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## **Women and Socio-Economic Development in Rural Communities in Ebonyi State, Nigeria: An Assessment**

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### **Abstract**

*It is the economy of a nation that determines the lives of the people within such country, as it serves as measure of the quality of life and the living standard of the people. This is only made possible by the contribution of the citizens both male and female. This paper examines the role of women in socio-economic development in Nigeria. The specific objectives include, to find out if rural women are engaged in farming and trading and to determine if these activities contribute to socio-economic development of Ebonyi State. In order to accomplish this objectives, the study adopted quantitative research method and applied cross sectional survey design, while applying purposive sampling technique. The study was carried out in 10 selected communities from 5 Local Government Areas in the State with a population of 608, 296, applying primary source of data collation and a sample size of 400 respondents. The descriptive statistical analytical methods involving frequency tables and percentage were employed for data analysis while the hypotheses that guided the study were tested using Chi-square. The study adopted the participatory theory as its theoretical framework of analysis. The findings show that women contribute to socio-economic development in Ebonyi state through farming activities, trading, weaving, and agro processing among others. It finds equally that the rural women were faced with both cultural and social challenges, while their efforts in contributing to socio-economic development were not were not recognised by the government. The paper recommends among other things that women's contribution should be recognised by the government and as well assist them through soft loans, while such obnoxious culture and beliefs that exclude them from active participation should be addressed through legislative and administrative actions to eliminate these barriers.*

**Keywords:** Women, Rural Communities, Socio-Economic Development, Ebonyi State

### **Introduction**

In the third world countries including Nigeria, women have continued to be classified as only helpers of men in the areas of taking care of the children, preparing food and taking general care of the home while the men are engaged in socio-economic activities. This has subjected the women to be economically dependent on the men. The further activities allowed of the women is to assist their husbands in the farms and skilled craft production, and take some farm produce to the market for sales (Oyemoni, 2008). Women are adjudged to be hard working if they are capable of taking good care of the home and ability to handle some other domestic activities.

As the society continued to develop, the duties and roles of women continued to shift from only giving birth and taking care of the home, to getting involved in socio-economic activities. Though this shift is gradually taking place, it has not taken away the belief that women are still considered as subordinate to men in traditional African setting and in Nigeria, there by encouraging discrimination against them. In some traditional settings, the husbands still see their wives as possessions meant for the happiness of the man after the days' work. This has seriously deprived the women the needed equal opportunities in the society. With the turn of events today all over the world including the developing countries in which Nigeria is one, women have continued to show that they have potentials to contribute immensely to socio-economic development of the society. Women today are striving hard to have a say in the society. The old notion that women's education ends in kitchen does no longer apply to the women of the present age, as they combine motherhood with their respective careers.

Women are today contributing in the economic growth in the areas of farming, trading, weaving, agro-processing, household affairs and are professionals in different fields. Despite all these efforts of the women in contributing to the socio-economic development, the society still see their duties as restricted to only taking care of the home (Onwubiko, 2012). This has continued to dampen the efforts of women in contributing to the socio-economic development of the society as noted by Vladimir (1997).

The contributions of women in socio-economic development is being recognised all over the world, but the situation is totally different in Nigeria, as most of the contributions of women are not recorded, signifying that their contribution is being regarded as grossly insignificant. Nigerian government has failed to recognise that women have significant role to play in the socio-economic development of the country, especially in the rural communities where women have been contributing immensely in combining house keeping with farm work and trading as noted by Elem (2016). Elem states further that in some rural communities, the women clear the farm, cultivate them, and plant cassava, cocoanut, potatoes, groundnut, pepper, garden egg, vegetables among others. Many women today are becoming heads of many households contributing to the training of their children in schools and other fields. All these contribute to no small measure to the economic development of the society.

Nigeria today is the most populous country in sub-Sahara Africa and the ninth most populous country in the world with a population of 180 million population with about 70% of this number living in the rural areas, while 50% of the population are female (NBS, 2017). With this number, it becomes obvious that the role of women in socio-economic development of Nigeria cannot be neglected. This is evidenced from the national report for the 2004 United Nations Conference on Economic and Development which indicates that women perform at least 40% of agricultural production activities and 85% of agricultural produce, processing and marketing.

