

Empowering Rural Women for Gender Equality in Ashanti Region of Ghana Through Programmes and Projects.

Simon Kyei, (Ph.D.)

Department of Social Studies Education
University of Education, Winneba, Ghana
Cimmonny40@gmail.com

Abstract: Women empowerment has been an issue for discussion all over the world. One of the major means of empowering women throughout the world is by the use of programmes and projects. This study is designed to ascertain whether or not the available women empowerment programme in Ghana really empower women to challenge the gender inequality status quo and, to explore an alternative direction to improve on women empowerment programme. Thus, the study attempts to assess the efforts made by two of such programmes – Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP), a Government intervention and, Care International project for women empowerment, an non-governmental intervention. Theories such as Marx’s class theory, functionalism theory as well as conflict theory were used to explain why gender inequality exist and the need to consider the basic causes of gender inequality in designing any women empowerment programme. The central theory used in explaining how these available interventions approach women empowerment is deficit thinking theory. The study used qualitative and descriptive statistics method. As the study explored an alternative direction for women empowerment programmes, it used exploratory research design. Interview and focus group discussions were used to elicit information from the women. The analysis were made based on the data collected from the selected programme and project such as CARE international and Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP). The main findings was that the available projects and programmes only provide mitigation measures to support women and do not address the root causes of what disempower women and therefore their effort do not challenge the status quo. What the study found to be the better practice for women empowerment programmes to improve the women status is to target a particular gender inequality and design an appropriate women empowerment programme that tackles the root cause of it.

Key words: Gender, programmes, empowerment, inadequacies, inequalities, deficit thinking,

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The problem of bridging the gender inequality gaps has been a major issue since 1995 after the Beijing Conference. The idea of creating an enabling environment for the women to achieve their outmost desire was derived from the fact that women are seen to be more vulnerable and at a disadvantage due to the role they play in the society and also as the weaker sex. Many authors have argued that ideas about gender difference were derived from classical thought, Christian ideology, and contemporary science and medicine (Gambetti, 2003; Blakemore, 1998). The question that needs critical attention in solving gender inequality problem through empowerment strategies is “*what do we empower to equate?*”

A great deal of work has been done on women empowerment, especially, since 1995. The concept of empowerment was adopted after the Beijing Conference in 1995. The Beijing Declaration (section 13), presents women’s empowerment as a key strategy for development: “*Women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.*” The empowerment of women is located within the discourse and agenda of gender equality; and is increasingly being taken in the agendas of international development organizations, perhaps more as a means to achieve gender equality than as an end in itself. At the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1993 and the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, Governments committed themselves to the empowerment of women. This commitment was operationalized and formulated into a clear action plan at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995.

The purposes of treaties and conventions from which policies, programmes and projects were derived are that women are to be empowered. UNDP for instance in the year 2008 did integrate women’s empowerment into its three key thematic areas: sustainable development; inclusive and effective democratic governance; and risk prevention and resilience (UNDP, 2008). The organisation at the time believed that running programme and projects such as its Global Gender and Economic Policy Management Initiative (GEPMI) would give the women a comprehensive capacity development and policy advisory services that would accelerate

achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by making economic policies and poverty reduction strategies deliver results equitably to women and men. A new approach to women empowerment and Gender equality was adopted by UNDP in 2008 through to 2011. Another Gender Equality Strategy was put in place again in 2014. With this new strategy, UNDP is now ensuring that gender equality and the empowerment of women are integrated into every aspect of its work to support countries to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities and exclusion (UNDP, 2014).

Differences in understanding of women empowerment to different empowerment agents creates various forms of definitions and means of empowering the women throughout the world. To some people, empowerment is *obscenity* – “it has been said that empowerment is like obscenity, you don’t know how to define it but you know it when you see it” (Stranberg, 2001 cited in Ridgeway 1997). An NGO Activist has been quoted by Batliwala (1994) to have said that no one has been able to define empowerment clearly therefore it gives a breathing space to work it out till its logical meaning. Rappaport (1987) points out that to *empower* is to enhance the possibilities for people to control their own lives.

