

# Women Empowerment and Community Development in Okigwe Local Government Area, Imo State.

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## ABSTRACT

The study examined women empowerment and community development in Okigwe L. G. A, Imo State. Three research objectives, three research questions and three research hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was used and questionnaire served as the instrument of data collection. The researcher sampled 176 people from the entire population for the study. The data collected were presented in tables and analyzed using simple percentage and the hypotheses were tested using chi-square. Based on the data analysis, the findings revealed that there is significant impact of educational empowerment on women contribution to community development; there is significant relationship between skill acquisition for women and community development; and employment of women contributes to women community development. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the Nigerian government should be empower women through educational and technical training to enable contribute significantly in community development. More so, women in good position should try significantly to prove that they have significant thing to offer in promoting community development, peace and harmony and unity in the society.

## INTRODUCTION

Community development has been one of the basic issues which people promote and discuss. This is because when community development is achieved, it has significant value on human capital improvement and infrastructural transformation at the rural level. To achieve community development, there is need to consider the role of women. Women serve as mother, home makers, conflict managers, and direct assistants to their husband in their efforts to encourage community development. For that, there is need for women empowerment. According to Uche (2016) women empowerment aims at increasing the capacity of women making them aware of their potentials. Such empowerment includes educational, employment, financial and political empowerments. Women can significantly contribute to community development if they are well empowered. Therefore, community development can be described as a process of growth and progressive change in the physical, economic, health, welfare institutional and organizational set up of a community. It involves adopting one or more approaches in bringing about development in the above mentioned areas of a community (Egwu, 2018). This is true because in view of Ubonso (2018), it is an acknowledged fact that in all situations, development involves progression, movement, as well as advancement towards something better. Hence, it is improvement in the material and non-material aspect of human life. To him, it involves action, reaction and motion, aimed at positive change. The contribution of women in community development cannot be overemphasized.

But unfortunately, there are many challenges affecting women in playing their developmental roles. Such challenges which affect women in their efforts to achieve development in most cases include low level of education, lack of human development empowerment, marginalization from social institutions – men,

church, traditional institutions and many others (Abiola, 2019). The above challenges have made it possible that women may not contribute to development as it should be. For that, there is need for women empowerment.

Women occupy a special position in terms of their roles in the society. This includes women participation in many activities which affect the well-being of their families in particular and their society at large. Any society that wants to achieve high level of development and transformation should not overlook the power of women in both human and infrastructural development of communities. The women should be well empowered in all ramifications. Women in different rural areas in Nigeria in general and Okigwe LGA in particular has always contributed in building maternity homes in their communities, training their children in school, training their children on skill acquisition, inculcation of the right cultural value on their children, assisting their husbands for economic stability and assisting in building community halls in different villages. Based on the above, there is need for positive empowerment of women. Specifically, the study is designed to:

1. To investigate the extent educational empowerment on women contribution to community development.
2. To determine the extent skill acquisition for women contribute to community development.
3. To examine the extent employment of women contributes to women community development.

## MATERIALS

### Conceptualizing Women

In pursuance of this study, the concept women mean the female human category. For Nwabueze (2010), women are our mothers, sisters, aunts, wives, daughters, friends and confidants: they are the blocks, economists, decorators, care givers upon which the foundation of happy homes, families, communities, societies and countries rests (Yecho, 2014). They are physically healthy, exhibiting feminine characteristics quite distinctive from the opposite sex and contributing to developmental processes just like the men. The Webster Dictionary as cited in Olaifa (2010) defines a woman as “an adult female of the human race”. It connotes the feminine gender. This in essence establishes that in physical appearance, man is different from woman. Certainly, we cannot discuss womanhood without recourse to gender. It is therefore pertinent to discuss the female gender as it relates to this topic.

Williams et al., (1994) describe gender thus:

*People are born female or male, but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. They are taught what the appropriate behavior and attitudes, roles and activities are for them, and how they should relate to other people. This learned behavior is what makes up gender identity and determines gender roles.*

In every society of the world there are basically two groups of human beings namely men and women, Thus, for the purpose of tills research who are women? Willie this may at first seem like a silly question, Kirby (1997:166) asserts:

*A physical being with certain distinguishing biological characteristics but it is difficult to make any further assertions which are not open to questions. Does the fact that some women can give birth indicate that all women have a natural inclination to care for children and carry out associated domestic tasks? Do women have particular mental processes which lead them to favour certain modes of behaviour?*

Kirby (1997: 168) further holds that:

*One is mint born, but rather becomes woman. It was not the case that women were naturally inclined to house work or to child care, as had been previously supposed, but rather that social and economic circumstances had tended to channel women into occupying such roles (Yecho, 2014).*

In pursuance of a better definition of the word 'women', Ikoni (2003:62) conceives thus: "Full grown human females and also it is the adult female of human beings physically weaker than the male and exhibiting feminine characteristics quite distinctive from the opposite sex". That women are weak makes the definition improper to be used in this work. What makes a woman weak when so many of them are taking very good care of their families instead of the husbands who in so many cases may be alive but doing nothing? The United Nations Development Programme Report (1986:3) defines gender as follows: The term gender denotes the qualities associated with men and women that are socially and culturally, than biologically determined. Gender includes the ways in which society differentiates appropriate behavior and access to power for women.

