



Women Empowerment And Rural Development In Ugwunagbo Lga, Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract-

This study observes that empowerment of women is a desideratum for sustainable rural development in Ugwunagbo LGA, Abia State, Nigeria. This study underscores that women empowerment is the hub and the wheel on which rural development and administrative efficiency rotates. Women play a vital role in the socio-economic development of rural communities, yet they often face numerous challenges that hinder their full participation in rural development. Three hypotheses guided the study. The study made use of research design for collecting and analyzing data. The population of the study was one hundred and fifty (150), and data for the study were collected from primary and secondary sources. This study found out among others that marginalization of women is because of the mantra of gender inequality practiced in Ugwunagbo LGA of Abia State, Nigeria due its tradition or custom. It recommends among others that the women of Ugwunagbo LGA in Abia State, Nigeria should shun class distinction or social stratification. This will help them to share their experiences and be able to tackle the problems facing women. The study therefore, concludes that Women empowerment is a critical driver of rural development in Ugwunagbo LGA, Abia State, Nigeria, and policymakers must address the challenges facing women empowerment to achieve sustainable development goals.

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, Rural Development, Sustainable Development, Education, Economic Resources, Social Services, Nigeria*

Introduction

Empowerment of women is a critical component of rural development in Ugwunagbo Local Government Area (LGA), Abia State, Nigeria. Women play a vital role in the socio-economic development of rural communities, yet they often face numerous challenges that hinder their full participation (Ogunleye, 2020). These challenges include limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, which perpetuate poverty and inequality. In Ugwunagbo LGA, women's empowerment is essential for achieving sustainable development goals. The area is predominantly rural, with a significant proportion of the population engaged in agricultural activities (Adebayo, 2019). Women's contributions to agriculture are substantial, yet they often lack access to resources, including land, credit, and technology. Education is a critical component of women empowerment in Ugwunagbo LGA. It enables women to acquire skills and knowledge necessary for economic independence and informed decision-making (Uzochukwu, 2022). The literacy rate among women in the area is relatively low, limiting their access to economic opportunities. Economic empowerment is another vital aspect of women empowerment in Ugwunagbo LGA. Women's access to credit, land, and other resources is essential for entrepreneurial activities and economic growth (Adebayo, 2019).

Women's participation in decision-making processes is essential for promoting gender equality and addressing their specific needs (Ogunleye, 2020). However, patriarchal societal norms often limit women's involvement in community decision-making. The impact of women empowerment on rural development in Ugwunagbo LGA cannot be overstated. Empowered women can contribute to improved healthcare, education, and economic outcomes (Uzochukwu, 2022). Moreover, women's empowerment can promote sustainable agriculture, environmental conservation, and social cohesion. Government policies and programs can also play a vital role in promoting women's empowerment in Ugwunagbo

LGA. These initiatives should focus on improving access to education, healthcare, and economic resources (Uzochukwu, 2022). Moreover, policies promoting gender equality and social inclusion can help address patriarchal societal norms. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) can also contribute to women's empowerment in Ugwunagbo LGA. These organizations can provide training, mentorship, and resources to support women's economic and social development (Adebayo, 2019).

Women's empowerment initiatives in Ugwunagbo LGA should also focus on promoting sustainable agriculture and environmental conservation. Women play a critical role in agriculture, yet they often lack access to resources and technology (Okpara, 2021). Empowering women in agriculture can promote sustainable agriculture practices and improve food security. Women's empowerment initiatives should prioritize healthcare and family planning services. Women's health outcomes in Ugwunagbo LGA are often poor, with high maternal mortality rates (Uzochukwu, 2022). Empowering women to make informed decisions about their health can improve healthcare outcomes. In addition, women's empowerment initiatives should focus on promoting education and skills training. Education is critical for women's economic empowerment and social inclusion (Okafor, 2020). Empowering women through education can improve their economic prospects and promote social mobility. Women's empowerment initiatives should prioritize social inclusion and community engagement. Women's participation in decision-making processes is essential for promoting gender equality and addressing their specific needs (Ogunleye, 2020). Empowering women to participate in community decision-making can promote social cohesion and development. Women's empowerment is critical for rural development in Ugwunagbo LGA, Abia State, Nigeria. Addressing the challenges facing women in this region

requires a multifaceted approach, including education, economic empowerment, and social inclusion.

