (2012) in considering the exclusion of the visually impaired saw ATI as access to everything and advocated that libraries for special persons especially the visually impaired be given attention by governments, associations, and people who had the vision for inclusion of the less privileged. Studies indicate that men are more likely than women to use the Web to read news, seek financial information and trade stocks online, participate in online auctions, access government Websites, and search for sports news. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to seek health information and play online games, and are more inclined than men to get religious information and research new jobs (Pastore, 2000).

Uganneya and Umaru (2008) found that women farmers in Benue State, Nigeria, own various types of information and communication media, particularly radio sets (53.0%) and television sets (37.0%). Majority of the women's ATI and communication media was not impressive due to high cost of the media and high rate of illiteracy. Sibanda (2001) reiterated the fact that in Africa, radio is and will continue for a long time to be the most appropriate communications technology that is available to the majority of people in developing countries, particularly the disenfranchised communities, women, children, and the youth. Since the rural populations, the urban poor, the illiterate, and the marginalized are at the greatest risk of being left out of the information and knowledge revolution, the radio is usually the communication media most used.

Methodology

The case study research method was adopted. The study was conducted on NGOs selected from online searches to identify organizations with women's concerns. NGOs that had Web presence, thus, formed the core of the study population. The respondents were the Chief Executive Officers of the NGOs or their information officers. More information was got from telephone interviews, online chats, and e-mail communication. In order to gather data that are truly representative of Nigerian NGOs, the decision was taken to draw the sample from six geopolitical zones of Nigeria if possible. Eight NGOs were contacted but only four were able to give full details and responses to the questions asked. They are:

(1) CIRDDOC (The Civil Resources Development and Documentation Centre), Enugu State;
(2) Women Inspiration Development Centre, Ile-Ife, Osun State;
(3) W-TEC (Women's Technology Empowerment Centre), Lagos, Lagos State;
(4) EWEI (Empowering Women for Excellence Initiatives), Kaduna, Kaduna State.

Case Studies

CIRDDOC, Enugu State. CIRDDOC, Enugu State, was established in 1996 for the protection and promotion of human rights and women's human rights and the strengthening of civil society. CIRDDOC is committed to the institutionalization of good governance, gender equality, and the rule of law in Nigeria. They have branch offices in Anambra and Ebonyi States as well as in Abuja the Federal Capital. They have a Web presence at http://www.cirddoc.org. They publish books and monographs and provide gendered information, that is, information that was designed or gathered specifically for either men or women in their documentation unit for women in their community. They have book sales outlet and organize seminars and workshops to educate the women on topical issues that concern them. Some of their challenges are funding and the ability to get the women

to master the use of the new technologies that they need to use to access information;

Women Inspiration Development Centre, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. The vision of this NGO is to provide a safe place and network to empower women and girls in challenging situations to discover the real purpose of their existence and create new possibilities for themselves without fear or intimidation. Its aim is to increase the efforts of improving the health, economic and social status of Nigeria women and girls and doing so can reduce violence against women and girls to its barest minimum. Programmes developed are along the lines of:

(1) Accessing information through sensitization workshops organized viz.: (a) They have empowered about 80 women within two years through participation in workshops that help them increase their self-confidence and self-knowledge so that they can discover what is important to them; and (b) Translated this knowledge into a workable vision; identified and transformed the limiting beliefs that inevitably arise when creating something new; and adopted an actionable growth strategy to attain their goals. This training program was developed by David Gershon and Gail Straub, founders and co-directors of Empowerment Institute's School of Transformational Change, in the United States of America. Busayo Obisakin, the Chief Executive Officer of the NGO is a Certified Empowerment Trainer of that school;

(2) Empowerment through talks and enlightenment campaigns: They have empowered about 350 women and girls in their community on how to protect themselves from domestic and sexual violence through talks and enlightenment campaigns;

(3) Empowerment through counseling and outreaches: (a) They have also helped women facing domestic violence with one-on-one counseling, helped them to start small business and find a safe place to settle down with their children; and (b) Violence prevention outreach had been organized in poverty-stricken slums and villages around Ile-Ife to educate women and girls about their rights. It is also to educate men about the fact that women and girls are to be taken care of and not turned into punch bags. Campaigns always last for two hours engaging in conversations, and then questions and answer sessions follow.

