

## **Empowerment of Women through Technical Education, Training and Employment in Africa**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this research paper was to establish how access to education, technical training and employment opportunities for women affected their empowerment. This was motivated by the ever increasing disparities in both the economic and social docket where women from across the globe are denied equal chances as opposed to men, be it in employment, politics and in other social arenas. It is argued that this not only affects the women individually but the global economy as a whole since there is underutilization of this available manpower. This paper adopted descriptive survey design and had a sample of 150 respondents which was derived through stratified random sampling. A self-structured questionnaire was used in the study. The paper established that women with technical education and with various training skills showed high responsibility, made their own rules, empowered their relationships, and were willing to empower other women. It recommends that women should be encouraged to take up technical education and contest for available employment opportunities to empower themselves for better jobs.*

**Key words:** *Technical education, training, women empowerment*

### **Introduction**

The African continent is favored with abundant natural, human and cultural resources yet Africans remain poor and most of the poor are women. In almost all the countries in Africa, empowerment of women faces major challenges (The African Development Forum, 2008). Several efforts to tackle this challenge gave birth to initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Africa Network of Gender Machinery, and African Information Society Initiatives (AISII) by the African Union (AU) the former Organization of African Unity (Africa Partnership Forum, 2007).

About half of the world's population is women who are ideally supposed to contribute to 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 had bank accounts, and yet, of the 162.5 million people in the country, 49% (80.2million) were girls and women (Nwiro, 2012). Furthermore, other research 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 would lead to economic empowerment. 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 (Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009).

The promotion of women empowerment in Africa in areas such as education, politics and economics has been slow and much remains to be done. The African Development Forum (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 leading to economic growth. The government in African countries cannot do this enormous task alone, this is the reason Non-governmental organizations (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 (Kabeer, 2012).

While it can be seen that definitions of women empowerment have, from the outset, encompassed an economic dimension, this dimension has become increasingly visible within the international policy discourse in recent years. The Beijing Platform for Action spoke of the need to promote women's economic independence, including employment, and 'ensuring equal access for all women to productive resources, opportunities and public services'. The Millennium Development Goals on gender equality and women's empowerment adopted an increase in women's share of nonagricultural employment as one of its indicators of women's empowerment. 'Full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people' were later added as a target in relation to the overarching MDG on halving extreme poverty (Bakker, 2007).

Given the dominance of economic thinking within the World Bank, it is not surprising it was one of the first agencies to explicitly adopt the language of women's economic empowerment: 'Economic empowerment is about making markets work for women (at the policy level) and empowering women to compete in markets (at the agency level)' (World Bank 2006). From the point of view of gender advocates within the Bank, this definition, with its clear focus on economic sectors (specified as land, labour, product and financial markets), had the advantage of giving gender issues more traction institutionally (Klugman, et al., 2014).

UNDP (2008) sought to extend the five components outlined in the UN Task Force definition quoted earlier to the economic sphere 'where women's economic empowerment can be achieved by targeting initiatives to expanding women's economic opportunity; strengthen their legal status and rights; and ensure their voice, inclusion and participation in economic decision-making'. The OECD-DAC Network on Gender Equality (2011) defined women's economic empowerment as their 'capacity to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth

## **Research Problem**

The level of women's access to education, technical training and employment opportunities is rather low and therefore the women are not as empowered as their male counterparts, or are totally disempowered (Kabeer, 2012). Many organizations 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 pace is rather slower. Despite the tremendous efforts to have the women empowered and equality promoted, the cases of inequalities and gender-based discriminations are still high. Empirical studies reveal that technical education and training is one aspect that has been lacking among women which has made them only to focus on the formal and non-technical areas which are already over-competitive. It is based on this merit that the paper sought to find out the role of technical training and education in women empowerment.

## **Research Objectives**

- i. To find out the extent to which education, technical training and employment opportunities empower women in Thika town.
- ii. To establish the relationship between access of education, technical training and employment opportunities and the sense of empowerment of women in Thika town.