### **The Concept of Community Development**

According to Asemah (2010), development is a process of change in attitude, social structure and general acceleration of economic growth, through reduction of poverty and inequality. Asemah (2011) notes that development in human society is a many sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. The achievement of any of these aspects is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole. Development involves the creation of opportunities for the realization of human potentials.

Community development is a concept that is used to describe a strategy that is designed to improve the economic and social life of the people in the community areas. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sees community development as a process of socio-economic change, involving the transformation of agrarian society, in order to reach a common set of development goals, based on the capacities and the needs of the people (Owo, in Nwosu, 2007, p. 305). To Anibueze, in Nwosu, Aliede and Nsude (2005, p. 36), community development is a strategy that is designed to improve the economic and social conditions of a specific group of people, that is, the rural people. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest, among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. Community development in general, is used to denote the actions and initiatives taken to improve the standard of living in non-urban neighbourhoods, countryside and remote villages. These communities can be exemplified with a low ratio of inhabitants to open space (Ezeiel and Anum, 2013).

As earlier noted, rural areas are such areas in a country that lack necessary social amenities and infrastructures which are necessary for good living. Thus, there is the need for advancement and growth in these rural areas. The process of bringing about this advancement and growth in the rural areas is what is referred to as community development. Anaeto and Anaeto (2008) observe thus:

*Community development is a subset and an important part of national development. The idea and concern for rural development stems from the fact that majority of the people in the developing countries reside in rural areas and the fact that development of the nation cannot be achieved without the development of the rural areas. Even the developing countries have recently come to realize that unless the rural areas are well-developed, hardly would any meaningful development occur in these countries.*

The above assertion implies that community development is part of national development, because when rural communities are not fully developed, the objectives of national development cannot be achieved. No country can boast of development when its rural communities have not been positively affected. This perhaps explains why Moemeka (1985, p. 9) explains that rural community education entails all activities

like social, economic, educational, political and cultural, which touch on the lives of rural communities, knowledge of which is essential to purposeful living and progress. Onabajo cited in Anaeto and Anaeto (2010) say that community development entails interventions aimed at improved productivity, increased employment/incomes for the target groups, as well as, minimum acceptable levels of food, shelter, education, health and housing. Rural development according to Anaeto and Anaeto (2010) is a subset and an important part of national development. The idea and concern for rural development stems from the fact that majority of the people in the countries reside in the rural areas. Rural development efforts attempt to bring about self-reliance in the rural communities in a country. New practices, ideas, innovations and methods, are introduced and when the rural dwellers accept these practices, it leads to economic gains.

### **The Concept of Women Empowerment**

Ike (2019) opined that empowerment involves a radical alternation of the process and structures that reproduces women's subordinate position as a gender. This is because empowerment means people taking control over their lives in all issues. According to Uche (2016:5) women empowerment aims at increasing the capacity of women making them aware of their potentials. Discrimination against women is a fact that cannot be denied or swept away with ignominy and callousness. In fact, the patriarchal institution has kept women subjected, humiliated, marginalized and oppressed in society, women especially in Africa, are denied certain basic, human rights such as free education, health care, employment and political development and most times, religious equality with their male counterparts. Even though the bible states that God made them male and female to complement one another, men, use culture, religion, custom and politics to relegate women to the background.

According to Ohaegbuchi (2014), when women begin to enjoy their rights in the society, then they are being empowered. Yecho (2014) opined that education is the vital tool for emancipation and social justice due to its long effect and its utilization value, which makes it a ready tool in the emancipation and empowering process. To educate therefore is the training of the mind and character in order to be informed. In giving children the right education, the discrimination against women is mostly perpetrated by the uneducated. Most educated parents will give their children equal opportunities to education. (Uche, 2016:8).

### **Women Education, Educational Empowerment and Community Development**

According to Uangbaoje (2019), education is the prime means of social mobility. For Ganze, de Graaf and Treiman (1992) cited in Uangbaoje (2019), education offers a chance to make up for the various wrongs suffered by one's previous generations. Educational empowerment increases women's ability to take advantage of opportunities in the society. Education may provide the know-how which is valuable in business or profession but there are other skills required to grab opportunities. Education also plays a role in income. In most cases, median earnings increase with each level of education (Chukwu, 2018). In some cases, the highest degrees, professional and doctoral degrees, make the highest earnings while those with lower qualifications earn less. Higher levels of education are associated with better economic and psychological outcomes for women (i.e.: more income, more control, and greater social support and networking). Women involved in the Nigerian leadership will improve if they are well educated. A leader must have charisma, which appeals to the citizens (Egwu, 2018), Therefore, when women are empowered through education, they will take active part in political leadership and community development.

