



HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: A TOOL FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Hospitality industry is considered as one of the world's largest economic activities today. The Draft hospitality industry is an important instrument for sustainable human development including poverty alleviation, employment generation, environment regeneration and advancement of women. The contribution of women in the business world has increased in recent years, although women are underrepresented in management and leadership. In the hospitality industry, the percentage of women who work in the industry is high, but their function is dominated by unskilled, low-paid jobs. The hospitality industry definitely provides various entry points for women's employment and opportunities for creating self-employment in small and medium sized income generating activities. In recent years the increased number of women in the hospitality industry and their underrepresentation has made women's status in industry a great concern. This paper aims to examine Hospitality industry as a tool for women's empowerment in Nigeria. In addition, the paper discusses the perceived factors that facilitate and constrain women's in the industry. The paper also attempts to explain the need for approaching the Hospitality industry sector as mechanism for women empowerment. It also explains the importance and benefits that arise from women empowerment and highlights the essential element of empowerments. The paper concludes that, Hospitality sector in the Nigeria could play an important role in creating a more equitable environment for women advancement.

Keywords: *Hospitality, Management, Empowerment, Polytechnic, Education.*

Introduction

Hospitality is considered as one of the world's largest economic activities now. This industry creates a lot of employment as it is a labour intensive service industry. It is observed that the hospitality industry is a large and fast - growing service sector, with an average 55% female participation at global level (Molline , Patrick , Farayi and Felistas, 2014). Women are employed in every department, including as cleaners and kitchen staff, front line customer service workers and senior management. The contribution of women in the business world has increased in recent years; even then women are underrepresented in management and leadership. In the hospitality industry, the involvement of women is high, but their role is dominated by unskilled, low-paid jobs. It even provides self-employment for women (Molline et al., 2014).

In all parts of the world, women make tremendous contributions to the development of their communities. In fact, women exert considerable impact on the productivity of male workers. The women, because of their multiple roles have significant control over the subsistence lives of their communities. They perform reproductive roles of child bearing and rearing. They are also engaged in productive activities like trading, weaving, farming, etc for the production of income and other day-to-day maintenance of homes. Although, women have always participated in development, their efforts have not been taken into account or recognized (Nkiruka and Akabue, 2012). This means development in any society will never make any meaning or progress if women's roles are not acknowledged and appreciated (Akubue, 2001). This shows that women are important resource for development. Thus, in the words of Singh and Titi (2016), man and woman are like two wings of a bird, which only in unison can take a lofty flight.

In Nigeria, Women are denied their rights and are often subjected to callous and inhuman practices (Sako, 1999). It is generally believed that in Nigeria, men and women play complimentary roles. However, if the activity profile of men and women are assessed, it will show that more than 80% of the work is done by women. It is therefore sad to say that in Nigeria, one of these wings is wounded and weak. The question then is how can the people that contribute the most to the daily activities that keep the society going be so humiliated and overpowered. It is on this basis that this paper suggests strategies for the empowerment of women in Nigeria (Sako, 1999).

Sako (1999) further stressed that the demographic and socio-economic factors are the key factors for women participation in hospitality industry. Hence, in this paper, these factors are traced and analysed in respect of hospitality industry in Nigeria. This paper is focused on the women who are involved in hospitality industry especially in Boarding and lodging, Restaurants/Food and Beverage, Travel agencies and Home stay in Nigeria.

The Concept of Women Empowerment

The central concept in the discussion of empowerment is power. Power, according to the International Encyclopaedia (1995), refers to having the capacity and the means to direct one's life towards desired social, political and economic goals. Empowerment therefore is a process of acquiring power in order to understand one's rights. According to Rappaport (1982), empowerment is a process or mechanism by which people, organizations and communities gain mastery over their lives. It is the capacity of individuals, groups to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their goals (Adams, 2008).

The International Women's Conference (1985) defined empowerment as a redistribution of social power and control of resources. It is the measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self determination in people and in communities in order to enable them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way. Empowerment enables people to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of influence. It makes people powerful or equips them with the power to face the challenges of life to overcome disabilities, handicaps and inequalities (Singh, 2016).

Women empowerment therefore is a process by which those who have been denied power gain power, especially the ability to make strategic choices. It is a process that allows women to make self-determined choices. That is, it allows women to gain control over their lives by participating in decisions that affect them in the home, community, government, and international policies (Rahman, 2013). Women play important role in socio-economic development of all societies. Since women are crucial to the survival of all societies, their empowerment becomes essential.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN NIGERIA

To appreciate the plight of the Nigerian women, it is pertinent to understand their status in specific contexts such as poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, etc.