UN Human Development Report (1995) also stresses that empowerment is about Participation. For Oxfam, empowerment is about challenging oppression and inequality for equity (Oxfam, 1995). Feminist activists has been quoted to have stressed that women’s empowerment should lead to the liberation of women from false value systems and ideologies of oppression. It should lead to a situation where each one can become a whole being regardless of gender, and realization of one’s fullest potential to construct a more humane society (Batliwala, 1994: 131).

It appears the most frequent approach to women empowerment problem is by the use of either a programme or a project. A *programme* is defined here to mean a group of related *projects* managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits not available from managing the *projects* individually. The programmes and projects are not used interchangeably in this paper. There are number of measures being taken by the existing women empowerment programmes in Ghana such as REP (Rural Enterprises Programme) NGOs, (such as CARE International) and LEAP (Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty) and many others found in the study area, as well as many other empowerment programmes in Ghana (Handa et al, 2013). Some of these measures are women advocacy and skill training in nature. Also, there have been income generating-activities at the various levels both individually and collectively (Awumbila, 2001; Tsikata, 2001). Other measures include promoting women decision making and participation in local, regional and national politics. All these measures have one way or the other pushed some women to make some marginal gains. From the question asked earlier, “ what do we empower to equate” if our empowerment programme is to solve gender inequality problem, then the main problem to address in this study is that, *were women in Ashanti Region of Ghana empowered to challenge the status quo as they received the programmes or projects interventions?*

The study is therefore designed to:

1. Assess the extent to which the available women empowerment programmes and projects such as Leap and Care international’s women empowerment programmes empower the poor rural women in the informal sectors of Ashanti Region of Ghana to challenge the gender inequality status quo.
2. Establish an alternative direction for women empowerment programmes and projects that would ensure the development of the potentials of rural women to bridge the inequality gaps for socio-economic development.

2.0 Literature Review

It is believed that gender comes about as the society defines the role of men and women (Risman, 2004). Role definitions among females and males have created inequalities and social classes between men and women in the society and that it has led to women subordinations to men (Lorber, 1994). Awumbila, (2001) stated that there is power inequality in gender relations to the disadvantages of the woman. To be able to understand why women need to be empowered, the concept of inequality needs to be understood. The main basic issue that needs to be examined in dealing with societal settings (as they create inequalities) is the question of why inequality exists in our societies. Thus, various social theories were employed to provide different perspectives of gender inequality and its solution, women empowerment. Marx’s class theory; functionalist; Conflict theory, and cognitive theory were employed to explain gender inequality as social construct and point out how women become less empowered. On the other hand, it appears that available programmes and projects in Ghana consider rural women’s deficiencies as a basis in designing the interventions needed to empower women hence, the review of deficit thinking theory.

2.1. The concept of gender inequality

Marx’s class theory rests on the premise of class struggles. According to the theory as explained by Edward (1983) Marx meant that in every known human society there has been a fundamental division between two broad social groups, the exploited and the exploiter.

Theorizing power struggling in gender from Marx's class theory point of view, men represent the control class as the women occupy the controlled class. As many scholars and gender activists have stated, we are living in a *patriarchal society*. Viewing society as fairly balanced system that has parts which interrelate, the functionalist or order theorist asserted that society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. According to Anderson and Taylor (2009), functionalism interprets each part of society in terms of how each contributes to the societal stability as part organized to fill different needs and has consequences for the form and shape of society. Functional arguments are summarized as follows:

- Society has system of interconnected parts that come together in harmony to maintain the state of balance and social equilibrium
- Certain positions are more important to the society and require special skills
- Only few people in the society such as men have these special skills
- Those with these skills need to be compensated with the additional reward
- The result is the social inequality (Dye, 1996).

