



An Assessment of the Provision of Micro-Credit for Women Empowerment in Plateau State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The world has come to realize that micro-credit plays very important role in empowering women. Government, groups and individuals have established cooperative societies to pool resources together for the provision of micro-credit to women. The study is concerned with the assessment of Country Women association of Nigeria (COWAN) in the provision of Micro-credit in Plateau State, Nigeria. The objectives of the study are to determine the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, assess the role of COWAN in the provision of micro-credit, identify the sources of capital for their businesses and assess the impact of micro-credit on the respondents. A questionnaire was used for the collection of data while random sampling technique was used to select the samples. A sample size of 310 was adopted. The findings reveal that majority of the respondents have benefited from micro-credit. Some have received the loan once, twice, thrice, four times and some others many times. In the area of sources of capital to start small business the findings reveal that the sources include personal savings, government organizations, NGOs, husbands and from relatives and friends. This implies that the loans provided by NGOs and governments are not sufficient for small scale business of the COWAN respondents. The findings further reveal that majority of the respondents have experienced change of status in their socio-economic wellbeing as a result of the loans which they invested in their small scale business. Based on the findings of the research it is recommended that more NGOs should be established to provide loans to women for self-empowerment. Government should make policies that will sustain microfinance banks to provide one digit loans for women. Women should be encouraged to form cooperatives to pool resources together so that they can give loans to their members.

Keywords : Assessment, Micro-credit, Empowerment, Discrimination, Access.

Introduction

Women empowerment has received serious attention in recent times. In fact it is one of the contemporary issues that are being discussed globally. Similarly women in development is an approach to development which concentrates on women's access to cash income (usually via the market) either as an individual or members of some form of collectivism as the base strategy (Young, 1993). Since women account for 50% of the world's population, it will be a major setback if they are omitted in the development programmes of nations. According to Manuh, (1998), "African women's fundamental contributions in their households, food production systems and national economies are increasingly acknowledged within Africa and the international community. This is due, in no small part on African women's energetic efforts to organize, articulate their concerns and make their voices heard. This implies that women's role in development cannot be ignored. Although women are making all efforts to improve their socio-economic status, they have been constrained by so many factors; among them is lack of access to micro-

credit. Access to micro-credit is considered a precondition for poverty alleviation and women's empowerment. As poor women are increasingly recognized to be better borrowers, they are attracting interest from regular financial institutions. But despite the proven positive impact of providing microfinance services to female entrepreneurs in the informal sector, microfinance is just one tool among others to address the multiple causes of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion (Srinivas 1998).

Access to loan facilities has since been recognized as an instrument for changing the economic status of women. Thus Olujide (1999) affirmed that the role of micro-credit as a poverty alleviation strategy and a vehicle for providing financial service to the poor has continued to gain prominence in the society. The connection is not far-fetched; this is because developing a broad-base of micro-entrepreneurs in any economy is consequential to the sustenance of its growths and development process.

Country Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN) is a non-governmental, non-religious, non-political voluntary women focussed Association. The vision statement of country women Association (COWAN) is 'A society free from poverty and ignorance'. In order to achieve the aims of COWAN, the following objectives have been outlined:

- (i) Raise the level of understanding of the rural and urban poor women to build their self-esteem.
- (ii) Build their capacity to execute successful income generating activities
- (iii) Promote sustainable agricultural practices.
- (iv) Promote healthy living through awareness creation on productive health, HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.
- (v) Motivate and equip women for higher productivity.
- (vi) Resource mobilization for productive activities.

Statement of The Problem

Although governments have established several poverty reduction programmes but most attentions have always been on men. Programmes such as Directorate of Employment, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) were introduced by different governments in Nigeria, yet the impact on women has been very minimal. Commercial banks which give loans to people give stringent conditions that most women would not be able to meet. Microfinance banks have been established yet women have not felt their impacts. A research conducted by Umar et al (2004) on socioeconomic characteristics of women farmers in Kanam and Wase LGAs of Plateau State revealed that 68.2% of them have their major source of finance for their farm work from personal savings and only 10.1% were assisted by women cooperative societies. None of them had any access to government loans. This concurred with the fact that most women do not have access to loan facilities because they lack the initiative to organize themselves into cooperative groups hence it is difficult for them to improve their status. Although a large number of women are engage in agriculture yet they do not have access to loan facilities to increase their production. This situation has brought the need to ask the following questions with a view to answering them.

