

**LOCAL WOMEN INITIATIVES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF  
INHABITANTS OF AKPABUYO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS  
RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

By

**BASSEY BALLANTYNE IKPEME**

Department of Social Work

University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

**VICTOR EDE**

Department of Social Work

University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

**NNANA OKOI OFEM**

Department of Social Work

University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

&

**LAZARUS BASSEY ABNOR**

Department of Social Work

University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

**ABSTRACT**

*Using the quantitative method to collect data from 400 respondents, the main focus of this study was to establish the nexus between local women's initiatives and the economic wellbeing of inhabitants in the study area. Their initiatives in the aspects of involvement in agricultural production, rural education, encouragement of women's membership in cooperative societies, and socio-economic impact have been specifically examined. The study was sustained on the functionalist perspective. The research design was a survey while the multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient. Findings revealed that a significant relationship exists between involvement in agricultural production, involvement in rural education, and promotion of membership in cooperative societies and the socio economic wellbeing of inhabitants. The study concluded that local women's initiatives are essential strategies for the enhancement of the socio economic well- being of inhabitants of rural communities. The policy implication is that women should be encouraged in their local initiatives, especially in agricultural production, through extension*

*education and accessibility to loans, in order to arrest the relative stagnation of agriculture and reduce rural poverty.*

*Key words: Local women, socio economic wellbeing, empowerment, productivity, sustainable development, Nigeria.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The cardinal goal of global and local development efforts is to guarantee the wellbeing of individuals in society. Wellbeing is the end product of economic and social transformation processes. This socioeconomic well-being requires that important things like life support, self-esteem, and freedom show up (Thirwall 1994). Thus, development at any level of society is deemed to have occurred when basic needs have been improved, when economic progress has contributed to yielding a greater sense of self-esteem for individuals, and when there is a corresponding expansion of the range of people's choices due to advancement in material resources.

The well-being of rural residents revolves around the creation and expansion of opportunities for self-sustained development, access to empowerment opportunities, and opportunities to access and use local resources to improve their standard of living (Peter & Okpa, 2019). Their well-being is linked to bold and persistent measures to expand opportunities,

choices, and rights that promote involvement in community development activities. Economic empowerment gives better chances and accessibility to sustainable materials. It guarantees that rural residents benefit from a business environment that encourages the start-up and long-term growth of businesses. This also has the benefit of allowing individuals, particularly rural women, to have access to financial services (Ahmed, 2009; Braun, 2010; Omang, Okpa, Okoi, & Iniama, 2020). Socio-economic wellbeing manifests in improvement in the social, cultural, educational, economic, and political dimensions of the rural environment.

The need to develop and improve the lives of rural dwellers motivated governments at all levels in Nigeria to design and implement development plans and programmes.

However, previous development attempts appear to have been imbalanced, ignoring the importance of women in the socioeconomic development process (Okpa & Ekong, 2017; Ukwaiyi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019). Rural women contributions have been less emphasized. But their activities, especially in initiating

community projects, constitute an essential ingredient in the focal point of rural development initiatives. Policymakers at the grassroots have not seen women's self-help development as a prerequisite for eradicating poverty in rural areas (Bayes, 2009; Okpa, Ilupeju, & Eshiotse, 2020).

The experience of rural women, as observed by Nkpoyen and Bassey (2012), is a full withdrawal from the development process, notwithstanding their many rural development policies and initiatives. The rural development plan has not given enough credit to women's communal initiatives. Rural women's self-help programs assist in improving the grassroots economy. This approach has been successful in reversing Asian countries' economic disempowerment. The goal of the rural women community project is to provide answers to the community's socioeconomic well-being, as well as to raise the quality of life and promote social welfare. It entails women's deliberate attempts, either collectively or individually, to improve people's living conditions. According to existing research, women may gain economic empowerment by engaging in neighbourhood localized development. Participation in rural education, health care, agriculture, and small-and medium-sized enterprises may help provide a better quality

of life for rural communities (Ahmed, 2009; Okpa & Ukwai, 2017).

Women's empowerment programs are an example of a bottom-up development strategy. The creation of support programs for economic empowerment via the efforts of women rather than depending heavily on external initiative and/or assistance has taken on huge significance in rural community development (Peter, Okpa & Okoi, 2020). These grassroots efforts have the ability to relieve poverty at the local level. In some areas, rural women's community efforts have aided in the enhancement of communities' socioeconomic well-being.