Statement of the Problem

Women empowerment in Ugwunagbo LGA, Abia State, Nigeria, faces significant challenges that hinder rural development. One major obstacle is the patriarchal societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality (Eze, 2022). These norms often limit women's access to education, economic resources, and social services, making it difficult for them to participate in decision-making processes. Limited access to education is another significant challenge facing women in Ugwunagbo LGA. The literacy rate among women in the area is relatively low, which hinders their ability to acquire skills and knowledge necessary for economic independence (Uzochukwu, 2022). This, in turn, limits their access to economic opportunities and perpetuates poverty. Economic empowerment is also a significant challenge for women in Ugwunagbo LGA. Women often lack access to credit, land, and other resources necessary for entrepreneurial activities and economic growth (Adebayo, 2019). This limits their ability to engage in income-generating activities and contribute to rural development.

Social inclusion is another challenge facing women in Ugwunagbo LGA. Women's participation in decision-making processes is essential for promoting gender equality and addressing their specific needs (Ogunleye, 2020). However, patriarchal societal norms often limit women's involvement in community decision-making, making it difficult for them to influence development initiatives. Cultural practices and traditions also pose a significant challenge to women empowerment in Ugwunagbo LGA. Certain cultural practices, such as early marriage and female genital mutilation, perpetuate gender inequality and limit women's access to education and economic opportunities (Okpara, 2021). Limited access to healthcare services is another challenge facing

women in Ugwunagbo LGA. Women's health outcomes in the area are often poor, with high maternal mortality rates (Uzochukwu, 2022). This is often due to limited access to healthcare services and lack of awareness about reproductive health issues.

Inadequate infrastructure is also a significant challenge facing women in Ugwunagbo LGA. The area lacks basic infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, and water supply, which hinders economic development and limits women's access to social services (Adebayo, 2019). Women in Ugwunagbo LGA also face significant challenges in accessing technology, including mobile phones and computers (Okpara, 2021). This limits their ability to access information and participate in the digital economy, perpetuating poverty and inequality. Limited access to markets is another challenge facing women in Ugwunagbo LGA. Women often lack access to markets where they can sell their products, limiting their economic opportunities and perpetuating poverty (Ogunleye, 2020).

Climate change is also a significant challenge facing women in Ugwunagbo LGA. Women are often more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including droughts and floods, which affect their livelihoods and perpetuate poverty (Eze, 2022). Insecurity is another challenge facing women in Ugwunagbo LGA. The area has experienced insecurity issues, including kidnapping and armed robbery, which limit women's mobility and access to social services (Uzochukwu, 2022).

Research Questions

1. What are the categories of women empowerment programme in Ugwunagbo LGA?
2. What do the women of Ugwunagbo LGA benefit from women empowerment?
3. Does women empowerment contribute significantly to the development of Ugwunagbo LGA?

Objective of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine women empowerment and sustainable rural development in Ugwunagbo LGA in Abia State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

1. To ascertain the categories of women empowerment programme in Ugwunagbo LGA
2. To find out what the women of Ugwunagbo LGA benefit from women empowerment
3. To know if women empowerment contribute significantly to the development of Ugwunagbo LGA

Hypotheses

The study was guided by the following hypotheses:

1. There are different categories of women empowerment programme in Ugwunagbo LGA
2. There are benefits that accrues to the women of Ugwunagbo because women empowerment
3. Women empowerment does not contributes significantly to the development of Ugwunagbo LGA

Literature Review

The Concept of Women Empowerment

The concept of women empowerment refers to the process of enabling women to take control of their lives, make informed decisions, and participate fully in societal development (Ogunleye, 2020). It involves creating an environment where women can exercise their rights, develop their potential, and contribute to the development of their communities. Women empowerment is a critical component of sustainable development, as it promotes gender equality, reduces poverty, and improves health outcomes (Uzochukwu, 2022). Women empowerment encompasses various dimensions, including economic, social, and

political empowerment. Economic empowerment involves providing women with access to resources, such as credit, land, and technology, to enable them to engage in income-generating activities (Adebayo, 2019). Social empowerment involves promoting women's education, health, and well-being, while political empowerment involves increasing women's participation in decision-making processes (Eze, 2022). The concept of women empowerment is rooted in the principles of equality, justice, and human rights. It recognizes that women have the same rights and dignity as men and should be treated with respect and dignity (Ogunleye, 2020). Women empowerment also involves challenging patriarchal societal norms and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality and limit women's access to opportunities (Eze, 2022).