1. What are the roles of COWAN in the provision of micro-credit?
2. Do COWAN members have access to micro-credit?
3. Has access to micro-credit improved the status of COWAN members?

Aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to assess the contribution of COWAN in the area of the provision of micro-credit to its members. To achieve the above aim, the objectives are to:

1. Determine the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.
2. Assess the role of COWAN in the provision of micro-credit
3. Identify the sources of micro-credit of COWAN members;
4. Assess the impact of access to micro-Credit of COWAN members in improving their socio-economic status.

Hypotheses

The study shall adopt the Null hypotheses (Ho) in testing relationship and differences between the variables

1. There is no relationship between literacy level of COWAN members and their access to micro-credit
2. There is no relationship between access to micro-credit and improvement in socio-economic status of COWAN members.

Literature Review

Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment means the ownership and control of the factors of production; land capital and labour. According to the Rural Development institute (2007). Although women constitute 50 % of the world's agricultural labour yet they own less than 5 % of the world's land. The report further stated that assets and income in the hands of women results in higher caloric intake and better nutrition for the household than when in the hands of men. Improving women's land rights makes a powerful contribution to household food security. Women's property rights increase women's status and bargaining power within the household and community.

Economic empowerment of women could be seen in two dimensions; economic participation and economic opportunity. Economic participation is the presence of women in the labour force in quantitative terms which is very important not only for lowering the disproportionate levels of poverty among women but also as an important step towards raising household income and consequently economic development. Where women are employed, gender bias in remuneration should not exist. Although the United Nations has made declaration against any form of discrimination against women in employment remuneration, yet developing and developed countries still practise it. According to Klonoff (1997) women are paid 74 % less of the wages paid to men even in developed economies. The MDG No. 1 is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. The target of the goal is to reduce by half between 1990-2015 those whose income is less than and \$1 a day and also to reduce by half between 1990-2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. The deadline has already passed yet, disparity in salary still exists between men and women and hunger is still staring us in the face. Economic opportunity refers to the quality of women's economic involvement beyond their mere presence as workers. Women's opportunity should be in the formal sector of the economy which generates high income not the informal sector which is poorly paid or unskilled jobs characterised by the absence of upward mobility and opportunity. In fact some employers use maternity laws and benefits to penalise women economically for child birth and child responsibilities. Women should have the opportunity of taking to any profession of their choice and not the women dominated professions like nursing, teaching, hospitality business etc. Thus the Nigerian government under Olusegun Obasanjo launched its National Gender Policy in 2006. The overall goal of the gender policy is to build a just society where everyone is given equal opportunity for sustainable development.

In order to empower women economically in Nigeria, Government and Non-governmental organizations have provided micro-credit loan schemes for women e.g. Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE), Business and development fund for Women (BUDFOW), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and other International donor agencies like United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) etc.

The National Commission for women realises its role in ensuring that Nigerian women are mobilized and organized to enable them participate fully in their own uplift. To this end, the commission organises various training and enlightenment programmes in such areas as economy, insurance, export entrepreneurship, health etc. The Nigeria Association of women Entrepreneurs is just being formed by the National Commission for women. Several workshops have been organized among which is, a capacity building workshop for state Directors of Women Affairs on project Management. (National Commission for Women 1999)

The Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE) implementation started in 2005 with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Women Affairs and the Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank. The purpose of the programme is to create a special funding facility to Nigerian women cooperative societies at the grassroots level thereby reducing the constraints faced by small scale women cooperatives in accessing loan from banks and other financial institutions. Thus Olujide (1999) affirmed that the role of micro-credit as a poverty alleviation strategy and a vehicle for providing financial services to the poor has continued to gain prominence in the society. The connection is not far fetch; this is because developing a broad-based of micro-entrepreneurs in any economy is consequential to the sustenance of its growth and development process. Although a well-intended programme and the required structures put on ground, but the implementation has become very difficult. Only few cooperatives have benefited. During the 2005 International Women's Day the Minister of Women Affairs distributed cheques worth ₦6 million each to eight states of the federation among which Plateau State was one. Women who organize themselves into cooperative societies pool resources together which gives them access to loans from banks and international donor agencies. This approach has helped many women to improve their socio-economic status.