Women and Poverty: In Nigeria, like elsewhere in the world, the poor form the majority. Studies conducted by UNFPA (1992) have also established that among the poor, women are poorer than men because of their unequal status in the society. Most of the poor women in Nigeria reside in the rural areas and are getting poorer because they do not have equal access to the available resources and development processes

In Nigeria, agriculture is the main occupation of the rural women. Women represent about 70% of food producers in Nigeria yet agriculture has the largest number of the poor because they are denied access to social services and title to the land they work on (Jekayinfa, 2007). Most Nigerian women do not have voice in the power structures that control resources allocation. It can thus be said that the main cause of female poverty in Nigeria lies in the inequalities in the control of assets and discrimination in the labour market.

Women and Illiteracy: The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for access to education for all. In pursuit of this, there have been campaigns to encourage people to enroll their school-age children. There are also programmes for adult and non-formal education. However, the Women's Consortium of Nigeria (2004) quoted UNESCO as positing that Nigeria was one of the 9 countries with the highest rate of illiteracy and that women constituted the largest percentage. Scholars and analysts such as Umar and Sambo (1996) have lamented the educational imbalances against females and have maintained that it is detrimental to national development. Osuala (1984) posited that the disparities in education have been affecting women in the labour market as some firms discriminate against women in their employment policy.

Discrimination and Injustice: In Nigeria, injustices and discriminatory attitudes exist. Women are treated differently. They are seen as second-rated citizens only to be seen but not heard. Women's rights are often denied them simply because they are women. For example, they are not entitled to inheritance nor ownership rights. They have no say in the decisions affecting the family, community and nation.

Violence against Women: Thousands of Nigerian women are often subjected to sexual, physical or psychological suffering. The violence against women has no regard for income, class and culture boundaries as all women/girls are affected. Examples abound on the pages of Nigerian newspapers of such

violence against women. The violence against women is a direct consequence of the unequal power relations between men and women.

STRATEGIES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment is a multidimensional process as such the strategies being suggested are meant to address the existential factors hampering the full development of the potentials of the Nigerian women.

Women education: The key to achieving high standards in women's empowerment lies in women education. Education will help women/girls to develop skills and self confidence. It will also enable them to participate effectively in society. In Nigeria, women have low education which retards them from participating actively in every aspect of social life. In fact, the low level of women's education is often interpreted as low wisdom. Women therefore need to have education because they have the right to it, they have knowledge to share, they have dreams and with education they can improve life for everyone. After all, we are all humans and should therefore have equal right to live happily and have fulfilment. This means that women/girls should have much education just as the men.

Sound economic policies for women empowerment: In Nigeria, women are more economically disadvantaged than men. Women generally lack real freedom to make rational choices because of lack of reasonable income security. Women cannot exercise their rights because they lack economic strength. Women have less access to agricultural assets, inputs and" services. Women hardly have access to the resources that generate stable incomes. For example, they have less access to credit, inheritance and ownership rights. This underinvestment in women is limiting development, slowing down poverty reduction and economic growth. With the crumbling economy in Nigeria today, women are becoming more increasingly disadvantaged. Therefore, women should be economically empowered because an economically self reliant woman acts as a self-generating dynamo by fostering the goals of family planning and self development (Singh, 2016).Sound economic policies are therefore needed to achieve women's economic empowerment. Strategies should be designed to focus on building credit worthiness (Fapohunda, 2000). The empowerment of women in the hospitality industry can remarkably enhance their personal development. This empowerment can make women have more confidence in themselves and provide them with ability to contribute

effectively to the socio economic development of themselves and society in general. According to Fapohunda, (2000) empowering women in the hospitality industry can help in the fulfillment of women's obligation and purpose in life. The value of women empowerment for career progress within the hospitality industry often has been asserted in different works of life (Chon & Sparrowe, 1995).

Laesecke (1991) asserts that empowering women in the Hospitality industry aims to produce individuals who can think, lead and solve problems. The relevance of hospitality industry is further emphasized by Ladki (1993) who argues that the hospitality industry is important as it seeks to achieve some specific responsibilities such as equipping women in providing skilled services to customers in order to meet their needs and monitor expectations and can go a long way in enabling women with the relative education and preparing them as strong, competent individuals.

