

STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL LIVELIHOOD IN ETCHE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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ABSTRACT: *The study examined strategies for empowering rural women for sustainable livelihood in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State. the objectives include to determine factors constraining women empowerment and to identify strategies for women empowerment in the study area. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. A multistage sampling technique was used to select 300 women (respondents). Data were collected using structured questionnaire designed in sections, with each section eliciting responses in respect of the research questions. A test-retest method was used to ascertain the reliability of instrument with r-value of 0.85. data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics. A minimum mean of 2.50 was accepted as the standard. The findings showed that majority (43%) of respondents were between the age range of 40-49 years, majority (40%) had basic education while crop family processing was the primary occupation of majority of the respondents. The study also showed that women empowerment were constrained by gender discrimination; poverty; traditional belief, among others as equal opportunities for access to resources and elimination of discrimination to work and wages were some of the identified strategies for women empowerment. The study recommended that government at all levels should formulate policies that would encourage equal distribution of power right across gender.*

KEYWORD: empowerment, sustainability, rural women, livelihood.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, women occupy the centre stage in terms of family wellbeing in particular and the society in general. At home, women are known for caring and nurturing the family in all areas. Yet, they are involved in different activities, all to provide for the family. Regrettably, however, the enormous contributions of women in this regard in most cases go unnoticed: instead they are confronted by challenges that adversely affect their wellbeing. Women suffer as a result of discrimination, stemming from inequality that culminates to denial from access to resources and neglected when issues of inheritance are discussed. In agricultural activities, women perform majority of the functions, especially in societies where farm practices are gender based. They rent them to farm as many societies do not consider them for land allocation. In educational sector, women come last after male children. These man-made hurdles against women ironically bear consequences on the society. Therefore, it should be better to give both men and women equal opportunities to develop.

The National Population Commission (2006) put the figure of women in Nigeria approximately at par (49%) with that of men; it would therefore be a costly mistake if such a number is ignored in development efforts and policy. In this regard, to empower women is the sure way to all meaningful development. In most African societies, women are seen as a group of individual whose duties are within the home, keep the home, raise children and minister to their husband (Osirike and Egbayabo; 2012).

The world over, 70% of the work is done by women, 50% of the food are produced by them but earn little or nothing in terms of income and property (Sohail, 2014). Duflo (2011) observed that although a small number of women have the opportunity to work, yet they earn less than men in the same work done by them. This discrimination in work and wages causes poverty among women. Oyebamiy and Amini-philip (2012) posit that global peace and prosperity is only feasible when men and women are empowered equally to enable them take charge of their lives. Empowerment could be likened to giving someone the power to do something or be in control of his/her own life. Sohail (2014) describes empowerment as the authority to challenge injustice that forces people to take part in the society or conditions which are unfair. It entails structural changes that enables people to determine their parts to life and take decisions affecting their wellbeing. According to Kapitsa (2005), empowerment has two elements that are inter-related-resources and agency. The resources include financial and material assets, knowledge, skills and ability, while agency is the power to set goals and objectives and achieve them.

There are three elements of empowerment- self-empowerment, mutual and social empowerment. The idea means empowerment either by individual effort, or in relation with others or generated by removing social, political, legal and economic hurdles to get individual influence (Sohail, 2014). These three elements must be considered equally for the empowerment to be holistic. Concentrating on one or two only would not engender the necessary changes (Piggs, 2002). According to UN (1995), development is caused by people; it does not happen spontaneously but through effective participations. Therefore, empowering women enhances economic growth. Oyebamiy and Amini-Philip (2012) believe that naturally women were created to give and nurture life and therefore are peculiar forces in national growth and development where there is no discrimination based on gender. Torqvist and Schruitz (2009) advocated that women acquiring education is the best strategy of empowerment , as education develops skills, knowledge and confidence in women, that can help them achieve opportunities in the economy. In the same vein, Panigraphy and Bhuyan (2006) assert that women empowerment could be achieved when there is an increase of self-esteem, confidence and understanding of their own potential, understand themselves and value what they can do. According to Kabar, Mahmud and Tasneem (2011), women need education to get information concerning their rights, for decision making, self-confidence, rights to vote and respects for others.

Auisumbing and Pandoffelli (2009) believe that what women need most is adequate knowledge of legislation which constrain their will to challenge injustices. In relation to access to resources, Isiugo-Abamili (1996) believes that what women need most is educational resource which is the earliest to get to mitigate bad conditions faced by women who depend on men for survival. Education guarantees enduring employment opportunities, thereby reducing household poverty.