Education plays a pivotal role in skill sets for acquiring jobs, as well as specific qualities that stratify people with higher SES from lower SES. Here, where high and middle class parents take an active role in their children's education and development /training them to high education, low income parents have come to realize the benefit of education and are training their children to even higher education for better tomorrow (Kasa, 2015). Education empowers everybody in the society including women. For that, when women are empowered through education, they will contribute positively for development through active participation

in development planning and implementation (Okafor, 2019). Therefore, the high level of women neglect as it concerns educational training at primary, secondary and tertiary level forms the major challenge contributing to women.

### **Skill Training and Women Community Development**

Socio-economic status (SES) of women can increase when they enjoy skill training in the community (Adefemi and Agunbiade, 2019). Such skill training will enable women to have better economic life and contribute to community development (Chukwu, 2018). According to Abiola (2019) skill acquisition encompasses not just job training, but self-employment ventures like tailoring, bakery, hair salon, fashion and designing, and so on. Women who are educated and skilled are engine of development in their respective communities. In so doing, they gain the confidence of their people and subsequently mobilize them easily (Egwu and Egwu, 2016:11). The socio-economic statuses of Nigerian women are so little when compared to that of men because of their dependency nature.

Skill training can encompass quality of life attributes as well as the opportunities and privileges afforded to people within society. Poor skill for women, specifically, is not a single factor but rather is characterized by multiple physical and psychosocial stressors (Agina, 2017). To Chukwu (2018) poor skill for women affects overall human functioning, including our physical and mental health. For that, women inability to play good roles for development is because of poor women skill acquisition.

### **Employment of Women and Community Development**

According to Uangbaoje (2019), employment is an economic condition that plays a very important role in changing the status of an individual. In other words, employment of women is another important indicator of social mobility. When women are empowered through job, it leads to their improved socio-economic status. Empirically, it has been shown that better employed, wealthier, and more occupationally skilled women are more likely, on the average, to enhance community development (Achike, 2019). On the basis of employment, women can achieve a high status in the society. In Nigeria today, employment is the important determinant of social class. Employment has other subtle overtones like income from investments is more prestigious than income from welfare payments. Income from the professions is better than wages (Uangbaoje, 2019). Therefore, the nature and source of one's income carry suggestions as to one's family background and probable way of life.

Women income can also come in the form of unemployment or worker's compensation, social security, pensions, interests or dividends, royalties, trusts, alimony, or other governmental, public, or family financial assistance. The poor financial disposition of most women in Nigeria is a serious militating factor which account in the most part for women's defeat. The lack of employment has placed womenfolk either as subordinate or weak players in the political game. About 70% of women in Nigeria currently live below poverty line (Chukwu 2018). In this case, the cost of realizing development goals is still far beyond the reach of even the most highly placed women" (Yahaya, 2012:9). The relatively pathetic financial status of Nigerian women is a major limiting factor for their effective participation in community development.

### **Socio-Economic and Cultural Challenges Affecting Effective Women Empowerment and Community Development**

The challenges are:

1. **Occupation:** In view of Achike (2019) occupational prestige, as one component of SES, encompasses both income and educational attainment. The occupational status reflects the educational attainment required to obtain the job and income levels that vary with different jobs and within ranks of

occupations. Additionally, it shows achievement in skills required for the job. Occupational status measures social position by describing job characteristics, decision-making ability and control, and psychological demands on the job. Some of the most prestigious occupations are physicians and surgeons, lawyers, chemical and biomedical engineers, university lecturers, and communications analysts. These jobs, considered to be grouped in the high SES classification, provide more challenging work and greater control over working conditions but require more ability. Occupation is the most difficult factor to measure because so many exist, and there are so many competing scales. Many scales rank occupations based on the level of skill involved, from unskilled to skilled manual labour to professional, or use a combined measure using the education level needed and income involved.

## 2. Discriminatory Culture, Religion, customs and laws:

Women are discouraged from participating in public life from childhood through adulthood by authority figures such as husbands, fathers, mothers and other relations due to cultural image of a virtues woman define as quite, submissive who should be seen and not heard (Muoghalu and Abrifor, 2012). Therefore, partisanship is seen as ventures that are beyond the limit of societal expectation of a descent feminine behavior thus leading to stereotyping. In view of Adefemi and Agunbiade (2019) these cultural orientations constitute disincentives for women participation in politics. Similarly, religion is also used as instrument of stereotype against women who venture into politics or as barriers to prevent them from public life. For example, Pudah – which is the restriction of women to their quarter predominantly in practice among Muslims in Northern Nigeria, ensures that they are barred from participating in politics either as voters, aspirants or even participation in economic activities likewise, the Christian faith also does not accord women much role in public affairs. The customary practices of many contemporary societies are biased by subjugating women to men and undermining their self-esteem. The overall impact of gender bias, cultural norms and practices has entrenched a feeling of inferiority in women and place them at a disadvantage vis-a-vis their male counterpart in the socio-political scene even in urban centers. These socially constructed norms and stereotype roles make women overplay their ‘femininity’ by accepting that they are ‘weaker sexes’ overemphasizing the dainty nature of their sex and regarding exceptional achievement as masculine. For example, most customs often prefer sending the male child to school over the female, who is expected to nurture siblings and to be married off. This marginally increases the illiterate women and stiffens their competition with their male counterparts in politics (Damilola, 2010).