Each empowerment workshop is organized for women and girls in the community on creating their lives the way they most want. The workshop focuses on seven areas of life—emotions, relationships, sexuality, money, body, work, and spirituality. In each of these areas of life, the workshop helps them to:

(1) Discover what is uniquely meaningful;

(2) Translate this insight into a realistic vision;

(3) Heal and transform unconscious limiting beliefs that might prevent its realization;

(4) Build a new belief through affirmation and visualization to manifest their vision;

(5) Heal and release emotional wounds from the past;

(6) Deepen the quality of their relationships by more vulnerable and authentic communication;

(7) Nourish and enhance intimacy in their sexuality;

(8) Achieve prosperity and quality of life;

(9) Create work that is fulfilling and inspiring;

(10) Develop a conscious and sacred relationship with their body;

(11) Build their spiritual path around a sense of higher purpose.

After the workshop, participants are followed up for three months to see how they are doing and the improvement that have occurred in their lives. Many of their past participants are now living better lives as a result of the workshops and enlightenment campaigns. Many have learnt to raise their voices against violence

against them, many now have additional economic power that shields them from abusive husbands, and many are having better relationships with their neighbors, friends, and children. Many are now having fulfilled sexual lives.

The achievements, so far according to Busayo, the Chief Executive Office, are that:

(1) There are increased hopes and visions for the future;

(2) Women in her community are becoming more conscious of their rights;

(3) Women are making more contributions in their community;

(4) There is a decrease in the rate of girls wandering aimlessly about in the community;

(5) The voices of the women are becoming louder in their community;

(6) There are some behavioral changes in relation to the quality of life of the women.

Challenges faced are those of getting enough information materials for the women, and having to translate this information to local languages for those of them not literate in English, the language in which most of the gendered information is written.

W-TEC, Lagos, Lagos State. W-TEC is a NGO working for the economic and social empowerment of girls and women, using ICTs. They have chosen to focus on this area because statistical evidence has shown that in most African countries, women's use and knowledge of ICTs (to store, share, organize, and process information) are lower than men's, denying them of income-generating opportunities and the chance to network with others. W-TEC's programmes comprise technology literacy training, technology-based projects, mentoring, and work placement. W-TEC will also research and publish works examining pivotal issues related to how African women use technology, barriers preventing or limiting technology use, and strategies for more efficient technology use.

Their objectives are for Nigerian women to develop financial independence by: training for ICT-specific jobs, like computer engineer, programmer, system analysts, hardware and network specialists, and designers; developing technology skills that can be used for other ICT-reliant jobs or self-employment. They also want women to develop skills and confidence to use ICTs for activism, learning, awareness-raising, and advocacy for a better quality of life.

The goals of the NGO are being achieved by:

(1) Providing technology education for Nigerian women and girls, so that they are able to use ICTs effectively for work, activism, and networking;

(2) Producing innovative and ground-breaking research that supports the development and implementation of technology programmes for women and girls;

(3) Promoting and supporting the use of ICT in uplifting women's rights;

(4) Establishing a network of technology-fluent alumni and mentors.

Their achievements so far are mainly in the various training programmes they have successfully conducted. (see Figures 1 and 2).

Networking for Success—the project of W-TEC's, taught women how to use Web 2.0 tools to collaborate on projects, gather and build knowledge, and share information. During the project, participants took part in online discussions with mentors, who were people experienced in applying Web 2.0 tools to development work, networking, and entrepreneurial ventures. These discussions are recorded on the project blog at http://w-teconline.nfsblog/, which serves as a resource for people interested in practical applications of Web 2.0 and social media.

Figure 1. W-TEC in training session (Source: Retrieved from http://www.flickr.com/photos/wtec).

