

Christian women groups contributions and community development in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria: Implications for social work practice

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Abstract

This paper examines the contributions of Christian women groups and community development in Opobo /Nkoro Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria; and its implications and opportunities for social work practice. Literature were reviewed and the social capital theory was adopted to explain the phenomenon. The methodology use for this research was the survey research design. And the population was drawn from the entire members of the Women Groups in Opobo/Nkoro, the sample size for this study is 120 respondents randomly selected. The instrument of data collection was the questionnaire and the data collected was recorded and analysed by frequency distribution tables and the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 13, data collected were subjected to chi- square statistical analysis for testing the study hypothesis. The finding reveals that most of the sources of income and funding by Christian women groups in Opobo came from lunching and ceremonies, levies loans and self-help contributions and donations. It was recommended among others that women and women groups should be empowered financially and economically to enable contribute meaningfully and participate actively in community development projects.

Key words: Christian Women, Groups, Contributions, Community, Development

Introduction

Women groups form a critical mass in fostering community initiatives, participation and development in society, even though their contributions are most often not noticeable. To a large extension these women group especially the christian groups perform the primary role of social welfare in advancing the socioeconomic growth and development of the citizenry and society in general. Little (1964), observe that prior to the development of formal social welfare system in West Africa, Women Voluntary organization took the major responsibility of catering for the needs of the sick, the poor, and the disabled in the society, especially in Nigeria in Nigeria, Little (1964), reported that women's groups have always play an important role in community development through village associations, market associations and councils. Egboh (1987), reported that various women associations such as the 'Umuada' and the married wives' associations of various village groups in the Eastern part of the country, Abia, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi and Anambra states, under took various aspects of community development. Egboh reported that the women organized various activities for the welfare of both the members of their natal and marital home and also organized peaceful relations among warning communities and in such a way to maintained peace. He pointed out those women equally organized activities that could enhance their socioeconomic welfare such as dancing groups etc, were they could raise some resources for developmental projects that will be benefit to all are usually their frontline activities. Robison (2006:41) observed that women contribution in community development have improved in recent years and the number has continued to improve. He pointed out that women, considering their passionate nature, are in the best position to effectively carryout community development initiatives. Robison categorically stated that in areas where men have failed to deliver the goods to the people in the community, women had succeeded, especially in the area of providing succour to the physically challenged and orphaned children as well as the physically challenged citizens in the society. This paper therefore acknowledges the activities and contributions of women groups to the development of their communities.

Statement of the problem

Every community value the contributions of their Women groups especially, the Christian groups exceptionally because they form a critical mass and indispensable element in community development in society/their contribution are enormous. Women generally, form the trim-tap and driving wheel of informal economic development in Nigeria. There is no society or community that women not carrying out commerce and trade to foster growth and development, vocational and skills acquisition programmes, health care services and infrastructure development, market stalls as well as to support their children and wards education, conflict resolution. They engage in school scale business especially trading in food stuff etc. However, the patriarchal and cultural factors limit their involvement to development activities in the society. Despite their involvement their efforts, their contributions are merely noticed and sometime not calculated for Gross National Domestic Product (GNPD), and per capita index. Is excluded. It is against this back drop that this paper examines Christian women groups contributions and community development in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area, Rivers state, Nigeria: implications for social work practice, how does Women Group generate funds for community development projects? What opportunity does this provide to social work practice to promote inclusivity and participation of women groups in community development

Literature review

The contribution of Christian women groups to community development

Women's organization by their very role and remit contribution first and foremost to Community development by providing life changing opportunities to women across the full range of ethnic and religious backgrounds ages sexual orientation, abilities and educational levels. Mean while according to the Task force on Resourcing the Voluntary and community sector, community development can be defined as "empowering individual and groups to take issues that affect their lives and the communities in which they live. The Task Force acknowledges that to do this, people need to work together and "in partnership with other groups and statutory agencies". The impact of Women's Organization goes much further than the immediate benefit to their direct service users. For example, WSN (2002) states that women's centers are invariably at the heart of community development initiative within their communities such as economic and physical regeneration project as well as their participation on "a wider range of advisory bodies and partnerships" (WSN2002). Women Groups have gathered themselves into strong Organization with different aims and objectives.