Increasingly, women are contributing to the growth of their household income via grassroots development initiatives. Thus, the focus of this study is to evaluate women's initiatives in agricultural production, rural education, and the promotion of membership in cooperative societies as tools for enhancing the living conditions of people in rural areas of Akpabuyo local government area of Cross River State of Nigeria.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The living conditions of grassroots inhabitants are of great relevance to social workers, community development advocates, and other stakeholders in rural development. This has roused serious

attention, especially here in Akpabuyo local government area of Cross River State. Rural Nigeria is littered with examples of development efforts that have had mixed results in terms of enhancing socioeconomic well-being. The well-being of rural residents has not improved substantially because the huge human and material resources have not been adequately used to drive growth. The central government, in collaboration with the subnational government, has devised strategies to help improve the living standards of rural people. The programmes include but are not limited to: "Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), National Poverty Eradication Programme, Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme, First Ladies Empowerment Programmes" etc. All of this was intended to scale up efforts to promote socioeconomic well-being and alleviate rural poverty. However, these interventions have not been able to transform or improve rural areas in the way that was envisioned (Nkpoyen, Mbat, & Bassey 2015).

Perhaps the capacity of women, an essential part of the development process, has been ignored. Women's grassroots efforts in their communities have received less attention. Women in rural areas across the globe have contributed extensively to their communities' socioeconomic well-being. There is a scarcity of literature about this

connection in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. As a result, the present research filled a knowledge void in this area. The survey answered the following research questions: "to what extent does women local initiatives relate with socio-economic well-being of rural dwellers in Akpabuyo local government area"? The concern of this investigation is to analyze local women initiatives in the aspects of agricultural production, promoting rural education, promoting membership in cooperative organizations, and socio-economic well-being of inhabitants of Akpabuyo local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Is there any relationship between women involvement in agricultural production and socio-economic wellbeing of rural inhabitants?
2. What association exists between women involvement in promoting rural education and socio-economic wellbeing of inhabitants?
3. To what extent do women involvement in promoting membership in cooperative activities relate with socio-economic wellbeing of rural inhabitants?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Functionalism Theory**

Functionalism is linked to French philosophers, Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, and others (Charles, 2011). Functionalism is a sociological model that primarily explains social institutions as collective means to meet personal biological needs. Thereafter, functionalist theory developed to concentrate on how social structures meet social demands, particularly social cohesion (Haralambus & Holbon, 2000). Women are an important part of the social structure. Their presence and support for the community's general well-being are essential and vital. Their self-help programs have improved the socioeconomic well-being of rural residents in a variety of ways. These women have helped to solve core social system problems, including adaptability, goal accomplishment, integration, and latency.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The cross-sectional survey research design was used because it allows the researcher to generalize the research findings to the entire study population. The study area was Akpabuyo Local Government Area in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study elements and the respondents were selected from the ten political council wards, namely; "Atimbo West, Edem Odo, Edet Nsa, Effanga Offiong, Eneyo North, Eneyo South,

Idundu/Anyanganse, Ikot Edem Odo, and Ikot Nakanda". According to the National Population Census (2006), Akpabuyo had a population of 272,262 people. All the research participants were women. Therefore, the study heavily relied on the female population, which stood at 82,488 (NPC. 2006).

### **Sampling Techniques**

The study area was delineated into ten electoral wards. The ten wards made up the ten strata of the study. For ease of selecting the study elements and respondents, one community was randomly selected from each of the ten political wards. This brings the total number of selected communities to ten. To avoid the arbitrary selection of the study sample size, Taro Yamene's sample size determinant was used to arrive at a representative sample size of four hundred respondents. From stratum 1, Akwa Obio Inwang community was selected, stratum 2, Ikot Umo community; stratum 3, Ikot Edem Ndarake community; stratum 4, Ekpoeyo; stratum 5, Esuk Mba; stratum 6, Ikot Akiriba; stratum 7, Ikot Ekpo Essien; stratum 8, Idebe Offiong Umo; stratum 9, Akwa Ikot Effanga/Akansoko; stratum 10. These were the 10 clusters of the study.

The respondents were selected through a systematic random sampling

technique. Only houses that were evenly enumerated by the researcher took part in the study. The questionnaire was distributed only to women, purposively selected for the study, and 1/10<sup>th</sup> of respondents were selected per cluster. Using Taro Yamene's

(1967) technique for determining sample size based on the number of women in the region, 400 participants were recruited from 10 clusters. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze data gathered from the field.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Socio demographic data