The neglect of women and the potential contribution to the socio-economic development activities have prompted the establishment of many women-oriented

programmes such as Better Life for Rural Women, Family Support Programme (FSP), Family economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Child Trust Fund (CTF) and National Association for Nigerian Women in Business (NANWB). These were aimed at assisting the rural women to improve on their contributions to socio-economic activities in the country as such efforts have contributed a lot in reduction of unemployment rate as noted by Agu (2007), when he averred that the future economic development of Nigeria lies in the dynamic and growth of small and medium scale enterprises which are directly or indirectly owned and managed by women especially in the rural communities.

Despite all these known contributions of women in the socio-economic development of Nigeria especially in the rural communities, the women are still being discriminated against, as they are never given equal opportunities with their male counterpart to participate and fully contribute to the development of the country.

It is encouraging to note that recently, the contributions of women to socio-economic development of the society is being acknowledged all over the world including African continent, although in Nigeria, the recognition is in a slow pace. Women at both national and rural communities are taking advantage of the new opportunities being given to women, to showcase their capabilities in different fields of life. They are equally pressing for the continued expansion of their economic and social opportunities and advancement of their rights. However, through the ages, the sharing of opportunities, powers, wealth, influence, employment etc. between men and women has never been close to equality, however, the situation in Africa and Nigeria in particular has continued to live with the absolute notion that women are inferior to the men. This has been the belief, and has seriously affected the chances of women in contributing to the socio-economic activities of the country especially in the rural communities.

The women are not given the opportunity to develop the capacity and the ability to control and direct those things that affect them. Though their recognition has continued to grow over the years, these recognition has not translated into reasonably improved access to resources or increased decision-making powers, neither has the dynamism that women display in the economic, cultural and social lives of their communities through their different associations and informed networks been channelled into creating new models of participation and leadership as noted by Onokerhoraye (1978) and Akosile (2010). Despite the potentials of women on contributing to the socio-economic activities of the nation, their efforts are not recognised despite the fact that the progress and development of any nation is the women in the society as argued by Little (1987) and Onwubiko (2012) that women represent a tool for positive change, depending on how they are treated and the levels of opportunities given to them to actualise their potentials. In the rural communities, the women are crucial factor of production as they are responsible for the bulk production of crops, agro based food processing, preservation of crops and distribution of yields from farm centres to urban areas.

This study therefore sets to examine the contributions of women to socio-economic development and their challenges in selected rural communities in Ebonyi State. To this end, addressing the following questions has become highly necessary.

1. What is the role of women to socio-economic development in the rural communities of Ebonyi State?
2. Are the roles contributed to socio-economic development of rural communities in Ebonyi State by women recognised by the government?
3. Are there challenges encountered by women in contributing to socio-economic development of rural communities in Ebonyi State in the areas of farming, trading etc.?

### **Definition of Operational Concepts**

#### **Rural Community and Socio-Economic Development**

Rural community constitutes rural areas of agrarian countryside usually characterized by relatively lower population, lower income, homogeneity and agricultural economy (Gafar, Mukaila, Raji and Michael, 2011). In terms of community, Igbo and Ikpa (2013) see community as a population that occupies a given area that is bound together by a shared system of rules and regulations which control their relations with each other. This group of people meet regularly for intense interactions among residents. Community is therefore a social group that occupy a geographical area with members sharing common historical background, cultural values, economic activities, defined geographical area and basic social institutions (Ekong, 2006). From the foregoing, rural community can be said to be of a group of agrarian and relatively less density population with low income and homogenous group that occupy a geographical entity with members sharing common historical background, cultural values, and economic activities with basic social institutions.

With the above postulate, one can see vividly the characteristics associated with rural community. Therefore, we discuss rural community development in terms of the ideas on how to improve the living standard of those in the rural community. Therefore, rural community development can be said to mean the efforts put together to improve the living standard of those who reside in the rural communities in the areas of improved social amenities, job creation, and improved standard of living. However, in the views of Ekong (2006), there is no precise and generally accepted definition of community development, and by implication, rural community development. To him, community development is any action taken by any agency and primarily designed to benefit the community in improving and promoting a better living with the active participation on the initiative of the community.

The United Nation's Economic and Social Council on its part, as captured by Kamar, Lawal, Babangida and Jahun (2014), states that rural community development is a process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities into the life of the nation and enable them contribute fully in national progress.

For the purpose of this chapter, we simply define community development as the improvement of the living standard and quality of life of the people living or residing in the rural community through increased job creation, provision of social services such as social amenities and infrastructures like roads, electricity, pipe-borne water, security, industries, etc. Community development facilitates improved conditions of life as well as eradicates poverty and reduces unemployment both rural and urban.