3. **Lack of Self-Confidence:** one of the major challenges facing women in politics and decision making is women themselves. Most women lack confidence in their own ability and capacity to lead. In most cases, they feel the game of politics is an exclusive reserve of men and dare not venture into it; and those who manage to venture are usually content with the back seat. Similarly, many women do not have confidence in the leadership abilities of their fellow women (Achike, 2019). Although, factors like envy, jealousy, and other problems associated with interpersonal relations are common with women, generally, most women would rather vote or support men to win election than their fellow women in spite of their numerical strength. This has often given the men an upper hand when it comes to mobilizing support for elections. A classical example of this scenario was the case of Mrs. Sarah Jubrin, who contested against the former President Goodluck Jonathan and former vice President Atiku Abubakar in the PDP presidential primaries preparatory to the 2011 general elections. At the end of the exercise, Sarah Jubrin pulled only one vote-obviously an own vote. This shows that even her closest female supporters did not vote for her.
4. **Poor or low implementation of affirmative action;** Affirmative Action is usually a measure intended to supplement non-discrimination; it is a broad term encompassing a host of policies that seek to support weak groups in society. They include policies where deliberate action is used to stop discrimination. A policy process of this kind allows for rules that have the objective of enhancing equal opportunity for individuals and the improvement, in the situation of marginalized groups (Chukwu, 2018). In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This convention has variously been described as the “Bible of women empowerment” and “Women’s International Bill of Rights.” Since its adoption it has become a reference point for the women’s movement in the demand for gender equality (Damilola, 2010).

The Convention “reflects the depth of the exclusion and restriction practiced against women solely on the basis of their sex by calling for equal rights for women regardless of their marital status in all fields – political, economic, social, cultural and civil; it calls for national legislations to ban discrimination, recommends temporary special measures to speed equality in fact between men and women” (UNESCO, 1999:6). The Convention provides that:

*“Adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved. – Article IV, CEDAW”.*

The 1999 Constitution provided somewhat similar affirmative action to supplement non-discrimination of contending parties. The Constitution provides that:

*“...the composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also command loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or any of its agencies.”*

Notwithstanding the above, Nigeria has not been able to effectively implement the affirmative action, and enhance women representation in politics and economic wellbeing.

## **Empirical Review**

Some work has been done in related areas of this study.

Ekong (2018) carried out a research on contributions of women to national development: example from Akwa Ibom State. He observed that the role and extent of women involvement in National Development Process. It examines the contributions of women to National Development using example from the civil service. The study used Akwa Ibom State as the case study. Information on workers from level 07 and above was sourced from the state civil service commission, school boards and political party offices. A total population of 33,670 workers was used of which 19,941 (59.23%) were women in different administrative capacity. Research result shows that women dominate in teaching and nursing professions in the state and form more than 40% of workers in other professions. The future of the civil service especially education and health in the country seems to depend on women. However, by a contribution of factors women could contributions more to National Development if deliberate efforts are made to encourage them. Various programme options are therefore suggested.

Ohaegbuchi (2014) carried out a research women in community development: interrogating the role of women august meeting in south east Nigeria. He asserted that the involvement of women in community development with a view to interrogating the impact of the annual women August meeting in the South East, Nigeria. The paper shows how a combination of community development and August-meeting can be a viable project that has the potential of making women even more relevant and capable of being a model in the quest for sustainable development which is part of the Millennium Development Goals. It discusses the role of women in the quest for sustainable development through community development. The paper argues that the involvement of women in community development promotes peace and consequently gives room

for sustainable development and good governance. Thus, ways of realizing these objectives are highlighted. Also in focus is the need to separate politics from the activities of the women August meeting as the paper revealed that the annual gathering has assumed the status of a political jamboree. Therefore, the research submits that the yearly August meeting should be used to consolidate peaceful relations and create an environment which deters the emergence or escalation of tensions that may lead to violent conflict. Thus, giving room for community development for no development thrives in an environment where there is violent conflict. Methodologically, primary and secondary data were used and for theory, social responsibility theory was used in the study which proved effective in carrying out the research.

