WOMEN in rural community development activities in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Full Length Research

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Accepted 27th February, 2012

This paper analysed the role of women in rural community development activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The descriptive research method was adopted for the study and this enabled the researcher to collect data without manipulating either the independent or dependent variables under study. The population of the study embraced 600 respondents who were randomly selected from the state through the process of multi stage sampling techniques. The major research instrument utilized was a set of questionnaire. The consistency of the research instrument was established through the test-re-test method. The null hypothesis generated for the study was tested at 0.05 alpha level. It established the fact that women are involved in rural community development activities in the state as they have contributed immensely towards the socio-economic development of the rural areas of the state. Women embarked on a lot of rural community development projects like providing social services like construction of waiting sheds at bus stops, building of community women centres, building classrooms for primary and secondary schools. It is recommended that governmental and non-governmental agencies should encourage and motivate women groups to embark on more meaningful community development projects through adequate funding and provision of grants.

Keywords: Community Development, Activities, Rural, Women, Rivers State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Women are the objects as well as the subjects of all human activities (Makinwa, 1987). They constitute a sizable proportion of human race. The United Nations estimates in 1980 put world population at 4.432 billion, approximately 22.28 billion or 49.8 per cent are female (United Nations, 1980). The United Nations in 1993 affirms that women constitute a majority of the world's population. According to Kwapong, (2007), the majority of the poor live in rural areas. 70% are women. In spite of their tremendous contribution to development, rural women in Africa continue to suffer invisibility, poor health, low levels of formal education and income and limited access to infrastructural development. They also dominate in small-scale agriculture. According to the International Labour Organisation(2003), women produce more than half the food that is grown and are primarily responsible for preparing, storing and processing food. In rural areas the total work day is 20% longer as compared to urban areas. Women in rural areas spend an average of 20% more time than men working. According to Manuh (1998), women provide the backbone of the rural economy in much of sub-Saharan Africa. About 80 per cent of the economically active female labour force is employed in agriculture and women comprise about 47 per cent of the total agricultural labour force. Food production is the major activity of rural women and their responsibilities and labour inputs often exceed those of men in most areas in Africa. Women also provide much of the labour for men's cultivation of export crops, from which women derive little direct benefit.

They contribute unpaid labour to the household's agricultural production and spend up to 50 hours a week on domestic labour and subsistence food production, with little sharing of tasks by spouses or sons in the household. Studies have documented that women work 12-13 hours a week more than men, as the prevalent economic and environmental crises have increased the working hours of the poorest women (Manuh, 1998). As a matter of fact, women are responsible for 70 per cent of...
food production, 50 per cent of domestic food storage, 100 per cent of food processing, 50 per cent of animal husbandry and 60 per cent of agricultural marketing.

They perform crucial roles in the domestic and economic life of the society. Rural and national development can hardly be achieved with the neglect of this important and substantial segment of the society (Kishor, et. al., 1999).

Before Nigeria attained her independence in 1960, women in the country had already been known for their industry in retail trade, which formed the bedrock of the national economy. Some of them were actually employers of labour, because they hire people, male or female, to buy and sell for them. They were leaders and members of market groups and in their local community. They played vital roles in decision making process. Women comprise a minority of the leadership makers (Karl, 1995:1). They are frequently excluded from positions of power (UNDP, 1993:25).

Women, according to Ubi (2008), constitute at least half of the human race, yet on the basis of three recognized dimensions of inequality- class (economic situation) status, (social position) and political power, women occupy secondary place in relation to men, a position which correlates in many respects with that of minorities.

According to Manuh(1998), women had their own age-grade associations and leaders and wielded power in spheres regarded as exclusively feminine, guaranteeing them some leverage in decision processes and allowing them to negotiate with men. Through their involvement in the birth and care of children, some women developed extensive knowledge of herbs and healing powers and had important religious roles and achieved fame and recognition. Women perform all domestic tasks, while many also farm and trade. They are responsible for the care of children, the sick and the elderly, in addition to performing essential social functions within their communities. They seek to manage the environment, although their struggle for survival often results in environmental damage from activities such as fuel-wood collection. These tasks have made women to be the breadwinners in one out of three households in the world (United Nations Report, 1989). Women have played important roles in history. It is on record that the Amazons of Dahomey, a standing army of 60,000 female participated in raids on Nigerian border towns. The raid did not succeed because Nigeria also had her Madam Tinubu, the Iyalode of Egba who procured on regular basis weapons of superior value from Lagos for Egba army (Okunola, 2002:293). Most of them were queens in the courts and palaces and were noted for their power and authority. In the Yoruba kingdom of the South Western Nigeria, women were made Obas (kings) (Afonja, 1996 and Aina, 1991).