Figure 2. W-TEC Web 2.0 training session.

After the project ended, they discovered that many of the participants are using tools learnt from the project in their professional or personal lives. For instance, one participant set up a group on a popular social networking site to promote her businesses; another participant created and managed a blog on behalf of her employer, a youth-focused NGO, which is used to gather feedback from their stakeholders. Another participant combined a blog and a social networking group to set up a discussion group for young mothers. Many more participants were using the tools in a variety of ways to promote issues of particular interest to them. The Networking for Success project was implemented from May to July, 2008, with the kind support of the IDRC (International

Development Research Centre).

EWEI, Kaduna, Kaduna State, Nigeria. EWEI was founded in April 2008 with a vision of providing multi-sectoral interventions towards the empowerment of women and improving the lives of women through capacity building and advocacy. Needlessly, countless children and women die of preventable causes like malaria, HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)/AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), lack of proper child and maternal care, and change can only come when women come to a realization of their abilities and the need for them to take an active part in decision-making and policy formation. EWEI seeks to bring such information to women through the use of the Internet, seminars, newsletters, and various other interventions. EWEI was officially registered by the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria on the June 6, 2008, and has been actively working to achieve her aims and objectives which are to:

(1) Enlighten girls/women on health, reproductive, political, economic, and social issues and topics;

(2) Encourage girl-child education;

(3) Inspire girls/women to aspire to be the best they can be—aim for excellence;

(4) Encourage girls in various fields of study like sciences and information technology;

(5) Encourage political participation of girls/women and contribute to both the political and legislative process through capacity building, civic education, and advocacy;

(6) Work towards the accomplishment of millennium development goals 2, 3, 4, and 5;

(7) Make simplified information accessible to girls/women at no cost;

(8) Get involved in and advocate for progressive budgeting practices, gender mainstreaming, and good governance initiatives;

(9) Advocate for legislation for women's rights and the rights of the girl-child, using creative means like sports to build self-esteem and confidence in girls, women, and youth in general.

The main activities of the organization are:

(1) Empowerment and topical seminars (focuses on issues like HIV/AIDS, malaria, cancer (breast, cervical, etc.)), excelling in careers, girl-child education, MDG (millennium development goals) awareness, health practices, etc.;

(2) Bi-monthly newsletters featuring topics that touch on health, politics, economic empowerment, security, food, and nutrition, etc.;

(3) Website: It provides access to the same information in the organization's newsletters and a lot of helpful resources. It is designed to encourage IT (information technology) literacy among girls and women (Retrieved from http://www.ewei.wetpaint.com);

(4) Delegate/Mentor program: Representatives of EWEI help to mentor and encourage beneficiaries in their various areas of need. It provides a support base for EWEI activities across the nation and gives delegates and mentors a chance to give back to their communities;

(5) Advocacy and participation: This involves advocacy to various stakeholders, making a case for necessary legislation and implementation of existing laws, and policies for enforcements of women's rights;

(6) Sports, recreational, intervention, and step-down programs: These programs are usually designed in collaboration with other organizations to further the development of women in the various subject matters;

(7) Educational subsidy programme: This programme is designed to encourage girl-child education and subsidize the cost of education for girls from indigent families. The subsidy is currently a small fund that can benefit girls at any level of education;

(8) EWEI projects: Empowerment seminars: EWEI's Exceptional Empowerment Seminars are designed to enlighten female students on various topics. So far, such seminars have featured talks on "HIV/AIDS awareness", "Making early wise choices", "Excelling in your chosen career", and "Your role in governance". Such seminars have held at prince schools and Beijing international schools in Kaduna, Nigeria, where 99 female students and 38 adults actively participated and benefited. Empowerment seminars can also follow the CEPWOP and KNOW AND SAY NO design;

