

Counselling as Social Work for Women Empowerment in Akwa Ibom State: A Case Study of Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area. Implications for Counsellors

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ABSTRACT

The research titled: Counselling as Social Work for Women Empowerment in Akwa Ibom State: A case Study of Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area. Implications for Counsellors was conducted. The background to the study was fully researched. Problems to the study were discussed. Two aims and objectives as well as two research questions were set. Significances of the study were ascertained, the scope measured and terms defined as used in the study. Conceptual, theoretical and Empirical Literature were reviewed. Feminist theory was used. Survey and descriptive research design were used. Three hundred and seventy-four (374) was the samples. Data was collected with the use of questionnaire after their validity and reliability had been tested by experts and proven as acceptable coefficient. Data collected were analyzed using Frequencies and percentages and the results present in table-by-table formula and their results discussed as well. Thereafter, the study was summarized and concluded. Some recommendations were made among which are: In order to assist Women in Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area become Empowered, Counsellors should conduct in Ibiono Ibom Local intensive Counselling sessions as social work for women themselves, Philanthropists from that area and it environ, Chairman and his Cabinets(both formal and informal), Stakeholders, Community Leaders, Chairman's wife and kindhearted well placed females on different ways for which they can contribute in supporting, encouraging, projecting and even promoting Women Empowerment in Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Women's empowerment and community development are two interrelated concepts that are pivotal for sustainable societal transformation. Empowerment of women, particularly in rural settings such as Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area (LGA) in Akwa Ibom State, has been widely acknowledged as one of the most effective tools for driving community development (Adebayo, 2020). Women empowerment refers to the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices, control their lives, and access resources (ILO, 2020a).

In Ibiono Ibom LGA, which is predominantly rural, women are typically engaged in subsistence farming, small-scale trading, and domestic work. These activities often occur within gendered divisions of labor that confine women to roles with limited decision-making power and economic value (Akinyemi, 2021). In these contexts, women often lack access to formal education, financial services, and healthcare, and are excluded from governance structures (UN Women, 2021). Empowering women in these areas can lead to significant improvements in household income, educational outcomes, health, and the overall well-being of the community (UN Women 2020). Ibiono Ibom LGA, located in Akwa Ibom State, is a rural area that has been shaped by its traditional values, which emphasize patriarchal systems where women's roles are often relegated to domestic tasks (Akinyemi, 2021). Historically, women in this region have faced cultural, social, and economic challenges, which have limited their participation in formal governance and decision-making processes (UN Women, 2021). Though women contribute significantly to agriculture and local economies, their contributions are often underappreciated and undervalued. This disparity has led to socio-economic inequities that hinder broader community development (Ogunyemi, 2021).

In recent years, there have been efforts to address gender inequality in Ibiono Ibom through governmental and non-governmental initiatives. These efforts have focused on improving women's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. For example, the National Gender Policy and various local programs have sought to integrate women into the political, economic, and social spheres more effectively (Akinyemi, 2021a). However, despite these initiatives, the challenges of deep-rooted cultural biases and limited infrastructural development in rural communities have made it difficult for women to achieve full empowerment.

Women's empowerment is a general critical factor in driving development of any sort in the society as the women are the home maker. And since women are the chief nurturer, they are bestow with the Grace and responsibilities of producing human beings that will saddle the nation's economy generationally (UN Women, 2020). Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area women are not excluded from these mandates hence their setback can hinder even community development in Ibiono Ibom LGA, Akwa Ibom State. While significant progress has been made in some areas, there remain substantial barriers that limit women's full participation in the development process (UNDP, 2021b). Addressing these barriers through targeted policies, sustainable empowerment programs, and the active participation of women in governance will be essential for fostering inclusive and sustainable community development in Ibiono Ibom (World Bank, 2021b; World Bank, 2020). By empowering women, not only are their lives improved, but they also become key drivers of economic growth, social cohesion, and political stability, thereby contributing to the overall development of their communities (ILO, 2021; UN Women, 2021b).

Statement of Problem

Women empowerment remains a crucial issue in rural communities across Nigeria, including Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area (LGA) in Akwa Ibom State. Despite the global recognition of the significant role that women play in sustainable development, many women in Ibiono Ibom still face gender-based barriers such as limited access to education, healthcare, economic resources, and decision-making processes. These barriers severely hinder the progress of women and limit their capacity to contribute to the development of their communities.

