

WOMEN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: AN APPRAISAL

NGOZI MUONAGOR MARYANN
Department of Public Administration
Federal Polytechnic, Oko
Anambra State, Nigeria
Email: muonagor.ngozi21@gmail.com
Phone: +2348063026453

&

OKONKWO, NKIRU ANNA
Department of Public Administration
Federal Polytechnic Oko
Anambra State, Nigeria
Email: nkiruanna007@gmail.com
Phone: +2348037296585

Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to examine the relationship between women and community development in Nigeria by highlighting the challenges they face, the impact of their participation towards community development and strategies that can help them contribute effectively. According to Alemayehu (2014), community development can be defined as a process concerned with the improvement as well as the transformation of the social, mental, economic, institutional and environmental conditions of the rural dwellers through the mobilization and rational utilization of their human, material and institution resources so as to enhance their capacities to cope with the daily tasks and demands of modern time. Women have played an important role in the development of societies throughout Nigeria's history, their participation and contributions are linked to the social, economic and political progress of communities across the country. Traditionally, women have been at the center of community life but their contributions are often ignored or undervalued. It is important to not only consider the role of women in the development of societies but also to harness the enormous potential they possess to bring about positive changes.

Keywords: Women, Community development, Impact, Empowerment, Strategies.

Introduction

Women have always played important parts in Nigerian society thus, contributing to the country's culture, economy and society. In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of the important roles women play in community development initiatives across the country. Community development is essential to creating sustainable and inclusive societies and women's active participation can lead to transformative change in the above cause. This study aims to explore the relationship between women and community development in Nigeria, highlighting the challenges they face, the impact of their participation and strategies that can help them contribute effectively. Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa is experiencing rapid urbanization and development which creates opportunities and challenges for communities across the country. Traditionally, women have been at the center of community life but their contributions are often ignored or

undervalued. It is important to not only consider the role of women in the development of societies but also to harness the enormous potential they possess to bring about positive changes.

By conducting a comprehensive literature review, this study will build on existing knowledge in understanding the relationship between women's empowerment and community development in Nigeria. This research has important implications for policy development and practice. Understanding the challenges that hinder women's participation in community development will enable stakeholders to design targeted interventions that effectively address these barriers. In addition, recognizing and amplifying the impact of women's participation can also help create inclusive policies and programs that exploit their potential to achieve sustainable and equitable development across Nigeria.

Historical overview of women in community development

Women have played an important role in the development of societies throughout Nigeria's history. Their participation and contributions are linked to the social, economic and political progress of communities across the country. Historically, Nigerian women have actively participated in local development initiatives in their communities. Traditional roles such as running a household, raising children and maintaining social cohesion provide women with an important basis for community participation. Women use their social networks, personal relationships and collective decision-making skills to meet the diverse needs of their communities and create positive changes. In pre-colonial Nigeria, women held influential positions in their communities. They were often involved in the decision-making process and play an important role in resolving conflicts. Women contribute to agricultural, commercial and craft activities which contributed to the economic prosperity of their communities.

In addition, they participate in community rituals, religious activities and cultural practices that reinforce community values and traditions. With the advent of colonial rule, Nigerian women faced many difficulties due to the disruption of their traditional roles. However, this period also saw the emergence of organized women's associations aimed at addressing social problems and protecting women's rights. It is noteworthy that the establishment of the Nigerian Women's Union (NWU) in 1947 by women like Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti marked an important milestone in the women's movement in Nigeria. NWU provided a platform for women to express their concerns, fight for social justice and contribute to community development.

In post-independence Nigeria, women continue to contribute to the development of society through various avenues. They have been actively involved in political movements, education, healthcare and economic empowerment initiatives. Women's participation in politics has increased over the years, with more women holding leadership positions at the local, state and national levels. This has led to policies and programs that prioritize gender equality and women's empowerment in community development efforts.

