

# WOMEN COMMUNITY SELF-HELP PROJECTS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF RURAL DWELLERS IN AKPABUYO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA.

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## ABSTRACT

*The major objective of the study was to investigate women community self-help projects and economic empowerment for wellbeing of rural dwellers in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined how women involvement in agriculture, education and cooperative societies relate to economic empowerment. The functionalist theoretical framework was adopted. The research design was survey and the study area was Akpabuyo Local Government Area. The study elicited data from 400 respondents using the multi-stage sampling procedure. This sample size was determined through the use of Tara Yamene's (1967) sample size determination formula. Data were obtained through use of questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient. Findings revealed that a significant relationship exists between women community self-help projects in area of agriculture, Education and cooperative societies and economic empowerment for well-being of rural dwellers. The study concluded that women involvement in self-help projects is vital to enhanced well-being of rural dwellers. It was recommended that women should see their participation in community self-help project as their significant contributions to rural community socio-economic well-being.*

## INTRODUCTION

Women economic empowerment is associated with the bold and sustained actions to advance

women's opportunities, rights, and choices which facilitate their participation in locality development activities. Economic

empowerment guarantees economic opportunities and access to livelihood resources. It ensures that women take advantage of business climate that supports the initiation and sustainable business development. This also has the advantage of accessing financial services to meet the ends of people especially rural women (Ahmed 2009)

Economic empowerment has enormous potential to secure women's legal rights, especially to land and other property and ensures that women's voices are heard and priorities addressed. It implies securing land rights and other productive resources for the purpose of strengthening the socio-economic well-being of rural dwellers (Braun 2010). Economic empowerment is a veritable instrument of rural women emancipation. However, rural women economic empowerment has been less emphasized as manifested in their income levels, power relations within households, markets and communities' economies. Thus, it may not have been actively integrated into the mainstream of rural development activities. Rural development policy designers have not been perceived women empowerment as the pre-condition for the elimination of rural poverty (Bayes 2009).

Nkpoyen and Bassey (2012) commented that the experience of rural women has been that of their complete severance from the process of development even with the various rural development measures and strategies. Women activities have not been rightly situated in the rural development agenda. In Akpabuyo Local Government Area, women have not been able to significantly define the objectives of development for themselves. This affects outcomes that could bring about improvements in rural life.

Rural women contribute to the development of the rural economy through self-help projects. This strategy has served to reverse the economic disempowerment in the Asian economies. The project aim at providing solutions to community's socio-economic well-being, raising the standard of living as well as promoting social welfare. It involves the conscious efforts of women working individually or in groups to make a better

living for the people. Existing literature reveals that women can obtain economic empowerment by participating in community self-help projects. Participation in community self-help projects in areas such as education, health, agriculture, small and medium scale entrepreneurship, economic enablers and socio-economic development facilitators (Ahmed 2009).

Women's economic empowerment through self-help effort is a common feature of bottom-up development strategy. The development of the resources of the community for economic empowerment by women's own efforts rather than relying on outside initiative and/or support has assumed and enormous importance in rural community development. Women self-help groups stimulates economic empowerment. Their initiatives have the potential to alleviate poverty at the locality level. In other localities community's self-help projects of rural women have enabled women to improve the socio-economic well-being of their communities. Women are now adding to their domestic income by their self-help efforts. Therefore, this paper examined the extent to which women community's self-help projects in agriculture, education and cooperative societies are tools of women empowerment. For economic empowerment for socio-economic well-being (Braun 2010, Chauhan 2013).

### **Statement of the problem**

Economic empowerment for socio-economic well-being of rural dwellers is of enormous concern in grassroots development, especially in Akpabuyo local government area of Cross River State. Rural Nigeria provides huge evidence of limited success in development for improved socio-economic well-being.

Rural community dwellers have not experienced improved well-being as communities are unable to effectively mobilize and harness the abundant human and material resources to stimulate development activities. The Federal, State, and Local government have designed measures to foster development in rural communities. These have included Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), National Poverty Eradication Programme,

Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme, First Ladies Empowerment Programmes etc. All these were meant to scale up activities to induce women economic empowerment for socio-economic well-being. However, these programmes have not been able to transform nor modernize communities in Akpabuyo local government area as expected (Nkpoyen, Mbat and Bassey 2015).