According to Duley and Edwards(1976:324), “among the Yorubas, a major trading people of South western Nigeria, women as a group had official public representation through a variety of institutions including the office of the Iyalode, an influential women appointed to the ruler’s council of chiefs, who functioned as the leader and spokesperson for the women of the city. The Iyalode had her own court and council of subordinate female chiefs to make decisions and adjudicate disputes connected with women’s dominant role in trade and market as well as domestic concerns. These roles were complementary to those of the male chiefs; the Iyalode participated in all the judicial and political affairs of the royal court, and some Iyalode were major political powers in their states”.

In the Eastern part of Nigeria, group of women known as the “Otu Umuada” were known for their dynamism and powerfullness in politics of the east (Uchendu, 1993). Also, among the Hausa, women held offices and titles like Iya, Magajiuga and Mardini before the 1804 Jihad. Prominent of such women was Queen Amina of Zaria. Women have participated greatly in other development strides in Nigeria. In 1887, a league of ladies was reported to have played a major role in the control of malaria in Lagos and its environs. Women demonstrating in sack cloth took up the gauntlet to check ineffective control of thieves in Ibadan between 1904 and 1907. There were also group actions by women to check the abuse of their rights. Among such group actions were the 1929 Aba women’s agitation against property taxation(Aba Women’s Riots) and the Egba Women Movement of late 1940s (nineteen forties) led by late Chief Dr. (Mrs.) Funmilayo Ransome Kuti in a mass protest against women taxation (Okunola,2002:293).

Historical accounts and oral records reveal that women in Nigeria had actively contributed to the social, economic and political development of their societies as far back as the 19th century. According to Johnson (1966), Awe (1991), Mba (1982), Denzer (1994) and Hallet (1965), women played significant roles within their families and communities. Their roles are important in economic, social and political areas. In economic life, they are producers or consumers, entrepreneurs and employees. In social life, as members of families or of community organisations or groups and in political life, as voters or members of the political parties or perhaps pressure groups (UNDP, 1993:22).

Anikpo (2000) and Agbola (1996) have emphasized the important roles women play in national development. The issue of women’s contribution to the development of communities and in search for the real place of women in development building still continues. In the traditional African society, women have been noted for their great effort and involvement in community development efforts. Community development is an indigenous mechanism and technique employed by the people to identify their felt needs, choose what they want and take co-operative action to satisfy their needs. Women form themselves into groups or co-operatives to move the communities forward. They act as volunteers to work for the
improvement of the community. Indeed, they are responsible for development issues of the community only (Deekor and Nnodim, 2005).

According to Trecker and Trecker (1979), there is little that the individuals can do alone as far as improving the community life is concerned. It is very essential that the individual work with other like-minded people in groups to make a meaningful achievement not only satisfying the basic human needs but also to raise the condition of living of the people to acceptable standards (Onibokun and Faniran, 1995:195). To make headway in the provision of such services like health, co-operatives, education, public safety and so on, it is essential for the people to make effort to effect the desired changes. This is the origin of community approach to development (Biddle and Biddle, 1965; Goshi, 1994; Onibokun, 1976, Mabogunje, 1980; Ijere, 1992; CASSAD, 1991a and b).

The organisation of people in a locality to solve the problems bordering on their lives and pattern of living is the main thrust of community development. Ever since the Second World War, there has been constant emphasis on community planning and community action involving citizens to take active part in the formulation, execution and implementation of programmes which they themselves will carry on to fruition. In such a situation, government can now come to render assistance to the people concerned. This united effort of the people with those of governmental authorities is highlighted in the United Nations definition of community development as “the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities to integrate those communities into the life of the nation and to enable them contribute fully to national progress” (United Nations, 1957: 4 and United Nations, 1963: 4). This definition is embedded with two key elements. The first, is the participation of the people themselves in efforts to improve their level of standard of living with as much reliance as possible on their own initiatives. While the second is the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiatives, self-help or mutual-help and consequently make these services more effective.

In many communities, especially in developing countries of the world like Nigeria, a new approach to grassroots development or self-help has received enormous attention in the last five decades. This approach centres on self-chosen development that ensures the initiation of a self-generative, self-sustaining and enduring growth. The crux of the matter is the emphasis on the need for communities to initiate and support their own development. This implies that, communities should initiate and implement their own development in whatever small way to support government efforts. The needs of the people are multifarious and because governments cannot meet up with all the needs of the people due to immense financial constraints and dwindling resources, community self-help endeavours have become paramount in community development practice in Nigeria.