## **Significance of the Study**

The findings from the study will also benefit the key stakeholders such as government, NGOs and other agencies that focus on empowering women by identifying the best approach to do so, and in contributing to closing the gap in literature resource.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The Relational Theory developed by Charkham (1994) based on the experiences of women and on earlier research on gender-related developmental issues was used. In his study of power perceptions, McClelland (1973) as cited by Kabeer (2012) found that women tend to define power in terms of the ability to care for and contribute to others' wellbeing. In this perspective empowerment of women through technical training promotes their role in the society not only as caregivers but also as economic builders.

## **Literature Review**

Oyelude and Bamigbola (2013) studied women empowerment through access to information; the strategic roles of non-governmental organizations in Nigeria. The NGOs were discovered to be slowly but steadily gaining ground in educating 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.

Friedmann, as quoted by Lennie (2002), however had earlier purported that empowerment cannot be conferred by external agents and suggested 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.

The Inter-American Development Bank (2010) defined women's empowerment in terms of expanding the rights, resources, and capacity of women to make decisions and act independently in social, economic, and political spheres'. The UN (2001) defined women's empowerment in terms of five components: 'women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. A paper by SIDA on women's economic empowerment defined it as 'the process which increases women's real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in society. Women's economic empowerment can be achieved through equal access to and control over critical economic resources and opportunities, and the elimination of structural gender inequalities in the labour market including a better sharing of unpaid care work' (Tornqvist & Schmitz, 2009). Empirically, Coleman and Susan (2010) carried out a study on the constraints facing women-owned firms and established that empowerment of women was a key aspect that would enhance their performance in business and the aspect was easily overlooked. Through this as Coleman and Susan (2010) record, their businesses continued to underperform with many of them collapsing.

According to Box (2012), women's improved economic situation provides opportunities to escape exploitative relationships at home. It breaks the economic dependence on a partner that is often at the root of domestic violence. However, there is also some evidence of how economic empowerment has led to increased gender-based violence. Female access to credit or land for example may be perceived by male members of the family as challenging the existing gender order within the household. Domestic violence can arise as a backlash effect to

women's new activities in the economic arena. It can therefore be important to address risks for increased violence and ensure support for survivors of violence, as well as to include male relatives in activities as a preventative measure.

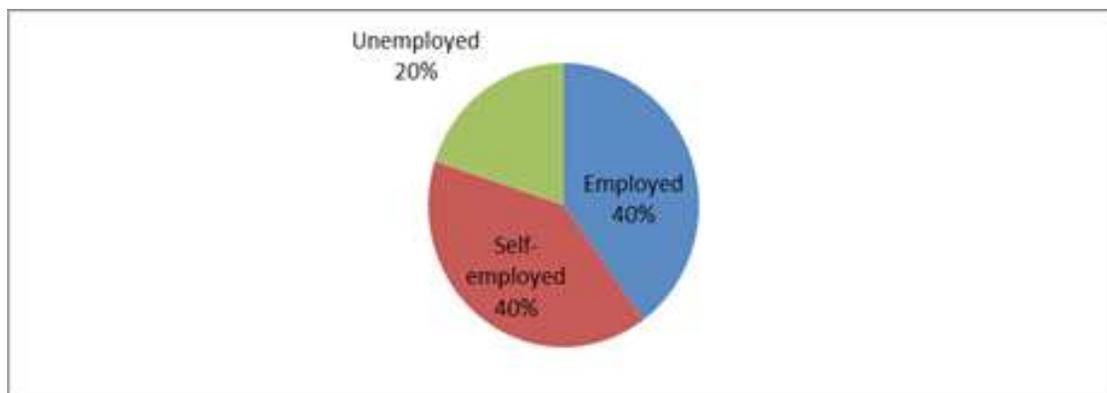
## Methodology

Mixed methodology was employed in the study where both quantitative and qualitative data was used. The study adopted descriptive survey design and targeted the women who owned or worked in technical sectors in Thika Town. The target population was considered appropriate since such persons had the main characteristics needed in the study which included the experience in technical training. Questionnaires were used as the research instruments and were distributed to a sample of 150 Women in Thika town who were sampled by stratified random sampling method. The nominal and ordinal data collected using questionnaires was subjected to quantitative analysis using SPSS, version 20. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), statistical computations often done in descriptive studies include frequencies and percentages. The study further used cross tabulation to test the relationship between the variables.