It is possible that a vital component in the development process, that is, women has been neglected. The efforts of women in community self-help projects have been given due recognition. Women in several regions of the world have made significant contributions to economic empowerment for the socio-economic well-being of rural dwellers. There is a dearth of existing literature on this linkage in Akpabuyo Local government area. Thus, this study filled up the gap in knowledge in this area. The specific question that this paper addressed was: to what extent does women community self-help projects relate with economic empowerment for socio-economic well-being of rural dwellers in Akpabuyo local government area. This study therefore investigated women community self-help projects in the aspects of women agriculture, education and cooperative organization projects and socio-economic well-being of rural dwellers in Akpabuyo local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

### Research hypotheses

1. Women involvement in agricultural activities has no significant relationship with economic empowerment for well-being of rural dwellers.
2. Women involvement in educational activities has no significant relationship with economic empowerment for well-being of rural dwellers.
3. Women involvement in operations of cooperative societies has no significant relationship with economic empowerment for well-being of rural dwellers.

### Review of related literature

#### 1. Women's agricultural activities and economic empowerment for well-being of rural dwellers.

Women have been very much involved in contributing their quota to the society through involvement in various self-help projects especially in agriculture. They habitually work in farmlands to improve the good security of their communities. These various agricultural activities of women have helped to set their communities on the path towards economic empowerment for well-being (Chung2012). In a study carried out by Ekwe (1993) on women self-help projects in agriculture and economic empowerment for well-being of rural dwellers, it was found out that women were involved either individually or in groups in several agricultural practices such as land clearing, land tilling, planting, weeding, fertilizer or manure procurement and application. Also, in harvesting, food processing, threshing, winnowing, milling, transportation and marketing. Ekwe (1993) reported that women are significantly involved in raising livestock such as chicken, pigs, goats, sheep, turkey etc. on a modest scale. These domestic animals yield cash as they served the need for local and foreign consumption.

Women self-help projects in agriculture has helped to sustain the socio-economic well-being of rural families. Women remain the producers of food, the stock breeders, suppliers of fuel, wood and water and collectors of forest products. This results to community self-sufficiency in food production to a significant extent (Epstein2009). According to Evertts(2012) in most countries of the world, women do most of the work in agricultural production such as carrying out long distance as well as local trading and other self-sufficiency activities geared towards self-sufficiency and economic empowerment. Both Dwyer and Bruce (2011) concluded from their studies that women have contributed to the economic empowerment of their communities through their socio-economic development activities and individual activities for the upkeep of the family.

Ibiang (2014) stressed that virtually all feeding, health and educational

responsibilities in the community are shouldered by the women folk. This corroborated in the finding of Moghadam(2012) that women occupy prominent positions in rural communities and have tremendously boosted the rural economy through their self-help projects especially as a result of the attraction of urbanization by the men. The men have abandoned their traditional role of cash crop production to the women who have now taken the challenge by involving themselves in self-help projects.

In the views of Okojie (1991) the transformation of women's mentality in agricultural self-help projects started with the launching of the Better Life for Rural Women. Women associations in Southern Senatorial district of Cross River State have been involved in the education of women as well as other members of the communities on proper methods of food processing activities even within their home. They sit in groups and teach one another easier methods of processing grains such as rice, maize and millet into flour, melon seeds, palm nuts and groundnut into oils for both domestic consumption and for sale. The net effect of women involvement in agricultural self-help projects is economic empowerment for well-being of rural dwellers (Robson2014; Speth2010).

## **2. Women's educational involvement and economic empowerment for well-being of rural dwellers.**

Education is and indispensable for the enhancement of the quality of community life. The purpose of education in community development is for economic empowerment; to produce people who can choose for themselves what kind of development and self-actualization they want to pursue (Ihejiamaizu, 2002).Stretching the significance of women education project, Ukpong(2009) commented that education is used to prepare man for social civil and economic roles that extend beyond the limit of rudimentary literacy training. Women involvement in educational activities have helped to demonstrate its importance for economic empowerment and the instrument for updating cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritage. Varma (2009) observed that literacy is a pre-requisite for economic development by

diminishing exploitation, poverty and contact point for the achievement of liberation. Women's involvement in educational activities has galvanized rural dwellers to embrace a new vision, learn to respond to production initiatives, integrate individuals into existing institution and where necessary strengthen existing economic, social and political institutions for the well-being of the rural people(UN2016).

