

## Factors Influencing Female Empowerment and its Benefits in Community Development in Imo State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This study analyzed the factors influencing female empowerment and its benefits in community development in Imo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to describe the socio-economic characteristic of the respondents, examine the constraints to female empowerment, and ascertain the ways of female empowerment and factors influencing female empowerment. Multi stage random sampling technique was used in selecting 120 respondents for the study. Data for the study obtained were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The study also revealed that an average of 51.3% of the respondents strongly agreed on the perceived effects of female empowerment on community development while 25.50% of them agreed on the perceived benefits as 12.1% strongly disagreed while 11.1% disagreed on the perceived effects of female empowerment in community development. Results of multiple regression revealed that female empowerment at 1% level of probability indicate that age at 5%, income at 10%, education at 5% level of probability were the determinants of female empowerment in the study area. Result showed that the major constraints to female empowerment were: poor access to productive resources ( $\bar{x} = 2.8$ ), lack of quality education ( $\bar{x} = 2.77$ ) and poor political representation ( $\bar{x} = 2.74$ ) while the major ways of female empowerment were providing training (3.25), providing opportunities (3.02), mentoring (2.83) and decision making positions. The study concluded that female empowerment improves health care and well-being of families and communities. The study therefore recommends that communities should be mobilized to support victims of gender based violence provide platforms for female girls and women's voice to be heard.

**Keywords:** Factors-Influencing, Benefits, Female, Empowerment, Community-Development.

### INTRODUCTION

Agricultural development is an integral part of rural development. Hence there is no meaningful rural development can occur without women who make up more than one half of the rural population is still upheld (Okwu, 1999). This supports the saying which states that if you educate a woman, she educates the nation and if you educate a man, he educates himself'. Nigerian women are veritable assets in the agricultural and rural transformation. Their participation in the various sectors and activities of rural development are tremendous (Onuoha, and Nnadi 1999).

The issue of female role in community development has received little attention to date considering the fact that women consist of 50-60 percent of the total rural work force. There is need for different government and agencies responsible for community development to pay more attention to this

large group of rural communities (FAO, 1986). The extent of women's contributions to rural development was generally grossly underestimated and undervalued (Mgbada, 2010). One of the major constraints affecting contemporary Nigeria is community development. Women empowerment activities in Nigeria have been a matter of great concern among stakeholders. One of the major challenges of rural transformation programme is attributed to the inability of the government to integrate women into the mainstream of the numerous rural development programmes implemented over the years (Mgbada, 2010). Although rural women lack control over productive resources necessary for their livelihood activities, (Umeh, et al. 2016). Empowerment is defined as a person's capacity to make effective choices. Female empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social and economic strength of a woman (Mgbada, 2010). It is the enhancing of assets and capacities of driving individuals. Empowering a woman

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in the economy and closing gender gaps in the world of work are the keys to achieve 2030 vision.

Gender equality is an indication and a precondition for sustainable development especially in poverty reduction. Despite the relevance of gender for the persistence of poverty and the effectiveness of poverty reduction strategies, anti-policy still does not address gender equally as an integral part of female empowerment (Alamu and Olowo, 2008). Women make up 60-80 percent of rural labour force and produce two-third of the food crops (Ejenma, et al, 2015). Despite these, men and not women make the key farm management decisions, while female in the economy are among the voiceless instead they are underestimated or totally ignored (Mgbada, 2010).

WiN (2019) noted that women perform multifarious functions, represent a strong productive force in subsistence agriculture, although not recognized as active economic population. Culture give preference to the male children because they are regarded as pillars and foundations of their families. Ekong 2010, female children are less privileged and lack opportunities to formal education (British council, 2012). The girl child is valued not for whom she is but for her potential or achievement. The contribution women made to the small firm sector either as business owners in their own right or more commonly as providers of labour to family- owned firms. (Afolabi, 2008). Community development is a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with active participation and initiation of the community. It creates conditions of economic and social progress for the entire community with its actions, participation and operation through enlistment and organization of self-help and co-assistance from government or voluntary agencies (Mgbada, 2010).

It is estimated that the number of male empowerment was nearly twice that of all empowerment (Mabel, 2008). Empowerment is the process of strengthening the existing capabilities and capacities of disadvantaged groups in society so as to enable them perform towards improving themselves, their families and the society as a whole (Sako, 1999). It involves the provision of enabling environment for their proactive and intellectual abilities to be realized. Empowerment is a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation of the economic, social, psychological, political and legal circumstance of the powerless (Enemuo, 1999). Women empowerment is defined as a process of enabling women to develop the capacity to actualize their potentials (Ojobo, 2008). Despite the development of an important research literature on women empowerment, some researchers argue that the study of female empowerment remains a neglected area (Nwaru and Nwaru, 2008).