According to Ogunleye (2000), in order to empower women economically COWAN introduced the African Traditional Responsive Banking (ATRB) through which they generated a lot of money. The loan portfolio of COWAN is in the region of ₦1.58 billion with about 9000 women Cooperatives as beneficiaries and 260,000 members. This money was raised through ₦20 (\$0.1) mandatory monthly contributions of members. Today COWAN has given loans to many of its members which has gone a long way in changing their status. A research conducted by Olujide in 2008 on, "The assessment of Micro-credit supply by Country Women Association of Nigeria" Ondo State shows that out of the 106 respondents, all benefited from loans facilities ranging from ₦5000 to above ₦16000 at different times in which 84 % subscribed to the fact that the loans were favourable using attitudinal scores. The beneficiaries of these loans were farmers, traders and artisans who used the loan to increase their production and buy more inputs.

A research conducted by Awojabi (2014) on empowering women through micro-finance shows that 16 representing 40 % out of the 40 respondents passionately subscribed that loans from micro-finance institutions improved their business and standard of living of their family. Furthermore, 13 respondents constituting 32.5 % agreed that income and employment have increased. This is followed by another 13 respondents representing 32.5 %, significantly attested to the fact that participating in micro-credit increased their income and employment. In all, the total of 26 respondents representing 65 % agreed that income and employment have increased since they started benefiting in micro-credit programmes.

A research on "The characteristics of women farmers in Kanam and Wase LGAs of Plateau State" conducted by Umar et al. (2004) revealed that most of the women do not own farmlands due to low access to loan facilities. According to the findings 68.2 % operate on their husbands' farmlands which have serious implications on the control of what they produce, 26.8 % operate on hired farmlands which they always pay in kind i.e. paying with some of the farm produce. The research findings also

revealed that 68.2 % of them have their major source of finance for their farm work from personal savings and only 10.1 % were assisted by women cooperative society. None of them had any access to government loans. This concurred with the fact that most women do not have access to loan facilities because they lack the initiative to organize themselves into cooperative groups hence it is difficult for them to improve their status.

Methodology

Sources of Data

The sources of data for this study are primary and secondary. The primary source was obtained through the administration of questionnaire to COWAN and the beneficiaries. Interviews were conducted so that in-depth information could be collected. Visits were made to areas where the respondents have their businesses.

Questionnaire Design and Administration

The main technique for collecting the primary data was the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two; one for the agency of women empowerment and the second for the beneficiaries of the programmes of the agency.

Sample Selection and sample procedure

Cost and time are very important factors to be considered in research. It was not possible to administer questionnaire to all beneficiaries of the programmes of the agencies under study therefore some LGAs have to be selected. The research adopted 310 as its sample population. The number of questionnaires administered to COWAN members was 308. The villages selected are the areas where COWAN is established (Table 1)

Table 1. Number of Registered COWAN members According to village Groups

| S/No | Name of Village Group | Name of LGA | No of Registered Members | Sample Selected |
|-------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Bwonpe | Mangu | 102 | 47 |
| 2 | Panyam | Mangu | 98 | 45 |
| 3 | Agingi | Bassa | 65 | 26 |
| 4 | Kunet | Bokkos | 105 | 47 |
| 5 | Mandarken | Bokkos | 107 | 47 |
| 6 | Amper | Kanke | 105 | 47 |
| 7 | Dawaki | Kanke | 119 | 49 |
| Total | | | 701 | 308 |

Source: Field Survey, 2014

The activities of COWAN were not felt in all the 17 LGAs of the state because of the incessant ethno-religious crises particularly the Northern and Southern geopolitical zones. Thus the researcher selected the central geopolitical zone where there is relative peace and the activities of the agencies are fully established. There are five LGAs in the central senatorial zone out of which three were randomly selected. They are Bokkos, Mangu, Pankshin, Kanke and Kanam. The 5 LGAs were given random numbers out of

which three were picked. Although there are six LGAs in the Northern Senatorial District of Plateau State but only one LGA (Bassa) was selected because it is only in that LGA that COWAN is present.