In effect, inequality is essential in getting people to work harder in a more difficult jobs that require special skills (Dye, 1996). The inevitability of inequality in the society is best explained by Conflict theorists. This sociological approach does not look at how social structures help society to operate as in functionalism, but instead looks at how social patterns can cause some people in the society to be dominant, and others to be oppressed. These theorists argued that those who are given the most reward and influential position are able to apply the greatest power resources they possess. Conflict theorists argue that there are no assurances that the most qualified individuals will actually occupy key societal roles. This interpretation of conflict theory also leads to the idea that men cannot be trusted to give power to women because this gift would conflict with their inherent nature (Bruegal, 1979). Another example is seen in Althusser's (1971) Concept of Repressive State Apparatus which suggests that as police and armed forces are used as factors to maintain law and order in a state, by extension, as stated by Liversey and Lawson (2008) suggests that if the society is fundamentally unequal and the work of police and armed forces is to uphold the law and order, their behaviour simply seek to maintain the existing unequal social order. Conflict theory has been used by feminists to explain the position of women in the society. Feminist conflict theorists such as Bruegal (1979) argued that women have traditionally been oppressed so that men could benefit from positions of power, wealth, and status.

2.2. Deficit Thinking as a Model for Women Empowerment programmes

Deficit thinking, according to Valencia (1997) is an endogenous theory suggesting that some group of people (such as women) lack power due to deficiencies or deficits. Valencia (1997) was with the view that genetics, culture, class and familial socialization have all been postulated as the sources of the alleged deficits. Deficit thinking theory as applied to social class classification, refers to the notion that the programme and project implementers as women empowerment agents automatically make assumption that their beneficiaries – women, are less powerful such as earning low income, attaining low education or not at all; are more vulnerable than men, and inferior to men, and therefore needs to be empowered (Gorski, 2008; Valencia, 1997; Ryan, 1971). By extension, what renders these women into such status is not the major concern of the empowerment programme agents but they are only interested in measures to help the situation. The implication of such posture of these women empowerment agents – programme or project implementers, is top-down development approach, a developmental model that force the programme on the beneficiaries.

2.3 The Root Causes of Women Disempowerment

Fundamentally, women are disempowered by processes and social interactions. The central point explained by many authors is discriminations that occur from childhood, organisational settings and hierarchical gender inequality (Acker, 2006; Figart, Mutari, and Power 2002; Pierce, 1995; Adkins 1995). Women also get disempowered through status expectation, cognitive biases and resources control (Haselton, Nettle, and Andrews, 2005). Solutions to what disempower women can be summarised by the statement made by Ridgeway, (1997). Ridgeway, (1997) who asserted that if women are disempowered through processes and social interactions, then our approach to empowering women must deal with both organisational and socialization processes to compensate the women in such a way that women will not be *worst off* due to the disadvantages these processes put them into.

From the literature reviewed, it was established that society fuels inequalities. And, as the available programmes and project adopt deficit thinking model approach in addressing inequality through empowerment, one would accept the criticism made by Swadener and Lubeck (1995) that the deficit thinking approach is unreasonably simplistic, grounded in classism and therefore can establish that there exist a gap between what the programmes offer in relation to clients' needs. The missing link in literature is therefore the fact that there is no enough literature to show how these programmes or projects could empower women to challenge the status quo of gender inequalities.

3.0 Procedure and Data Collection Method

This study uses exploratory research design and, qualitative and descriptive statistics methods in data collection and analyses. The qualitative data derived from the respondents as I visit them, through the use of interview and focus group discussion (for women respondents) and questionnaire (for institutions and programme implementers) were expressed and analysed in words (Twumasi, 2001; Brown, 1996). However, there were few descriptive statistics presented in basic tables, diagrams and percentages. Both secondary and primary sources of data were used. The secondary materials include national reports and policies on gender issues, and documentation on women empowerment related projects and programmes. Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) and CARE International empowerment project were respectively consulted for both primary and secondary data.

