

## **EXTENT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN NJIKOKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE**

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### **Introduction**

In many countries of the world, there exist major inequalities between men and women in all aspects of life such as employment opportunities, political participation and education, power-sharing among others. These inequalities seem to have subjected women to exploitation even in sexual relationship among couples. Women are marginalized in politics, employment and even in matters related to decision making (Ugwu, 2014). Yet, women are more than half of the world population and they are saddled with a lot of responsibilities in the family and the society at large yet are systematically denied the resources to fulfill these responsibilities (Ugwu, 2014). Two-third (2/3) of the world's illiterates are females, also of the millions of school age children not in school, the majority are girls (Abiola, 2005).

According to Ugwu (2014), in many rural communities in West African sub-region, many women deny themselves one or two square meals to ensure that their children are fed hence the need for empowerment to ensure sustainable and good standard living condition.

Empowerment is the ability to take control of oneself or one's life in terms of being well informed and equipped with education, finance and other relevant skills. It is also the ability to take decisions and act on such decisions without any external hindrances (Urom, 2002). Stressing further, Okpoko (2002) stated that empowerment is a term which has its root in power and maintained that to empower means to give power or authority to enable a person to take decision by himself. Empowerment implies that the person being empowered has hitherto lacked power or authority, either by default or denial. Empowerment can either be individual or collective, it becomes collective if the enablement affect a group as a whole, for example women folk. In discussing the need to empower individuals, Goshe and Attahiru (2010) noted that the benefits of empowering individuals with skills include

income generation, ability for them to become self reliant and employees of labour, and that individuals and the nation cannot actualize any growth and development without empowerment hence may slide into poverty. Ugwu (2003) suggests that as a way of empowering the women, government should create the culture of industrial production and management establishment of skill acquisition center in rural areas for rural needs.

Poverty is seen as the situation of material and non-material deprivation which is mainly represented by food shortage, poor or lack of health services, lack of education as well as lack of basic physical and psychological needs (Ovute, 2003). Poverty alleviation is the effort made by both the government and other well meaning individuals in the society to reduce the level of poverty of the indigenes of a nation to its minimal state, (Narayan, 2002).

In Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra state which is made up of six (6) communities that include: Abagana that houses its secretariat, Abba, Nimo, Enugwu-Ekwu, Nawfia and Enugu-Agidi, majority of women there are rural inhabitants that are struggling in one way or the other to survive. These women are saddled with a lot of responsibilities such as child bearing and rearing, domestic chores, livestock rearing, tilling of lands, farming, labourers at building sites, among others with little or no help from the immediate families, community and the nation as a whole. These women engage in all sorts of trades, crafts and form cooperative societies in the bid to help alleviate their state of poverty. These labourious activities often deteriorate their health condition and sometimes result to sickness and loss of life (Obi, 2010). These women to some extent do not benefit from the poverty alleviation programmes provided to them, either because of lack of interest or because the programmes are not well structured by the initiators.

Empowered women play crucial roles in the rural economy including agriculture, livestock and cottage industries. They play far more active role in the rural economy than is generally believed (Ugwu, 2014).

In a bid to overcome poverty in Nigeria, government has initiated various policies and structural programmes from 1972 till date (Igbuzor, 2005). The programmes include: Food National Accelerated Production Programme (FNAPP) in 1977 by General Yakubu Gowon, Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1977 by Olusegun Obasanjo, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) in 1986 by Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1986 by Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, Better Life Programme (BLP) in 1987 by Mrs Mariam Babangida.

Family Support programme (FSP) in 1994 by Mrs Sani Abacha, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in 1998 by General Sani

Abacha, Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999 by Olusegun Obasanjo for children of school age to have free access to education both males and females, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in 2004 by Olusegun Obasanjo, among others. The aims of the above programmes according to Igbuzor (2005) are to reduce the suffering of the people by empowering the people and providing employment opportunities. Unfortunately, most of these poverty alleviation programmes suffered the same fate as a recent government assessment showed that they all failed due to the fact that, they are characterized by corruption on the part of some government and some public servants and officials (Igbuzor, 2005). Ugwu (2003) asserts that since human history, every type of government and every type of social system has tried to alleviate poverty without success.