In Nigeria the number of hospitality outlets has increased with the growth of the hospitality industry. This has led to an increased demand for qualified hospitality professionals in the country. However, the issue of experience has been valued in the hospitality industry for a long time, but today, with the complexity of the industry and the fierce competition, the need for diverse and new ideas of doing business is highly appreciated (Stutts, 1999). The growth of the hospitality industry in the country and the world at large as well as the need for hospitality professionals can go a long way in encouraging most hospitality outlets to offer job opportunities with women mostly forming the majority of the population.

Esther and Stephen (2013) argued that the increase of one's understanding and skills produces one's ability to influence the surrounding environment. This ability allows the individual or group to become controllers of change, rather than victims of change (Okeiyi, 1994). Empowerment through the hospitality industry results in committed individuals who bring decision-making skills and enthusiasm (Iverson, 1995). Furthermore, Ivan (2000) postulated that, the greater and varied the skills of the individual the better the person is in terms of personal skills, individuality and use for industry.

The hospitality industry is very significant because it increases the rate of empowerment of women by 76%-78% (Sparrowe & Popielarz, 1995). A lot of sectors are included in the hospitality industry and some of them are; transportation, restaurant, general tourism and event planning. The food and

beverage segment represents the largest percentage of the overall hospitality marketplace.

The hospitality industry is indeed a very profitable industry, and it has a whole lot of sectors that a woman aspiring entrepreneur can comfortably latch onto and make tidy profits for herself in a short while. Therefore, the following are selected sectors of the hospitality industry that have been identified to serve as a stimulant to women empowerment:

1. **Establishing a hotel business**

One of the major areas of hospitality is hotels. People always need where to stay when they are away from home, and building hotels are one way to draw in tourists. Adding breakfast to the offerings may help get frequent patronage because it is on record that people prefer hotels that offer meals than ones that don't. This business is very capital intensive, so any woman wanting to empower herself in this sector have to prepare for it. One can equally skip the hassles of building a big hotel and just start a small and manageable bed and breakfast.

2. **Producing and selling allergy cards**

People are always excited when they visit a new location, and usually want to get a taste of the local cuisine. A lot of people cannot do this due to certain allergies. An allergy card enumerates all foods that the holder of the card may be allergic to so they can present it to local restaurants and save themselves from having allergies. A woman who wants to be empowered can setup a business that produces such cards in the native language of various countries and sell such cards to travelers and tourists. People who travel with allergy issues often look for allergy cards in the new location where they arrive, a woman can be empowered by initiating a business that provide allergy cards in many languages as home based basis.

3. **Start a shuttle service**

One major area in the hospitality industry is transportation. People would always need to move around, and women who want to be empowered can provide this service for a profit

and financial independence among women. For instance, all the skills and entrepreneurial development programmes should be redesigned to favour women and implemented sincerely.

Easy access to health care services: Another strategy relates to the health status of women. Women's health issues deserve as much attention as men since health care matters impact women differently than men. It should be noted that the health of women has an overarching influence on the health of the entire family (Kerela Women, 2012). Improving women's health strengthens their economic empowerment, enhances access to sexual and reproductive information and services (Kerela Women, 2012). It also increases their chances of finishing education and breaking out of poverty. Due to the multiple roles women play in society, they are more prone to wear and tear. Therefore, policies and programs should be put in place to enable women live healthier lives. Gender-equitable approaches to health should be put in place to enable women have easy access to health care services.

Policy reforms in support of gender equality and women in governance; In Nigeria, from the local to national levels, women are underrepresented in leadership positions. They have no voice in decision-making. They lack social and political support and capacity building opportunities. This exclusion is because of entrenched traditional views, lack of confidence, gender discrimination and intimidation. But involvement of women in politics can enhance bigger economic benefits and more sustainable conflict resolution. Therefore, there should be policy reforms in support of gender equality. It is important to raise women's engagement in politics by raising their awareness of opportunities available and by building confidence and skills. Women themselves should come together to assert themselves. Cross-sector women caucuses should synergize to provide structured support through training programmes. The synergy, it is hoped, would provide an opportunity for them to raise funds for campaigns.

The suggestion therefore is that women should be involved in the governance of the communities they belong to. This is because decision-making can only be beneficial to the entire country if it reflects the collaborative inputs from all members without discrimination.

THE ROLE OF HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY AS A TOOL FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The benefits to be derived from the industry include enhancement of the quality of living, housing, health, clothing, transport, communication, entertainment and gainful use of leisure if they have some cars at their disposal. Shuttling people that arrive at the airports to their final destination and also handle luggage services can be a very good source of empowerment for a woman. To promote the business, she needs to ensure that contact phone numbers are given out to happy customers so that they can further contact to be taken to other events and tourist attractions in any area.