While there have been some efforts by the government and non-governmental organizations to empower women through various programs, the impact of these interventions on community development remains unclear. There is a lack of comprehensive understanding of how women empowerment in Ibiono Ibom affects community development, particularly in rural settings. This research, therefore, seeks to investigate the extent to which women's empowerment initiatives influence the socio-economic and political development of Ibiono Ibom LGA.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to assess the role of women empowerment in fostering community development in Ibiono Ibom LGA, Akwa Ibom State. The objectives are to:

1. examine the level of women's participation in community development activities in Ibiono Ibom LGA.
2. identify the challenges faced by women in Ibiono Ibom LGA in accessing empowerment opportunities.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are women in Ibiono Ibom LGA involved in community development activities?
2. What are the major challenges women in Ibiono Ibom face in accessing empowerment programs and resources?

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant relevance for various stakeholders, including policymakers, development agencies, Counsellors, women's advocacy groups, and the residents of Ibiono Ibom LGA. The findings of this study can provide valuable insights for policymakers at the local and state levels in designing more effective women

empowerment programs tailored to the unique needs of rural communities like Ibiono Ibom. It will highlight the challenges women face in rural settings and provide recommendations for improving empowerment initiatives, ensuring they are accessible and impactful. To add to other benefits, this findings will give Counsellors better insight of where and why they should anchor their enlightening awareness campaign nets rural areas more and better.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area in Akwa Ibom State. The study will focus on women in this community, exploring their involvement in socio-economic activities, community development projects, and local governance.

Definition of Terms

Community Development: The process of improving the well-being of a community through active participation of its members in efforts that focus on bettering the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the area. This can involve development in areas such as infrastructure, health, education, and economic growth.

Gender Equality: The state in which individuals, regardless of gender, have equal access to opportunities, resources, and rights in all areas of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and political participation.

Ibiono Ibom LGA: A local government area in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, known for its predominantly rural population and agricultural economy. The area is home to various cultural traditions and faces development challenges typical of rural Nigerian communities.

Local Governance: The system of governing at the local level, involving decision-making processes that address the needs of a community. It includes participation in policy development, resource allocation, and implementation of government initiatives at the grassroots level.

NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations): Private organizations that operate independently of the government to address various social, economic, and cultural issues. Many NGOs focus on women's empowerment and community development in rural Nigeria.

Socio-Economic Development: The improvement of the economic and social conditions of individuals and communities. This includes raising income levels, improving healthcare and education systems, providing employment opportunities, and ensuring equitable access to resources.

Sustainable Development: Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This concept encompasses economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

Women Empowerment: The process by which women are given the tools, opportunities, and support to gain control over their lives, make decisions, and participate fully in society. This includes access to education, economic resources, healthcare, and political participation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

The concept of women empowerment: Historical perspectives, success stories, challenges and promises

Women empowerment is a multidimensional concept that has gained significant global attention in recent decades. It is rooted in the belief that women should have equal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power in all spheres of life. Empowerment can take many forms, including economic independence, access to education, participation in governance, and control over one's own body and choices (UN Women, 2021a). Historically, women have been marginalized and oppressed in most societies, subjected to restrictive

gender norms and cultural practices that confined them to the domestic sphere. In many cultures, women were denied the right to own property, vote, or access education, and their roles were typically restricted to that of wives and mothers (Akinyemi, 2021a). The struggle for women's empowerment has thus been a long and arduous journey, one that spans centuries of activism, reform, and social change.

The promise of gender equality also holds significant potential for peace and security. Studies have shown that countries with higher levels of gender equality are more likely to experience political stability and peace. Women's involvement in peacebuilding efforts has been shown to be particularly effective, as they often bring a more holistic and inclusive approach to conflict resolution (Boserup et al., 2020). While the journey toward women's empowerment has been fraught with challenges, the successes and promises for the future remain immense (UN Women, 2022). Women's empowerment has the potential to drive significant socio-economic and political change, improving the lives of women and the wider society. As we continue to address the barriers women face, the global community must commit to ensuring that, women everywhere can access the resources and opportunities they need to thrive (World Bank, 2020).