Women empowerment is a critical component of sustainable development, as it promotes economic growth, improves health outcomes, and enhances social development (Uzochukwu, 2022). Empowered women are more likely to invest in their families, communities, and societies, leading to improved outcomes for all (Adebayo, 2019). Despite the importance of women empowerment, many women in Nigeria face significant challenges, including limited access to education, economic resources, and social services (Okpara, 2021). These challenges perpetuate poverty and inequality, limiting women's ability to contribute to societal development. To promote women empowerment, stakeholders must prioritize initiatives that address the specific needs of women. These initiatives should focus on promoting education, economic empowerment, and social inclusion, and providing access to resources and opportunities (Ogunleye, 2020).

Empowerment is a long-term process that requires commitment, resources, and partnerships. Stakeholders must work together to promote women empowerment and address the challenges facing women in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2019). Women empowerment is critical for promoting sustainable development and reducing poverty in

Nigeria. Stakeholders must prioritize women empowerment and work together to create an environment where women can thrive and contribute to societal development (Uzochukwu, 2022).

Rural Development

Rural development refers to the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in rural areas (Okpara, 2021). It involves creating opportunities for economic growth, improving infrastructure, and providing access to social services, such as healthcare and education. Rural development is critical for reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development, as it addresses the specific needs of rural communities. Rural areas in Nigeria face significant challenges, including limited access to infrastructure, healthcare, and education (Adebayo, 2019). These challenges perpetuate poverty and inequality, limiting the ability of rural communities to contribute to societal development. Rural development involves a range of initiatives, including agricultural development, infrastructure development, and social services development (Ogunleye, 2020). Agricultural development involves promoting agricultural production, improving agricultural productivity, and enhancing market access for rural farmers.

Infrastructure development involves improving roads, transportation, and communication networks in rural areas (Eze, 2022). Social services development involves improving access to healthcare, education, and other social services in rural areas. Rural development is critical for promoting sustainable development, as it addresses the specific needs of rural communities (Uzochukwu, 2022). It also promotes economic growth, improves health outcomes, and enhances social development. To promote rural development, stakeholders must prioritize initiatives that address the specific needs of rural communities.

can contribute to rural development, rural development can also promote women empowerment

These initiatives should focus on promoting agricultural development, improving infrastructure, and providing access to social services (Okpara, 2021).

Rural development requires a multi-stakeholder approach, involving government, private sector, and civil society organizations (Adebayo, 2019). Stakeholders must work together to promote rural development and address the challenges facing rural communities. Rural development is critical for promoting sustainable development and reducing poverty in Nigeria. Stakeholders must prioritize rural development and work together to create an environment where rural communities can thrive and contribute to societal development (Ogunleye, 2020).

Gap in Literature

Despite the growing body of research on women empowerment and rural development in Nigeria, there is a dearth of studies that specifically focus on Ugwuagbo LGA, Abia State. Most studies have concentrated on urban areas, neglecting the unique challenges and experiences of rural women (Ogunleye, 2020). This gap in literature limits our understanding of the complex relationships between women empowerment and rural development in this specific context. Existing studies on women empowerment in Nigeria have largely focused on economic empowerment, with little attention paid to social and political empowerment (Adebayo, 2019). However, women empowerment is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various dimensions, including social, economic, and political empowerment. The neglect of these dimensions in existing studies has resulted in a lack of comprehensive understanding of women empowerment in Ugwuagbo LGA.

Moreover, the relationship between women empowerment and rural development is complex and bidirectional. While women empowerment (Eze, 2022). However, existing studies have largely focused on the impact of women empow-

erment on rural development, with little attention paid to the reverse relationship. This gap in literature limits our understanding of the dynamics of women empowerment and rural development in Ugwunagbo LGA.

Methodology

The data for this study were collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary source includes questionnaire, which was closed-ended type. The close-ended type of questionnaire provided five (5) options, where respondents selected their answer. The questionnaire was structured into two (2) sections, with section one (1) eliciting information about the respondents' bio-data, like age, sex, qualification, etc. Whereas, section two (2) reflected the objectives, research questions and hypotheses of this study. To support the findings of this study, the researcher used secondary information from textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers, periodicals, monographs and government documents, etc.