Little was known about the female empowerment until recently. Although many studies have been undertaken in investigating empowerment, the bulk of the work concentrated on the male empowerment and there was an assumption that palter of female behavior conformed to those of male. The whole studies had been based on studies of men, although of recent triggered the start of a new research interest in female empowerment. The aim of empowerment was the search for independence and control over one's destiny. Despite that female economic participation was higher than men participation while the share of earned income of female was lower than shared earned income of men and the highest proportion of female. Sadly too women lack control over their bodies as some of them have been converted into breeding machines producing babies almost annually.

However as the quest for female empowerment for sustainable community development continues to gather momentum a few pertinent questions are inevitable. What are the consequences of female empowerment on community development? What are the ways of female empowerment? What are the constraints to female empowerment and what factors influence female empowerment? Based on the above questions, this paper seeks to achieve the following specific objectives; to analyze the consequences of female empowerment on rural community development, determine the factors influencing female empowerment and examine the constraints to female empowerment and the ways adopted for female empowerment in the study area.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Imo State, Nigeria. It is bounded in the East by Abia state on the West by River Niger and Delta State and on the North by Anambra State while Rivers State lies on the South. The state is located within the Rain forest belt of Nigeria and within latitudes 4° 45N and 7° 15N, and longitudes 6° 50E and 5° 72E. The state has an area of 5,530km<sup>2</sup> and population density of 710 persons per square kilometer and has a population of 2,934,899 persons (NPC, 2006). The state consists of 27 local Government Areas. Climatically it is tropical with two distinct seasons of rainy and dry seasons and temperature that ranges between 20<sup>0</sup>C and 30<sup>0</sup>C. Agriculture is the major occupation of the people and predominantly rural. Multistage sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents. A total of 120 respondents were chosen for the study. Firstly, three LGAs were randomly selected from the 27LGAs in Imo state namely; Obowo, Oguta and Ezinihitte Mbaise, Secondly, two rural communities were also randomly selected from each LGA giving a total of six (6) communities. Thirdly, two villages were randomly selected while (10) ten female were purposively selected from each of the 12 villages giving a total of

120 respondents. Primary data were collected using a structured interview schedule administered on the 120 respondents. Primary data obtained were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics used were frequency counts,

percentage, mean, and Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) while inferential statistics used was the multiple regression model. The regression model is shown implicitly thus:

$$Y = f(x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4, x_5, x_6, x_7, x_8, x_9, x_{10}, e_i)$$

Where

Y = effects of female empowerment on community development (higher income/%)

X<sub>1</sub> = culture (dummy for favourable =1; otherwise =0)

X<sub>2</sub> = multiple social roles (dummy for domestic work =1; otherwise = 0)

X<sub>3</sub> = Leadership Participation (Dummy for representative = 1; otherwise = 0)

X<sub>4</sub> = Age of female/father (in years)

X<sub>5</sub> = Educational Level of husband/father (in years)

X<sub>6</sub> = Income of husband/father (dummy for high = 1; otherwise = 0)

X<sub>7</sub> = Government policies (dummy for support of female initiatives = 1; otherwise = 0)

X<sub>8</sub> = Family size of the woman (in number)

X<sub>9</sub> = Marital Status (dummy for married = 1; otherwise = 0)

X<sub>10</sub> = Self-confidence (dummy for self-confidence = 1; otherwise = 0)

X<sub>11</sub> = Independence of the Female (dummy for independence = 1; otherwise = 0)

e<sub>i</sub> = error term.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table-1: Distribution of Respondents by Socio-Economic Characteristics**

Socio-Economic Attributes	Frequency	Percentages	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )
<b>Age (Years)</b>			
≤ 19	3	2.50	46.0 years
20 – 29	7	5.83	
30 – 39	11	9.0	
40 – 49	54	45.0	
50 – 59	25	21.0	
60 and above	20	16.7	
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Married	101	83.3	
Single	7	5.7	
Separated	3	2.5	
Widowed	9	7.5	
<b>Household Size</b>			
1-4	9	7.5	8 persons
5-8	64	53.4	
9-12	67	39.1	
<b>Educational Level (Years)</b>			
Non formal	6	5.0	8.5 years
1 – 6	26	21.6	
7 – 12	73	60.8	
13 – 18	14	11.67	
19 and above	1	0.83	
<b>Membership and Social Association</b>			
Cooperative Society	36	30.00	
Women Group	54	45.00	
Religious Association	56	45.5	
Social Network	56	45.5	