Furthermore, women-focused organizations and NGOs have played important roles in promoting community development initiatives across Nigeria. These organizations provide platforms for women to acquire skills, access financial resources and participate in sustainable development projects. They play a vital role in protecting women's rights, combating gender-

based violence, improving health care, promoting education and promoting economic opportunities for women from diverse communities. Recently, Nigerian women have continued to advocate and participate in community development activities. They actively participate in local initiatives, establish partnerships with government agencies and organizations and use technological advances to enhance their impact. In sum, Nigerian women have a long history of active participation in community development. From traditional roles to organized movements and modern initiatives, women have always contributed to the progress and well-being of their societies. Their participation is vital to achieving sustainable development and social progress in Nigeria.

Community development

Alemayehu (2014) regards community development as a process concerned with the improvement as well as the transformation of the social, mental, economic, institutional and environmental conditions of the rural dwellers through the mobilization and rational utilization of their human, material and institution resources so as to enhance their capacities to cope with the daily tasks and demands of modern time. It is about the quality of life of people, their capacity to improve the conditions of their existence to reach, control and utilize their resources for greater productivity and enjoyment. It is about the autonomy and self-respect of the individuals as a free member of his community. Community development objectives include;

- (1) To increase employment.
 - (2) To uplift the general health of the rural dwellers.
 - (3) To provide technical works and knowledge to the rural dwellers.
 - (4) To maximize the productivity of the average person on and his family (Hiruni, 2013).
- It also requires citizen's participation, increase in their productive capacity and attitudinal change leading to their desire to show their sense of dependence on their environment.

Challenges faced by women in community development in Nigeria

Various challenges have been observed to act as a clog in the wheel of the progress towards women's path to contribute to community development in Nigeria. Some of them are;

Gender Inequality and Discrimination

According to Oladepo (2017), women that are involved in community development initiatives are prone to various forms of discriminations including sexual harassment based on gender. This can discourage them from active participation and thus limit their contributions towards the development of their various communities.

Limited Access to Education and Skills Training

Limited access to education and skills training deters women's effort to actively participate and contribute immensely to community development initiatives (Ogunsanwo & Davies, 2019). This has created a very big hindrance towards women empowerment initiatives.

Cultural and Traditional Practices

According to Okoro & Okafor (2018), various cultural and traditional practices deter women from participating in community development. It has been observed that women are in most

times not allowed to take part in some important decision making process simply because they are females and are barred because of cultural or traditional reasons.

Inadequate Finance

Women in African settings are made to believe that their place is in the home and this invariably affects their access to finance which limits their ability to contribute to community development. In most cases, they are seen as not credit worthy for those that intend to get access to credit. According to Ofoegbu & Nwajiuba (2017), women are faced with the troubles of lack of finance and resources which hampers their effort towards community development in Nigeria.

Political Marginalization:

According to Onyishi (2018), women are politically marginalized in the country and this serves as a hindrance to their bid to assist in community development. Politics have been seen as a source to power and resources. With the near absence of women in politics, this cripples their access to power and resources which is essential in community development agendas.

The Impact of Women in Community Development in Nigeria

Women have had a significant impact on the development of societies in Nigeria throughout history. Their active participation has played a vital role in shaping various aspects of Nigerian society, including social, economic and political development. One of the major impacts that women have on community development is the promotion of education. Historically, women have been at the forefront of advocating for educational opportunities for children and adults. They established and ran schools, encouraged girls' education and provided vocational training to equip women with skills for self-reliance. By giving priority to education, women contribute to the intellectual development and empowerment of individuals as well as the overall development of societies. In addition, women play an important role in promoting healthcare initiatives in their communities. They actively participate in health campaigns, health education programmes and establishment of medical facilities. Women's participation in public health has greatly improved access to quality health care resulting in better health outcomes, lower mortality and improved overall well-being for community members.