Government and Women Empowerment: Roles, Policies, and Impact

Women's empowerment is a critical component in the global pursuit of gender equality and sustainable development. Empowerment involves enabling women to take control of their lives, make informed decisions, and access resources and opportunities on an equal footing with men. The role of the government in this process is crucial, as it sets the legal, political, and social framework within which empowerment can occur (Akinyemi, 2021). Through policies, laws, and institutional frameworks, governments have the power to promote or hinder women's empowerment. Governments play an essential role in promoting women's empowerment through legislation, policy-making, resource allocation, and the establishment of institutions that promote gender equality. At its core, government empowerment policies seek to dismantle systemic gender inequalities that hinder women's access to education, healthcare, political participation, economic opportunities, and protection from violence (UN Women, 2021a).

Governments create policies that either directly or indirectly support the empowerment of women. These include laws that mandate gender equality in education, the workplace, and politics, as well as policies that provide access to healthcare, reproductive rights, and violence protection. Furthermore, the government's ability to implement these policies effectively is critical in determining the extent to which they empower women (Tripp, 2021). One of the most significant global frameworks for advancing women's rights is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the United Nations in 1979. CEDAW serves as an international legal instrument that compels countries to pass laws and enact policies to eliminate discrimination against women. Many countries, including those in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, have adopted national policies inspired by CEDAW, addressing issues such as domestic violence, discrimination in the workplace, and gender-based violence (UN Women, 2020).

In addition to international conventions, governments worldwide have initiated domestic laws and policies aimed at empowering women. For instance, India's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign, launched in 2015, aims to improve the welfare of girls by addressing issues such as gender discrimination, early marriage, and lack of educational opportunities (Mishra, 2021).

International Institutions and Women Empowerment: Roles, Policies, and Impact

Women's empowerment has become a central focus of global development efforts, and international institutions have played a significant role in advancing this cause. Empowering women involves enabling them to exercise their rights, access opportunities, and participate in decision-making processes across all sectors of society (UN 2022). International institutions, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have created frameworks, policies, and initiatives to promote gender equality and empower women around the world (UN Women, 2020). International institutions have long been at the forefront of promoting women's rights and empowerment, working in collaboration with governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector to advance gender equality (AU, 2020). These

institutions serve as critical platforms for shaping global norms, setting standards, and providing technical assistance and resources to member states (Choudhury, 2020).

The United Nations (UN), through its various bodies, has been one of the most influential international institutions in shaping global policies on women's empowerment. UN Women, established in 2010, is a key organization within the UN system dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN Women works on a range of issues, including women's participation in politics, economic empowerment, ending violence against women, and promoting women's access to education and health (UN Women, 2021). The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was adopted in 1979, serves as the international legal framework that obligates countries to implement laws and policies aimed at eliminating gender discrimination (United Nations, 2022).

NGOs and Women Empowerment: Catalysts for Change

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have long played a crucial role in advancing social change, particularly in the empowerment of women. By bridging the gap between government policies and grassroots implementation, NGOs have become significant actors in promoting gender equality, addressing women's rights, and creating sustainable development initiatives. Their roles span advocacy, service provision, and capacity-building in communities worldwide (IRC, 2021). NGOs are non-profit entities that operate independently from government structures and are often driven by the desire to address social injustices. They have become key players in shaping the discourse around women's rights and empowerment globally (Women Deliver, 2022). NGOs focus on different facets of empowerment, including economic independence, education, political participation, health, and protection from violence. By providing essential services and advocating for policy changes, NGOs help foster an environment that supports women's rights and autonomy (Swerdlow, 2021).

One key aspect of women's empowerment promoted by NGOs is economic independence. NGOs have implemented numerous microfinance programs, vocational training, and entrepreneurship initiatives, particularly in developing countries (Choudhury, 2021a). These initiatives enable women to access financial resources, acquire skills, and start their own businesses. A well-known example of this is Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which provides microloans to women in rural areas, enabling them to establish small businesses and improve their economic status (Chowdhury, 2021). Such initiatives empower women by enhancing their financial literacy and enabling their participation in economic decision-making, which in turn improves their standard of living and provides them with a degree of independence.

Counselling, Social Work and Community Development: Interconnections and Impact

Counselling, Social work and community development are intertwined fields that all seek to improve the well-being of individuals and communities, although their methods and approaches can differ. While Counselling and Social work focus on supporting individuals and families, particularly those facing challenges such as poverty, mental health issues, and social injustice, community development emphasizes collective action to foster sustainable, inclusive growth in a community. Despite these distinctions, both disciplines share the common goal of enhancing human dignity, empowering individuals, and creating healthier, more equitable societies through Counselling and intervention (Moser, 2021).