Socio-Economic Attributes	Frequency	Percentages	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )
<b>Occupation/Skill</b>			
Farming	5	4.2	
Trading	14	11.7	
Civil Servant	18	15.00	
Unemployed	83	66.1	
<b>Income</b>			
High	36	30.0	
Low	54	45.0	
None	30	35.0	
<b>Access to Productive Resources</b>			
Yes	40	33.33	
No	80	66.67	

Source: Field Survey, 2019

**Table-2: Distribution of Respondents by their responses as to the benefits of female empowerment on community development**

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Total (%)
Improved standard of living	55 (45.8)	43 (35.8)	12 (10.0)	10 (8.3)	120 (100)
Financial autonomy	70 (58.3)	35 (29.2)	19 (7.5)	6 (5.0)	120 (100)
Increased productivity	55 (45.8)	43 (25.0)	15 (12.5)	7 (5.8)	120 (100)
Break the set gender	75 (62.3)	30 (25.0)	9 (7.5)	6 (5.0)	120 (100)
Capacity for action	65 (54.2 <sup>2</sup> )	35 (29.2)	12 (10.0)	8 (6.7)	120 (100)
Increased educational attainment Of children by financing their Education	69 (57.5 <sup>d</sup> )	21 (17.5)	21 (17.5)	9 (7.5)	120 (100)
Enhance autonomy self Determination	48 (40.0)	42 (35.0)	25 (20.8)	5 (4.2)	120 (100)
Reduce reduction in number of children	25 (20.8)	15 (12.5)	25 (20.8)	55 (45.8)	120 (100)
Increase the potentials which leads to female entrepreneurial skill	55 (45.8)	25 (20.8)	15 (12.5)	25 (20.8)	120 (100)
Promotes gender equality	65 (54.7)	37 (30.8)	10 (8.3)	8 (6.7)	120 (100)
Improves develop and stability of rural of communities/women	82 (68.3)	28 (23.3)	5 (4.2)	5 (4.2)	120 (100)
Enhancement peace, harmony	88 (73.3)	12 (10.0)	5 (4.2)	15 (12.5)	120 (100)
Enhance sustainability development	48 (40.0)	32 (26.7)	25 (20.8)	15 (12.5)	120 (100)
Mean scores	51.3	25.50	12.1	11.1	120 (100)

Source: Field survey, 2019

Figures within a column with the same letter in the bracket are not significantly differed (DMRT).

The distribution of respondents by their responses to the benefits of empowerment on community development is presented in Table 2. The Table shows that an average of 51.3% of the respondents strongly agreed with item statements, while 25.5% agreed. 12.1% strongly disagreed, while 11.1% disagreed with the statements. The effects of female empowerment in community development therefore, takes the following order enhancements of peace, harmony and restoration, human dignity and self-image of woman, improved development and stability of rural women, breaks the set of gender stereotyping, increment in productivity, assist in educational

financing of children, increase income enhance nutrition status and health standard of their families, promote skill acquisition, leads to imbalance of roles and increase competition between genders, reduce over dependency, and enhance autonomy and self-determination, promote gender equality and gives access to productive resources and other natural resources. These effects are geared towards the needs to satisfy interest of empowering rural women. These observations are in line with the assertion of Mgbada (2014) and Okeke (1999) to the benefits that women empowerment accelerate social and economic progress of the society. They are potential benefits of female empowerment which are highly achievable in the long run and hence pose a change to the community development.

**Table-3: Distribution of respondents by perceived Constraints to female empowerment**

Constraints to female empowerment	Not serious (1) Freq%	serious (2) Freq%	Very serious (3) freq%	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard Deviation
Poor access to productive resources	2 (0.6)	14 (16.7)	104 (86.7)	2.85	0.4103
Lack of quality education	51 (4.2)	17 (14.2)	98 (81.7)	2.77	0.6198
Poor political Representation	5 (4.2)	21 (17.5)	94 (78.3)	2.74	0.4583
Cultural practice	27( )	3 (2.5)	90 (75.0)	2.53	0.3245
Sex stereotyping	3 (2.5)	24 (20.0)	93 (77. )	2.75	0.5619
Poor implementation of female friendly policies	18 (15.0)	96 (80.0)	6 (80.0)	1.9	0.4993
Discriminating Attitude of gender	21 (17.5)	89 (74.2)	10 (8.3)	1.908	0.4993
Poor access to health services	98 (81.7)	7 (5.8)	15 (12.5)	1.308	1.2528
Multiple Gender Roles	4 (3.3)	23 (19.2)	83 (69.2)	2.49	0.5928
Low participation and membership of Association limited social network	17 (14.2)	15 (12.5)	88 (73.3)	2.591	0.5321
Lack of access to information	48 (40.0)	69 (57.5)	3 (2.5)	1.625	0.5151
Greater Risk aversion of rural women	16 (13.3)	8 (6.7)	96 (80.0)	2.63	0.6957

Grand mean 2.45 Bend marks 2.0.