Women also play a central role in initiating and promoting economic development in Nigeria. They are actively involved in various income generating activities such as agriculture, trade and business. Her contribution to agricultural productivity and food security is particularly noteworthy. Women have established cooperatives, developed value chains and implemented microcredit programmes all of which have helped improved economic opportunities and reduce poverty levels in communities. In addition, they are at the forefront of advocates for social justice and gender equality. Through popular movements, women have fought against discriminatory practices, traditional norms and gender-based violence. Their activism paved the way for legal reforms, policy changes and increased recognition of women's rights.

According to Odozi and Isah (2019), women's involvement in community development initiatives in Nigeria has led to improved access to education and healthcare services resulting in better overall well-being. While, Amodu & Gbervbie (2016), opines that women's

participation in community development efforts has contributed to economic empowerment through the establishment of income-generating activities and entrepreneurial ventures. In a research conducted by Obi & Ogbuabor (2020), they obliged that women's involvement in community development has played a pivotal role in promoting gender equality and social justice by addressing discriminatory practices and advocating for women's rights. While in their article on women and community development, Ibrahim & Usman (2017), explained that women's engagement in community development has positively influenced their political empowerment by increasing their participation in decision-making processes and political representation.

Also, in the research conducted by Umar & Mohammad (2018), they emphasized that women's active involvement in community development initiatives has been crucial in promoting sustainable development in Nigeria, including environmental conservation and community resilience.

Theoretical framework

The theory deemed fit for this study on Women and Community Development in Nigeria is the Gender and Development (GAD) theory. GAD theory was proposed in the late 1980s by feminist researchers and activists who sought to criticize and challenge dominant development models in their favour. The theory was then advocated by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1985 with the aim to address the limitations and biases of current development models that have largely excluded or pushed women to the margins of the society. GAD theory emphasizes the importance of analyzing gender power dynamics, social norms and cultural practices to understand women's experiences and roles in development. It recognizes that women's empowerment and participation are essential to achieving sustainable and equitable development outcomes. This theory posits that development initiatives must view gender as a cross-cutting issue, address gender inequality and promote women's rights to create comprehensive and effective development strategies. In the Nigerian context, GAD theory provides a framework for examining the challenges and opportunities facing women in community development initiatives. It highlights the need to address discriminatory practices, social stereotypes and unequal power dynamics that limit women's participation and opportunities to contribute to the development of various communities. By incorporating a gender perspective into community development efforts, GAD theory aims to promote women's empowerment, enhance their self-determination and recognize their unique contributions to community development in Nigeria. Overall, gender and development theory which was proposed in the late 1980s has greatly influenced community development discourse and practice in Nigeria and beyond with its emphasis on women's interest in achieving equitable and sustainable development outcomes.

Method of Data Collection

The method used for the collection of data is the secondary sources which included journals, the internet, textbooks, newspapers, conference papers, etc. These were carefully scrutinized to bring out the purpose of this paper.

Strategies for Women in Community Development in Nigeria: The Way Forward

Various strategies have been opined to facilitate the development of communities in Nigeria by women. Some of them would be examined here. They include but are not limited to:

Promoting Women's Education and Skills Development

By encouraging women to pursue education and acquire skills related to community development, such as project management, leadership and management skills, and communication. This will enhance their ability to contribute effectively to community development initiatives. According to World Bank (2019), Implementing educational programs and vocational training that empower women to acquire new skills and knowledge would help them contribute to community development efforts.

Empowerment through Entrepreneurship

Encouraging women to start their own businesses or engage in income-generating activities does not only empower them economically but also contributes to the overall development of the society. According to Women's World Banking (2020), supporting women-owned businesses and providing them access to microfinance and business development services empowers their efforts towards community development.

Networking and Collaboration

Encouraging women to form networks and collaborate with community development organizations and other individuals. This can help them exchange ideas, share resources and work together to achieve common goals.

Advocacy and Awareness

By promoting women's rights through advocacy campaigns and awareness programmes, this can help address challenges related to gender issues and promote more inclusive and equitable societal development. Also, by developing programs to raise awareness about gender-based violence and providing support services for survivors (International Center for Research on Women [ICRW], 2021).