Apart from the above highlighted failed poverty alleviation and empowerment programmes engaged by the women in the past, there are also skill acquisition programmes sited currently in Abba, along Abba-Awkuzu road by the administration of Mr Peter Obi, the then governor of Anambra state from (2008-2015). There is also the provision of portable bore-hole water for all the four villages that make-up Abba town, building of primary health care center for the improvement of health care delivery system. While in Abagana there is a skill acquisition center, that engages in some of the skill training, provision of cassava processing machine and palm oil extracting machine, provision of portable bore-hole water supply, micro finance credit loan facilities, that offers loan facilities for all the rural dwellers that meet their criteria, formation of corporative societies that assist the rural women in having access to fertilizers and other seedlings of agriculture among others. All these efforts are geared towards empowering rural women to alleviate their poverty level (Njikoka LGA Gazette, 2011).

Women undertake a wide range of activities both in the field and at home. In the production cycle, in the harvesting and post harvesting phase Shakira, Bukhari, Jahangir and Achakzia, (2005) noted that empowered women play crucial roles in the society, including agriculture, livestock farming, seed preparation and cottage industries. Women contribution is also significant in seed preparation, collecting farm yard manure, weeding, harvesting and various other farm operations (Eya, 2002).

In a related study, Olayele (2003) carried out a study on the analysis of rural women to capital and their economic decision making power in Ondo State, Adikwu (2009) carried out a research work on the role of guidance and counseling in women empowerment in Ado Local Government Area of Benue State. Similarly, Okpoko (2002) carried out a study on empowering women for community development through non-formal education and Eya

(2002) equally carried out a study on women empowerment as a tool for poverty eradication. Ugwu (2014) also carried out a study on women empowerment and poverty alleviation of rural women in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State.

These studies are related to the present study in that the studies are interested in the empowerment of women. But this study explores extent of women empowerment and poverty alleviation of rural women in Njikoka L.G.A. of Anambra State which filled a gap.

Women in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra state seems to be saddled with a lot of responsibilities as a result of increased level of poverty and lack of empowerment from both government and concerned individuals and even where such empowerment is noted, there seems to be lapses either in its functioning or in the way and manner it is functioning. These state of economic hardship seems to have taken greater toil on these women as they go through stress and storm in the areas of maternal mortality during child birth as a result of lack of care and high rate of poverty during pregnancy. Women in this particular locality are saddled with a lot of responsibilities such as child upbringing and care, home keeping and management, tilling of land, farming, planting, processing of harvested crops and storage, keeping of domestic and farm animals, processing of palm oil and garri, as well as working as day labourers at building sites among others. As a result of the above mentioned economic hardship these women go through, there is need to empower the women through education and skills acquisition in different fields, provide them with health care facilities, improve their living conditions through the establishment of government empowerment projects. Various governments in Nigeria have in time past initiated programmes that are aimed at alleviating poverty in Nigeria and by implication in this area empowering Nigerians, but the researchers are not certain of the efficacy of the pervious efforts, hence the problem of this study is to ascertain the extent of women empowerment and poverty alleviation of rural women in Njikoka local government area of Anambra state and its counseling implications.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the extent of women empowerment and poverty alleviation programmes that rural women in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra state engages in.

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) What poverty alleviation programmes do rural women in Njikoka Local Government Area engage in?
- 2) To what extent have women empowerment programmes helped in poverty alleviation of rural women in Njikoka Local Government Area?

- 3) What are the strategies that enhanced the empowerment of rural women for poverty alleviation in Njikoka Local Government Area?

### **Method**

The survey research was adopted for the study because it involved data collection from a given population in an attempt to explore their opinions on existing conditions, practices and attitude about a given issue.

The study was carried out in Abagana which is the secretariat for Njikoka Local Government Area and Abba towns respectively, out of the six towns that made up Njikoka Local Government Area. The choice of the area was based on the fact that these two communities were privileged to receive government attention during the administration of Governor Peter Obi of Anambra state.

The population of the study comprised 200 registered women in the skill acquisition centers located in the two communities (120 women from Abagana and 80 women from Abba). The entire population was used, there was no sampling because the population of the study is manageable. This is in accordance with the assertion of Nworgu (2006), that if a population of a study is manageable, then the entire population should be used.