Women's involvement in educational activities result to the creation of an enlightenment community with the potential to achieve a sufficiently high level of economic empowerment and comparatively higher standard of living. It has promoted economic empowerment and well-being through the eradication of illiteracy, development of skills and easy adaptation to change in rural communities. Self-help projects in education create, develop and position women to towards economic empowerment for well-being of rural dwellers (Williams2008).

## **3. Women Cooperative activities involvement and economic empowerment for well-being of rural dwellers.**

Researchers have found out that a properly motivated and organized cooperative organizations serve as a potent force in a nation's economic development and promotes economic empowerment. It fosters self-help projects and the development of community's economy through their own efforts and on the basis of maximum utilization of both human and natural resources for economic empowerment (Bayes2009; Akinwumi 2008 Nkpoyen and Bassey 2012).The formation and involvement of women in cooperative societies such as multi-purpose cooperative, farmers' cooperative society, credit and loan cooperative society etc. has transformed the role of women in the family as well as their community. They have influenced the trend of affairs in rural communities by their self-help initiatives. Even the widows can now carry the entire burden of the family through cooperative back-up given to them, this ensuring economic empowerment (Burthe 2012). Women associations have rigorously promoted the collectivization of women into cooperatives so

as to enjoy the advantages of the economy of size. Those self-help efforts have to do with better access to funds and information needed to enhance productivity, and better management techniques (Chauhan 2013).

Women embark on various self-help projects through cooperatives for the sole purpose of improving the economic condition of their communities. They engage in small scale industries such as soap making and pomade industry, dress making, art and craft industries. Women engage in basket making, poultry palm produce processing, garri and dress making.

Their involvement in cooperative operation has positively impacted on their living standards by improving access of rural women to credit facilities, income, skills and knowledge acquisition. It has placed women in an advantaged position in terms of benefitting from government and donor agencies in the supplies of essential food items and farm implements (Grossman 2012).

### **Theoretical framework**

#### **Functionalism Theory:**

Associated with Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer and later fine-tuned by Talcott Parsons. Functionalism is a sociological paradigm that originally attempted to explain social institutions as collective means to fulfil individual biological needs. Later, the functionalist theory came to focus on the ways in which social institutions fulfill social needs especially social stability (Haralambus and Holbon, 2000). Women make up a vital component of the social system. Their existence and contributions to the overall well-being of the community is significant and critical. Their self-help projects in various aspects have enhanced the socio economic wellbeing of rural dwellers. These women have contributed towards solving the basic of the social systems such as adaptation, goal attainment, integration and latency.

### **Methods and materials**

The research design adopted was survey. A survey research is directed towards determining the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of the investigation. This design enabled the researcher make inferences about

the population through the study since it was a quantitative study. The study area was Akpabuyo Local Government Area in Cross River State, Nigeria. The local government area comprised 10 political council wards: Atimbo West, Edem Odo, Edet Nsa, Effanga Offiong, Eneyo North, Eneyo South, Idundu/Anyanganse, Ikot Edem Odo and Ikot Nakanda.

The population was made up of all the residents of Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State. This implies all individuals living in the 10 council wards formed the study population. With reference to National Population Census (2006), Akpabuyo had an approximate population of 272,262. However, the actual population of this study was drawn from NPL (2006) population of women, being 82,488. The women were the focus of the study.

#### **Sampling Procedure**

The 10 political wards for the 10 strata of the study. These 10 wards were purposively studied. However, one community was selected per ward using simple random sampling procedure. The communities constituted the clusters of the study. Altogether 400 respondents were selected from the 10 clusters of the study based on Taro Yamene's sample size determination. From stratum 1, Akwa Obio Inwang community was selected, stratum 2, Ikot Umo Community; stratum 3, Ikot Edem Ndarake community; stratum 4, Ekpoeyo, stratum 5, Esuk Mba; stratum 6, Ikot Akiriba; stratum 7, Ikot Ekpo Essien; stratum 8, Idebe Offiong Umo; stratum 9, Akwa Ikot Effanga/Akansoko; stratum 10. These were the 10 clusters of the study.