Leadership Skills Development

According to Olawale & Olawale (2017), this can be done by encouraging women's participation in community decision-making processes, including local councils and development committees. By encouraging women to assume leadership roles in community development organizations and participating in decision-making processes and involving themselves in leadership development programs and mentoring opportunities, this can help them build confidence and increase their effectiveness as community leaders.

Ensuring Equal Access to Resources and Opportunities

This can be done by supporting policies that ensure equal access to resources such as land, credit and employment opportunities for women (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2018). This has been a contentious issue for women advocates in Nigeria as lack of finance has stunted various developmental initiatives by women in the country.

Engagement with Local Authorities

Encourage women to actively engage with local authorities and government organizations to voice their concerns and support community development initiatives. This can help ensure that women's views are taken into account in decision-making processes.

Capacity Building and Training

By providing training and capacity building programs to enhance women's knowledge and skills in community development strategies, proposal writing, project management and resource mobilization. This will enable them to implement effective community development projects.

Cooperation with International Organizations

Seeking cooperation with international organizations or non-governmental organizations that focus on women's empowerment and community development. These partnerships can provide access to resources, funding and expertise of different kinds that will promote their effort towards community development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Nigerian women have made significant contributions to community development in various fields. Their participation in education, health care, economic rights and social justice movements led to deep positive changes in Nigerian society. Awareness and support for women's participation in community development remains very important for sustainable and comprehensive development in Nigeria.

References

- Alemayehu, B. (2014). The impact of education on rural women's participation in development and economic activities. *International Journal on Management Sciences Vol 6(9)* p.7
- Amodu, O. K & Gberevbie, D. E. (2016). Women's participation in community development in Nigeria: Issues and challenges. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 55(1-2), 23-33.
- Hiruni, R. (2013). Women participation in rural development. *International journal of Education and Research vol 8(6)* P.18
- Ibrahim, Z & Usman, N. (2017). Women's empowerment through community development in Nigeria: A study of political participation and representation. *Journal of Research, Policy & Practice of Teachers and Teacher Education*, 7(1), 60-69.
- ICRW. (2021). Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://www.icrw.org/where-we-work/nigeria/Women's>
- Obi, N & Ogbuabor, D.(2020). Women's participation in community development and gender equality advocacy in Nigeria. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, 9(2), 434-442.
- Odozi, J & Isah, A. (2019). Women's involvement in community development in Nigeria: Implications for sustainable development. *Journal of Educational Policy and Entrepreneurial Research*, 6(10), 65-75.
- Ofoegbu, F & Nwajiuba, C. (2017). Women in community development projects in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 7(11), 110-122.
- Ogunsanwo, A. O & Davies, O. S. (2019). Women empowerment and community development in Nigeria: Implications for sustainable development. *Journal of Social Sciences and Public Policy*, 11(1), 1-15.
- Okoro, R. N & Okafor, V. N. (2018). Cultural practices and women's participation in community development in Southeast Nigeria. *Journal of Women in Technical Education and Employment*, 2(2), 48-63.

- Oladebo, O. (2017). Gender inequality, discrimination, and socio-economic development in Nigeria. *Gender & Behaviour*, 15(3), 9633-9650.
- Olawale, F & Olawale, Y. (2017). Women's participation in decision-making processes in rural Nigeria. *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*, 5(1), 99-113. doi:10.15640/ijgws.v5n1a7
- Onyishi, I. E. (2018). Women's political participation and community development in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(4), 390-404.
- Umar, A & Mohammad, A. (2018). Women's participation in sustainable community development in Nigeria: Roles, challenges, and prospects. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, 7(2), 108-116.
- UNDP. (2018). Nigeria. Retrieved from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NGA>
- World Bank. (2019). Nigeria - Women's education and skills development program for results: Implementation support mission. Retrieved from <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P157309>
- World Banking. (2020). Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://www.womensworldbanking.org/network/country/nigeria/>