The instrument for data collection in the study was a structured questionnaire titled, Extent of Women Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation Questionnaire (EWEPAQ). It is a structured self-report questionnaire consisting of two sections: A and B. Section A was on the demographic data of respondents, while section B was grouped into three (3) clusters of ten items each, making it a total of 30 items used to elicit information from the respondents. Clusters 1 and 3 was structured on a four point rating scale with response options of Strongly Agree (4); Agree (3); Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1), while cluster 2 was structured on a 4 point rating scale with response options of Very High Extent (4); High Extent (3); Low Extent (2) and Very Low Extent (1).

Two experts in Guidance and Counselling and one from Measurement and Evaluation, all three from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka validated the instrument and their corrections guided the final draft of the questionnaire.

The researchers carried out a trial-testing of the instrument by administering 20 copies of the instrument to the rural women in Iheala Local Government Area, outside the study area. Data collected were subjected to test of internal consistency using cronbach alpha procedure which gave the reliability co-efficient of 0.84 for cluster A, 0.86 for cluster B and 0.78 for

cluster C, with an overall reliability co-efficient of 0.82. This is an indication that the instrument was reliable.

The researchers personally administered the instrument to the respondents in one of their monthly meetings and equally collected it immediately. This was done to avoid attrition of any kind and high return rate.

The items were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Items with mean values between 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree (D), 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree (A), 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree (SA) were used to analyze question 1 and 3, while item 2 with mean values between 1.00 – 1.49 = Very Low Extent (VLE), 1.50 – 2.49 = Low Extent (LE), 2.50 – 3.49 = Great Extent (GE), 3.50 – 4.00 = Very Great Extent (VGE) were used to analyze question 2. These are the bench mark.

**Results**

**Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviation of poverty alleviation programmes Njikoka rural women engaged in (N = 200).**

S/N	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1.	Rural women engaged in bead making programmes such as necklaces, earrings, handbags among others.	3.82	0.43	SA
2.	Rural women engage in palm oil and garri processing	2.32	0.48	D
3.	Rural women engage in cassava, cocoyam, tomatoes and vegetables production.	2.45	0.48	D
4.	Rural women engaged in primary health care services.	2.10	0.46	D
5.	Rural women engaged in livestock farming such as goats, sheep, snails and birds rearing.	2.45	0.49	D
6.	Rural women engaged in plaintain plantation.	2.47	0.47	D
7.	Rural women engaged in food processing services.	2.43	0.47	D
8.	Rural women engaged in the production of soya milk.	3.82	0.43	SA
9.	Rural women engaged in the production of detergent.	3.60	0.49	SA
10.	Rural women engaged in adult	1.80	0.60	D

education programmes.			
<b>Cluster mean</b>	<b>2.56</b>	<b>0.48</b>	<b>A</b>
<b>Key:</b> SA – Strongly Agree			
A – Agree			
SD – Strongly Disagree			
D – Disagree			

Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviation of registered rural women on the poverty alleviation programmes with the exemption of item one, eight and nine where the respondents strongly agree that rural women engaged in bead making, production of soya milk and detergents with the mean scores of 3.82, 3.82 and 3.60 and corresponding standard deviation of 0.43, 0.43 and 0.49, the respondents disagree to the rest items. 2, 3.4.5.6.7 and 10 that rural women engaged in palm oil and garri processing, cassava, cocoyam, tomatoes and vegetable production, primary healthcare services, livestock farming, plantain plantation, food processing and adult education programmes with mean scores of 2.32, 2.45, 2.10, 2.45, 2.47, 2.43 and 1.80 and corresponding standard deviations of 0.48, 0.48, 0.46, 0.49, 0.47, 0.47 and 0.60 listed in the table above were not poverty alleviation programmes rural women engaged in. This is because each of the items has its mean score ranging between 1.80-2.47 with corresponding standard deviation of 0.43-0.60 which is below the agreed criterion mean of 2.50. Equally, the overall mean score show a cluster mean of 2.56 with a standard deviation 0.48. This indicate a decision level of agree. Consequently, the result shows that all the items in the table with the exception of items one, eight and nine are not poverty alleviation programmes rural women engaged in.