3.1 Population and Sample of the Study

The population for this study comprises rural women who were beneficiaries of LEAP in Amansie West District and Asokore Mampong Municipal, and Care International clients in Amansie West all in Ashanti Region of Ghana. Specifically, Care clients covered include those in informal sector such as farmers, traders, and seamstresses. In all, a total of 83 women were randomly selected from about 805 women representing 10% of the population. Two groups were identified from the 83 respondents to engage in focus group discussion. Each group was made up of maximum of 10 members from each district. Interview was used in soliciting information from the 83 programme beneficiaries. A large number of 83 women respondents were interviewed in order to ascertain the impact the programmes or projects selected have on different group beneficiaries. The number is also huge (for qualitative study) because the study was involved with two interventions and each involved sizable number of respondents. The focus group discussion was also used to have fair assessment on how the groups were formed and how each group member was either benefiting or not from the intervention they been receiving. Non-probability sampling (purposive) was adopted to select the empowerment agents which include

3.2 Data Analysis

The analysis was connected to data collection as a field note book was used to capture any important issue that was necessary for the study and meanings were given to each issue raised. The analysis was done manually. The key issues were presented in tables, chart, diagrams and others.

4.0 LEAP and CARE International women's Empowerment Efforts

Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) as a National programme and, CARE International, as an NGO which also has 'Cocolife empowerment project' are the two woman empowerment programme and project assessed.

4.1 Care International's Projects for Women Empowerment

In 2015, Care International – Non-Governmental Organisation, reviewed its strategy of development and added women empowerment as an integral part in order to make development a whole. The NGO's (CARE) strategic plan for empowering women is based on how it defines women empowerment. CARE's operational definition for women empowerment is through the concept of *Agency*. This agency was explained to mean improvement of individual and collective well-beings. It entails increase in knowledge, wealth, change in attitude and, provisions of good structures and conducive environment for the betterment of women's lives. This definition links itself to the word 'agency'. CARE activities and strategies reviewed are more of 'power to' than the 'power from within' (Rowland, 1997). Their interventions help the women to create wealth, and have knowledge about the existing institution that can help women to resist women oppression and control. However, the other aspect of agency which UNDP (2014) placed emphasis on such as agency to use rights, capabilities, resources and opportunities to make strategic choices is not seen in CARE's definition of women empowerment which guides CARE for its intervention.

The office of CARE did indicate that CARE links up with BAC and Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) to help women to acquire skills to create wealth and have access to financial resources. The effective use of resources which these rural women need to acquire such that they can make strategic choices and decisions is however missing from CARE's interventions. This is evident in the presentation below.

CARE International as an NGO, has a project called CocoaLife which has five pillars. These pillars include; livelihood programmes that have projects such as Women Extension Volunteer (WEV) and, Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA). Other pillars include farming; community and, youth and environment. These pillars are intended to empower women economically, socially and politically. For the purpose of this study, only VSLA and WEV were considered.

4.1.1 CARE International's Economic Empowerment Strategy

There are two key projects in the Care’s programme that seek to drive women economic empowerment in the study area. These pillars are Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) and, Women Extension Volunteers (WEV). Under village Savings and Loans Associations, CARE is able to form at least a 25-woman member group in each of the 10 communities and assist them to contribute to a ‘susu’ scheme. Each person’s contribution is used as a share. Through this scheme, members can contract a ‘soft loan’ for their economic activities.

A total of 40 women who are CARE’s VSLA and WEV project beneficiaries (22 from VSLA and 18 from WEV project), representing a total of 10% of the total beneficiaries in the study area were interviewed on how the scheme is effecting economic improvement in their lives. It must be noted that 18 out of 20 (90%) WEV direct beneficiaries were interviewed. The VLSA scheme as a source of major income for their economic activities, is said to be helping the members in number of ways. Table 1 below gives figures on the impacts of VSLA and WEV projects components on the beneficiaries.