According to COWAN, 5,000 women have benefited from their programmes in Plateau State out of which 701 are from the study area as indicated in Table 1. The population sample for the questionnaire administration to COWAN respondents is 308 which represents about 44 % of the total population of COWAN members within the study area and 6.2 % of the entire registered members in Plateau State. COWAN respondents were selected through random sampling. This method of selection involves a random start and there after an interval is maintained.

Techniques of Data Analysis

The data collected were categorised grouped and analysed. The data were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The descriptive statistics for the study include frequency and percentage. The data generated were transformed before they were subjected to test of Null hypotheses. The variables that were tested are literacy level, access to micro-credit and socio-economic improvement. The Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient a non-parametric test was used to test the Null hypotheses. The formula is expressed as:

$$rs = \frac{1 - 6(\sum d^2)}{n^3 - n}$$

The SPSS Version 17.0 was used for data analysis.

Results and Discussion

Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of a population determine the quality of the population in terms of sex distribution, dependency ratio, labour force, employment status, income et cetera. Table 2 presented below shows the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. These include age, marital status, number of children and highest educational qualification.

Age, Marital Status and Family Size of all Respondents

The age structure of a population is very important in population studies and development planning, because it determines the dependency ratio and the labour force strength. The information on the age structure of the women respondents is summarised in Table 2. From the 307 of the respondents, 35.5 % of them are within the age cohort of 31-45 which is the most active working population while 24.4 % are within the age cohort of 18-30, 27.4 % and 12.7 % are within the age cohorts of 46-60 and 60 and above respectively.

Table 2 presents a spatial variation of demographic and socio-economic characteristics among COWAN respondents according to villages. These characteristics include; age, marital status, family size and highest educational qualification. Among the respondents in Bwonpe village group majority, (93.6 %) of the women are married which is the highest while Amper accounts for the lowest (57.4 %) of the respondents as married. The village group with the highest number of widows is Panyam (31.1 %), while Bwonpe village group accounts for the lowest (6.4 %) of the widows. Marriage plays very important role in family stability economically and otherwise. Divorce and separation affect family's stability because children upbringing suffers as the responsibility is left for one partner. The spatial variations of the socio-economic and demographic variables are as a result of the different socio-economic factors affecting the respondents.

Table 2. Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics of COWAN Respondents According to Villages