## Findings and Discussions

### Employment Status of the Respondents

The study administered questionnaires to a sample of 150 Women in Thika town out of which 90 questionnaires were properly filled and returned. The results indicated that 40% of the respondents were employed; another 40% were in self-employment while 20% of the women were unemployed. The findings implied that only 4 out of every 10 women were in formal employment which is still very low.



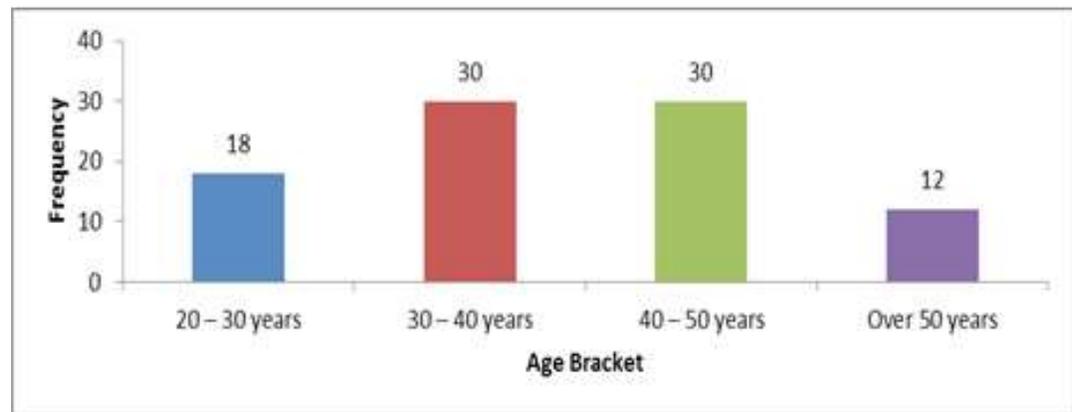
**Figure 1.** *Employment status of the respondents*

### Marital Status of the Respondents

The results of this study showed that majority (54) of the women that participated in this study was married, 18 were single, and 12 were separated and 6 were widowed.

### **Age of the Respondents**

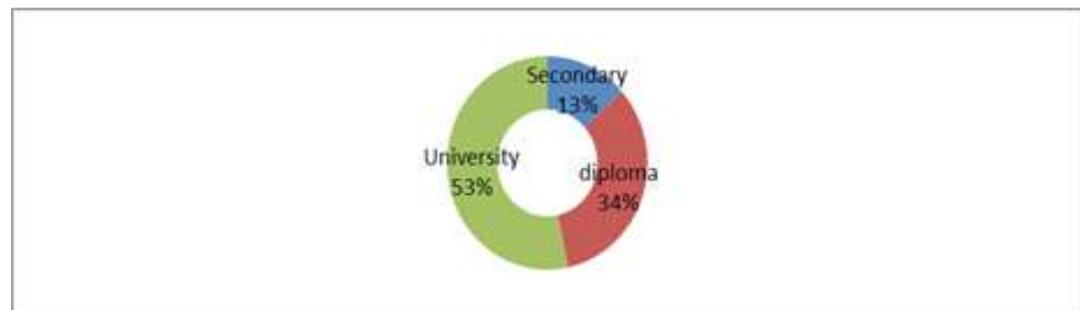
The study sought to find out the age bracket of the respondents. The findings showed majority of were between the ages of 30 and 50 as show in figure 2.



**Figure 2.** *Age bracket of the respondents*

### **Level of Education of the Respondents**

The results indicated that majority (53%) of the respondents had university level of education. Those who had diploma level of education were 34% and final 13% had secondary level of education. The findings showed that the women who participated in the study were well educated and were aware of women empowerment programmes.