Table 1. WEV and VSLA as a Means to Improve Income Earning

a. WEV Impact on Cocoa Farmers (2014/15 and 2015/16)

Rate of increase	Frequency	
	Number	%
2 bags	8	44
3 bags	1	6
4 bags	3	17
5 bags and above	6	33
Total	18	100

b. VSLA impact on the Traders and Farmers

Activity	Real Impact	Frequency	
		Number	%
Susu Loans Scheme	As Source of capital and means to hire farm labour	14	64
	As Source of financial security against business bankruptcy	8	36
	Total	22	100

The tables show how the respondents from VSLA and WEV project of CARE reacted to the question of “What benefits have you received...” “What change has the benefits received from CARE projects brought in your life?” Table 1a above shows the number of WEV respondents and how WEV as project benefits the respondents. The project covers 20 women found in 10 communities in Amansie West District. Through Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) expertise, it trains the women on best practices in cocoa farming through the use of cocoa demonstration farms found in each of the 10 communities. These Women, Extension Volunteers (WEV), are to retrain other women on modern techniques in cocoa farming. The rate at which the project intervention is helping these women has been quantified into the number of cocoa bags each of them earned between the year 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 cocoa seasons. About 44% (8) of the WEV respondents had their cocoa yield increased by 2 extra bags between the 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 cocoa seasons. In the same period, 33% (6), of them had an increase of 5 bags or more.

Table 1 also indicates the rate at which the intervention helped to increase the income levels of women cocoa farmers. However, further check from focus group discussion show that the least cocoa beans harvested by the WEV respondents in the year 2015/2016 cocoa season was 6 bags (increases from 4 bags in the previous year to 6 bags in the following year) and the highest was 20 bags (increased from 15 to 20 bags). Thus, using GhC 450 (price per bag of cocoa), it can be said that the income of these women’s income, if they solely rely on the cocoa, is between GhC 2,700 and GhC 9,000 per year or, between GhC 225 and GhC750 per month. The difference in the number of yield increase was due to two reasons. It was learnt from the MOFA officer I talked to that in a situation where the size of the farms are the same, the yield can be different. Also, differences in the adoption of the techniques taught by the individual farmers also led to differences in yield. This confirms the assertion made by Caplan (1985) that different women have different ability levels to convert any empowerment intervention to different levels of empowerment. What it means is that inequality, needs to be tackled from individualistic and not in heterogeneous. If not mass education will still widen the already existing gap. It can be inferred from the promotion of cocoa yield production among women groups in Amansie West District of Ghana that even though they all receive the same empowerment intervention, other factors such land fertility, farm sides and ability to absorb the intervention led to difference in yields.

From Table 1 a, a total of 64% of VSLA respondents said they rely on the scheme to hire the services of the farm labours to carry out their farming activities. Thus, these women do not depend on men or family members for such supposedly ‘men’s work’ in the farm. Close to 30% of the VSLA respondents did indicate that the scheme gave them assurance and a source of security against bankruptcy in their trading business. “With VSLA, I am now not afraid of bankruptcy, I do have reliable capital source” (A 40-year old woman beneficiary). The question is, do these women have control over their cocoa business? In table 2, a probe question was asked to ascertain the role of husbands in these women’s cocoa businesses

Table 2 VSLA and WEV beneficiaries’ Business Management Status

Who manages	WEV clients (Cocoa Farms)		VSLA clients (Farming/Trading Activities)		Total	
	Number(A)	%	Number(B)	%	Number (A + B)	%
Husband	14	78	9	41	23	58
Self	4	22	13	59	17	42
Total	18	100	22	100	40	100

From Table 2, a close to 78% of the WEV respondents have their cocoa business controlled and managed by their husbands. They did indicate that their husbands are the managers. It is interesting to note that those who control their own cocoa business (about 22%) do not have husbands. This is attributed to the accepted perception that cocoa business is difficult to be handled by women alone. On the other hand, majority of VSLA respondents seem to have control over their business. About 59% of them manage their own businesses and the loan they take whilst 41% have their loans and businesses controlled by their husbands. In total, only 42% of the CARE clients who responded have control over their businesses whilst the majority, 58% of them have their businesses controlled by the husbands. What it means is that women in the study area find it difficult to control and manage cocoa business as compared to those who are engaged in trading activities in VSLA project. Thus, even if the project helps to increase the income levels of women in the WEV project, it cannot be guaranteed that women in WEV have financial independence.