### **Socio-Economic Development**

Socio-economic development is seen generally as sustained action of policy makers and communities geared toward promoting and improving standard of living of people in the areas of improved health services, human capital development, infrastructural development, health safety, improved literacy, job opportunities, good road network, good drinking water among others (Fagbemi, 2011). Socio-economic development can't be achieved when the citizens still lack access to job opportunities, improved living condition and security to life. This prompted the federal government through the Ministry of National Planning (2011) to affirm that though Nigeria has achieved reasonable growth since 1999, that those achievements have no significant effect on poverty alleviation and employment opportunities. The Ministry pointed out that unemployment rate rose from 13.3% in 1999 to 19.7% in 2009 and 21.1% in the final quarter of 2010, while between 1999 and 2009, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased from about \$250 billion to \$836 billion, yet the number of unemployed people increased from 5.9million to 17.5 million.

November 20<sup>th</sup> every year is commemorated every year by the United Nations and the African Union Commission as African Industrialization Day (AID) with the aim of raising awareness and to spur up actions that would lead to ensuring sustenance of industries by African States so as to diversify the economy, improve on the nations socio-economic and infrastructural development which would in turn create jobs and lift the citizen out of poverty line, yet the World Bank Reports have continued to rate the country as one of the 20th poorest countries in the world (UNDP Report, 2017). Imhonopi & Urim (2010), noted that socio-economic development is the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people in the areas of social amenities such as education, healthcare services, power, housing, pipe-borne water, roads, access to means of production, participation in governance among others. They stressed further that the components of socio-economic development in any country include; economic development, socio-cultural development, life expectancy, literacy and level of employment and their impacts on overall human development. Ogboru, (2007) observed that socio-economic development expressed in GNP can increase human development by expenditure from families, government and organizations such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), adding that With the increase in economic growth, families and individuals would likely increase expenditures with the increase in income which can lead to greater human development, showing that socio-economic development can be measured in terms of jobs created, justice dispensed and poverty alleviated.

Contributing to the issue of socio-economic development in Nigeria, Adeyeye (2000) postulates that one of the major causes of Nigeria's backwardness in socio-economic development is the non-diversification of the economy, arguing that since Nigeria discovered oil, the agricultural sector that was the main stay of the economy was neglected, and as well neglected other sectors including the manufacturing sector that would have propelled socio economic development.

### **Theoretical Framework of Analysis**

A lot of theories exist that can be used to explain the appropriateness of given research study, but this paper adopted participatory theory. John Dewey postulated this theory in 1954 in an attempt to explain participation in government policies. Others are; Henry Kariel (1960) and Peter Bachrah (1967). Participatory theory is a theory of knowledge which holds that meaning is enacted through participation of human mind with the world. It is a conceptual framework which attempts to bridge the subject-object distinction. It is aimed at turning from intra-subjective experiences to participatory events in the understanding of transpersonal and spiritual phenomena.

The proponents of this theory believed that citizens' participation in government policies rested on social consensus with regard to human development. Participation is vital to the process of policy selection since consensus could form a proper base for social judgement and the act of participation by itself is essential for self-development (Aderigbagbe, 2004).

This theory therefore x-rays the need for rural women to be recognised and give opportunity to contribute more for the socio-economic development of the rural communities. There should be a large means of social control of economic development, preferably by agreement in which the policy makers would meet the citizens, women inclusive to plan, formulate and implement public policies geared towards the development of the society. The proponents of this theory argued that the government should go beyond provision of social services and socialize the forces of participation now at hand, so that the liberty of individuals will be supported by the very structure of economic organization, acknowledging that our institutions and democratic forces tend to favour in substance, a few privileged. They added hopefully that it is sheer defeatism to assume in advance that the government institutions are incapable of furthering development.

### **Methodology**

Under this section, we x-rayed the research design, population of the study, sample size and the method of data collection.

The study adopted quantitative research method and applied cross sectional survey design, while purposive sampling techniques was adopted. The study was carried out in 10 communities selected purposively from 5 Local Government Areas of Ebonyi and 2 communities per selected Local Government Area. In Ebonyi North Senatorial zone, Izzi and Ebonyi Local Government Areas were selected with Ezza Inyimagu and Ndiegede Igbeagu, Ishieke and Odumoke communities respectively. In Ebony central senatorial zone Ikwo, and Ezza North Local Government Areas were

selected with Ndufu Amagu and Inyimagu Ameka, Ekka and Oriuzor communities, while in Ebonyi South senatorial zone, Ohaozara Local Government was selected with Okposi and Uburu communities. The choice of these Local Government Areas and the communities were guided by their rural locations.

