

TVET Inclusiveness as Pathway to Economic Independence for Women Living in Nigeria's Informal Settlements

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Abstract

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is viewed globally as a poverty alleviation strategy because of its potential to create work. Work leads to income, and income drives economic development. This study seeks to investigate women's inclusion in TVET and explores the role of TVET in elevating economic empowerment and sustainability for women residing in informal settlements. The study employed an extensive literature review of related peer-reviewed articles, policy documents on TVET, Social Development Goals (SDGs) and other related reports. This was done through a wide range of search from data-base sources like Google Scholar and institutional repositories to provide a robust foundation for understanding barriers and opportunities in TVET. Findings revealed that, there are deeply entrenched socio-cultural norms that prioritise male education and employment over that of females, many women lack access to financial resources to cover their tuition, there is a lack of comprehensive data on women living in informal settlements, inadequate basic infrastructure such as schools and training centres, and inadequate information dissemination about TVET programs within the communities leading to low enrolment rates. Therefore, it was recommended that, Private Sector Partnerships should be encouraged to provide funding support through scholarships or stipends for women, policy interventions mandating gender quotas in TVET programs, community engagements through collaborations with local leaders to address cultural barriers to women's education will improve access to the trainings and reduce disparities in the enrolment, among others. additionally, further research focusing specifically on women living in informal settlements could provide valuable insights for designing targeted policy interventions that would promote inclusivity, equity, and empowerment for sustainable development.

Keywords: Informal Settlement, Inclusion, Sustainability, Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality.

Introduction

Globally, women living in informal settlements face various types of challenges, especially those in developing countries like Nigeria, (UNESCO 2020; Badejo, & Morenikeji, 2017). These problems range from limited access to education, inadequate infrastructure, and employment opportunities to economic and political marginalization, among others. These

challenges often worsen the disparities that already exist thereby resulting in a continuous cycle of poverty and hindering women's ability to achieve economic stability and sustainability, (Badejo, & Morenikeji, 2017).

Although Technical Vocational and Education Training is crucial to economic empowerment and promoting gender equality, the story is different for women living in most informal settlements in Nigeria because they face numerous challenges and barriers accessing these programs. For example, 40% of TVET institutions in Nigeria are concentrated in urban centers, leaving women in rural and marginalized areas with limited access (UNESCO, 2020).

TVET has the potential to empower women living in marginalized settlements by providing them with skills for economic independence, but difficulties in accessing TVET programs persist due to socioeconomic, cultural, and infrastructural barriers. For instance, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022), women make up only about 30% of TVET students with fewer participating in fields like engineering and construction in Nigeria while adult literacy rate for women in informal settlements is 38%, compared to 68% for men (NBS, 2022). A survey carried out in informal settlements of Lagos State shows that only 20% of women aged 18-35 had access to vocational training, compared to 45% of men. Also, low literacy levels hinder women from qualifying for or succeeding in advanced vocational programs, confining them to low-income trades in Ajegunle, Lagos. Furthermore, a study by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2022) shows that seven out of ten women in informal settlements experience cultural restrictions that discourage participation in skill acquisition programs, particularly in non-traditional fields. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO] 2019), TVET emerged as a tool or strategy for addressing such challenges by economically empowering women to secure livelihoods thereby contributing to the nation's economic development. TVET skill development systems have dual objectives that support growth and contribute to the broader social objective, it can equip individuals with practical skills and knowledge that are trade-specific because they encompass a range of programs and initiatives that offer hands-on training and market-driven skills (UNESCO, 2020; ILO, 2022; FMEN, 2020). While TVET improves participants' employability and breeds entrepreneurship and social mobility, it also has the potential to transform the marginalized section of the population including women living in informal settlements, the youth, those living with disabilities, etc. and various stakeholders including governments, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies have increasingly focused on promoting women's inclusion in TVET programs, (Oyekanmi 2018; FMEN 2020).