S/No.	Demographic Variables	Options	Response rate	Percentage
1.	Age in years	20 - 24 years	48	12.0
		25 - 29 years	122	30.5
		30 - 34 years	88	22.0
		35 - 39 years	102	25.5
		40 years and above	40	10.0
		Total	400	100
2.	Highest educational Status	No formal education	18	4.5
		FSLC	32	8.0
		SSCE/GCE	122	30.5
		B.Ed/BA/HND	208	52.0
		Ph.D/MED/MA/MSc	20	5.0
		Total	400	100
3.	Religious Affiliation	Christianity	376	94
		Islam	8	2.0
		Traditional religion	16	4.0
		Total	400	100
4.	Marital status	Married	154	38.5
		Single	186	46.5
		Widow	18	4.5
		Divorced	10	2.5
		Separated	32	8.0
		Total	400	100
5.	Occupation	Civil servant	82	20.5
		Farmer	6	1.5
		Self-employed	288	72.0
		Unemployed	20	5.0
		Any other (specify)	4	1.0
		Total	400	100

**Source:** Field survey, 2021

In Table 1, with respect to age, 48 (12%) were between the ages of 20 and 24; 122 (30.5%) respondents were between the ages of 25 and 29 years; 88 (22%) respondents were between the ages of 30 and 34 years; 102 (25.5%) of the research participants were between the ages of 35 and 39 years; and 40 (10%) of the research participants were between the ages of 40 and above". Majority of the study participants 122 (30.5 percent) were between the ages of 20 and 24. In terms of educational attainment, 18 (4.5%) of respondents had no formal education; 32 (8%) had FSLC; 122 (30.5%) had SSCE/GCE; and 205 (52%) had Ph.D/M.Ed/MA/MSc. The majority of respondents held a B.Ed/B.Sc/BA or an HND. "In terms of religious affiliation, 366

(91.5%) were Christians, 8 (2%) were Muslims, and 16 (4%) were traditional worshippers. According to marital status responses, 154 (38.5%) were married, 186 (46.5%) were single, 18 (4.5%) were widows, 10 (2.5%) were divorced, and 32 (8%) were separated. In terms of occupation, 82 (20.5%) were civil servants, 6 (1.5%) were farmers, 288 (72%) were self-employed, and 20 (5%) were employed).

**Hypothesis One:** Women involvement in agricultural production activities has no significant relationship with the socio-economic well-being of rural inhabitants. The results of the correlation analysis are presented below

Table 2: PPMC analysis of the relationship between women involvement in agricultural production and socio-economic well-being (N = 400).

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Women involvement in agricultural production(x)	1490	5710		
Socio-economic well-being (y)	1470	5815	5670	0.75*

*Significant at 0.5, crit. r = 0.196, df = 398*

Source: Field survey, 2021

“Table 2 indicates that the calculated r-value of 0.75 is greater than the threshold r-value of 0.196 at 0.5 level of significance with 398 degrees of freedom”. “As a result, there is a considerable relationship between women's participation in agricultural activities and empowerment for well-being”.

**Hypothesis Two:**

Women involvement in educational activities has no significant relationship

with socio economic well-being of inhabitants. The following are the findings of the correlation analysis:

Table 3: PPMC analysis of the relationship between women involvement in rural education and socio-economic well-being (N = 400)

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Women involvement in rural education ( $x_2$ )	1495	5720		
			5690	0.83*
Socio-economic well-being (y)	1470	5815		

\*Significant at 0.05 level, crit.  $r \geq 0.196$ ,  $df = 398$

Source: Field survey, 2021

“At the 0.05 level of significance with 398 degrees of freedom, the calculated r-value of 0.83\* was determined to be larger than the critical r-value of 0.196. As a result, women's participation in educational

activities is strongly linked to economic empowerment and well-being”.

**Hypothesis Three:** Women involvement in promoting membership in rural cooperative societies has no significant relationship with socio economic well-being of inhabitants.

Table 4: PPMC analysis of the relationship between women involvement in promoting membership in rural cooperative societies and socio-economic well-being (N = 400).

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Promoting membership in cooperative society ( $x_3$ )	1492	5718		
			5675	0.76*
Socio-economic well-being (y)	1470	5815		

\*Significant at 0.05 level, crit –  $r = 0.196$ ,  $df = 398$

Source: Field survey, 2021

“Table 4 shows that the computed r-value of 0.76\* is more than the threshold r-value of 0.196 at the 0.05 level of significance and with 398 degrees of freedom. This

suggested that there is a substantial relationship between women's self-help initiatives of engagement in cooperative



society operations and economic empowerment for well-being”.

## **Discussion**

The findings generally revealed that the essential role played by women in agricultural output is a key and sometimes neglected component of agricultural systems in the global south. Singh and Sengupta (2009) observed that women do practically all the duties relating to subsistence food production in the global south, where subsistence farming is the norm and shifting agriculture is still essential. It is a common practice for women to perform all the following operations, clearing and burning trees felled on land that may be suitable for cultivation; this is even though men who stay at home tend to perform the initial task of clearing the land of trees and bushes. Weeding, harvesting, and prepping crops for storage or immediate consumption are all done by women. (Blackden & Wodon, 2006; Ebingha, Eni, & Okpa, 2019). These activities collectively impact on the living standards of the people.