Population of the Study

We selected randomly 150 women from the 27 villages in Ugwunabgo LGA. Our respondents were selected on the basis of usefulness to the study and not on sight. Based on this, respondents were randomly chosen from all the villages in UgwunagboLGA

Table 1 (27 Villages and selected number of women interviewed in ugwunagbo L.G.A)

Villages	Total
Abayi Njokoro	8
Akanu	5
Alaoji	5
Amaokpu-Umuitiri	5
Amaorji	5
Amapu-Ukebe	7
Amapu-Umuodo	8

Amavo	5
Amuzu-Amaikoro	5
Asa-Amuhi	5
Asa-Nnentu	5
Asa-Oberie	5
Asa-Umunka	5
Asaomuakwa	6
Ngwaiyiekwe	7
Obegu	5
Obuzor	7
Osusu-Aku	5
Ozaa-Umuebukwu	5
Ukebe	5
Umuaja	5
Umuama-Oke	5
Umuchukwu	5
Umugo	7
Umule-Osoamadi	4
Umunkama	7
Umuodo	4
Total	150

Source: Field work (March, 2024)

Determination of Sample Size

It was not easy for the researcher to cover the entire women in Ugwunagbo LGA. The numbers of women were given equal opportunity of being selected. Based on the population of one hundred and fifty (150), a normal confidence level of 95% and error tolerance of 5% was used. The researcher therefore, used the Yamane's (1964) formula to determine the sample size from the

total population. The derived sample size gave a typical representation of the population from which generalizations about the population was drawn. Taro Yamane’s formula is given below as thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

where:

- n = sample size
- N = population size
- e = Error of tolerance
- 1 = Statistical constant

That is,

$$n = \frac{150}{1 + 150(0.05)^2}$$

Therefore,

$$n = \frac{150}{1 + 0.375}$$

$$n = \frac{150}{1.375}$$

$$n = \frac{150}{1.375}$$

$$n = 109$$

Therefore, the sample size is 109

Method of Data Analysis

The method of data analysis for the research findings is descriptive. The method involves describing the data collected using the simple statistical method such as tables, means and percentages. The data generated were subjected to statistical analysis using Coefficient of Variation (C.V). Coefficient of variation was used to measure or evaluate the degree of variations among the observation (responses). The formula used for coefficient of variation (C.V) is given as follows:

$$C.V = \frac{S}{X} \times 100$$

X

Where S is unbiased standard deviation

$$S = \frac{\sqrt{\sum x^2 - \frac{(\sum x)^2}{n}}}{n-1}$$

X is unbiased mean of observations

$$X = \frac{\sum X}{n-1} \text{ or } \frac{\sum x}{df}$$

Discussion

Test of Hypothesis One

Table 2 There are different categories of women empowerment programme in Ugwunagbo L.G.A

Options	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Strongly agree	47	47
Agree	39	39
Disagree	8	8
Strongly disagree	6	6

Undecided	0	0	5-1
Total	100	100	

Source: Field work (March, 2024)

			3830-2000
		S	= 4
X	X ²		
47	2209		
39	1521	S	= 1830
8	64		4
6	36		
0	0	S	= 457.5
100	3830	S	= 21.4
		Coefficient of variation (C.V)	
X	= $\frac{\sum X}{n-1}$	=	$\frac{S}{X} \times 100$
		X	1
	= $\frac{100}{5-1}$	=	$\frac{21.4}{25} \times 100$
			85.6%
	= $\frac{100}{4}$		
	= $\frac{25}{4}$		
	$\frac{\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2}{n-1}$		
S	= $\frac{3830-10000}{5}$		
S	= 5		

The above table shows that the number of respondents that strongly agree that there are different categories of empowerment programme for the women of Ugwunagbo LGA outweighs other responses with a value of 47% of the total respondents. This reveals that there are different empowerment programme for the women in Ugwunagbo LGA. Moreover, the result of coefficient of variation analysis about the number of respondents in the various options with a value of 85.6% indicates that different categories of empowerment programmes are for the women of Ugwunagbo. This discussion therefore accepts the hypothesis that there are different categories

of women empowerment programme in Ugwunagbo LGA

Test of Hypothesis Two

Table 3 There are benefits that accrues to the women of Ugwunagbo because women empowerment

Options	Frequency	Percentages(%)
Strongly agree	45	45
Agree	40	40
Disagree	10	10
Strongly disagree	5	5
Undecided	0	0
Total	100	100

Source: Field work (March, 2024)

X	X ²
45	2,025
40	1600
10	100
5	25
100	3750
$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{n-1}$	
	$= \frac{100}{5-1}$
	$= \frac{100}{4}$
	$= 25$

$$S = \frac{\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2}{n-1}$$

$$S = \frac{3750 - 10000}{5-1}$$

$$S = \frac{3750 - 20000}{4}$$

$$S = \frac{1750}{4}$$

$$S = 437.5$$

$$S = 20.9$$

Coefficient of variation (C.V) =

$$\frac{S}{\bar{X}} \times 100$$

$$= \frac{20.9}{25} \times 100$$

$$= 83.6\%$$

The above table indicates that the number of respondents that strongly agree that there are benefits of empowerment programme for the women of Ugwunagbo LGA is high. It is greater than

other responses with a value of 45%. Thus, this shows that there are benefits of empowerment programme for the women of Ugwunagbo LGA.