Ike (2019) focused on political participation and women empowerment in Nigeria. The study was carried out following the inability of the Nigerian government (at all levels) to implement the 35% UN affirmative action for women in elective and selective positions. Four (4) research questions, four research objective and two research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The researcher adopted survey research design. Questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection and the data were analyzed using simple percentage and chi-square. The findings revealed that there is significant relationship between socio-economic status of women and their level of political participation; and religious and traditional beliefs and practices have positive impacts on women political empowerment. Based on the findings, the study recommends that women political empowerment in Nigeria through constitutional reform is required, to promote feminine political model as against the historic and unyielding masculine model. More so, to attain sustainable democracy and effective women political participation in Nigeria, the federal government should empower women-in line with the international declarations, instructions, and protocols on women's rights issues.

Ubonso (2018) examined the role of women in community development in Ahiazu Mbaise LGA of Imo State. The study was carried out to examine the contribution of women in community development and the challenges hindering their effective contribution in the society. Based on the above, the researcher formulated four research objectives, four research questions and two hypotheses. Descriptive survey research design was used and questionnaire served as the instrument of data collection. The people of Ahiazu Mbaise LGA made up the population, from where 180 persons were sampled using purposive sampling technique. Though out of 180 questionnaires distributed, only 170 were properly filled, returned and used. The data collected were presented in tables and analyzed using simple percentage and the hypotheses were tested using chi-square. Based on the data analysis, the findings revealed that there is significant role of women in human capital/infrastructural development, there is significant relationship between socio-economic status of women and contribution in community development, there is significant impact of educational empowerment on women contribution to community development and that women have significantly contributed in building of health centres, town hall and training of their children. Based on the findings, we recommend that the Nigerian government at all levels should empower women through technical/educational training, job opportunity and involving them in decision making as that will make them to contribute significantly in community development. Hence we conclude that women are the instrument for improved development at community level.

Abiola (2019) examined Women's political participation and grassroots democratic sustainability in Osun State, Nigeria (2010-2015). It studies on Osun State and women's representation in both the federal and state levels and in the legislative and executive arms of government indicated it has the second highest women's representation in South West, Nigeria. This study adopted survey research design \_ Data were collected through questionnaires and unstructured interviews. Simple percentage was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that the number of women involved in political participation in Osun State is low compared to their male counterparts yet they are beginning to make great strides. It was found that women's representation at the two levels of involvement in the period under study was 50 women or 20.5% of the group while male representation was 244 or 79.5 %. Further, it was revealed that the under representation of



women in political participation in Osun State was due to certain socio-cultural factors like violence, discrimination against women, people's perception of politics as a dirty game and cultural beliefs. It is recommended that there needs to be local policies to end all discrimination against women as well as a platform of action entrenched in the constitution.

Chukwu (2018) examined women empowerment and political participation in Abia State (1999-2015). System theory and the theory of economic determinism were employed for the study. Survey research design was adopted and questionnaire served as instrument of data collection (primary data). Though secondary data were sourced and used. The data collected were presented in tables and analyzed using simple percentage and chi-square. The result shows that low level of women economic viability impair their political participation, women have low social status and that affects their rate of political participation, women socio-economic empowerment will lead to active political participation, our traditional practices/beliefs hinder women political empowerment, religious view/marginalization of women contribute to their low level of political empowerment, religious and traditional empowerment of women can enhance their political involvement in Nigeria. It therefore recommends that women political empowerment in Nigeria through constitutional reform is required, to promote feminine political model as against the historic and unyielding masculine model.

Achike (2019) focused on gender inequality and women participation in politics: a critical evaluation in Nigeria. The study was carried out to determine the challenges affecting women in political participation in Nigeria. The researcher employed systems theory and the theory of economic determinism to analyze the subject matter. Survey research design was used and questionnaire served as our instrument of data collection. The researcher sampled 180 respondents from the entire population, but out of 180 questionnaires distributed only 170 were properly filled returned and used. The data collected were presented in tables and analyzed using simple percentage and chi-square. The findings revealed that gender inequality is a challenge that discourages women political participation in Nigeria Cultural belief system, low level of education, social marginalization, and bad political culture are the challenges affecting women political participation. Not only that, gender inequality is one of the problems contributing to Nigeria low level of development. It was recommended that the Nigeria government, political leaders, and men in our society should reduce women political marginalization, enhance gender equality and encourage women involvement in politics in the country so as to achieve development.

Adefemi and Agunbiade (2019) appraised the participation of women legislators in law-making process at the Houses of Assembly, Southwest Nigeria. It highlighted women legislators' challenges, experiences and contributions with a view to providing information on the representation and participation level of women in law-making in Nigeria. Survey method was used. Structured interviews were conducted with key respondents consisting of purposively selected women legislators, women leaders of political parties and members of Houses of Assembly in Lagos, Ekiti and Oyo States. A total number of 24 respondents were interviewed in the three states. Data collected were analyzed using content analysis. Results showed that women legislators have been highly involved in legislative debates by sponsoring diverse motions despite their low representation in the selected State Houses of Assemblies. Also, results affirmed that, factors such as shunning of ideas and motions, lack of equal knowledge of partisan politics, lack of adequate education, discrimination, marriage, late night meetings and sittings remain some of the challenges that women legislators in Southwest Nigeria face. To overcome these problems, the study recommended, the development of electoral reforms that promote equitable representation of women.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Systems Theory**