This findings partially confirms the work of Rahman (2013). Rahman found out that “the economic dependency of woman is built into the structure of property relations which are dominated by man” (p. 12). However, figures from women in VSLA, show that majority of the traders do control their businesses. Figures from VLSA shows that without the help of men, women can better manage

jobs which they have absolute control over them. Putting the figures of VLSA and WEV together, it indicates that women can be independent economically if they have the skills and control over the work they do. Thus, it is clear here that when women's confidence levels in jobs perceived to be men's jobs are boosted through well designed programme, women can go into such jobs and perform. Therefore, what programmes and projects should be seen doing is to prepare women to have skills and confidence over the so called men dominated jobs. Figures and interpretations from WEV also mean that the planners and world women empowerment bodies always plan how to support women and not how to develop power within women because they take structuralist perception that sees the existing programmes and projects to women empowerment as an attempt to regard one part of social structure as perpetually weak which needs to be supported. It also confirm my central theme that the available programmes are coming from deficit thinking point of view. As women in WEV only work for the men to control the resource at the end of it all, the effect is that these women only increase their work load but cannot control the cocoa resource.

4.1.2 CARE International's Political Empowerment Strategy

In the political empowerment, CARE seems to have few strategies to handle it. The NGO rely on the existing structures and institutions to create awareness on women's political rights. According to the Project Director of CARE in Kumasi area, CARE believes in the sensitization and building of women's confidence as a key tool to get women involved in politics. However, from women focus group discussion held in the various communities, those CARE women respondents who are into politics developed interest in politics not from the programmes and interventions they received from CARE or any other organisational body, but from their various homes. In Amansie West District, the NGO does form women groups and give them skills in public speech. It organises political fora and sensitisation programmes for them to uplift their political confidence. CARE has strengthened Gender and Child Protection Committees in every community it operates. There are 11 members in each group. Apart from their social functions, these groups are also sensitised politically to take part in both local and national politics. In the last 24 months, (since 2015) CARE through these groups has been organising District Assembly Engagement Fora. In these fora, the District Assembly sittings are moved from the District capital, Manso-Nkwanta to the remote communities where CARE operates. All the Assembly members, Heads of Departments, District Chief Executives, Coordinating Directors and all other District Assembly Machineries are brought to the door steps of these women.

The impacts of these moves from the CARE International are supposed to boost the confidence levels of the rural women in involving themselves in politics, both locally and national. It is also intended to educate them on their political rights. A check from these women political rights and confidence revealed that majority (63% of them) do not want to go into politics.

The major reason given by those who said they are not into party politics is that politics in Ghana is men's business and not a woman's one. They explain this to mean that it needs a lot of muscles and money. "Whom am I to vie for MP position in this constituency, it is for men not women" (A 46-year old political party's woman organiser). From focus group discussion, it came to light that the two main factors that discourage women in these rural communities to enter into politics are the women's low educational levels and huge money involvement in Ghana politics. From the literature what other study has established is that women political rights are hindered by the low education among girls (UN women, 2014). In the year 2010, Capaity.org published in its Issue 40 editorial that women are afraid of hot contest and high political tensions and that put them off from politics. Ghana women's political empowerment is hindered by monetisation and low educational levels among women

4.2 How LEAP as a Ghana Government's Programme Empowers its Beneficiaries in Ghana

Unlike CARE which has social, economic and political means of empowering women, LEAP is a programme for livelihood empowerment against poverty. The programme offers the physical money to its beneficiaries to give economic empowerment. There are four categories of women who can qualify to be given LEAP. These are: persons with severe disability; orphan children in the community; persons above 55 years without regular income and the indigents. The money is given to them direct, 'cash in hand'. According to the officials, the money ranges from 64 Ghana cedis (for one beneficiary), 76 Ghana Cedis (for two persons in a household), and 88 Ghana Cedis, (for three persons in a household) to 106 Ghana Cedis (for four persons in a household) per every two months.