(9) Getting involved: A step-down of the British Council/World Bank Institute's Debate to Action, Getting Involved is a programme that seeks to raise awareness about the Millennium Development Goals and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy among youth, equip them on how to effectively share this information with others in their communities, and to determine their own roles within these frameworks. This knowledge not only empowers young people to change agents within their communities, but also contributes to transparency and accountability, which in turns supports good governance. By 2009, EWEI has been able to reach over 1,500 youth and adults through the Getting Involved Programme which included seminars, newsletters, a Train the Trainers Seminar, and distribution of Global Fund insecticide treated mosquito nets;

(10) Let her play: In Partnership with Generations for Peace, Amman, Jordan, EWEI has been involved in the design and implementation of the "Let her play campaign". The campaign is designed with a primary focus of increasing the participation of girls and women in sport in northern Nigeria and helps bridge the gender, ethnic, religious, and political divides in our local communities. "Let her play" has been able to reach over 4,000 children, youth, and adults in and beyond northern Nigeria;

(11) Educational subsidy programme: Currently, a small fund, EWEI's ESP is designed to encourage girl-child education at all levels. It is currently working to help subsidize the cost of books, uniforms, and exam fees for girls from indigent families;

(12) EWEI NEWS: EWEI publishes free bi-monthly colorful newsletters which contain political, educational, health, financial, and other articles for girls/women's benefit and are currently distributed in more than six states of Nigeria. EWEI NEWS contains articles in the local social language of where it is most widely distributed. Over 6,000 copies have been distributed and free, since the commencement of the project in 2008. This project also occasionally features articles and contributions from girls and women helping to play their part in national development. An online version is also available by clicking the link on their Website or going direct to the newsletter Website: http://www.eweinews.wetpaint.com;

(13) EWEI online: The EWEI Wiki and Website were launched to give many more beneficiaries access to EWEI's activities and resources and encourage IT literacy among women. Retrieved from http://www.ewei. wetpaint.com and http://www.eweinitiative.org;

(14) Economic empowerment partnerships: Training Programmes and Economic Empowerment Partnerships targeted at low income or out of school girls and women. Beneficiaries of this programme are empowered through capacity building and micro credit facilities to set up or build upon existing economically viable businesses or projects;

(15) Capacity building and partnerships: EWEI has formed solid partnerships, collaborations, and capacity building relationships to help consolidate and improve their work and interventions. Some of these partnerships have been forged with: Kaduna State Government, UNICEF, NDI (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs), British Council/World Bank Institute, Generations for Peace, CPCC/OBI (Open Budget

Index), PMNCH (Partnership for maternal, newborn, and child health), CSOLO (Civil Society Office Liaison Office)-NASS (the National Assembly), CSACEFA (Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All), and many others.

One of the EWEI's activities on empowerment is an advocacy and sensitization project with the objective of encouraging and promoting women's participation in the political process. It was also organized to encourage women to come out and register to vote during the voter's registration exercise and 2011 elections.

Another empowerment programme was a collaborative one held by one of the NGOs' empowered women (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Asabe Victor Yohanna, a 2010 CEPWOP delegate organized her step down project in collaboration with the Aminci Awareness and Empowerment Women Club which held on January 8, 2011.

Findings of the Study

All the NGOs have empowerment programmes for women and though their focus or areas of concentration differed, they all had an ATI provision priority. It was found that majority of the women using the centres provided by the NGOs had to be taught how to use new technologies like computers, laptops, ipads, smartphones, and so on. From observation of the management of the NGOs, the most used means of accessing information by the women was the radio and television, and person-to-person communication either by word of mouth or by telephone. This finding corroborates Muturi's (2004) and Wambui's (2004) findings that radio is widely used by women especially in rural communities and it helps empower them.

The NGOs were discovered to be slowly but steadily gaining ground in educating the women and creating awareness among them of their potentials to do better, to be empowered, and to stand up for their rights and themselves anywhere. The Women Inspiration Development Centre particularly seeks to give women a voice by presenting the Women Pulse platform. Women can tell their stories, share their ideas, and help others mutually exchange for the benefit of all. Their program touches on social inclusion of women for strategic empowerment. Gendered information can be shared and networking maintained.