**Figure 3.** *Age bracket of the Respondents*

### **Results on Women Empowerment and Responsibility**

The study sought to test the level of women empowerment and sense of responsibility.

These findings implied that the respondents were highly empowered and were responsible in their lives. However, the findings also revealed that majority of the respondents disagreed with the statements “I do not apologize or devalue who I am even if others do not agree with me. I am discerning and do not diminish or weaken others” “I am always moving forward and if choices were unclear, I would relax and trust the signs from my intuition and inner knowingness” and “I am not attached to anything, any outcome or anyone”. This indicated that although the women were empowered to some extent they still felt concerned what and how others people

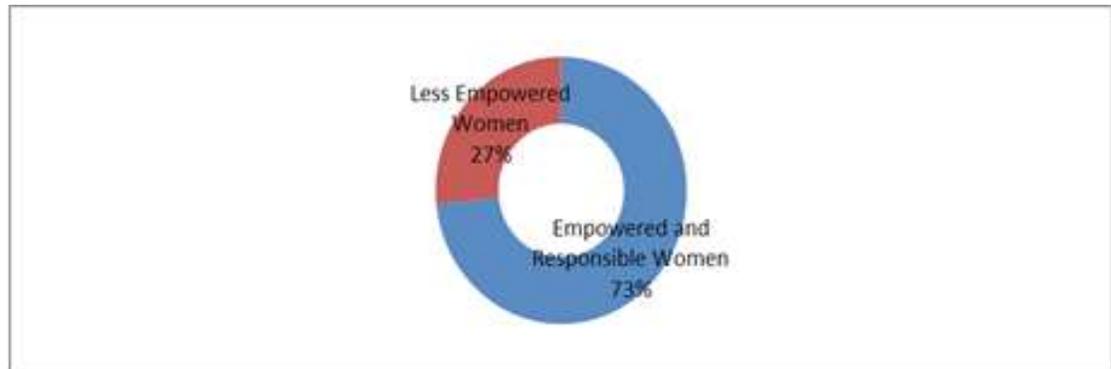
treated them and were still attached to other people opinion. The findings further implied that the respondents were not fully responsible for their lives they still had to consult on various matters in their lives.

**Table 1** Result on Empowerment and Responsibility

Statements	Agree	Disagree	Total
	N %	N %	Mean
I do my inner work to raise my clarity by speaking my truth	100.0%	0.0%	1.0
I hold myself totally responsible for my actions and reactions past, present and future.	80.0%	20.0%	1.2
As a compassionate humanitarian, I do not tolerate injustice to myself or to others.	80.0%	20.0%	1.2
I do not apologize or devalue who I am even if others do not agree with me. I am discerning and do not diminish or weaken others.	40.0%	60.0%	1.6
I am always moving forward and if choices are unclear, I relax and trust the signs from my intuition and inner knowingness.	40.0%	60.0%	1.6
I am not attached to anything, any outcome or anyone.	20.0%	80.0%	1.8
I am clear about my mission and allow it to evolve naturally without forcing things to happen.	100.0%	0.0%	1.0
I embrace and honor who I am, as I am, not caring what anyone else thinks of me.	86.7%	13.3%	1.1

### Results on the Level of Women Empowerment and Responsibility

The study used the mean of the respondents' responses on the above statement to categorize the respondents into two categories - less empowered women, and empowered and responsible women. Those with a mean score of below 1.5 were categorized as empowered and responsible women since they agreed with most of the statements while those with a mean score of above 1.5 were categorized as less empowered since they disagreed with majority of the statement measuring the level of empowerment and responsible. The results showed that 73% of the women were found to be empowered and responsible whereas 27% were less empowered. This could be attributed to the quality of education the respondents had. Additionally, the study focused most on the women in teaching who were aware of their rights.



**Figure 4:** *Level of women empowerment and responsibility*

**Relationship between Education and the Level of Women Empowerment and Responsibility**

The study used cross tabulation to find out the relationship between the education level and the level of women empowerment and responsibility. The results showed that out of the 12 women with secondary education 10 were less empowered while only 2 were found to be empowered and responsible. Diploma category had 30 respondents, and results indicate that 22 were empowered while 8 were found to be less empowered. Those with university education were 48, 42 indicated that they were empowered while 6 were less empowered. These findings implied that women empowerment increased with increased level of education. More educated women were found to be more empowered and highly responsible.