This study was anchored on the system theory that was propounded by Ludwing Von Bartalanffy, a

biologist and a mathematician in the 1940's but popularized especially in political science by David Easton in 1965 Von Bertalanffy was reacting against both reductionism and attempting to revive the unity of sciences, He is considered to be the founder and principal author of general system theory. Von Bertalanffy wrote that a system is a complex of interacting elements and that they are open to, and interacts with their environments. In addition, they can acquire qualitative new properties through emergence, resulting through continual evolution rather than reducing an entity (e.g. the human body) to the property of its parts or elements (e.g. organs or cells) system theory focuses on the arrangement of and relations between the parts which connect them into a whole. David Easton was regarded as the Father of System Theory; he is one of the most influential political scientists in the half of the last century.

His system analysis approach was an effort to provide a coherent theory of political life. During the 1950's and 1960's the theory flourished as some of the leading figures tried to make political studies more systematic and scientific. Many of Easton's concepts were observed by the discipline and the very success of the work changed the vocabulary of political science. A system is a set of elements standing in interaction. A whole compounded of many parts and assembly of all parts. It is necessarily for all parts to be working. According to Egwu (2007:34), in simple social science parlance, a system is a whole or an integral with structure and interrelated parts which all function to maintain the continuity of their existence. To him, the system theory sees society as that governed by mutually interrelated structures which through possessing their unique individualized characteristics and performing special roles independently, but still maintain a dynamic equilibrium between themselves for the successful maintenance of the entire system.

Applying this theory to this work, it should be noted that women ineffective contribution in community development in the Nigerian society is based on the Nigerian system. This is to say that women are marginalized and are not encouraged in the Nigerian political and economic system. At the community and family level, women has less role to play in decision making; at the educational level, women are marginalized and seen as less important in our society. Most times, they are not sponsored in school by parents based on the belief that they will be married to another man. At the economic level, most Nigerian women are reduced to the role of house wife notwithstanding their educational level/exposure. At the social level, women are marginalized in social organizations like church and club etc. At the political level, Nigeria has not achieved the 35 percent affirmation action in appointing/electing women in political positions.

They above revealed the marginalization of women in the Nigerian political and economic reality. And that has made it possible that women play less contribution in community development in Nigeria. Community as a system does work and perform transformations with inputs. The products of the work are discharge into the environment, outputs. Information about the reaction in the environment may be transmitted back to the system as a form of input. The community system is conceived in relation to the environment.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Okigwe L.G.A, Imo State. Okigwe local government area is located in the city of Okigwe which also doubles as the administrative seat for the Local Government Area. Okigwe is the third largest city in Imo state in Nigeria after Owerri and Orlu. Okigwe has 22 autonomous communities with different village (in bracket). Some are listed below: namely; i) Ezinachi (Ndiobia, Umudiaba, Amukwa, Amorie, Umuokparaoba, Amajarata, Obiohia, Umudo, Ndi Ngeleogwe, Umuebiri, Ubahe, Ajanumuna, Amachi, Umuike, Amachara, Umuoma, Umunuma, Umuoho, Uhugbuala/Ndizorie, Ovoro/Umuagu); ii) Ikigwu (Aro-ubaha, Aro-Okigwe, Ope, Ubanaka, Umuka, Umuokpara); iii) Otanzu (Amaeze-Ogii, Umuawa-Ogee, Umualumoke), Amuro (Amuro, Aro-Amuro); iv) Umulolo (Agbobu, Agbuala, Aku/Ihette, Aku/Ikenga, Amaosu, Amasator, Aro-Agbobu, Aro-Umulolo West, Aro-Umulolo

East, Ibinta, Ndi-Oji, Ndi-Okoroji, Okanachi, Umuawa-Ibu); v) Ihube (Agbala, Akpugo, Amagu, Amalator, Amano, Nkoto, Ogube, Ozara); iv) Otan-Chara (Alaika-Ogwaku, Alaocha-Igwaku, Ihitte-Isiokwe, Ikenga, Ikenga-Isiokwe, umuinem, umuzegem, Umueze, Umukeoke.

The city lies between the Port Harcourt-Enugu-Maiduguri rail line, being the nearest city to the biggest cattle market in Nigeria located in the Umu Nneochi Area of Abia state. Thus, the city has grown into a major cattle transit town for the southeast and south sub-regions of Nigeria. The soil is predominantly partly red clay and black or dark brown. The major crops grown in the district on its hilly farmlands are palm trees (palm oil and palm wine), cassava, and vegetables.