Some empirical studies have investigated women's participation in TVET more broadly but there is limited research that specifically examines the intersection of gender, living conditions in informal settlements, and access to TVET, etc. in the Nigerian context. Other studies have focused on policies at the national level but always overlook the dynamics of socio-economic and localized barriers faced by women in informal settlements. Furthermore, there is inadequate qualitative research on the experiences, perceptions, and

aspirations of women regarding TVET participation and its impact on economic sustainability within these marginalized communities. Policies and practices are mostly focused on a single dimension of disadvantage overlooking the fact that most TVET learners may have multiple, intersectional experiences of disadvantage.

Aim and Objectives

This study seeks to investigate women's inclusion in TVET and explore the role of TVET in elevating economic sustainability among women residing in informal settlements through increased participation and inclusion through the following objectives;

1. To investigate the potential strategies for promoting women's inclusion in TVET programs in Nigeria's informal settlements.
2. To study the socio-economic impacts of TVET in economic development and sustainability among women living in Nigeria's informal settlements.
3. To examine the barriers stopping women from accessing and participating in TVET programs in informal settlements
4. To assess the policies on TVET and inclusion in Nigeria and make recommendations for further studies, policymakers, stakeholders, etc in enhancing the participation of women living in informal settlements in TVET programs for economic sustainability.

Research Method

The methodology for this study is based on an extensive literature review of peer-reviewed articles, government and non-governmental reports, and policy documents focusing on TVET inclusiveness and its impact on economic empowerment for women in informal settlements. The Social Justice and Equity theory, Human Capital Theory, etc. were used to frame the analysis, ensuring alignment with education equity and sustainable development principles. Data were selected from databases like Google Scholar and institutional repositories to search for recent studies and selections were made based on topical relevance, year of publication, etc. to provide a robust foundation for understanding barriers and opportunities in TVET access.

Topics such as gender inclusion in TVET, benefits and challenges of TVET, access to and impact of TVET, contributions of TVET gender-sensitive policies, emerging issues and knowledge gaps, etc. were reviewed. Most of the literature provided information on the output and outcome of TVET but there is inadequate evidence to conclude on the inclusivity of women living in informal settlements and the income generated from the jobs gained after the training. furthermore, specific studies or data that focus exclusively on the inclusion of women in informal settlements in TVET are limited. (Ojo, 2019). The paper finally discussed the findings and subsequently offered recommendations.

Literature Review

Theories and Gender Equity

Investment in TVET enhances the productivity and earning potential of marginalized groups, for example, the Schultz's Human Capital Theory stresses the importance of skill development for economic empowerment for women in informal settlements, (Schultz, 1961). Acquiring vocational skills in fields like tailoring or ICT could transform the economic status of women in informal and marginal settlements such as Makoko in Lagos, etc. resulting in breaking the cycles of poverty (ILO, 2022). Likewise, Rawls' (1971) Social Justice Theory highlights the importance of equitable resource distribution. For example, implementing policies that reserve quotas for women in male-dominated vocational fields like engineering or construction can promote gender equity and economic diversity (World Bank, 2021). Furthermore, the Intersectionality Framework (Crenshaw, 1989) reveals the compounded disadvantages faced by women in informal settlements due to overlapping factors such as gender, poverty, and low literacy. Addressing these challenges through TVET inclusiveness requires context-specific interventions, such as offering programs tailored to women's needs in communities like Kabong, Jos (UNICEF, 2022).

The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning hence, when sustainability is integrated into TVET curricula and access is expanded to women in informal settlements, it will align with global efforts to reduce inequality. For instance, the UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) program have successfully incorporated sustainability principles into vocational training thereby, creating opportunities for marginalized groups (UNESCO, 2020).

Informal Settlements and TVET

A significant portion of the Nigerian population lives in urban areas because of rural-urban migration (Badejo & Morenikeji, 2017). In contrast, the urban infrastructure has not kept pace with growth leading to the development of informal settlements, (Adedeji *et al.*, 2019; Badejo, & Morenikeji, 2017).