**Source:** Field survey, 2019.

Result in Table 3 shows that twelve possible constraints were investigated in this study; nine were considered to be serious constraints rural women empowerment in Imo state.

These serious constraints to women empowerment therefore, are in the following order, poor access to productive resources ( $\bar{x}$  =2.85) poverty ( $\bar{x}$  =2.84), lack of quality education for rural women, ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.77), poor political representation ( $\bar{x}$  =2.74), sex stereotyping ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.75) greater risk aversion ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.63), low participation and membership of association ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.59), cultural practices ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.53) gender roles and multiple role ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.49). The finding of this study on constraints to women empowerment agreed with those of British council (2012) who noted that sex stereotyping and discriminating attitude against women

constituted hindrance to rural women empowerment. The table also revealed that minor constraints to rural women empowerment were men's discriminating attitude against women ( $\bar{x}$  = 1.91) religious practice ( $\bar{x}$  = 1.90), lack of access to information ( $\bar{x}$  = 1.62) and poor access to wealth services ( $\bar{x}$  =1.31). The table further revealed a grand mean constraints of 2.4\*. This shows that rural women perceived constraint to women empowerment was high on nine investigated constraints because their individual mean constraint was above the grand mean constraint. The result showed that the standard deviations were closely packed and small. This implies that the data had high degree of uniformity and reliability. This is in line with the findings of Onuh and Igwenma (2007) who explained that the smaller the standard deviation the higher the degree.

**Table-4: Distribution of the Respondents based on the Ways of female empowerment in Imo State, Nigeria**

Way of Rural Women Empowerment	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (4)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Total	Mean	Decision
Providing formal and non- Formal and adult education	51 (26.4)	21 (63)	24 (48)	24 (24)	339	2.55	
Mentoring	22 (88)	42 (136)	36 (72)	20 (20)	306	2.83	
Providing opportunities	57 (228)	23 (69)	25 (50)	15 (15)	362	3.02	
Training	63 (252)	27 (81)	27 (54)	3 (3)	390	3.25	
Formation of women-only Cooperative societies	27 (108)	3 (12)	27 (54)	3 (3)	237	1.98	
Positioning in decision making	64 (256)	16 (48)	7 (14)	33 (33)	351	2.93	
Positioning female in decision making position	43 (172)	27 (81)	6 (12)	44 (44)	309	2.58	
Eliminating obnoxious laws on the status of women	53 (212)	37 (111)	17 (34)	13 (13)	370	3.08	
Exposing rural women to entrepreneurial skills	27 (68)	53 (159)	33 (66)	7 (7)	340	2.83	
Provision of financial Resources	17 (68)	53 (159)	23 (46)	27 (27)	300	2.5	

**Source;** field survey, 2019

The result in the Table 4 shows that a total of 10 female empowerment ways were identified in Imo state. The ways of rural female empowerment therefore, take the following order; training ( $\bar{x}$ =3.25) Eliminating obnoxious laws on the status of women ( $\bar{x}$ =3.08), providing opportunities ( $\bar{x}$  =3.02), positioning in decision making ( $\bar{x}$  =2.93), exposing women to entrepreneurial skills ( $\bar{x}$ =2.83). Others were positioning females in decision making ( $\bar{x}$ =2.58), providing formal and non- Formal and adult education ( $\bar{x}$  =2.55), provision of financial resources ( $\bar{x}$ =2.50) and formation of women cooperative societies ( $\bar{x}$ =1.98). The result shows that all except one way investigated had a mean less than the accepted bench mark of 2.5. This implies

that agencies charged with the responsibilities of women empowerment were effective in the study area. This result is in consonance with the finding of Mabel (2008). Alamu and Olowo (2008) where they found that women empowerment ways were adopted by the stakeholders in rural communities be devilled with poverty. The implication of this finding is that access to health services for rural women was most preferred as strategy to rural women empowerment. Hence, empowering women will bring a lot of succor to rural dwellers with a corresponding reduction in the level of poverty, as the rural women will be encouraged to engage in rural empowerment activities.