The selection of actual respondents was systematically done. The researcher decided to study even numbered households only. In doing this only women were purposively studied and 1/10<sup>th</sup> of respondents were selected per cluster. Altogether 400 respondents were selected from 10 clusters in compliance with Taro Yamene's (1967) sample size determination formula based on the population of women in the area. Data obtained from these respondents were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.



**Analysis and results****Socio demographic data**

S/No.		Variable		No. of Respondents	
Percentage					
1. Age in years					
20 -24 years			48		12.0
25 - 29 years			122		30.5
30 - 34 years		88			22.0
35 - 39 years		102		25.5	
40 years and above		40		10.0	
Total		400			100
2. Highest educational Status					
No formal education		18		4.5	
FSLC		32			8.0
SSCE/GCE		122			30.5
B.Ed/BA/HND		208			52.0
Ph.D/MED/MA/MSc		20			5.0
Total		400			100
3. Religious Affiliation					
Christianity				376	94
Islam		8			2.0
Traditional religion		16			4
Total		400			100
4. Marital Status					
Married		154			38.5
Single		186			46.5
Widow		18			4.5
Divorced		10			2.5
Separated		32			8.0
Total		400		100	
5 Occupation					
Civil servant		82			20.5
Farmer		6			1.5
Self-employed		288			72.0
Unemployed		20			5.0
Any other (specify)		4			1.0
Total		400		100	
5. Income Level					
Below N=100,000Per annum			176		46.0
Below N=200,000Per annum			140		35.0
Below N=500,000Per annum			40		10.0
Above N=500,000Per annum			44		11.0
Total		400			100

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 1 indicates the demographic profile of respondents. In terms of age, 48 (12%) respondents were between the age bracket of 20 – 24 years; 122 (30.5%) were

between the age bracket of 25 - 29 years, respondents were between the age bracket of 30 – 34 years, 102 (25.5%) respondents were between the age bracket of 35 – 39 years, 40

(10%) respondents were between the age of 40 and above. Thus the majority of respondents were between the age brackets of 25 – 29 years with 122 (30.5%) respondents. In terms of highest educational status, 18 (4.5%) respondents had no formal education; 32 (8%) had attained FSLC; 122 (30.5%) had obtained SSCE/GCE; 205 (52%) had obtained Ph.D/M.Ed/MA/MSc. The highest number of respondents were holders of B.Ed/B.Sc/BA and HND. Responses on religious affiliation shows that 366 (91.5%) respondents were Christians; 8 (2%) were Moslem; while 16 (4%) were traditional worshippers. Responses on marital status reveals that 154 (38.5%) were married; 186 (46.5%) were singles; 18 (4.5%) were widows; 10 (2.5%) were divorced; while 32 (8%) were separated.

In terms of occupation, 82 (20.5%) respondents were Civil Servants, 6 (1.5%) respondents were farmers; 288 (72%) were self-employed; 20 (5%) respondents were employed. Responses on level of income shows that 176 (44%) had below N=100,000 per annum; 140 (35%) had below N=200,000 per annum; 40 (10%) had below N=50,000 per annum while 44 (11%) had above N=500,000 per annum.

### Test of Hypotheses:

**Hypothesis One:** Women involvement in agricultural activities has no significant relationship with economic empowerment for well-being of rural dwellers. The results of the correlation analysis are presented below.

**TABLE 2:** Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between women involvement in agricultural activities and empowerment for well-being (N = 400).

$\Sigma x$	$\Sigma x^2$		
$\Sigma xy$	r-cal		
Variable	$\Sigma y$	$\Sigma y^2$	
Women involvement in agricultural activities	1490	5710	
5670	0.75*		
Economic empowerment for Well-being	1470	5815	

Significant at 0.5, crit.  $r = 0.196$ ,  $df = 398$

Source: Field survey, 2020

The result in table 2 shows that the calculation r-value of 0.75 is higher than critical r-value of 0.196 at 0.5 level of significance with 398 degrees of freedom. Thus a significant relationship exists between women involvement in agricultural activities and empowerment for well-being.