The main concept of community development is that a community should help itself by providing its felt needs. This is the reason why many communities in Nigeria embark on self-help development projects such as roads, markets, health centres, maternity homes, schools, bridges, water, town halls or civic centres and rural electricity projects. Majority of Nigerians still live in the rural areas despite the considerable economic growth of the nation. These rural areas also suffer a great deal of neglect and are very backward in terms of living conditions and provisions of social amenities.

Community service was, and is still part of the way of life of the women in Rivers State, Nigeria. Indeed women in Rivers State have through various forms of traditional education sought to perpetuate training in self-help and self-reliant programmes. Right from the tender age, the spirit and purposes of mutual work assistance get inculcated in the women through practical work experience, communal projects and moonlight tale extolling their virtues of self-help. Mothers teach the young through systematized apprenticeship and through the guilds, necessary skills in agriculture, fishing, art and craft so that the communities are appropriately equipped to change and control their own environments for the better.

Various efforts have been made by government, local communities, voluntary and international governmental and nongovernmental organisations to transform the rural communities in recent times. The strategies that are being employed is best carried out under the umbrella of women groups to provide the felt needs of the community in the areas of welfare service, environmental sanitation, health services and provision of other infrastructure to make life meaningful for them. When these are achieved, there is a process of “community development”. Therefore, it is not out of place to say that community organisation is the “heart of community development”. Women groups as community organisation is primarily aimed at helping people within a local community to identify their social needs, to consider the most effective ways of meeting these and to set about doing so, as far as their available resources permit. It is a stage further removed from the individual, it aims to build up and preserve a form of society which both pre-supposes and reinforces common direction of interest and co-operation in order to achieve shared aims.

Rural community development activities are being promoted by women complimentary investment in primary and secondary education; construction of feeder roads, provision of social services like deep wells, sinking of bores holes, creation of bus stops and building of waiting sheds; advancement of economic activities through creation of markets; provision of health facilities like health centres and maternity homes. These projects
help to reduce rural-urban migration among other objectives that can improve the socio-economic and political life of the people in the local government area. The growing concern for and investment in community development programmes by women in Rivers State, Nigeria call for an urgent need to foster effective women groups to ensure community participation in rural community development.

Objectives of the study
This study examines the role of women in community development activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specially, the study was designed to:
- Examine how women promote rural community development activities in area of health living standard in Rivers State;
- Ascertain the success level of women in promoting rural community development activities in area of road networks in Rivers State.

Hypothesis
The following a null hypothesis was formulated for testing in this study and is tested at 0.05 level of significance: There is no significant relationship between the women and their contribution to rural community development activities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY
The study area is Rivers State. Rivers State was created by Decree No. 19 of 31st May,1967 out of the then Eastern Region during the regime of General Yakubu Gowon. The state is located in the Niger Delta Basin of the country. It has a landmass of 37,000 square kilometres, with 23 local government areas. The state has a population of about 6million. The traditional occupations of the people include farming, fishing and retail trading. The state is blessed with abundant mineral resources of crude oil and gas, almost all year round rainfall, fresh water sources and forest resources. The present of mineral resources has made the state to be strategic to the economy of Nigeria. The study is limited to the 23 local government areas and their geographic limits that make up the state. This study is limited in scope and focuses principally on examining only the role of women in rural community development activities in Rivers State.

The study adopted a correlational research design method. This is so because the study attempted to establish the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Since the population is categorized into subgroups, the researchers used the multi-stage sampling technique by drawing the sample sizes from the adult and adolescent population of the state that constitute the catchment zone of the study. This technique was used so as to have a fair and wider representation of the population on the basis of age, social status, education, profession and marital status. Thus, the sample consisted of six hundred women. They were randomly selected.

Questionnaire served as the instrument the major means of data collection in this study. It contains 12 structured items and was designed to elicit information on women and rural community development activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The items were carefully and articulately framed bearing in mind that the responses so desired form the nucleus of the study. The design of the questionnaire was based on the research questions and the hypothesis raised in this study. Ideas from previous research literatures and authors’ experiences also formed the basis for the design of the research instrument. The data generated was analysed using item-by-item analysis to show frequencies, mean and standard deviation scores and presented in appropriate tables to answer the research questions. To determine the extent of significant relationship existing between the independent variables and the dependent variable at 0.05 alpha levels, the researchers employed Kuder Richardson Formula 21.

The content and face validity of the research instrument was ascertain in order to establish the ability of the research instrument to measure relationship among the variables of interest that has been designed for. The questionnaire which served as the instrument for the study was subjected to expert judgement of experts in community development, rural development, adult education, agricultural extension, measurement and evaluation. The experts’ criticism and suggestions were useful in refining the items.