With the application of Taro Yameni mathematical formula, a sample size of 400 was used for the study in the 10 selected communities. With the instrumentality of structured questionnaire, a total of 400 questionnaire were dispensed to the respondents across the 10 communities, at 40 copies each by the researcher with the aid of some research assistants. The respondents were purposely selected from women groups, community leaders, farmers, market women and men and artisans.

A total of 350 copies were properly filled and returned. The questionnaire was designed and structured by the researcher in the format of Likert rating scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree and Disagree, and contained twelve questionnaire items.

The descriptive statistical analytical methods involving frequency tables and percentage were employed for data analysis while inferential statistics using Chi-Square and analytical technique were used for testing of hypotheses. Construct validity and Inter-rater reliability methods were respectively used to guarantee validity and reliability of measurement and findings.

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. Women do not play any role in contributing to socio-economic development of rural communities in Ebonyi State.
2. The role of women in contributing to socio-economic development in Ebonyi State are not recognised.
3. Women's role in contributing to socio-economic development of the rural communities are not challenged by cultural, political and social factors.

### **Test of Hypotheses**

To test the hypotheses, the researcher used data collected from responses of relevant questionnaire items to each of the hypothesis.

Decision Rule: If the calculated value is greater than the tabulated value, reject the  $H_0$  (Null Hypothesis), and accept  $H_1$  (Alternative Hypothesis).

Using Chi-square ( $X^2$ ).

$$X^2 = n \sum \frac{(O_i - e_i)^2}{E_i}$$

Where  $X^2$  = Chi-square distribution

$o_i$  = Observed frequency

$e_i$  = Expected frequency

5% = Level of significance (allowed error)

### **Hypothesis 1**

Women do not play any role in contributing to socio-economic development of rural communities in Ebonyi State.

To test this hypothesis, relevant questionnaire items were used based on the Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

**Table 1: Calculated Value for Hypothesis 1**

Variable	O <sub>i</sub>	E <sub>i</sub>	O <sub>i</sub> -E <sub>i</sub>	(O <sub>i</sub> -E <sub>i</sub> ) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{(O_i-E_i)^2}{E_i}$
Strongly Agree	170	87.5	82.5	6806.3	77.8
Agree	86	87.5	-1.5	2.5	0.02
Disagree	84	87.5	-3.5	12.25	0.14
Strongly Disagree	10	87.5	-77.5	6006.3	68.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	-	-	-	<b>146.6</b>

Source: Field Survey Data, 2018

$X^2$  Calculated = 146.6

The degree of freedom = (n-k) = 3-1=2, the critical value on  $X^2$  table figure of degree of freedom (2) interest level of significance (0.05) is 5.991. Comparing results  $X^2$  (ei 146.6) 5.9

#### Decision Rule:

Since  $t^2$  calculated is 146.6 which is greater than  $z^2$  tabulated which is 5.991, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. This implies that women contribute to socio-economic development of rural communities in Ebonyi State through their involvement in farming, trading, craft making, weaving, and maintenance of peace at home and in the good upbringing of the children.

#### Hypothesis 2

The role of women in contributing to socio-economic development in Ebonyi State are not recognised.

To test this hypothesis, relevant questionnaire items were used based on the Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agreed (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

$$X^2 = \frac{\sum (o_i - e_i)^2}{e_i}$$

$$e_i = \frac{215 + 110 + 18 + 7}{4}$$

$$= \frac{350}{4}$$

$$= 87.5$$

**Table 2: Calculated Value for Hypothesis 2**

Variable	O <sub>i</sub>	E <sub>i</sub>	O <sub>i</sub> -E <sub>i</sub>	(O <sub>i</sub> -E <sub>i</sub> ) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{(O_i-E_i)^2}{E_i}$
Strongly Agree	215	87.5	127.5	16256.3	185.8
Agree	110	87.5	22.5	506.3	5.8
Disagree	18	87.5	-69.5	4830.3	55.2
Strongly Disagree	7	87.5	-80.5	6480.3	74.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>320.9</b>

Source: Field Survey Data, 2018

$X^2$  Calculated = 320.9

The degree of freedom = (n-k) = 3-1=2, hence, the critical value on  $X^2$  table figure of degree of freedom (2) interest level of significance (0.05) is 5.991. Comparing results  $X^2$  (ei 320.9) 5.9

#### Decision Rule:

Since  $t^2$  calculated is 320.9 which is greater than  $z^2$  tabulated which is 5.991, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. This implies that there are challenges hindering women from contributing effectively to socio-economic development of rural communities in Ebonyi State. Some of these challenges include; culture, societal norms, lack of education and poverty among others.