**Table 2: Mean scores and standard deviation of the extent women empowerment have helped in poverty reduction of rural women in Njikoka Local Government Area. (N=200)**

S/N	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
11.	Women who are empowered play crucial role in the rural economy.	3.35	0.47	GE
12.	Women empowerment creates awareness to available economic opportunities therefore reducing poverty level of rural women.	3.20	0.40	GE
13.	Empowered women will empower others therefore reduce poverty level of	3.50	0.50	VGE

	rural women by engaging them in skill acquisition for self-reliant.			
14.	Women empowerment minimizes inferiority complex among rural women.	3.84	0.45	VGE
15.	Women empowerment has enabled women to compete for survival.	3.65	0.48	VGE
16.	Women empowerment enable rural women to know their right.	3.15	0.65	GE
17.	Women empowerment has enable rural women to determine their choice in politics and decision making in the society.	3.50	0.50	VGE
18.	Women empowerment has enabled women to understand their worth for embarking on education.	3.39	0.49	GE
19.	Women empowerment through education has enabled women gain access to healthcare information needed during pregnancy and after delivery.	3.25	0.49	GE
20.	Women empowerment has helped in poverty reduction of rural women through the establishment of skill acquisition centers	3.45	0.48	GE
	<b>Cluster mean</b>	<b>3.43</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>GE</b>

**Key:** GE – Great Extent

VGE – Very Great Extent

VLE – Very Low Extent

The result presented in table 2 shows that mean scores and standard deviation of registered rural women on the extent women empowerment helped in poverty reduction reveals that items 13, 14, 15 and 17 with mean scores of 3.50; 3.84, 3.84, 3.65 and 3.50 with corresponding standard deviation of 0.50, 0.45, 0.48, and 0.50 where the respondents designates very high extent that empowered women: empower others, minimizes inferiority complex, complete for survival; determine their choice in politics and decision making respectively. Other items 11, 12, 16, 18, 19 and 20 with mean scores of 3.35, 3.20, 3.15, 3.39, 3.25 and 3.45 with corresponding standard deviation of 0.40-0.65, also indicate to a great extent that empowered



women play crucial role in the society, creates awareness, know their right, among others. All the items were above the criterion mean score of 2.50 indicating that the items have helped in reducing poverty level of the rural women. The overall mean score show a cluster mean of 3.43 with standard deviation of 0.49 indicating a decision level of great extent, implying that to a great extent women empowerment has helped in poverty alleviation of rural women.

**Table 3: Mean scores and standard deviation of the strategies that enhanced the empowerment of rural women for poverty reduction in Njikoka Local Government Area (N=200)**

S/N	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
21.	Monitoring and assessment of the activities of poverty alleviation programmes will enhance the empowerment of rural women.	3.60	0.49	SA
22.	Investing in the health of rural women will greatly lead to their empowerment.	3.44	0.48	A
23.	Modification of societal cultural activities that is targeted against women folk will enhance the empowerment of women in rural area.	3.64	0.48	SA
24.	Vocational skills acquisition of women will enhance the empowerment of the rural women.	3.65	0.48	SA
25.	Establishing skill acquisition centers and markets enable women to share and discuss issues relating to their lives and solve common problems that hinder empowerment.	3.34	0.47	A
26.	Allowing women to fully participate in politics will enhance their chances of being empowered.	3.65	0.48	SA
27.	Adequate measure to procure farming facilities will enhance empowering rural women for poverty reduction.	3.39	0.49	A
28.	Adequate loan for establishment of farming firms for poultry, fishery and plantain plantation will empower rural women for self reliant.	3.49	0.50	A
29.	Establishing of palm oil extraction and cassava processing mill will provide empowerment opportunities for rural women.	3.30	0.45	A
30.	Establishment of skill acquisition centers	3.55	0.49	SA

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such as bakery, soap making, weaving, bead making, among others will provide empowerment opportunities for rural women.

**Cluster mean**

**3.51 0.48**

**SA**

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**Key:** GE – Great Extent

VGE – Very Great Extent

A – Agree, D – Disagree

SD – Strongly Disagree

Table 3 shows the mean scores and standard deviation of registered women on the strategies that enhances the empowerment of women for poverty reduction in rural areas. Items 21, 23, 24, 26 and 30 had mean scores of 3.60, 3.64, 3.65, 3.65 and 3.55 with corresponding standard deviation of 0.49, 0.48, 0.48, 0.48 and 0.49 indicate that the rural women strongly agree that monitoring and assessment of the activities of poverty alleviation, modification of societal cultural activities, vocational skill acquisition of women, allowing women to fully participate in politics and establishment of skill acquisition centres are strategies that enhanced empowerment of women. While items 22, 25, 27, 28 and 29 had mean scores of 3.44, 3.34, 3.39, 3.49, and 3.30 each with corresponding standard deviation of 0.48, 0.47, 0.49, 0.50 and 0.45 reveals that the rural women also agree that investing in the health of rural women, establishing skill acquisition centres and markets; procure of farming facilities, loan for establishing farming firms and establishing palm oil extraction and cassava processing mill are also strategies that enhanced empowerment of rural women.