In developing countries, 70% of the population live in rural areas and gain their livelihood with varying degrees of success according to their access to resources and empowerment; and how they deal with pressures emanating from social, economic and environmental changes (Bernstein;1992). Livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities needed for a means of living (Arnold and Bird, 1999). Rural people hardly depend on one single occupation to survive, they engage in many activities that should be sustained for a long time without harming the environment. To achieve this, they need empowerment. Then the questions are: What is the present condition of women in Etche Local Government Area? What factors had hitherto constrained their empowerment? What could be done to empower the rural women for sustainable livelihood? This study intends to proffer the answers.

Purpose of the Study

The study was designed to:

1. Describe the socio-economic characteristics of rural women in Etche Local Government Area.
2. Examine empowerment programmes for sustainable livelihood of the women in the study area.
3. Identify strategies for empowering rural women for sustainable livelihood in the study area.
4. Determine factors constraining the socio-economic empowerment of rural women in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State, a predominantly rural area situated in the North-Eastern part of the state. the primary occupation of the women is crop farming with other sources of livelihood complementing. The study adopted a descriptive survey that elicited responses from the target population. The study area is traditionally delineated into five clans: Okehi, Mba, Ozuzu, Ulakwo-Umuselem and Igbo clans respectively. The simple random sampling techniques was adopted in selecting three communities from each clan giving a total of fifteen communities, from which twenty respondents were randomly sampled giving a total of 300 women respondents used for the study. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data, complemented with structured interview schedule for respondents who could neither read nor write in English Language. The instrument was a four point rating scale of agreement and was validated by experts and its reliability determined through test-retest process, with coefficient value of 0.85. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics: mean and percentage, with a minimum acceptable value of 2.50 and above.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents (n=300)**

S.N	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean
1. Age grade (years)				
	20-39	20	6.67	45 yrs
	30-39	40	13.33	
	40-49	130	43.33	
	50-59	80	26.67	
	≥ 60	30	10.00	
2. Educational Attainment				
	No formal Education	60	20.00	
	Primary/Basic Education	120	40.00	
	Secondary Education	85	28.33	
	Tertiary Education	35	11.67	
3. Primary Occupation				
	Crop farming/processing	205	68.33	
	Fish farming processing	-	-	
	Livestock farming	-	-	
	Trading	25	8.33	
	Salaries work	40	13.33	
	Artisans	30	10.00	
4 Average Income Per Month (#)				
	10,000-19,000	80	26.67	26,000
	20,000-29,000	120	40.00	
	30,000-39,000	56	18.67	
	40,000-49,000	30	10.00	
	≥50,000	14	4.67	
5 Membership of Organizations				
	Religious	250	83.33	
	Social	160	53.33	
	Traditional	40	13.33	
	Political	10	3.33	
	Professional	30	10.00	
6 Marital Status				
	Married	240	80.00	
	Divorced	8	2.67	
	Widowed	20	6.67	
	Separated	15	5.00	
	Single	17	5.67	

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Findings in Table 1 show that majority (43.33%) of the women were aged between 40 to 49 years old, majority attained Primary/Basic education 120(40.00%), primary occupation was crop farming/processing 205(63.33%), average income per month was between #20,000 to #29,000 for 120(40%) respondents. Furthermore, majority belonged to religious organizations 250(83.33%), as also 240(80.00%) were married. The findings corroborated the findings of Duflo (2011) and Sohail (2014). Duflo (2011) observed that although a small number of women have the opportunity to work, yet they earn less than men in the same work done by them. Also, Sohail (2014) stated that over 70% of work in the world is done by women, 50% of the food are produced by them while they earn little or nothing in terms of income and property.

Table 2: Mean responses on empowerment programmes for sustainable livelihood of Women in Etche Local Government Area

S.NO	Variable	X	Decision
1.	Catering and hotel Management		3.40 Agreed
2.	Fashion and Designing		3.61 Agreed
3.	Hairdressing	3.45	Agreed
4.	Computer Literacy	2.52	Agreed
5.	Cosmetology	2.42	Disagreed
6.	Bag/Shoe making	3.35	Agreed
7.	Bead making	3.60	Agreed
8.	Leadership training	2.71	Agreed
9.	Agriprenurship training	2.54	Agreed
10.	Baking of Confectionaries	3.58	Agreed
11.	Literacy programme	2.65	Agreed
12.	Training Lady Cabs	2.70	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Data in Table 2 showed respondents opinion on empowerment programmes especially designed and implemented for women sustainable livelihood. Empowerment programmes such as Catering and hotel Management (3.40), Fashion designing (3.61), Hairdressing (3.45), Computer literacy training (2.52), and Bag/Shoe making (3.35) respectively were some of the skill acquisition programmes introduced to women for sustainable livelihood. Others are Bead making (3.60), Leadership training (2.71) Training women on various aspects of agricultural businesses (2.54), making of Confectionaries (3.58), exposure to varied literacy programmes (2.65) and Training women as cab drivers (2.70) respectively. These programmes would actually assist women to generate employment and wealth. The finding is in line with the opinion of Anyamamene et al in Nnodim and Pepple (2017) that women engagement in skills acquisition and other businesses would empower and liberate them by opening up opportunities that could advance their capabilities. Also, Nnodim and Allison (2017) noted that the interest of Nigerian Government towards the empowerment of rural women spurred them to introduce varied training programmes and the provision of finance for the unemployed and prospective entrepreneurs who wish to set up their own businesses.