A total of 43 beneficiaries from two districts were interviewed on how LEAP helps them in their economic lives and what they expect from the LEAP. Table 4 below shows the number of LEAP respondents and the total amount of cash each receives per month.

Table 3 LEAP Benefits

Amount Per Two Month (GhC)	Amount Per Month		Actual Amount per Head per month		Frequency	
	GhC	\$	GhC	\$	Number	%
64	32	8	32	8	7	16
76	38	9.5	19	4.75	18	42
88	44	11	14.7	3.7	6	14
106	53	13.23	13.25	3.31	12	28

Table 3 gives indication of amount of money a household takes per every two months as means to empower women against poverty. The highest amount of money a household can receive is 106 per two months (53 Ghana Cedis per month). To qualify for such amount, a household must contain 4 members who fall under any of the four categories that qualifies a person to be served under LEAP. In reality, each person receives GhC13.25 per month or \$3.31 per month (GhC4 is equal to \$1). It must be noted that this amount paid to LEAP beneficiaries is not regularly received in each month. This is the highest nominal amount of money one can receive under LEAP programme, whose aim is to support the poor to earn a living. Looking at the amount each person is supposed to receive each month, it is clear that if the household contains only one member of LEAP beneficiary, the person is entitled to GhC32 per month. This amount decreases as the number of beneficiaries increase in a household. From the table, only 16% of the beneficiaries do receive GhC 32 per month. About 84% of them receive between GhC19 and GhC13.25 per month. It can be argued that the amount given per month, if it is to be spent on food alone, can last an individual for one meal for children under 18 years and a snack for the adult. When the beneficiaries of the LEAP were asked if the intervention has brought any change in their lives, the responses were that the money is either used on food or save to support businesses as presented in the Table 4 below.

Table 4 What the LEAP Clients Use the Money for

USES	Number	%
Save to support business	10	23
For food	33	77
Total	43	100

From the Table 4, 77% of the LEAP respondents do spend the money on food. It is only 23% of them who are able to save and use it as a working capital to expand their porridge businesses. It is significant to note that 80% of these individuals – those who can save (8 out of these 10 women) did indicate that they have husbands who contribute to their up keeping. As the women confirmed that they have supports from husbands and children, they did confirm that the mode of selection is highly under political influence. Various offices of social welfare which manage the programme lamented that most beneficiaries do not deserve it. However, due to their affiliation to the ruling government, they were enrolled in the scheme whilst most of those who were supposed to enjoy were left out. During focus group discussion, the women groups from all the three districts covered did indicate that the capitation policy in the NHIS renders the card useless in accessing healthcare delivery.

It is significant to note that the amount given per month, as some of them indicated that the money is spent on food alone, can last an individual for one meal for children under 18 years and a snack for the adult. This confirms the findings of a study which suggested that the impact of LEAP on household consumption is essentially zero, likely due to the irregular payment, meagre nature of the

payment when made, and low level of the benefits (Honda, et al 2013). One would not be wrong to conclude from the LEAP figures that LEAP does not empower anybody in any form. First, the impact of LEAP on poverty eradication is almost nil. This is because an amount per month per head can only offer an individual a snack or a meal. To narrow it down to amount per head per day (between \$0.30 to \$0.11 per day), confirms the findings of a study which suggested that the impact of LEAP on household consumption is essentially zero, likely due to the irregular payment, lumpy nature of the payment when made, and low level of the benefits (Honda, et al 2013). It can therefore be concluded that, LEAP benefits as it stands now, cannot help its beneficiaries to fight poverty from any angle. LEAP fails to serve as a livelihood empowerment against any form of poverty among these women.

LEAP as a programme to empower the poor in this direction, seems to have failed to consider any of the principles needed to be considered in developing an empowerment programme as outlined by Oxaal and Baden (1997) as follows:

- The process of empowerment should not be confined to one area of development activity due to multifaceted character of empowerment. Hence, different aspects of empowerment (e.g. political, economic, social, legal) should not be addressed in isolation but rather there should be linkages between different aspects of empowerment in programme planning and implementation.