Furthermore, the result of coefficient of variation analysis about the number of respondents in the various options with a value of 83.6% is an indication that there are benefits of empowerment for the women of Ugwunagbo LGA. The above discussion accepts our second hypothesis that there are benefits that accrues to the women of Ugwunagbo LGA because of women empowerment.

Test of Hypothesis Three

Table 4 Women empowerment does not contributes significantly to the development of Ugwunagbo L.G.A

Options	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Strongly agree	21	21
Agree	15	15
Disagree	29	29
Stronglydisagree	32	32
Undecided	3	3
Total	100	100

Source: Field work (March 2024)

X	X ²
21	441
15	225
29	841
32	1024
3	9
100	2540
X	= $\frac{\sum X}{n-1}$
	= 100

$$S = \frac{\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2}{n-1}$$

$$S = \frac{2540 - 10000}{5-1}$$

$$S = \frac{2540 - 20000}{4}$$

$$S = \frac{540}{4}$$

$$S = 135$$

$$S = 11.6$$

Coefficient of variation (C.V) = $\frac{S}{X} \times 100$

$$= \frac{11.6}{100} \times 100$$

$$= 11.6\%$$

$$= \frac{11.6 \times 100}{25 - 1}$$

$$= 46.4$$

The above table shows that the number of respondents who strongly disagree that women empowerment does not significantly contribute to the development of Ugwunagbo LGA is higher than other responses with a value of 32%. This shows that empowering women contributes significantly to the development of the society. The result of coefficient of variation analysis about the number of respondents in the various options with a value of 46.4% is a clear indication that strongly disagree response is higher than the strongly agree. This therefore, rejects our third hypothesis that women empowerment does not significantly contributes to the development of Ugwunagbo LGA.

Findings

Therefore, some of the findings are:

1. Marginalization of women is because of the mantra of gender inequality practiced in Ugwunagbo LGA of Abia State, Nigeria due its tradition or custom.
2. Class distinction or social stratification among women in Ugwunagbo LGA of Abia State, Nigeria makes it impossible for them to share their experiences together.
3. There is no mechanism to monitor the women of Ugwunagbo LGA of Abia State, Nigeria in order to ascertain their disposable income geared towards ensuring that they invest meaningfully in order to have some degree of financial independence.
4. There is need to re-orientate the men of Ugwunagbo LGA of Abia State, Nigeria through

seminars and conferences to disabuse their mind from gender inequality. This will facilitate women empowerment

5. Some women in Ugwunagbo LGA of Abia State, Nigeria do not have requisite access to formal education due to cultural practices.

Recommendation

From the findings above, the study recommends as follows:

1. Government of Nigeria should enact into law gender policy that will provide a fundamental principle for gender equality which will trickle down to all states and local governments in Nigeria.
2. The women of Ugwunagbo LGA of Abia State, Nigeria should shun class distinction or social stratification. This will help them to share their experiences and be able to tackle problems facing women.
3. There should be a mechanism to monitor the women of Ugwunagbo LGA of Abia State, Nigeria to know how and where they invest their income so that their financial independence can be facilitated.
4. Reorientation of men's mind set on women involvement and participation in rural development in Ugwunagbo LGA of Abia State, Nigeria could greatly enhance women's empowerment. This could be achieved through seminars, training and workshop.
5. Women of Ugwunagbo LGA of Abia State, Nigeria should be given unlimited access to formal education. Through this, they will realize the scopes and opportunities through which they can improve their status in the society which will invariably enhance rural areas.

Conclusion

The study on women empowerment and rural development in Ugwunagbo LGA, Abia State,

Nigeria, highlights the complex relationships between these two critical concepts. The findings of this study underscore the need for policymakers and stakeholders to prioritize women empowerment as a key strategy for promoting rural development. The study reveals that women empowerment is a multifaceted concept that encompasses economic, social, and political dimensions. However, women in Ugwunagbo LGA face significant challenges, including limited access to education, economic resources, and social services. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that prioritizes women empowerment and promotes rural development.

The study also highlights the importance of addressing patriarchal societal norms and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality and limit women's access to opportunities. Policymakers and stakeholders must work together to create an enabling environment that promotes women empowerment and rural development. Promoting women empowerment and rural development requires a long-term commitment to addressing the specific needs of women and rural communities. By prioritizing women empowerment and rural development, Nigeria can promote sustainable development, reduce poverty, and improve the quality of life of its citizens.

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