**Table 2** *Education and Women Empowerment and Responsibility*

Score Women Empowerment			
Level of Education	Empowered and Responsible Women	Less Empowered Women	Total
Secondary	2	10	12
Diploma	22	8	30
University	42	6	48
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>90</b>

**Relationship between Employment and the Level of Women Empowerment and Responsibility**

The study further sought to find the relationship between employment status and level of women empowerment and responsibility. The result show that a total of 36 women were employed, 29 of who were empowered and independent in their decision making while 7 were found to be less empowered Those respondents in

self-employment were 36, 30 of who were found to be highly independent and responsible in their decision making while only 6 were less empowered. Interestingly, most women who were to be unemployed were also found to be less empowered. Out of every 18 women who were unemployed, 11 were less empowered and less independent in their decision making. The findings also imply that women employment increased the sense of responsibility and empowerment among women.

**Table 3** *Employment and Women Empowerment and Responsibility*

<b>Score Women Empowerment</b>			
<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Empowered and Responsible Women</b>	<b>Less Empowered Women</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Employed</b>	29	7	36
<b>Self Employed</b>	30	6	36
<b>Unemployed</b>	7	11	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>90</b>

### **Relationship between Age and the Level of Women Empowerment and Responsibility**

The study further investigated the relationship between age of the respondents and level of empowerment and responsibility. The results showed that older women felt empowered and responsible compared to younger women. For instance, only 1 of the 11 women in the age category of over 50 years said that she was less empowered as compared to the 6 out of 12 who responded that they were less empowered within the age group of 20 to 30 years.

**Table 4** *Age and Women Empowerment and Responsibility*

<b>Score Women Empowerment</b>			
<b>Age Bracket</b>	<b>Empowered and Responsible Women</b>	<b>Less Empowered Women</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>20-30 years</b>	12	6	18
<b>30-40 years</b>	20	10	30
<b>40-50 years</b>	23	7	30
<b>Over 50 years</b>	11	1	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>90</b>

### **Relationship between Technical Education and Training and the Level of Women Empowerment and Responsibility**

The study assessed the relationship between having technical education and training and the level of women empowerment and responsibility.

The findings show that of 55 women who had undergone various technical education and training 45 (81.8%) claimed to be empowered and responsible while 10 were felt less empowered. While these who had not undergone technical education and training were 35, 17 (48.5%) felt empowered and responsible and 18 (51.5%) were less empowered. The findings implied technical education and training empowered women.

**Table 5** *Technical Education and Training and Women Empowerment and Responsibility*

		<b>Empowered and Responsible Women</b>	<b>Less Empowered Women</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Have you undergone any technical education and training</b>	Yes	29	7	36
	No	30	6	36
<b>Total</b>		<b>66</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>90</b>

### **Conclusions**

The study therefore concluded that education and employment were most significant factors in women empowerment initiatives. The study established that women with technical education and with various training showed high responsibility, made their own rules, empowered their relationships, and were willing to empower other women. This agrees with the findings of Oyelude and Bamigbola (2013) who studied women empowerment through access to information found that educating women created awareness among them of their potentials to do better, to be empowered, and to stand up for their rights and themselves anywhere.

### **Recommendations**

In order to achieve the high level of women empowerment the study made the following key recommendation based on the findings;

- i. Women should be encouraged to acquire technical education and training. Through the technical training, women are able to not only compete in the usual ordinal jobs but also in the technical areas thus making them more active in the job market.
- ii. Women should be given access to the right information as far as technical training is concerned so that they can learn the need for them to take part in technical areas and thus see the training.

- iii. Women should be encouraged to attend as much technical training as possible since technical education and training empowers women.
- iv. Employment opportunities should be equally given without consideration gender but qualification as a way of empowering women to focus more on technical training.

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