The table shows that the items are strategies that enhanced the empowerment of women for poverty reduction in the rural areas.

### **Discussion**

The findings of the study showed that poverty alleviation programmes rural women engaged include bead making such as necklaces, earrings and hand bags; production of soya milk and detergents. The respondents disagreed to the other poverty alleviation options that rural women engage in palm oil and garri processing; cassava, cocoyam, tomatoes production; primary health care services; plaintain plantation; food processing and in adult education programmes. This finding could be because rural women as part of their vocation and life style are used to production and processing of most of this farm produce, and are used to health care services and adult education programmes but finds interest in learning new skills like beadmaking, neaklace, earrings and hand bags, detergents and soyamilks. This finding is very surprising, though it is not unexpected considering the view of Ugwu

(2003), that since human history, every type of government and every type of economic and social system has tried to alleviate poverty without success.

The findings in Table 2 showed that women empowerment has helped in poverty alleviation of rural women to a great extent. This is based on the fact that women who were empowered play a crucial role in the rural economy, create awareness to available economic opportunities, compete for survival, know their rights, understand their worth, gain access to healthcare information needed during and after pregnancy among others. Based on the finding of the study, it is evident that women empowerment educates and empower women who are homeless; with skills and confidence to stand on their own for positive impact on the society. The findings of the present study supported the study conducted by Shakira, Bukhari, Jahangir and Achakzia (2005) which stated that women who are empowered play a crucial role in the rural economy, including agriculture, livestock and cottage industries.

The findings in Table 3 showed that registered women strongly agree that strategies that have enhanced the empowerment of women for poverty alleviation in rural areas include; monitoring and assessment of alleviation programmes, modification of societal cultural activities, vocational skill acquisition of women, participating in politics and establishment of skill acquisition centres. The respondents also agreed to the other strategies that enhanced empowerment of women for poverty reduction. This finding is in line with the view of Ugwu (2003) who made suggestions that as a way of empowering women. Government should create the culture of industrial production and management in rural areas for rural needs.

This findings calls for an urgent demand for an intensive community counseling for rural women on the importance and need to actually participate in all government projects and establishment, and to also make effort to learn all the skills they are exposed to in such centres, as it will empower them to better their life and that of their family, if not, the aim of establishing those centres will be defeated.

Secondly, government should employ and assign counselors to all the communities, this counsellors would play greater role in community counseling so that better awareness be created in vocational skill acquisition.

Thirdly, government should try and set up monitors, whose duty is to monitor the extent of women participation in their different skill acquisition centers, this will form an avenue for government to monitor their skill centres for effectiveness and productivity.

Finally, counsellors should also adopt home visit as a counselling strategies, to reach out to women who out of ignorance do not participate in government poverty intervention programmes.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn;

- 1) Rural women mostly engage in bead making such as necklace, ear-rings and handbags, and in the production of soya milk and detergents as poverty alleviation programme.
- 2) Women empowerment has helped in poverty alleviation of rural women to great extent. This is based on the fact that women who were empowered, empower others by engaging them in skill acquisition for self-reliant, minimizes inferiority complex among rural women, enable women to compete for survival and also enable rural women to determine their choices in politics and decision making in the society.
- 3) Strategies that enhance the empowerment of women for poverty reduction in rural areas include; monitoring and assessment of activities of poverty reduction programme; modification of societal cultural activities that is targeted against women folk; creating vocational skill acquisition centers and allowing women to fully participate in politics will enhance their chance of being empowered.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study. The following recommendations were made:

- 1) Government should make sure that funds meant for women empowerment and poverty alleviation are properly utilized.
- 2) Government should establish more functional skill acquisition centers to expose women to more skills.
- 3) Government should ensure strict monitoring and assessment of the activities of poverty alleviation programmes.

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