### Hypothesis Two:

Women involvement in educational activities has no significant relationship with economic empowerment for well-being. The results of the correlation analysis are presented below:

**Table 3** Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between women involvement in educational activities and economic empowerment for well-being (N = 400)

$\Sigma x$	$\Sigma x^2$		
Variable	$\Sigma y$	$\Sigma y^2$	$\Sigma xy$
Women involvement in Education activities	1495	5720	
5690	0.83*		
Economic empowerment For well-being	1470	5815	

\*Significant at 0.05 level, crit.  $r > 0.196$ ,  $df = 398$

Source: Field survey, 2021

The calculation r-value of 0.83\* was found to be greater than the critical r-value of 0.196 at 0.05 level of significance with 398 degrees of freedom. This meant that women involvement in educational activities is significantly related to economic empowerment for well-being.

**Hypothesis Three:** Women involvement in operation of cooperative societies has no significant relationship with economic empowerment well-being. The result of the analysis was presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4 Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between women involvement in operation of cooperative societies and economic empowerment for well-being (N = 400).

Variable	$\Sigma x$	$\Sigma x^2$	$\Sigma xy$	r-cal
Women involvement in cooperative societies	1492	5718	5675	0.76*
Economic empowerment for well-being	1470	5815		

\*Significant at 0.05 level,  $\text{crit } r = 0.196$ ,  $df = 398$

Source: Field survey, 2021

The results in table 4 show that the calculated r-value of 0.76\* is higher than the critical r-value of 0.196 at 0.05 level of significance with 398 degrees of freedom. This implied that a significant relationship exists between women self-help projects of involvement in the operation of cooperative societies and economic empowerment for well-being.

### Discussion

Women self-help project in agricultural activities and economic empowerment for well-being. The analysis of the hypothesis indicated a significant positive relationship between women self-help project in agricultural activities and economic empowerment for well-being. Nigeria's agricultural production is operated by women. There is scarcely any local community in Nigeria where women are not overwhelmingly involved in various agricultural self-help projects. The result of studies carried out by (Ibiang2014; Idachaba and Iregbe 2005). Women are producers of food, the stockbreeders, the suppliers of fuel, wood and water; the collectors of forest products. These activities bring about self-sufficient and improved well-being (Chung2012). Hussain (2008) emphasized that women have played important roles in the agricultural activities in rural communities. Women have assumed more and greater responsibilities in different facets of agricultural activities more than their male counterparts.

Women community self-help projects in education and economic empowerment for well-being. The study found out that a significant relationship exists between women self-help projects in education and economic empowerment for well-being. Ngwu's (2003) findings are supported here. According to Ngwu, the involvement of women in self-help projects in terms of educational activities promotion has assisted in reduction of illiteracy, development of skills and easy adaption to change. The end result is an enlightened community capable of achieving better socio-economic well-being. Speth (2010) confirmed that women involvement in educational activities ultimately results in economic empowerment. Women support for education encourages young girls and women to participate in community development. The women also are involved in receiving education for more enhanced enlightenment (Grossman2012).

Women self-help projects in cooperative societies and economic empowerment for well-being. The finding of the study confirmed that a significant relationship existed between women involvement in operating cooperative societies and economic empowerment for well-being. The observations of (Nkpoyen and Bssey2012; Nkpoyen, Mbat and Bassey 2015) have been validated by this study. Women self-help projects in the domain of cooperative societies have engendered economic empowerment for well-being in terms of job creation through the establishment of small scale businesses, rural resource mobilization, economic transformation, reduction in labour investment. The findings agree with Braun (2010) that women economic empowerment is the consequent of their ability to access funds and information as a group. Self-help projects in the area of cooperative societies facilitate concession from the government, non-governmental organizations, private sector organizations, international agencies and banks towards taking advantage of loans, procurement of improved seedlings and new methods of economic production. These enhance economic empowerment for well-being in rural areas.



### Conclusion and recommendation

Women community self-help projects have the huge potential to enhance economic empowerment for the well-being of rural dwellers. Self-help projects in the areas of agriculture, education and operation of cooperative societies are strategic contributions of women to improve the quality of rural life. Women's contribution to self-help projects implies community intervention by women for the common good of the community. It is established that the women community self-help projects in domains of agriculture, education and cooperative societies are capable of empowering women economically for the well-being of rural communities. Rural women should see the need to participate in self-help projects as a necessary socio-economic requirement for the well-being of individuals in their communities. They should be encouraged to participate in educational activities as a catalyst for improving the socio-economic well-being of their rural communities. More rural women should embark on self-help projects through the framework of cooperative societies to maximally utilize both human, material and financial resources for productive economic empowerment purposes.

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