- **Establishing a food mart**

It is a known fact that food businesses are profitable business because people would always eat. A woman can pick up the challenge of starting a food mart in any lucrative area by taking into account the different tastes of the visitors that flock there and endeavour to stock food and local produce that would appeal to them. Women can specialize in quick, convenient, ready to heat and ready to cook items; such as instant lunch, dinner and school snacks; or desserts and other frozen foods.

- **Establishing an ethnic eatery**

Certain tourist destinations get a lot of visitors all year round and these visitors come from different ethnic backgrounds. A female chef who lives in such an area can start an ethnic eatery to cater to the different types of ethnicities that visit your community. A survey should first be conducted to find out which ethnic group frequents such location to avoid preparing meals that can't be consumed. Meals can equally be served from two or three ethnic groups, or as much as can be handled. A lot of people who miss their traditional dishes will definitely love to patronize eatery.

- **Start a travel agency**

A travel agency is a private retailer or public service that provides travel and tourism related services to the public on behalf of suppliers such as airlines, car rentals, cruise lines, hotels, railways, travel insurance etc. A travel agency is one good business to set up in the hospitality industry because people would always go on tours. You can help tourists arrange their trips, accommodation and tours for the duration of their stay.

- **Start a taxi service**

A taxi service is hospitality related service which women can venture into not considering it is mainly and predominantly dominated by their male counterparts that aim to help tourist get around. Women venture into such services and make available taxis to if they have some cars at their disposal. Shuttling people that arrive at the airports to their final destination and also handle luggage services can be a very good source of empowerment for a woman. To promote the business, she needs to ensure that contact phone numbers are given out to happy customers so that they can further contact to be taken to other events and tourist attractions in any area.

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Start a craft business

A craft is an activity involving skill in making things by hand. Women who have artistic skills or crafty hobbies might just have one of the essential building blocks of a successful business, especially those who reside in a tourist location because visitors always value indigenous crafts. Purchase at a cheaper rate of quite a number of handmade crafts, can set up a small shop in the city shopping center where there is the possibility to sell such crafts. Since this form of business can be capital intensive, an approach to crafts people could be made and an offer to market their products too.

- **Open a gift shop**

Thousands of tourists are drawn to tourist centers every year, which inevitably means that there are many people who return home with gifts for family and friends. Opening a gift shop is a sound business idea, and it is even a needed service. Efforts should be made to get differentiated from other tourist shops by offering authentic merchandise instead of only selling generic items such as T-shirts, key chains, and mugs.

Items made by local artists and crafters like artisan jewelry; postcards made from art prints by local artists; music CDs of local bands could also be offered. To add more revenue to the business, a website could be lunched where customers can buy more gifts later. By selling merchandise online, could assist to reach people all over the world, and market the business to future tourists.

- **Establishment of a restaurant**

Nigeria as a nation in an area that has some of the world's most delicious, exotic, and fresh ingredients, women can take advantage of this bounty

by opening a restaurant. They do not have to open a large location if they don't have the finances and sponsorship. Interested women can instead offer intimate dining for select customers. The key to success in this business is offering local cuisine as opposed to other specialties.

- **Establishing an airport baby space**

Traveling with infants has proven to sometimes become burdensome, and because of that, many airports are now setting up areas where parents can attend to their babies. Interested women could such services in any particular airport where such services are lacking, a private baby space could be setup in the airport and parents could be charged nominal fee to use the facility.

Establishment of catering service

Catering is another business idea that takes its roots from hospitality. As a qualified caterer or woman who is interested in the business, start a catering service that caters to weddings, birthdays, official and unofficial events.

CONCLUSION

The issue of Hospitality industry and women empowerment has been the focus of this paper. In Nigeria and indeed Africa in general, women play multiple roles and have significant control over the subsistence lives of Nigerians (and Africans). They perform reproductive roles of child bearing and rearing. The hospitality sector in Nigeria could be used to empower women development and career advancement. The first step for women empowerment is to enhance their literacy level and uplift their entrepreneurial skill. In spite of these tremendous contributions women make in the society, they still occupy second-rated position in society. Women therefore need to be empowered. The hospitality industry is indeed a very profitable industry, and it has a whole lot of sectors that a woman aspiring entrepreneur can comfortably latch onto and make tidy profits for herself in a short while by venturing into numerous sectors of the hospitality industry.

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