From the online chats, it was gathered that a few of the NGOs partnered with governmental organizations

and media houses to broadcast information to the general public to sensitize them to initiatives and programmes that affected women especially and which could empower them and their offspring. However, only one of the NGOs' documentation units is managed by an information professional while the three others manage with neither information professional nor collaboration with any libraries. The translation of materials to local languages aspect is handled by professionals outside the library/documentation centre. Some of their contacts in the media houses where they send their materials for conversion to jingles that sensitize the public about issues concerning women and girls, their health, HIV/AIDS assist in translating the materials.

The presence of more qualified library/information specialist is not usually found in NGO libraries/documentation centres because of the cost of paying salaries. Most NGOs cannot afford the expert hands and where they do get, it is usually on contract basis to organize the collection initially and when the cataloguing and classification has been done, they get less qualified staff to work and often double as information officers for the NGO. Foreign organizations were seen to be major donors or contributors to the NGO programmes.

One of the NGOs faced some funding constraints as well as lack of enough materials, equipment, and some other media needed to help further empower women. The NGOs were found to be a great source of inspiration to the women especially in the rural or less urban parts of the country. Gendered information was provided in the documentation units of the NGOs. Examples of this was information on reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality, and information on occupations predominantly carried out by women (depending on the area and culture), which had been documented and kept. Efforts were ongoing in two of the NGOs to translate some relevant materials into local languages.

The Way Forward

There is a need to expand some of the programmes of the NGOs to cater for more women. With a broadening of the scope, more women can be reached and more ATI provided. In addition, there is a great need for the creation of awareness to education for women (basic, adult, and information literacy). Women need to be fully made aware of the importance of education. The NGOs and women's organizations should conduct awareness programmes to sensitize women to make sure they get basic education and also make their children acquire education so as to be empowered.

Networking or resource sharing should be encouraged among NGOs involved in ATI provision. Since each NGO cannot provide everything, they should collaborate with other information providers like special, academic, and public libraries to get timely and accurate information to women. Collaboration with research and development agencies, academic and special libraries in the repackaging of information for women would be a way of solving the problem of localising the gendered information in the NGO libraries or documentation centres. The information on the online databases and Websites of the NGOs could also be made available in different local languages.

Collaboration with radio and television houses would yield better results for the NGOs in providing ATI for women. Campaign for the removal, eradication, or reduction in the religious, cultural, and social practices that exclude women from gaining ATI should be vigorously pursued. This would make it easier for more women to understand that they need the information, and the current practises forming barriers to women's ATI would be greatly reduced if not totally eradicated.

Library associations globally should take up the challenge and open up units or sections that could be of

assistance in repackaging information for special interest groups like that of women and girls, in order to further widen ATI and thus enhance their empowerment role.

Conclusion

In Africa and especially in Nigeria, women contribution to the nation's economic, social, and political input is far beyond expectation because most of them are marginalized in accessing information needed for empowerment. Information remains a critical commodity for empowerment, on the realization of this, many NGOs have been involved in empowering women through provision of access to information. Four of such NGOs highlighted in this study have been slowly and steadily educating women on diverse areas, such as economic, social, and political through gendered information provision. Some constraints were also identified, such as inadequate funding, lack of sufficient materials, equipment, and other media needed.

For effectiveness of the information provided, it is apparent that collaboration with libraries and services of information professional might be required for adequate users' studies and subsequent repackaging of information which many of the NGOs lack. The public and private sectors of the information divide should partner more closely to make ATI for everyone, especially disadvantaged women a reality highly achievable anywhere. Librarians are herewith encouraged to be more proactive in performing their jobs and also where jobs in established parastatals cannot be got, they could actually create jobs for themselves and others by doing consultancy for NGOs, helping to repackage, rebrand, and disseminate information with the specific aim of making ATI more feasible than hitherto. The challenge for libraries globally is to be proactive in assisting such NGOs in repackaging information for special interest groups so as to indeed avoid the exclusion in ATI provision.

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