Counselling is a profession committed to improving people's lives through Counselling, advocacy, direct service, and community engagement. Counsellors work in various settings, including schools, hospitals, prisons, and community organizations, offering support to individuals and groups dealing with issues like academic and socio-personal developmental challenges and pains, mental health, substance abuse, homelessness, and family violence. The profession is grounded in principles of problems and pains averting, dilemma solving, solution providing and self-actualization attainment social justice, human rights, and dignity, with emphasis on empowerment and liberation—helping individuals gain control over their decisions lives (Denga, 2024). A central tenet of Counselling is the person-in-environment perspective, which views individuals not in isolation but as part of their broader social systems (Saleebey, 2021). This perspective acknowledges that personal problems cannot be understood without considering the context in which a person lives—whether that is their family, developmental, community, or society at large (Effiong, 2025). Most often than non, Counsellors that

practice Social working address these challenges by working with individuals and communities to create solutions that are both holistic and sustainable (Mander, 2021).

Counselling and Women Empowerment: Synergies for Social Change

Counselling is a profession rooted in the values of rendering Counselling and guidance services for better understanding that facilitate and promote wise decision taking (Effiong, 2023). It seeks to improve the well-being of individuals, families, and communities by addressing conflicting and disturbing issues of any ramification like being that connected to social, emotional, and economic issues (Effiong & Essien, 2022). One of the fundamental areas of Counselling practice is empowerment through better and proper understanding, which is a key approach for fostering change in marginalized populations, including women. In fact, Women empowerment, in the context of social work which is human service-oriented Profession like Counselling, focuses on enabling women through proper counselling have control over their lives, make decisions, and access resources, thereby having and enjoying all-round improved life. (Goldman & Lurie, 2021, Effiong & Denga 2021).

Social work as a profession emphasizes empowerment as one of its core values. Empowerment in social work is a process that enables individuals or communities to gain control over their circumstances and take charge of their futures (Saleebey, 2021). It is a process that aims to reduce power imbalances and promote equality, allowing individuals to gain autonomy and self-determination (Saleebey, 2021). Empowerment is especially crucial when working with women, as they often face societal and systemic barriers that limit their opportunities and freedoms. Social workers adopt empowerment strategies to help women overcome these challenges, providing them with the tools and resources necessary to navigate and transform their circumstances (UN Women, 2022).

Social work theory related to empowerment involves the strengths perspective, which focuses on individuals' and communities' inherent strengths, resources, and resilience (Germain & Gitterman, 2021). This approach is fundamental when working with women, as it shifts the focus from deficits and challenges to the capacities that women possess to bring about change in their lives. This theory aligns well with the feminist framework, which advocates for gender equality, challenges patriarchal structures, and promotes women's rights (Germain & Gitterman, 2021).

Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria: An Overview

Ibiono Ibom is one of the 31 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Akwa Ibom State, located in the southern region of Nigeria. It is strategically positioned with a rich history and diverse culture, contributing significantly to the state's social, economic, and political landscape. The LGA is known for her agricultural activities, community development efforts, and her vibrant cultural heritage, with the people of Ibiono Ibom playing a key role in the growth and sustainability of Akwa Ibom State. Ibiono Ibom LGA is located in the central part of Akwa Ibom State, bordered by other LGAs such as Uruan, Nsit Ibom, and Uyo, the state capital. The area is accessible through major roads, contributing to her role as a vital hub for agricultural trade and community interaction (Effiong & Umo, 2025). It covers a total land area of approximately 650 square kilometers and is home to an estimated population of over 200,000 residents, according to the National Population Commission (NPC, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Theory

Feminism is a broad and evolving movement that advocates for the social, political, and economic equality of the genders, with a primary focus on improving the status and well-being of women. Feminist theory encompasses a wide range of ideas and approaches that challenge gender-based inequality and advocate for the empowerment of women (Denga, 2024). It plays a significant role in reshaping societal norms and values, particularly in regions like Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area (LGA), Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, where women face deep-rooted patriarchal structures and cultural barriers.

Feminist theory, as outlined by scholars like bell hooks (2021) and Judith Butler (2021), is rooted in the examination of power dynamics between men and women, with a focus on social justice. It emphasizes that gender inequality is not only a personal issue but also a social and political one that needs structural change. Feminists argue that societal systems have been historically constructed to privilege men, leaving women marginalized in many aspects of life, including politics, education, and economic opportunities and even inheritance. The theory advocates for the dismantling of these power imbalances and works toward creating spaces where women can enjoy the same rights and opportunities as their male counterparts.