| Characteristics | COWAN BWOMPE | | COWAN PANYAM | | COWAN AGINGI | | COWAN MANDARKEN | | COWAN KUNET | | COWAN AMPER | | COWAN DAWAKI | | TOTAL | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | NO | % | NO | % | NO | % | NO | % | NO | % | NO | % | NO | % | NO | % |
| Age | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18-30 | 12 | 25.5 | 6 | 13.3 | 9 | 34.6 | 10 | 21.3 | 14 | 30.4 | 12 | 25.5 | 12 | 24.5 | 75 | 24.4 |
| 31-45 | 16 | 34.0 | 21 | 46.7 | 12 | 46.2 | 10 | 21.3 | 15 | 32.6 | 14 | 29.8 | 21 | 42.9 | 109 | 35.5 |
| 46-60 | 14 | 29.8 | 12 | 26.7 | 4 | 15.4 | 15 | 31.9 | 8 | 17.4 | 18 | 38.3 | 13 | 26.3 | 84 | 27.4 |
| 61 and above | 5 | 10.6 | 6 | 13.3 | 1 | 3.8 | 12 | 25.5 | 9 | 19.6 | 3 | 6.4 | 3 | 6.1 | 39 | 12.7 |
| TOTAL | 47 | 100 | 45 | 100 | 26 | 100 | 47 | 100 | 46 | 100 | 47 | 100 | 49 | 100 | 307 | 100 |
| Marital Status | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Married | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Widowed | 44 | 93.6 | 27 | 60.0 | 22 | 84.6 | 37 | 78.7 | 38 | 82.6 | 27 | 57.4 | 35 | 71.4 | 230 | 74.9 |
| Divorced | 3 | 6.4 | 14 | 31.1 | 4 | 15.4 | 10 | 21.3 | 7 | 15.2 | 12 | 25.5 | 11 | 22.4 | 61 | 19.9 |
| Separated | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2.2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2.1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0.6 |
| Single | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2.2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2.0 | 2 | 0.6 |
| TOTAL | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4.4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2.2 | 7 | 14.9 | 2 | 4.1 | 12 | 3.9 |
| | 47 | 100 | 45 | 100 | 26 | 100 | 47 | 100 | 46 | 100 | 47 | 100 | 49 | 100 | 307 | 100 |
| No of Children | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-3 | 14 | 29.8 | 15 | 33.3 | 11 | 42.3 | 9 | 19.1 | 14 | 30.4 | 14 | 28.6 | 13 | 26.5 | 90 | 29.3 |
| 4-6 | 30 | 63.8 | 21 | 46.7 | 11 | 42.3 | 25 | 53.2 | 21 | 45.7 | 20 | 40.8 | 22 | 44.9 | 150 | 48.9 |
| 7-10 | 3 | 6.4 | 7 | 15.6 | 4 | 15.4 | 13 | 27.7 | 10 | 21.7 | 4 | 8.2 | 10 | 20.4 | 51 | 16.6 |
| No children | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4.4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2.2 | 9 | 22.4 | 4 | 8.2 | 16 | 5.2 |
| TOTAL | 47 | 100 | 45 | 100 | 26 | 100 | 47 | 100 | 46 | 100 | 47 | 100 | 49 | 100 | 307 | 100 |
| Highest Educ. Qualification | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prim Sch Cert. | 13 | 27.7 | 13 | 28.9 | 9 | 34.6 | 8 | 17.0 | 18 | 39.1 | 3 | 6.4 | 14 | 28.6 | 78 | 25.4 |
| JSCE | 6 | 12.8 | 6 | 13.3 | 6 | 23.1 | 5 | 10.6 | 6 | 13.0 | 7 | 14.9 | 5 | 10.2 | 41 | 13.4 |
| SSCE O level | 7 | 14.9 | 6 | 13.3 | 4 | 15.4 | 1 | 2.1 | 3 | 6.5 | 7 | 14.9 | 8 | 16.3 | 36 | 11.7 |
| Adult Educ. | 4 | 8.5 | 5 | 11.1 | 1 | 3.8 | 4 | 8.5 | 4 | 8.7 | 9 | 19.1 | 9 | 18.4 | 36 | 11.7 |
| No Formal Edu | 13 | 27.7 | 11 | 24.4 | 2 | 7.7 | 25 | 53.2 | 9 | 19.6 | 8 | 17.0 | 4 | 8.2 | 72 | 23.5 |
| NCE/Dip | 4 | 8.5 | 4 | 8.9 | 3 | 11.5 | 4 | 8.5 | 4 | 8.7 | 12 | 25.5 | 2 | 4.1 | 33 | 10.7 |
| HND/Degree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3.8 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4.3 | 1 | 2.1 | 5 | 10.2 | 9 | 2.9 |
| MSC/MED/MA | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| PHD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4.1 | 2 | 0.7 |
| TOTAL | 47 | 100 | 45 | 100 | 26 | 100 | 47 | 100 | 46 | 100 | 47 | 100 | 49 | 100 | 307 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey 2014