Many towns in Okigwe hold cultural masquerade festivals through which they express their communal attributes, descents and heritages. The people celebrate their new yam festival with a combination of dance among many masquerades groups. Christianity is the major religion of the people although few are adherent of traditional African religion. The main language spoken by the people is Igbo. Pidgin English is also used by locals to communicate with non-speakers of Igbo. Like many rural communities, women are faced with developmental challenges owing mostly because of patriarchal entrenched system of inequalities. Hence, the urgent need for women empowerment in order to engender community development.

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the subject matter. The population size for this research consists of 176. It covers the entire community government council executive in 22 autonomous communities (11 wards) in Okigwe LGA, Imo State. There are 8 members in the community government council of each autonomous comprising the traditional ruler, the president general, the vice president general, the secretary general, the assistants secretary general, the youth leader, the women leader, the PRO. However, only 170 questionnaires were fit and used for analysis. The sample techniques used in this study is census enumeration method. It was used so as to study the entire sample size for the study. Census method was used because the population is not much, and it could be studied. Data were collected through the use of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire were pretested and validated by a pilot study. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques of data analysis. This involved frequency distribution and percentages.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In table 1 below, **question 1** shows that a preponderant 80% of the respondents gave positive responses (SA + A) that education is crucial for women participation in society while 20% gave negative responses (D + SD). Evidently, education and development is intricately related. Educational empowerment at the community level is therefore necessary for women's involvement in community development. Result from **question 2** shows that majority of the respondents represented by 81.2% gave positive responses (SA + A) that education helps to improve the productive capacity of poor rural women while 18.8% gave negative responses (D + SD). A fashion designer interviewed echoed the benefit of education thus: *I was really struggling in my business until women organization from my community through the annual August Meeting for women organized a seminar to empower women in small scale businesses in the communities. I learnt how to make good business decision in order to grow my business and truly my business is doing well.* For Yecho (2014), financial disadvantage on women contribution affects community development efforts. For Ohaegbuchi (2014), involving women in decision making in the society will enhance their participation in community development programmes. Educational empowerment increases women's ability to take advantage of opportunities in the society. Data from **question 3** shows that majority of the respondents represented by 75.3% gave positive responses (SA + A) that education enables women to make informed decision to improve community's fortunes while 24.7% gave negative responses (D + SD). Lack of education has remained a serious challenge facing most poor rural women towards attaining sustainable development for their communities. This finding is in tandem with the study done by Adefemi and

Agunbiade (2019) that education may provide the know-how which is valuable in business or profession but there are other skills required to grab opportunities. They also found that education also plays a role in income generation. Data from **question 4** shows that majority of the respondents represented by 45.9% affirmed that educational empowerment of women have to a great extent contributed to community development in Okigwe communities while only 5.9% said not at all. Overall educational empowerment of rural women is a sine qua non for effective and sustainable community development.

From table 2 below, **question 5** shows that a preponderant 85.9% of the respondents gave positive responses (SA + A) that skill acquisition for women is crucial in community development while 14.1% gave negative responses (D + SD). Without doubt, acquiring skills ranging from intellectual, creative, political to economic, enables rural women to actively participate in socio-economic development of their communities. This finding corroborated that done by Abiola (2019) that women who are educated and skilled are engine of development in their respective communities. Data from **question 6** shows that majority of the respondents represented by 88.3% gave positive responses (SA + A) that training women in handiwork/skills such as entrepreneurship, trade, tailoring, catering etc helps to build their capacity in community development initiatives while 11.7% gave negative responses (D + SD). Abiola (2019) further found that skill acquisition encompasses not just job training, but self-employment ventures like tailoring, bakery, hair salon, fashion and designing, and so on. These give women the agency and knowledge to become participant rather spectators in their own community development efforts. Result from **question 7** shows that majority of the respondents represented by 79.4% gave positive responses (SA + A) that skill acquisition helps women in financial management, strategic planning, improved communication and better decision-making towards community development while 18.8% gave negative responses (D + SD). Basically, women are intentionally involved in almost all aspects of the economy owing to their dexterousness and resourcefulness to add a boost to the economy. Therefore, skills acquisition is definitely a potent force in the empowerment drive to adequately equip these women for the role they have to play in community development. Data from **question 8** shows that majority of the respondents represented by 51.8% affirmed that skill acquisition for women have to a great extent contributed to community development in Okigwe communities while only 2.4% said not at all. Those interviewed equally remarked that the present precarious and harsh economic situation in Nigeria has made it even more imperative for women especially those in rural areas to learn skills in order to adapt and help develop their communities.