**Table-5: Results of four functional forms on the factors influencing rural female empowerment**

Explanatory variables	Linear	Exponential	Semi-log	Double-log
Constant	1500.505 (0.623)	15.920 (3.151)	-300.716 (-0.334)	0.698 (0.22)
Age ( $x_1$ )	42.482 (3.487)***	0.002 (0.246)	19.824 (1.670)*	0.601 (2.648)**
Marital Status ( $x_2$ )	32.620 (5.034)***	0.019 (0.395)	2.876 (1.099)	0.745 (0.698)
Educational Level ( $x_3$ )	18.379 (0.550)	0.553 (0.553)	4.583 (0.997)	-0.937 (-0.937)
Income ( $x_4$ )	8.252 (4.929)	0.001 (4.264)**	0.044 (0.010)	0.518 (3.368)***
Culture ( $x_5$ )	-955.989 (-1.049)	0.094 (0.492)	6.741 (2.077)	0.096 (2.507)**
Family size ( $x_6$ )	36.396 (1.614)*	-0.014 (1.802)**	43.79 (0.319)	0.895 (0.602)**
Independency ( $x_7$ )	14.544 (0.098)	0.031 (1.000)	-0.186 (-0.064)	0.052 (0.499)
Gender norms ( $x_8$ )	0.004 (6.732)**	7.01E-007 (6.295)***	-1.227 (-0.326)	0.232 (1.708)*
Attitude of the husband ( $x_9$ )	10.827 (0.004)	-4.089 (1.397)	0.055 (-2.668)	1.613 (-1.365)
Community setting ( $x_{10}$ )	43.829 (1.689)	4.726 (1.903)	0.05 (1.613)	0.009 (1.814)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.668	0.648	0.207	0.674
R <sup>-2</sup>	0.610	0.557	0.109	0.617
F-Value	11.563***	10.591***	1.503**	11.876***
Sample size	120	120	120	120

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Figures in parenthesis are t-ratios

- \*\*\* Means significant at the 1% level  
 \*\* Means significant at the 5% level  
 \* Means significant at the 10% level

Results of four functional forms as presented in Table 5 showed that the double-log<sup>+</sup> was chosen as the lead equation based on R<sup>2</sup> coefficient of multiple determination. The value of coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) was 0.674. This implies that about 67.4% of the total variation observed in the dependent variable is accounted for by the independent variables in the model. Factors influencing rural female empowerment in Imo State; Double-log<sup>+</sup> function is the lead equation

among the four functional forms analyzed in the study. The regression shows that the major variables influencing female empowerment included; age ( $x_1$ ), educational level ( $x_2$ ), culture ( $x_3$ ), family size ( $x_4$ ), marital status ( $x_5$ ), income of parents( $x_6$ ) gender norms ( $x_7$ ) were significant in the other functions but not in the lead function. The variables were significant at varying levels. Rural female educational level and gender norms were both significant at 1% probability level and have

negative relationship with empowerment. Age of female, family size, marital status, independency, culture, attitude and community setting have significant levels between 5% and 1% probability. This is in line with Mgbada (2010) that women empowerment increase socio-economic status/strength of women.

Results shown that the coefficient of culture was significant at 5% and positively related to level of women empowerment. The coefficient of culture was significant at 10% and positively related to the level of empowerment. Result further show that the coefficient of community setting ( $x_3$ ) was significant at 1% and positively related to the level of empowerment. Result shows that the result of the coefficient of the variable culture factor ( $x_5$ ), multiple role ( $x_6$ ), government policies ( $x_7$ ), income ( $x_9$ ), political representation factor ( $x_{10}$ ) legal factors ( $x_4$ ) and sex stereotyping ( $x_{12}$ ) were significant at 5% level, while quality of education ( $x_8$ ) was significant at 10% level.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study reveal numerous benefits of female empowerment and analyzed the factors influencing female empowerment, described the socioeconomic characteristics of the rural women and concluded that female empowerment improves the health care and well-being of children, family and society. Although, female empowerment are saddled with a lot of constraints such as female gender discriminatory social norms and ineffective legal regulatory policy framework. The study therefore, recommends that communities should be mobilized to support victims of gender based violence, provide platforms for female girls' voice to be heard and strengthen legislations and policies to support girl child. Furthermore, follow-up and monitoring of rural women empowerment programmed to ensure that they judiciously utilize incentives and grants provided by the government agencies and non-governmental organizations involved in rural women empowerment.

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