In the area of family size, most of the families in the various village groups have 4-6 children. Bwonpe village accounts for the highest (63.8 %) of the respondents with 4-6 children while Mandarken accounts for 53.2 %. Other village groups vary between 6.4 % and 46.7 %. Family size or the number of children per house-hold is a major factor affecting improvement in the standard of living. A family with low income, many mouths to feed and more school fees to pay will have a low standard of living. Educational qualifications of the respondents vary among the village groups. Among the respondents in Mandarken village, majority (53.2 %) have no formal education and only 17% have primary school certificate as their highest educational qualification. Amper village group respondents have higher educational qualifications than all other villages as 25.5 % have NCE/DIP. In a Focus Group Discussion, the main reason given by the respondents is that in those days, women education was not given any serious attention as boy-child education was preferred. Majority (57.4 %) of the women are between the ages of 46-60 and above and did not have the opportunity of higher education. Their low level of education has placed them at a disadvantage position because they have not been gainfully employed.

The findings of this research agree with NBS (2011) which puts women illiterate population at 22.4 %. Similarly, Olujide (2008) who did a study on COWAN women in Ondo found out that 24.6 % of women had no formal education. Table 1:3 shows the low educational qualification of the respondents in which those who have primary school certificates, adult education, SSCE O level certificates and no formal education put together account for 81.1 %. This implies that all of them may not be gainfully employed unless they make effort to develop themselves. They can only use the skills they acquire to improve their businesses or expand their farmlands. Education is said to be the instrument for change. It is a powerful tool that is used in changing one's situation and status, from lack to abundance and from poverty to wealth. It is a major determinant of who gets what job and an obstacle to one getting a job.

Provision of micro-credit among COWAN members in Plateau State

COWAN has made some giant strides in the areas of loan disbursement, infrastructural developments and monitoring of its members' businesses and activities. According to COWAN over 5000 women have benefited from their programmes since inception in Plateau State while the present beneficiaries are over 3000. All the members have benefited from most of the programmes. The maximum amount of loan given to beneficiaries is ₦100,000 (\$500) while the minimum is ₦20,000 (\$100). The percentage of loan repayment varies between (60-100 percent) from year to year. The programmes that have had the greatest impact on the COWAN respondents are village savings and micro-credit scheme.

Table 3 presents the disbursement of micro-credit facilities to COWAN members. The table shows that majority (75.2 %) of COWAN respondents have benefited from the micro-credit programme while 24.8 % are yet to benefit, most of whom are new members. According to table, 51.5 % of the respondents have received between ₦1,000-10,000 (\$5-\$50), 37.7 % have received between ₦11,000-20,000 (\$55-\$100), 6 % have received between ₦21,000-30,000 (\$105-150) while 1.7 %, 2.2 %, and 0.9 % have received 31,000-40,000 (\$155-200), 41,000-50,000 (\$205-250), 51,000-60,000 (\$255-\$300), 60,000 (\$300) and above respectively. Among the recipients of these loans, 21.6 % received the loan once, 29.9 % have received twice, 30.3 % have received thrice, 9.1 % have received four times while another 9.1 % have received many times. The result of this research upholds the findings of Olujide 2008, who conducted a research on the assessment of micro-credit supply by COWAN in Ondo State which shows that out of the 106 respondents all benefited from loans facilities which ranges between ₦5,000-16,000 (\$25-\$80).

Village Savings and Loans

One of the objectives of COWAN is to build the capacity of women to execute successful income generating activities. In order to achieve this objective during the period 2007-2010 a sustainable lively programme called village savings and loans was initiated in which COWAN members pulled resources together through monthly contribution and gave loans to themselves even when the COWAN organization is unable to provide them with loan facilities. During the period 2007-2010, ₹3 million (\$15,000) each was generated by COWAN members in Mangu and Bokkos. This programme helped the COWAN members to expand their farmlands and business.

According to the UNO Secretary General Report (1995), several factors have led to increased interest in micro-credit in promoting growth in the recognition of the importance of empowering all people by increasing their access to all the factors of production, including credit facilities. In addition, the value of the role of NGOs in development is receiving more attention. Since the World Summit for social development in 1995, the priority given to poverty eradication has grown. As stated in a separate report of the Secretary General, it is now broadly accepted that robust economic growth that is labour-intensive and equitably combined with larger outlays of social expenditures especially directed towards the poor are winning combination in the fight against poverty.