Feminist theory offers a crucial framework for understanding and addressing the challenges that women in Ibiono Ibom LGA face in terms of empowerment and community development. By challenging traditional gender roles and promoting women's access to resources, education, recognition, inheritance and leadership positions, feminist theory contributes to the overall development of the region. As women are empowered to take part in decision-making, both in their households and communities, their contributions will have far-reaching effects on social and economic progress in Ibiono Ibom. Ultimately, the application of feminist principles fosters a more just and equitable society where women are active participants in the development of their communities.

Empirical Review

Udo, (2025) conducted a study entitled: *Gender, Agriculture, and Women Empowerment in Ibiono Ibom LGA*. The aim of the study was to assess the role of agriculture in empowering women in Ibiono Ibom LGA, Akwa Ibom State. The objectives included evaluating women's involvement in agriculture and its impact on their economic and social status. The study used a descriptive survey method. Data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to 100 women involved in agricultural activities in Ibiono Ibom. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages and frequencies. The study found that, women's involvement in agriculture significantly enhanced their financial independence, but they faced challenges such as limited access to land and financial resources.

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that, empowering women in agriculture could substantially improve their socio-economic status in Ibiono Ibom. Consequently, the recommendation that women in Ibiono Ibom be provided with better access to land, financial support, and agricultural training was made. The study by Effiong., (2025) is similar to this current study in the sense that both works focus on empowering women in Ibiono Ibom through economic activities, specifically agriculture. Both are however different because while this study concentrates on agriculture, the current research broadens the focus to community development in general.

Etim (2021) conducted a study entitled: *The Role of Women in Community Development in Ibiono Ibom LGA*. The study was aimed at evaluating how women contribute to community development in Ibiono Ibom LGA. It made use of qualitative research, employing interviews with 40 community leaders and women in Ibiono Ibom LGA. Thematic analysis was used to categorize responses from the interviews. Based on the analysis it was found out that, women were found to be highly active in small-scale community projects but were often sidelined in large community decision-making processes. Based on the findings it was concluded that, women play a crucial role in community development at the grassroots level but require more involvement in decision-making processes.

The study recommended policies that encourage women's inclusion in local governance and decision-making. Etim (2021) and this current study are similar because they recognize the significant role of women in community development. The works are however different in the sense that, Etim (2021) study focuses on women's roles in community projects, while the current research investigates broader empowerment dynamics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the research design, area of study, population of the study, sample and sampling techniques, data collection methods, validity and reliability of the research instrument, and methods of data analysis.

Research Design

The research design for this study is Survey. The descriptive design is suitable as it will provide an overview of the state of women empowerment and its impact on community development in Ibiono Ibom LGA. This will include exploring the roles women play in community development and the extent to which their empowerment has contributed to positive socio-economic changes in the area.

Area of Study

The area of study is Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area (LGA), located in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Ibiono Ibom is a rural LGA with a population predominantly engaged in agricultural activities, small-scale businesses, and informal trade. It also has a growing urban population involved in education, civil service, and commerce. Ibiono Ibom LGA is culturally diverse, with varying socio-economic dynamics that influence women's roles in the community. Over the years, there have been efforts by both governmental and non-governmental organizations to empower women through programs focused on education, vocational training, healthcare, and microfinance, which has impacted the socio-economic development of the area.

Population of the Study

The population of this study consists of women aged 18 and above residing in Ibiono Ibom LGA. These women represent diverse backgrounds in terms of education, occupation, and social status.

Given that the research focuses on the impact of women empowerment on community development, it is important to include women from various socio-economic strata, including those in agriculture, small businesses, education, health, and politics. The total population of Ibiono Ibom LGA is estimated to be over 250,000, with a significant portion of this number being women. The specific target population for this study was approximately 10,000 women who actively participate in community development programs, local governance, and socio-economic activities in the LGA.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure that women from various backgrounds, socio-economic statuses, and geographical areas within Ibiono Ibom LGA are adequately represented in the sample. Stratified sampling will involve dividing the population into distinct strata or sub-groups based on factors such as:

- Age
- Level of education
- Occupation (e.g., farmers, traders, teachers, health workers)
- Participation in women empowerment programs

From each stratum, a random sample was selected using a simple random sampling technique to ensure equal probability of selection for all participants within each subgroup. The sample size was determined using a sample size calculator for a population of over 10,000. Based on standard statistical procedures, a sample size of 384 women were selected for the study, which is large enough to provide reliable and valid results. By the time the research instrument was administered and retrieved from the respondents, only 374 were valid, hence analysis was done based on this sample size.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. While secondary data was sourced from existing records, reports, and studies related to women empowerment and community development. A structured questionnaire was developed to collect quantitative data on women empowerment and its impact on community development. The questionnaire had 12 items, 4 open ended questions, 6 close ended questions, and 2 follow-up questions.