#### Hypothesis 3

There are challenges hindering women from contributing effectively to socio-economic development of rural communities in Ebonyi State.

To test this hypothesis, relevant questionnaire items were used based on the Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

$$X^2 = \frac{\sum (o_i - e_i)^2}{e_i}$$

$$e_i = \frac{250 + 51 + 29 + 20}{4}$$

$$= \frac{350}{4}$$

$$= 87.5$$

**Table 3: Calculated Value for Hypothesis 3**

Variable	O <sub>i</sub>	E <sub>i</sub>	O <sub>i</sub> -E <sub>i</sub>	(O <sub>i</sub> -E <sub>i</sub> ) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{(O_i-E_i)^2}{E}$
Strongly Agree	250	87.5	162.5	26406.3	301.8
Agree	51	87.5	-36.5	1332.3	15.2
Disagree	29	87.5	-58.5	3422.3	39.1
Strongly Disagree	20	87.5	-67.5	4556.3	52.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>408.2</b>

Source: Field Survey Data, 2018

$X^2$  Calculated = 408.2

The degree of freedom = (n-k) = 3-1=2, hence, the critical value on  $X^2$  table figure of degree of freedom (2) interest level of significance (0.05) is 5.991.

Comparing results  $X^2$  (ei 408.2) 5.9

#### Decision Rule:

Since  $t^2$  calculated is 408.2 which is greater than  $z^2$  tabulated which is 5.991, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. This implies that there are solutions on how to improve the effective contribution of women in socio-economic development of the rural communities in Ebonyi State.

#### Findings

The following findings were made:

- The women in Ebonyi State have contributed to socio-economic development of the rural communities in the state. These contributions are seen in the areas of farming, agro-processing, trading, small scale and medium scale industries, craft making, weaving, child care and training among others.
- The contributions of Women in rural communities in Ebonyi State are not recolonized at both formal and informal sectors as there is no record to show their contributions to the economic activities in Ebonyi State despite their huge contribution to the economy.
- The women in Ebonyi State have challenges that have continued to hinder them from contributing effectively to the development of the socio-economic development of the rural communities in the State. Some of these challenges are seen in the areas of some obnoxious culture that hindered women from participating in some jobs they regard as exclusively meant for men. Other challenges are in the areas of education, as the women were not allowed to acquire the needed education that would have enable them contribute more to the development of the rural communities. Parents prefer to train the men whom they believe would replace the family whenever the parents are no more, rather than the women that would marry and leave their families.

### **Conclusion**

This study has provided reliable platform to suitably argue that women play a vital role in the socio-economic development of the rural communities in Nigeria and Ebonyi State in particular. The work has taken an in-depth look at the activities of women in the rural communities in Ebonyi State and considered the theoretical stand point of other various academic literature.

The hypotheses tested justified significant relationships with the variables tested as it was discovered that the women in the rural communities had the vigour for food production, employment generation and socio-economic emancipation of their sex.

It is a well-known fact that no economy in the world no matter how viable, will be able to completely take care of its citizens when the women are side-lined in the participation of socio-economic activities of the country.

With the level of contributions made by women in the areas of production, distribution and processing into food of agricultural product, providing jobs, providing physical, psychological and social comfort of families and homes, the women can be proudly argued that they contribute immensely to socio-economic development of rural communities in Ebonyi State.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made, for the government and the people at the rural communities to enhance the effective participation and effective contribution of women to socio economic development of the rural communities in Nigeria at large and Ebonyi State in particular.

1. Government should devise means of recognizing the contributions of women to economic development of the State, especially the women in the rural communities who are engaged in farming, trading, weaving, agro-processing, child care among others.
2. Government should sustain and improve any programme aimed at enhancing the welfare of women in the rural communities irrespective of the administration that established them. Such programmes as Better Life for Rural Women, Family Support Programme, Family Economic Advancement Programme, Subsidy Reinvestment Programme, You Win Programme among others should be sustained to encourage women to put more efforts in contributing to socio-economic development of the rural communities
3. Rural women should be protected from obnoxious culture that discriminate them against the men which reduce their opportunities for education, skills acquisition and participation in other socio-economic activities of the government. This could be achieved through bold policies, legal, legislative and administrative actions and reform and should form an urgent agenda for policy consideration.

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