Table 3: Mean responses on the factors constraining the socio-economic empowerment of rural Women in Etche Local Government Area.

S/N	Variable	X	Decision
1.	Gender discrimination	3.11	Agreed
2.	Lack of access to resources	2.88	Agreed
3.	Traditional belief about women education	2.68	Agreed
4.	Poor legal framework to protect women right	2.71	Agreed
5.	Lack of knowledge of legislation	2.70	Agreed
6.	Poor implementation of legislations	2.71	Agreed
7.	Lack of capacity to take decisions affecting them	2.56	Agreed
8.	Poor self-esteem among women	2.56	Agreed
9.	Poverty	3.24	Agreed
10.	Poor health condition and lack of access to health facilities	2.95	Agreed
11.	Poor participation in politics and social activities	2.70	Agreed
12.	Lack of opportunity to work	2.69	Agreed
13.	Poor remuneration for work done	2.85	Agreed
14.	Poor participation in skill acquisition programmes	2.79	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2019 **$X \geq 2.50$, were accepted otherwise rejected**

Table 2 shows that rural women in Etche Local Government Areas agreed in gender discrimination (3.11), lack of access to resources (2.88), traditional belief about women education (2.68), poor legal framework to protect women right (2.71), lack of knowledge of legislation (2.70), poor implementation of legislations (2.71), lack of capacity to take decisions affecting them (2.56), poor self-esteem among women (2.56), poverty (3.24), poor health condition and lack of access to health facilities (2.95), poor participation in politics and social activities (2.70), lack of opportunity to work (2.69), poor remuneration for work done (2.85) and poor participation in skill acquisition programmes (2.79). This is in line with the assertion of Quisumbing and Pandofelli (2009) who observed that women have poor access to property, including natural resources and poor implementation of legislation which constrain their will to challenge injustices.

Table 4: Mean responses on strategies for empowering rural women for sustainable Livelihood in Etche Local Government Area.

S/NO	Variable	X	Decision
1.	Equal opportunities for access to resources	2.81	Agreed
2.	Elimination of discrimination to work and wages	2.82	Agreed
3.	Deliberate policy in favour of women education	2.90	Agreed
4.	Effective participation in politics and social activities	3.04	Agreed
5.	Effective legal framework that protects women's right	2.78	Agreed
6.	Equal distribution of power between women and men in all areas of empowerment opportunities	2.70	Agreed
7.	Elimination of all forms of obstacle to individual influence	2.77	Agreed
8.	Encourage self determination	2.87	Agreed
9.	Deliberate investment on women to enhance economic growth through skills acquisition	2.97	Agreed
10.	Increase self esteem and knowledge of their rights	2.94	Agreed
11.	Linkage to market for products sales	3.09	Agreed
12.	Access to micro-finance	2.88	Agreed
13.	Improving transport facilities	2.81	Agreed
14.	Access to property and legal rights	2.76	Agreed
15.	Nutrition and extension education for family welfare	2.81	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2019 **$X \geq 2.50$, were accepted otherwise rejected**

Table 3 shows that all the strategies listed for empowering rural women for sustainable livelihood in Etche Local Government Area were accepted based on the fact that their mean values were greater than the minimum acceptable value of 2.50. this complements the assertion of Torquist and Schmitz (2009) who advocated that women acquiring education is the best strategy of empowerment, as education develops skills, knowledge and confidence in women that can help them achieve opportunities in the economy. In the same vein, Panigraphy and Bhuyan (2006) assert that women empowerment could be achieved when there is an increase in the self-esteem, confidence and understanding of their own potential, understand themselves and value what they can do.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it was deduced that women in Etche need empowerment which could be achieved when they avail themselves the varied opportunities provided to them through skills and knowledge acquisitions. Secondly, women empowerment could be enhanced through deliberate policies of Government on infrastructure and social facilities provision and dismantling obstacles constraining their advancement.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government should ensure that policies are made that will ensure equal distribution of power among men and women in all aspect of empowerment and occupation not for men to remain superior in national matters.
2. The government should ensure that policies that will encourage women's access to formal education and equally enforce the implication of these policies at all level of education in the states of the federation
3. Rural women should be provided with various opportunities to acquire relevant skills as to make them self-reliant in the family as this will help in generating more income in any chosen occupation by using their skills in productivity
4. Rural women as men should be given equal opportunities to access different resources such as land and others because with these resources, they can invest in agricultural production, business and enterprise etc.

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