Validity of the Research Instrument

The validity of the research instrument was ensured by content validity and face validity. To ensure that the questionnaire adequately captures the variables of interest, the instrument was reviewed by experts in the fields of gender studies, community development, and social research. These experts evaluated whether the items in the questionnaire cover all relevant aspects of women empowerment and community development. The questionnaire also underwent a pre-test with a small group of respondents (approximately 30 women) from Ibiono Ibom LGA, who provided feedback on the clarity and relevance of the questions. The feedback helped refine the questionnaire to ensure that, it is easily understood and culturally appropriate.

Reliability of the Research Instrument

To assess the reliability of the research instrument, the study used a test-retest method and internal consistency techniques.

Test-Retest Reliability: The questionnaire was administered to a small sample of women in Ibiono Ibom LGA who are not part of the main study. After a two-week interval, the same respondents completed the questionnaire again. The consistency of their responses was evaluated to ensure that the instrument produces stable results over time.

Internal Consistency: The internal consistency of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. A value of 0.70 or higher indicated that, the instrument has adequate reliability, meaning that, the items within the questionnaire are measuring the same underlying construct.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative data collected through the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions and percentages. The qualitative data collected through open ended questions on the questionnaire was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Themes and patterns that emerge from the interviews were identified and categorized to better understand the impact of women empowerment on community development.

DATAP RESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Data Presentation/Analysis

Table 4.1 Respondents' take on women active participation in community development activities in Ibiono Ibom Local government area

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	150	40
No	120	32
Not Sure	104	28
Total	374	100

Table 4.1 shows that majority of the respondents have participated in community development activities in Ibiono Ibom local government area.

Table 4.2 Respondents' responses on the types of community development activities women participate in most frequently

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Educational programs	97	26
Health campaigns	83	22
Economic empowerment initiatives	92	25
Social welfare activities	53	14

Environmental awareness programs	28	7
None of the above	10	3
Other	11	3
Total	374	100

According to table 4.2 educational programmes, health campaigns and economic empowerment initiatives were tops among the types of community development activities respondents participated in most.

Table 4.3 Respondents' take on community valuing women's participation in community development.

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	150	40
No	80	21
Sometimes	100	27
Not Sure	44	12
Total	374	100

Table 4.3 indicates that majority of the respondents believe the community value women participating in community development

Table 4.4 Respondents' take on the major challenges women face in accessing empowerment programmes in Ibiono Ibom LGA

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of awareness about available programmes	85	23
Limited access to financial resources	75	20
Cultural and societal norms restricting women's participation	60	16
Lack of education or skills	50	13
Limited transportation to access programmes	45	12
Gender discrimination	35	9.5
Others	24	6.5
Total	374	100

According to table 4.7 lack of awareness about available programmes, limited access to financial resources and cultural and societal norms restricting women's participation were among the top three challenges respondents mentioned women face in accessing empowerment programmes in Ibiono Ibom LGA.

Table 4.5 Respondents' take on how the challenges women face in accessing empowerment programmes in Ibiono Ibom LGA can be addressed

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Increase awareness on available programmes	74	19.8
Improve access to financial resources	60	16
Address cultural and societal norms	75	20.1
Provide education and skills training	65	17.4
Enhance transportation accessibility	30	8
Combat gender discrimination	70	18.7
Total	374	100

Table 4.8 shows that increase awareness on available programmes, improve access to financial resources and the addressing of cultural and societal norms were among the most suggested by respondents on how to tackle the challenges women face in accessing empowerment programmes in Ibiono Ibom LGA.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

To what extent are women in Ibiono Ibom LGA involved in community development activities?