Informal settlements otherwise referred to as slums or shanty towns are common in urban areas of developing countries, (Adedeji *et al.*, 2019). These settlements are typically inhabited by low-income households who are unable to afford formal housing because of economic constraints, and the residents often face social exclusion and economic marginalization, leading to cycles of poverty and vulnerability. (Adedeji, & Ogunleye, 2019). The settlements are characterized by inadequate basic infrastructure, poor sanitation, limited access to basic services such as clean water and electricity, overcrowding and limited voice representation in governance thereby making the residents vulnerable with weak adaptive capacity. (UN-Habitat, 2020). These challenges hinder their participation in TVET programs and addressing these underlying socio-economic issues is crucial in promoting inclusiveness in TVET. (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2020; Ojo, 2019)

Civil societies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play vital roles in supplementing the effort by addressing the needs of marginalized and vulnerable

communities through initiatives like skill training, entrepreneurship, and women's empowerment that indirectly contribute to enhancing the inclusion of women from informal settlements in TVET. (Oyekanmi & Adenike, 2018). However, the lack of comprehensive data and research focusing on this group is a notable gap in addressing the inclusion of women from informal settlements in TVET in Nigeria. Without robust data and analysis, it becomes challenging to develop targeted policies and programs that address the unique needs and challenges faced by these groups.

Economic Empowerment through TVET

Globally, informal settlements are known to have high rates of unemployment and underemployment, TVET can provide women living in such communities with pathways to secure employment or start their businesses. (World Bank, 2020). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2019), TVET emerged as a tool or strategy for addressing such challenges by economically empowering women to secure livelihoods, contributing to the nation's economic development and sustainability.

TVET is seen as critical to skills acquisition, gaining reliable wage employment, empowerment, and gaining self-esteem. Studies have shown that the necessary components of ensuring economic development in communities are employment and self-employment which have links to TVET. TVET's programmes and trainings provide some advantages over formal education because of their short-term and targeted nature. (INEE, 2011; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2007). TVET can significantly impact the economic empowerment, social mobility and overall well-being of women living in informal settlements. Furthermore, the trainings are practical therefore they can equip all participants with the skills and knowledge relevant to various industries and increase their employability (ILO, 2018; & World Bank, 2020).

The main goal of TVETs is to address the immediate income needs of society by building a sustainable human capital while promising participants a more economically better future. These trainings focus more on locally well-developed fields like sewing, bicycle repair, mechanics, basket-making, weaving, masonry, or carpentry targeted toward wealth creation which will eventually lead to economic sustainability. (ILO, 2004). By accessing these trainings and gaining vocational skills women in informal settlements can access income-generating opportunities, thereby improving their financial stability and sustainability. According to results from studies, TVET graduates, including women, are more likely to earn higher wages and achieve economic independence (ILO, 2018; & World Bank, 2020).

ILO (2019) reported that TVET programs often incorporate modules on entrepreneurship and small business, these are particularly relevant to women living in marginalized communities where traditional employment opportunities may be lacking or inadequate. Moreover, self-employment can offer flexibility and autonomy. On the other hand, women who participate and acquire skills from these trainings do not only gain economic

empowerment but also social empowerment in the areas of self-confidence, assertiveness, and decision-making abilities, among others which can positively impact their relationships within their families and members of the communities. Working conditions in the informal settlements are sometimes precarious and occupational health risks are prevalent, in such instances the aspects of the TVET programs that focus on occupational health and safety equip women with knowledge to protect themselves from workplace hazards. (ILO, 2002; World Bank, 2020 & ILO, 2012).

While TVET can significantly impact the economic empowerment, social mobility, and overall well-being of women, it can also have broader implications for community development in informal settlements because these women become agents of change within their communities, advocating for improved infrastructure, access to education, and women's rights, (Yusuf, 2012). Additionally, TVET can break the barriers on traditional gender roles and stereotypes by encouraging women to pursue non-traditional fields such as construction, automotive repair, or technology thereby promoting gender equality and creating more inclusive environments for women in the workforce.