LEAP seems to focus on livelihood '*empowerment*'. From the above Oxaal and Baden's (1997) principle, LEAP seems not to agree with it. Oxaal and Baden's (1997) also asserted that:

- The participation of women in planning at all stages is essential if development programmes are to be empowering. Steps need to be taken to involve women right from planning stage. Participation fora may provide an opportunity for facilitating a process of a group or community's own analysis of need and means for transformation. This will be most useful if the indicators should be generated through a participatory process.

The implementers of LEAP admitted that the programme was designed through a top-down approach. It did not offer any room for the beneficiaries to make input in addressing their needs during programme designing stage. When the client respondents were asked what they would have wished to be included in the programme, about 71% said they would have wished that at least one of their children is sponsored to the university level. Others said they wish the programme will be able to offer them capital to trade. Thus, LEAP does not address the core need of the beneficiaries.

Conclusions

The actual needs of women in the study area which this study identified include *social protection* which was found to be depending on the women's ability to have regular and effective income earning activities; have good education for their wards; and have financial muscles and confidence to compete with their male counterpart in local and national politics was not well addressed by any of the two intervention. This is because all that each provide are just mitigation measures. They also need *change in socio-cultural expectation* of women which put males ahead of females as both look for a level playing field to have equal opportunities and equality of resources. As the available programmes limit their efforts to the mitigation measures to assist the poor women and not to tackle the root causes of women disempowerment, it leaves a gap between what to be done to achieve the needs of these women and what the available programmes can offer.

- LEAP as a programme to fight poverty has completely failed the poor rural women. The programme's need assessment is poor. It does not apply any poverty eradication principle available. It has no positive effect on the poor rural women's income generation. It cannot also offer the poor rural women the basic needs such as food and shelter.
- CARE international seems to have better project to improve women income as compared to that of LEAP. However, it only gives supportive measures and not development of economic powers that has capability to lead women to controlling of available economic resources within the rural community thereby cannot empower to challenge the gender inequality status quo

From the forgone discussions, this study fundamentally argues that LEAP and CARE international effort in empowering women as a programme approach to empower women does not fundamentally change the status of women to operate as the status as men. Whilst it contributes to creating of awareness and supporting women, its contributions to changing social role stratifications and culturally dimorphic presentations is marginal. In terms of gendered approaches to communal life and social power relations, the approach has fundamental deficit because it does not aim to deal with the societal norms and other socio-cultural factors that fuel women disempowerment – the ground from which I see the root cause of women disempowerment. Even on the surface of what these programme and projects set out to provide to the beneficiaries, each of them does not effectively change lives of the beneficiaries to challenge the status quo. LEAP as empowerment programme that seeks to provide livelihood against poverty does not improve the incomes of the people, but rather it serves as an act of tokenism. Hence, the programme's interventions to effect economic empowerment do not challenge the status quo. CARE International which is also set out to provide sensitisation and creation of awareness on women's political and legal empowerment, as well as creating of wealth among the beneficiaries seems to offer the rural

women some level of economic relief yet the efforts are also mitigation measures which cannot give women power as they need to be as same status as men.

Recommendation

Women empowerment Programmes and Projects approach must address the root causes of what disempower women. A purposive women empowerment Programmes and must focus on addressing the root causes of what disempower women. For example, low education among women needs to be tackled from girl-child education Programme. A comprehensive Programme which shall deal with the causes of girl-child school dropout; and dealing with all forms of cultural practices that militate against girls' education among others as situational analysis may indicate. Low income among rural women working in the informal sector needs another comprehensive Programme that seeks to identify the basic causes of low income among these women. The ideal Programme should be a comprehensive and should be able to create the opportunity, provide skills, give capability to utilize the opportunity created and ensure controlling of the available resources generated.

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Author:

Simon Kyei, (Ph.D.) in Social Studies

Department of Social Studies Education

University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

Cimmonny40@gmail.com

0267883007 Ghana