From table 3 below, **question 9** shows that a preponderant 85.9% of the respondents gave positive responses (SA + A) that employment is crucial for economic growth in communities while 14.1% gave negative responses (D + SD). Ubah (2016) in his findings noted that women in African in general and Nigeria in particular have been marginalized significantly and that has hindered them in contributing positively women in community development. An unemployed housewife interviewed remarked thus: *I depend entire on my husband for sustenance because of joblessness. However, joined a thrift society where small loan was granted to me... I have started petty trading and at the moment I earn a somewhat reasonable income and can contribute to upkeep of my family.* This goes a long way to show the need for employment of women for community development. Result from **question 10** shows that majority of the respondents represented by 74.7% gave positive responses (SA + A) that women in viable economic ventures have the capacity to participate in community development projects/programmes while 25.3% gave negative responses (D + SD). To this end Abiola (2019) affirmed that there is need for employment of women in good occupation to make them play active development roles. Data from **question 11** shows that majority of the respondents represented by 85.3% gave positive responses (SA + A) that empowering women as economic actors give them power at local level to greater provision of social amenities like water, health and sanitation which matter more to them while 14.7% gave negative responses (D + SD). From the foregoing, been employed enables women to participate in community development projects that meet their immediate and felt needs. Data from **question 12** shows that majority of the respondents represented by 43.5% affirmed that

employment of women have to a great considerable extent contributed to community development in Okigwe communities while only 5.9% said not at all. Overall employment generation is germane for women participation in community development in Okigwe.

Table 1: Showing responses of questions on educational empowerment of women and contribution to community development

| No | Questions   | SA                       | A                              | D                        | SD                   | %   | Total |
|----|---|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-----|-------|
| 1. | Education is crucial for women participation in society                                     | 74 (43.5%)               | 62(36.5%)                      | 19(11.2%)                | 15(8.8%)             | 100 | 170   |
| 2. | Education helps to improve the productive capacity of poor rural women                      | 78 (45.9%)               | 60(35.3%)                      | 13(7.6%)                 | 19(11.2%)            | 100 | 170   |
| 3  | Education enables women to make informed decision to improve community's fortunes           | 68(40%)                  | 60(35.3%)                      | 27(15.9%)                | 15(8.8%)             | 100 | 170   |
| 4. | To what extent does educational empowerment on women contribution to community development? | Great Extent= 78 (45.9%) | Considerabl eExtent=54 (31.8%) | Lesser Extent=28 (16.5%) | Not at All=10 (5.9%) | 100 | 170   |

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2: Showing responses of questions on skill acquisition for women contribute to community development.

| No | Questions  | SA                       | A                              | D                        | SD                  | %   | Total |
|----|--|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-----|-------|
| 5. | Skill acquisition for women is crucial in community development.   | 84 (49.4%)               | 62 (36.5%)                     | 10(5.9%)                 | 14(8.2%)            | 100 | 170   |
| 6. | Training women in handiwork/skills such as entrepreneurship, trade, tailoring, catering etc helps to build their capacity in community development initiatives | 80 (47.1%)               | 70 (41.2%)                     | 13 (7.6%)                | 7(4.1%)             | 100 | 170   |
| 7  | Skill acquisition helps women in financial management, strategic planning, improved communication and better decision-making towards community development.    | 68 (40%)                 | 67 (39.4%)                     | 20 (11.8%)               | 15 (8.8%)           | 100 | 170   |
| 8. | To what extent does skill acquisition for women contribute to community development?   | Great Extent= 88 (51.8%) | Considerable Extent=54 (31.8%) | Lesser Extent=28 (16.5%) | Not at All=4 (2.4%) | 100 | 170   |

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 3: Showing responses of questions on employment of women and women contribution to community development.

| No  | Questions  | SA                       | A                              | D                        | SD                   | %   | Total |
|-----|--|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-----|-------|
| 9.  | Employment is crucial for economic growth in communities.  | 84 (49.4%)               | 62(36.5%)                      | 10(5.9%)                 | 14(8.2%)             | 100 | 170   |
| 10. | Women in viable economic ventures have the capacity to participate in community development projects/programmes  | 67 (39.4%)               | 60(35.3%)                      | 20(11.8%)                | 23(13.5%)            | 100 | 170   |
| 11. | Empowering women as economic actors give them power at local level to greater provision of social amenities like water, health and sanitation which matter more to them. | 78(45.9%)                | 67(39.4%)                      | 10(5.9%)                 | 15(8.8%)             | 100 | 170   |
| 12. | To what extent does employment of women contributes to women community development?  | Great Extent= 58 (34.1%) | Considerable Extent=74 (43.5%) | Lesser Extent=28 (16.5%) | Not at All=10 (5.9%) | 100 | 170   |

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Community development has been one of the basic issues which people promote and discuss. This is because when community development is achieved, it has significant value on human capital improvement and infrastructural transformation at the rural level. One of the basic people that contribute to community development in any country is the women. The study concluded that educational empowerment of women have to a great extent contributed to community development in Okigwe communities; skill acquisition for women have to a great extent contributed to community development in Okigwe communities and that employment of women have to a great considerable extent contributed to community development in Okigwe communities. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Nigerian government should be empower women through educational and technical training to enable contribute significantly in community development.
2. Women in good position should try significantly to prove that they have significant thing to offer in promoting community development, peace and harmony and unity in the society.
3. The Nigerian government should pragmatically implement the 35% affirmative action which will promote effective women representation in political, economic and social life in Nigeria.

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