The study found a substantial and favourable link between women's involvement in agricultural activities and the socioeconomic well-being of the residents. Women are in charge of agricultural production in Nigeria. In almost

every small community in Nigeria, women are heavily active in different agricultural self-help enterprises. The findings of research by Ibiang (2014), Nkpoyen, Kenneth, Eteng, Cobham, Umo, Anam, and Essien, (2021) confirmed that women are food providers, stockbreeders, fuel, wood, and water suppliers, and forest product collectors. These activities contribute to self-sufficiency and improved well-being, particularly in terms of ensuring food security (Chung, 2012; Ukwaiyi & Okpa, 2017; Ukwaiyi, Okpa, & Dike, 2018). Hussain (2008) said that women are the most important people in rural communities when it comes to farming.

Dwyer and Bruce (2011) found that women have assisted in empowering their communities economically via socio-economic development initiatives and individual household activities. Women's most essential function is probably ensuring food and nutritional security for the home. This is achieved through supplementing family revenues, diversifying household income sources, and producing livestock to complement household assets. (Robson, 2014; Speth 2010; Ukwaiyi & Okpa, 2017; Ukwaiyi, Okpa, & Dike, 2018). Producing veggies for family use helps to protect families from price fluctuations in food and saves monetary outlays for household essentials. Todaro and Smith (2011) say that

women's investments in income-generating projects and livestock are very important for the stability of their families.

Local women initiatives in education have significantly contributed to the well-being of rural inhabitants. The findings of the present study support existing literature "that a significant relationship exists between women involvement in education and economic empowerment for well-being" (Roy & Mondal, 2015; Nkpoyen, Mbat, & Bassey, 2015). According to Ngwu (2003), the involvement of women in rural transformation through educational activities promotion has assisted in the reduction of illiteracy, the development of skills and easy adaption to change. The final outcome is a more informed community capable of attaining greater socioeconomic success. Tambi, Tabi, Atemnkeng and Bime, (2017) asserts that "women's involvement in educational activities ultimately results in improving the standard of living of the people." Women's education support encourages young girls and women to take part in initiatives to enhance their common good. Women are also very interested in getting an education so that they can better understand the world (Grossman, 2012).

Women in rural Nigerian communities, particularly in the South

West, are playing important roles in the informal education process. The elites among them are interested in ensuring that professionals in agriculture, home economics, health, small-scale businesses, and other fields provide informal out-of-school education to rural households. They are also interested in arranging semi-formal literacy classes for individuals who were unable to get a formal education at a younger age. This is what adult education is all about (Chauhan, 2013; Grossman, 2012; Ebingha, Eni, & Okpa, 2019).

The involvement of women in cooperative societies has facilitated the transformation of the rural economy. The study's findings revealed that there was a strong link between women's participation in cooperative organizations and their overall well-being. The assertions of (Nkpoyen & Bssey, 2012; Nkpoyen, Mbat, & Bassey, 2015) were confirmed by the findings of this survey. Corporative organizations have contributed to the establishment of a diverse range of credit facilities for their members, resulting in increased farm investment, encouraged savings and the accumulation of capital among the rural poor (Usoroh, & Abia, 2018).

The promotion of membership by rural women in cooperative organizations

has assisted in creating a platform for job creation by establishing small-scale firms, mobilizing rural resources, economic change, and reducing labour investment. The outcome of this study supports Braun (2010) assertion that women's conditions have improved because of their ability to access funds and information as a group; they are able to fight against the scourge of poverty. The members are also able to develop leadership abilities in other areas of village life. Generally, membership in cooperatives has conferred benefits such as an increase in productive efficiency and the introduction of innovations to members. Members are able to build houses through loans generated by pooling members' resources. Previous studies have demonstrated that cooperative groups that are encouraged and formed may be a potent force in a nation's economic growth and promote economic empowerment (Akinwumi 2008; Nkpoyen & Bassey 2012; Burthe 2012).

## CONCLUSION

Local women initiatives have the huge potential to ensure the socio-economic wellbeing of the inhabitants. Investments in agriculture, rural education, and the encouragement of rural women participation in cooperative organizations are important contributions made by women to improve the living conditions of rural people. The

participation of local women through these initiatives has collectively led to an improvement in the quality of rural life.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Local women should be encouraged by government and non-governmental organisations in their local initiatives, especially in agricultural production, through extension education and accessibility to loans in order to arrest the relative stagnation of agriculture. More rural women should participate in the development process through promoting women's membership in cooperative organizations and involvement in rural adult education provided by government and non-governmental organizations.

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