Women's Inclusiveness and Participation in TVET

According to the UN Girl Education Initiative (UNGEI), inclusion is the provision of equitable opportunities to all learners at all levels including those with significant disability to receive effective educational services with the needed aid and support while preparing them for productive lives Ajayi *et al.*, (2018). Inclusion also connotes an increase in access and participation in learning, and reducing exclusion from and within education which may involve changes in the educational content, approaches, structures, intervention, and strategies Ajayi *et al.*, (2018), while equality in education means educational rights for all learners and supporting them to attain their full potential irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds, (UNESCO 2019). Although there are several overarching policies and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and encouraging the participation of women in TVET, specific TVET policies solely dedicated to the inclusion of women living in Nigeria's informal communities may not be available. (Okeke, 2019).

Skill development is key to promoting equal opportunity for women in employment, this is because women who have skills are more likely to get jobs where they are treated equally, but despite campaigns for gender equality and equity in higher education, research continues to show that women especially those in informal settlements are underrepresented in TVET (Ajayi *et al.*, 2018).

To achieve "education for all" and meet the learning needs of all, TVET is believed to be one of the essential components, however, there are concerns that TVET has not targeted those who face the most acute disadvantages and vulnerability because the causes and effects of marginalization are not given the deserved attention in terms of policy formulation and implementation. (UNESCO, 2010). According to Luguijo, (2002) and Wirak *et al.*, (2003), the drivers of inequality in education and training are not adequately taken care of by the educational policies in most if not all African countries making the inclusion of all difficult

to achieve. Embedded in the process of achieving equity includes increasing and improving access to TVET learning opportunities, making opportunities more equal particularly to improve the chances of the disadvantaged groups, especially women, and providing nondiscriminatory and engaging diversity of different needs of groups of learners, Wirak *et al.*, (2003).

Although the right to education and training has been established and recognized across the world, there is still systemic discrimination and inequalities related to career guidance, course materials and school infrastructure, hence systems and institutions must ensure equal access to technical and vocational education and training opportunities regardless of gender, age, religion, or ethnic background, and with special consideration for vulnerable members of society (UNESCO 2019, Wirak *et al.*, 2003).

Furthermore, gender equality has been identified by UNESCO as a global priority and it is well embedded in Sustainable Development Goal 4 to ensure inclusion rights and equitable education for all. Gender equality represents the birth of the new era of education that recognizes the needs, interests and lived experiences of all learners by tackling the challenges and barriers that stop any learner from exercising participation rights, complete and benefiting from TVET.

Policies on TVET

TVET is governed by policies, regulations, and initiatives in Nigeria to enhance the quality of vocational education and training to meet the demands of the labour market and promote national development. Among these policies are;

1. The National Policy on Education (NPE) emphasizes the importance of promoting equal access to education for all and advocates for the removal of barriers that may prevent women and girls from accessing education thereby indirectly promoting women's inclusion in TVET (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013 and 2006). The NPE guides all levels of education in Nigeria, including TVET which was hitherto revised in 2013, emphasizing the importance of technical and vocational education as one of the ways of promoting self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, [FRN] 2013).
2. The National Policy on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) recognizes the critical role of TVET in human resource development and economic growth. This policy addresses the issues of curriculum development, teacher training, industry partnerships, funding etc. It also outlines strategies for enhancing access, equity, quality, relevance, and sustainability in TVET programs. (FRN, 2011).
3. The National Vocational Qualification Framework (NVQF) defines the level of knowledge, skills, competence, and the provision of a comprehensive system for assessing and certifying the competencies acquired for various occupations through TVET programs, (NVQF 2013 & EIU, 2010).
4. The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) is the highest regulatory body that collaborates with stakeholders like government agencies, educational

institutions, and industry associations for the accreditation of technical institutions, development of curriculum and standards, quality assurance, and promotion of innovation in TVET to improve the quality and relevance of TVET programs (NBTE 2012 & EIU, 2010).

5. The Skills Development Fund (SDF) is an initiative of the government that aims to promote skills development and employability through TVET. This policy provides funding support for capacity building, infrastructure development, curriculum reform, and industry partnerships in TVET institutions. It also seeks to address the mismatch between the skills possessed by graduates and the needs of the labour market (FRN, 2011).
6. Industry Partnerships and Apprenticeship Programs (IPAP) promotes practical apprenticeship programs and encourages collaboration between TVET institutions and industry partners to ensure that training programs align with industry needs and standards.