Table 3. Loan Acquisition to COWAN Members

| Loan acquisition | NO | % |
|--|------------|------------|
| Amount benefited as loan | | |
| 5,000 – 10,000 | 119 | 51.5 |
| 11,000 – 20,000 | 87 | 37.7 |
| 21,000 – 30,000 | 14 | 6.0 |
| 31,000 – 40,000 | 4 | 1.7 |
| 41,000 – 50,000 | 5 | 2.2 |
| 51,000 – 60,000 | 2 | 0.9 |
| 61,000 and above | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 231 | 100 |
| No of times benefited from loan | | |
| Once | 50 | 21.6 |
| Twice | 69 | 29.9 |
| Thrice | 70 | 30.3 |
| Four times | 21 | 9.1 |
| Many times | 21 | 9.1 |
| TOTAL | 231 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey 2014

Micro-Credit for Sanitation and Hygiene

COWAN has recognized the role of sanitation and hygiene in women empowerment. Lack of modern toilets encourages defecation within the environment which can result to water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea and dysentery. Lack of good health in the family is a major obstacle to women empowerment because resources that should be used to improve the quality of life of the family is channelled into medications. Thus COWAN in 2011 implemented one of its programmes titled “Micro-credit in

Sanitation and Hygiene. A loan of ₦11, 275,460 (\$563,773) was disbursed to female headed households to construct modern toilets in selected districts in three LGAs of Plateau State in which 600 women benefited and over 1000 other women benefited from the training on sanitation and hygiene. The women beneficiaries formed solidarity groups through which they enlightened other women within their communities on the importance of sanitation and hygiene in their homes and the community at large.

Sources of Capital for Businesses and Programmes Benefited by Women Respondents

A major factor to be considered in the establishment of a business is the source of capital. Large businesses require large capital while small businesses require smaller capital. Sources of capital could be loan from governments, banks, NGOs personal savings, support from husbands, relatives and friends. Table 4 presents data on the sources of capital for business of the respondents. The Table reveals that 49.6 % of the respondents have their capital from savings, 2.5 % from government loan, 26.6% from NGOs, 13.9 % from husbands and 7.4 % are interest free loans from friends and relatives. The figures presented in the table indicate that NGOs have made some effort at providing loans to women, particularly COWAN.

Table 4. Sources of Capital for Business

| Characteristics | NO | % |
|---|------------|------------|
| Source of capital for Business | | |
| Personal Savings | 121 | 49.6 |
| Loan from govt. Orgs | 6 | 2.5 |
| Loan from NGOs | 65 | 26.6 |
| Support from husband | 34 | 13.9 |
| Free interest loan from Relatives and friends | 18 | 7.4 |
| TOTAL | 244 | 100 |

Source; Field Survey, 2014

Table 5 indicates that out of the 307 COWAN respondents, majority (88.6 %) state that the programmes have changed their status positively, and 82.7 % have experienced increase in their income. The Table 5 reveals that 16.5 % have expanded their farmlands, 15.4 % have expanded their businesses, 3.7 % have had their awareness on the importance of girl-child education increased, 2.9 % have acquired training on traditional birth, 4.8 % have been enlightened on the importance of women participation in politics and have increased their participation and 56.6 % have had general improvement in their family lives. These include improved diet, more clothing for the family, more income to pay children school fees; pay hospital bills, build better houses, purchase of cars and providing other family needs. The findings of this research concurred with Oluyombo (2011) on his research on “The impact of informal Microfinance on rural enterprises” which shows that the entrepreneurs were able to expand the size of their business facility. The findings revealed that 49.8 % of loan members increased their enterprise facility against 35.4 % for non-loan members. The likely implication of this result is that access to cooperative loan in the rural areas has the potential ability to cause a positive change in enlarging the size of loan members business facility above no loan members provided that the loan is used judiciously.