The instrument was assessed for reliability using the test-re-test technique and Kuder Richardson Formula 21. The test-re-test procedure assessed the stability of the instrument while Kuder Richardson Formula 21 assessed the internal consistency index of instrument. The instrument was administered to 30 respondents similar to those used for the study and it gave an internal consistency index of 0.83. The researchers personally administered the instrument to the respondents. The data collected through the questionnaire were analysed for the purpose of the study. Mean statistics were used to analyze the response measures on the questionnaire. The respondents to the instrument indicated one response option using the 4-point Likert-type rating scale responses (Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Strongly Disagreed and Disagreed). The decision rule based on statistical real limits of numbers were used to determine the acceptance and rejection of the items. A cut-off or decision point of 2.50 and above was regarded as a favourable decision (agreed) and decision point below 2.50 as unfavourable (disagreed). To test the hypothesis, the t-test for independent samples was computed and used for the analysis.

RESULTS
There is no significant relationship between the women and rural community development activities in Rivers State, Nigeria (Table 1).
The data above indicate that women disagreed with provision of electricity, vigilante exercise, provision of drugs in the health centres/maternity homes, building of public toilets/latrines, building of classroom blocks and road construction. While they agreed with provision of pipe-borne water, provision of credit facilities, award of scholarships, building of health centres/maternity homes, renovation of classrooms and building of market stalls. The data also indicated that women obtained a grand mean and standard deviation of 2.64 and 0.67 respectively. Hence women played a vital role in rural community development activities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

The mean (N) and standard deviation (SD) scores computed from the respondents’ response scores about women and their contribution to rural community development activities in Rivers State, Nigeria is presented in the above table. With N=600, df =598 and P< 0.05, the calculated t (0.943) is less than the critical values of t (1.960). Hence there is no significant (P<0.05) difference between the mean ratings of the two variables (Table 2).

That being so therefore, the calculated t is statistically significant at α=0.05, since it is lesser than the critical value of t. The hypothesis is thus, accepted and the conclusion is that, there is a no significant relationship between women and their contributions to the rural community development activities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The hypothesis tested show that the t-test result calculated was lower than the critical table value, which implied that there is no significant relationship between women and their contribution to the rural community development activities in Rivers State, Nigeria as contained in the table above in this study. According to the table, majority of the respondents testified that women are making meaningful contributions to the rural community development activities in the state. According to the respondents used in the study, women have embarked on socio-economic related community development projects like organising social events, construction of mini industries, award of scholarship, providing loans, construction of public toilets and bathrooms, erecting bus stop sheds, erecting market stalls, filling of pot-holes, building health centres, embarking on group farming, embarking on sanitation, providing pipe-borne water supply and assisting in school renovation.

This finding supports Anikpo (1998), Karl (1995) and Beard (1973) that there are historical roots of women’s contemporary participation in community development activities. And that of Nwachukwu and Asiabaka (2007), that women, embark on community development projects such as health services, renovating schools and building women centres. Also, the study supports Ogunlela and Mukhtar (2009), Matthew-Njoku (2004) and Asiabaka

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**Table 1:** Relationship between the women and rural community development activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities carried out by women</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>Level of significant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electricity Supply</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building of Public Toilets/Latrines</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road Construction</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building of market stalls</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renovation of Classrooms</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigilantee Exercise</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of Drugs in Health Centres</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building of Health Centres/Maternity homes</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of Credit facilities</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of Pipe-borne Water</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building of Classroom blocks</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Award of Scholarships</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Mean</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Standard deviation(s)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2:** T-test Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>SDx</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>tcal</th>
<th>Critical t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.053</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>0.943</td>
<td>1.960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Development Activities</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=006, df=598, P<0.05, * Significant
(1990) that women have been active stakeholders in community development in recent times. Indeed, the study confirms that the contributions of women are critical in the development process (Ihimodu, 1996).

The study confirms Kwapong (2007) that rural women have been key actors in solving major issues on the development agenda, including the need to manage the environment in a sustainable manner, control the exploding rate of population and urbanization, ensure food security, provide human needs with regard to health, promote education and literacy and eliminate poverty.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
The findings of the study established that there is a no significant relationship between the two variables examined in the study. The study really affirms the submission of Akande (1992) that women are special targets for development in-order to enhance efficiency and effective use of human resources. The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

(i) That governmental and non-governmental agencies should encourage and motivate women groups to embark on more meaningful rural community development projects through adequate funding and provision of grants.
(ii) That the education and training of women should encouraged, as a way to increase women's participation and decision-making process.
(iii) That efforts should be geared towards ensuring effective women participation in rural community development programmes.
(iv) Women should have access to affordable credit, information, technical advice and services for them to expand their enterprises.

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