The above policies and initiatives collectively form the foundation for the development and enhancement of TVET in Nigeria by producing skilled manpower capable of driving economic growth and development. However, what is being experienced is far from what has been expected. The effectiveness of an organization is not only reflected in its ability to formulate policy but also in its ability to execute such policies effectively (EIU, 2010).

The Challenges of Inclusion

Women living in informal settlements of Nigeria face numerous challenges and barriers in accessing TVET programs some of which include,

1. The deeply entrenched socio-cultural norms that prioritize male education and employment over that of females and these norms often limit women's access to education and training opportunities, including TVET. Women are expected to fulfil traditional roles within the household, which may restrict their ability to pursue education and training outside the home (Okeke, 2019).
2. Women living in informal settlements are often from low-income households, making it difficult for them to afford the costs associated with TVET, such as tuition fees, transportation, and the learning materials. Additionally, they may lack access to financial resources or support systems to cover these expenses (Adeyemi & Olaoye, 2019).
3. Informal settlements typically lack basic infrastructure such as adequate schools and training centres even when TVET programs are available, they may be inaccessible due to their distance from these settlements. This lack of infrastructure makes it challenging for women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities to access training programs (Adebayo & Bamgbade, 2018).
4. Women living in informal settlements are often at a higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence, which can act as a deterrent to their participation in TVET programs. For instance, the fear of harassment or assault, both during travel to

training centres and within the training institutions themselves, can prevent women from pursuing educational opportunities (Adeyemi & Olaoye, 2019).

5. Many women in informal settlements may not be aware of the availability or benefits of TVET programs due to lack or inadequate information dissemination about these programs within their communities, leading to low enrolment rates among women. (Okeke, 2019).
6. Many women in informal settlements may feel anxious, less confident and find it hard to understand the teachers and the teachers on the other hand may also struggle as their regular pedagogical approaches are obstructed by language barriers (UNICEF, 2016).
7. It is globally accepted that the participation in education and training of women and girls bearing domestic responsibilities is negatively affected by the daily hours taken on house chores. It is estimated that girls/women spend more hours doing house chores than boys/men, (UNICEF, 2016 & Akyuz *et al.*, 2018).
8. Women in informal settlements may lack access to support services such as childcare facilities or counselling services, essential for enabling their participation in TVET programs. Without adequate support systems, women may struggle to balance their caregiving responsibilities with their educational pursuits (Adebayo & Bamgbade, 2018).

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that involves policymakers, educational institutions, stakeholders, and community organizations. Strategies such as targeted outreach programs, provision of financial assistance, the establishment of closer-to-home training centres, and the implementation of safety measures can help improve access to TVET for women living in informal settlements in Nigeria.

Conclusion

TVET was identified as a promising avenue for empowering women economically and improving their livelihoods within informal settlements because they offer practical skills training, and entrepreneurship pathways to employment or self-employment leading to poverty reduction and sustainable development. (UNESCO, 2016). However, there remain significant gaps and barriers hindering women's inclusion in TVET programs in Nigeria's informal settlements among which are financial constraints, lack of awareness, language barrier, inadequate policies, infrastructure and services, etc. (Obanya, 2020).

In conclusion, findings revealed the importance of prioritizing women's inclusion in TVET is a strategy for advancing gender equality, poverty reduction, and sustainable development in Nigeria's informal settlements through investing in women's education, skills development, and economic opportunities.

Recommendations

To promote women's inclusion in TVET, the following recommendations are proposed.

1. TVET programs should be developed and implemented to address specific needs of women living in Nigeria's informal settlements. The programs should offer relevant skill training, support services and incentives to overcome barriers to access and participation.
2. Private Sector Partnerships should be encouraged to provide funding in form of scholarship or stipends to support vocational training for women living in informal settlements.
3. Policy Interventions mandating gender quotas in TVET programs and incentivizing women's enrolments in non-traditional fields should be developed to improve gender disparities in accessing TVET programs.
4. Community engagements through collaborations with local leaders to address cultural barriers and promote women's education will further help to improve access to the trainings.
5. Further research should be conducted to data on women living in Nigeria's informal settlements, etc.

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