Most of the respondents have had increase in their income as a result of the loans and trainings they received. According to Table 6, 83.6 % of the respondents have had increase in their monthly incomes between 500-5,000 naira, 12.9 % have 5,001-10,000 naira, 2.2 % have 10,001-15,000 while 1.3 % have between 15,001 and above

Table 5. Benefits Derived from Loans and Programmes by Respondents

| Characteristics | NO | % |
|--|------------|------------|
| Change of status by the programmes | | |
| Yes | 272 | 88.6 |
| No | 35 | 11.4 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |
| Areas of change of status | | |
| Expansion of farmland | 45 | 16.5 |
| Expansion of Business | 42 | 15.4 |
| Increase awareness on girl-child education | 10 | 3.7 |
| Receiving delivery | 10 | 3.7 |
| Increase participation in politics | 13 | 4.8 |
| General improvement in family life | 154 | 56.6 |
| TOTAL | 272 | 100 |
| Increase in income | | |
| Yes | 225 | 82.7 |
| No | 47 | 17.3 |
| TOTAL | 272 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Table 6. Increase in Incomes and change of status among Respondents

| Increase in income per month | No | % |
|--|------------|------------|
| 500-5,000 | 188 | 83.6 |
| 5001 – 10,000 | | 29 |
| 10,001-15,000 | | 12.9 |
| 15,001 and above | 5 | 2.2 |
| TOTAL | 3 | 1.3 |
| | 225 | 100 |
| Effects of improved income | | |
| Payment of sch. fees | 132 | 58.7 |
| Improve diet | 70 | 31.1 |
| Clothing | 23 | 10.2 |
| TOTAL | 225 | 100 |
| Reasons for No increase in income | | |
| No loan | 31 | 65.9 |
| No gain | 13 | 27.7 |
| Poor management | 3 | 6.4 |
| TOTAL | 47 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2014

On how the increase incomes have been expended by the respondents, 58.7 % have used it on payment of their children's school fees, 31.1 % used it more on improving their diet and 10.2 % used it more on clothing for the family. A total 17.3 % of COWAN respondents said they have not experienced any increase in their monthly income.

The findings also state that out of the 67 % of the respondents who said they have not experienced any increase in their income, 65.9 % have not enjoyed any loan facility hence they could not expand their farmland or their business, 27.7 % state that they could not make any gain on their business even though they collected loans, 6.4 % said it was as a result of their poor management of the business that they could not make any gain.

Test of Hypotheses

H₁ There is no significant relationship between literacy level of COWAN members and their access to micro-credit.

Using the spearman rank correlation the calculated value is 0.3 which indicates no significant relationship between literacy level of COWAN members and their access to micro-credit. We therefore accept the hypothesis of no significant relationship between literacy level and access to micro-credit. This implies that COWAN does not discriminate among its members on the disbursement of micro-credit; whether the members are literate or not.

H₂ There is no significant relationship between access to micro-credit and improvement in socio-economic status of COWAN members.

Using the Spearman rank correlation the calculated value which is 0.8 of the relationship between access to micro-credit and improvement in socio-economic status of COWAN members indicate a high correlation. This implies that most of those who have access to micro-credit have been able to improve their socio-economic status. Since the correlation is very high we therefore reject the hypothesis of no significant relationship between access to micro-credit and improvement in socio-economic status of the COWAN members.

Conclusion

The findings of several researches on empowering women through access to micro-credit show that many women do not have access to micro-credit because of their low economic power and inability to provide collateral to commercial banks. However most NGOs have realized the fact that unless women are organized through cooperatives it would be very difficult for them to access micro-credit. It is in the realization of this fact that Country Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN) have been able to organize women into cooperatives through where they pool resources together as well as source money from foreign donors and well spirited individuals to give to its members as micro-credit. COWAN has changed the socio-economic well-being of many of its members through the provision of micro-credits and trainings on skill acquisitions and establishment of small scale business. Other NGOs should take a leaf from COWAN so that a larger percentage of underprivileged women can be reached. Based on the findings of the research it is recommended that more NGOs should be established to provide loans to women for self-empowerment. Government should make policies that will sustain microfinance banks to provide one digit loans for women. More women should be encouraged to form cooperatives to pull resources together so that they can give loans to their members.

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