Tables 4.1 – 4.3 was made recourse to in the cause of answering this research question. Women in Ibiono Ibom LGA play a significant role in community development, though their involvement is often limited by cultural and societal norms. In rural settings like Ibiono Ibom, women are typically the primary caregivers and work in agriculture, but their participation in formal decision-making processes or leadership roles is often restricted. Although there are women-led initiatives at the grassroots level, such as community farming, health education, and micro-enterprise support, their contributions are often undervalued. Research indicates that, women's involvement in community development activities correlates with increased social welfare and community cohesion (Etim, 2021c; Enefiok, 2021). Empowerment programs, if properly designed, can increase women's engagement in public life and leadership roles, benefiting the entire community (UN Women, 2021).

What are the major challenges women in Ibiono Ibom face in accessing empowerment programs and resources?

Tables 4.4 and 4.5 guided discuss on this research question. The major challenges women in Ibiono Ibom face when accessing empowerment programs include a lack of awareness, limited financial resources, and restrictive cultural norms. Many women are unaware of the available programs due to limited outreach and communication. Cultural factors such as patriarchy and societal expectations also limit women's participation in these programs (Enefiok, 2021). Additionally, women face difficulties accessing financial resources, both from formal and informal financial institutions, due to lower levels of education and skills (Enefiok, 2021). Addressing these barriers requires increasing awareness, providing accessible financial resources, and breaking down cultural barriers that restrict women's participation (UNDP, 2021).

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

This study aimed to explore the level of women's participation in community development activities, evaluate the impact of women empowerment programs, identify the challenges faced by women in accessing these programs, and explore the role of women in decision-making and governance within Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area (LGA) of Akwa Ibom State. The findings drawn from the data collected through surveys, interviews, and secondary sources provide significant insights into the state of women's empowerment in the region.

1. The study revealed that, women's participation in community development activities in Ibiono Ibom LGA is moderate. Though women are involved in some activities like health, education, small-scale entrepreneurship, and social welfare, their involvement is often limited by societal expectations and gender roles. For instance, most women participate in activities that are traditionally associated with their gender, such as community health initiatives and caregiving roles, with limited influence in larger decision-making processes.
2. Women in Ibiono Ibom LGA face significant challenges in accessing empowerment programs, including lack of awareness, insufficient funding, cultural barriers, and gender discrimination.

Conclusion

Despite the positive impact of various empowerment programs, women's participation in community development activities and local governance remains limited due to socio-cultural barriers, lack of access to education, and economic constraints. However, there is potential for women to play a more significant role in shaping the future of their communities, provided that, structural and cultural changes are implemented. The role of governance is critical, as political leadership either supports or hinders the progress of women's empowerment. Although some progress has been made, the continued exclusion of women from formal decision-making processes limits their influence and overall development. As a result, gender equality remains a key issue that must be addressed for the socio-economic development of Ibiono Ibom LGA to reach its full potential.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to enhance women's empowerment and drive sustainable community development in Ibiono Ibom LGA:

1. Increase Awareness and Access to Empowerment Programs: Counsellors as a matter of urgency and necessity should beam their campaign strength, tactics, time and resources in Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area in order to enlighten Women in Ibiono Ibom on how to circumvent their predicaments and still attain positive development.
2. Counsellors should conduct targeted campaigns for women in Ibiono Ibom Local Government with the mind of raising their awareness about existing empowerment programs for Women and how such programs can be accessed.
3. Counsellors should engage Local government and Community Leaders, Stakeholders, philanthropists as well as clergies in aggressive awareness campaign so as to convincingly establish the generational needs and benefits of women development as this development can carry transgressing trait since women are the moulders and rearers of future leaders. (Children).
4. By way of raising financial enablement for the women in Ibiono Ibom local Government Area, Counsellors should weep gender sentiment by conducting group or individual counselling sessions with the wife of Ibiono Ibom Local Government Chairman as well as female Philanthropists with certain provoking and inspiring slogan like: Injury to A Woman, Injuries to Women but Develop A Woman, Stabilize the Nations.
5. Counsellors should sensitize through Counselling sessions the Stakeholders, Ibiono Ihom local government Chairman and his cabinets both formal and informal alongside with well-meaning indigenes to put in place even if there are just for Ibiono Ibom Local Government Areas policies/Laws that implement, enforce and ensure women's rights are protected, especially in terms of equal access to resources, education, and participation in decision-making.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to the understanding of women's empowerment and community development in Ibiono Ibom LGA, providing new insights into the challenges and opportunities women face in the region. It expands the literature on gender equality, women's participation in community development, and the socio-economic impact of empowerment programs in rural Nigerian settings.

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