Most of the Women Group organizations main objectives are directed to social, economic cultural, religious and political needs of their members and those who are less privilege in the society. Infrastructural and local community amenities that support their wellbeing, as well as towards community development. In another development, women groups have placed more emphasis so much in development programmes like road construction and maintenance, building of classroom blocks, market stalls, church projects, civic centers, and scholarship scheme etc. in the society with or without government involvement. They involve in providing innovative projects with the aim of promoting the living condition of the citizenry. They setup vocational and skill acquisition training centers in the community for both male and female school drop-outs providing them the opportunity to become self-dependent and sufficient especially in the areas of; woodwork, carpentry, tailoring, embroidery, hair dressing, electrical work and mechanics, iron fabrication and joinery, aluminium fabrication as well as other agro-based services.

The important but other invisible contribution of women group in the economic and social development of their communities, and plight of low- income women has been well acknowledged and publicized by the United Nation Decade for Women (1976-1985). This

shows that the contribution of women groups in community development projects such as housing, health, commerce, income generation, skills development etc have far reaching implication on their well welfare and standard of living, and also in a wider context embraces health, childcare, better household management, and control of the environment combined with providing the opportunity for women to organize and negotiate for better control of their lives and develop their potential for community leadership (Fernando, 1987). In the past, it was evident that women's activities were inhibited by formal organizations in the society and were dominated by men as a result of patriarchal and cultural factors.

The involvement of women groups in community-based information production and child care, gives women groups the opportunity to associate with each other and articulate their concerns, develop new skills as well as manage activities that promote their economic and social development. Initially the engagement and involvement of women groups in community participation and development to promote economic upscale both community and national level with the result of achieving self-reliance of all the community members. Most of the women groups especially, Faith-Based organizations (FBOs) e.g. the Catholic Women Organisations, the Christian Girls in Training (CGIT), the Anglican Women Organisation among others contribute to the development of their communities by raising funds for the development both their local church and congregation and other community development projects like market stalls, health centres, Primary and secondary schools etc. The funds raised are being used to finance community support schemes and infrastructural development to meet the domestic needs of the local populace. In their bid to contribute to the development of their community women groups embark on building mechanisms to enhance peace and conflict resolution in their community especially in tribal and community disputes and war., and during electoral process to avert political unrest.

Social Capital Theory propounded by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and popularized by While James Coleman (1988). Bourdieu (1986) examine and emphasize the role of maximizing and emplacing social equality in his work "The Forms of Capital, and James Coleman (1988) in his work "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," focused on its importance in education and human capital development. The theory emphasizes the ability of Non-governmental Organizations like the Women Christian groups and faith-based organisations to build social capital of the community relationship, trust and cooperation, which will help in providing efforts and enabling platforms for the development of their society and members of the group. Capital Theory explains how social relationships and networks can help to create value chain and opportunity and facilitate collective action that promotes results through interventions that are goal directed. The theory builds on the importance of trust, norms, and social connections in achieving common goal and allowing people to take advantage of the services provide to meet their demands and needs in the society. The theory amplifies the need for collective action and equity, egalitarian, expectations of reciprocity and cooperation as well as fostering a sense of security and encouraging collective action and the participation of individuals in meeting their needs.

Research methodology

The Survey research design was used for study. This study was carried out in Opobo Town in Opobo /Nkoro local Government Area of Rivers state. It is located within logical 0.6o52oE and latitude 07o24oN, in Rivers South-East Senatorial zone. The population of this research work is 10% 12,000 of the entire members of the Women Groups in Opobo. Therefore, the sample size for this study is 120 respondents, using the simple random sampling procedure. The research instrument for data collection was the questionnaire based on the sources of income and funding of women groups and community development. Data were analysed using

the frequency table and social sciences (SPSS) version 13, data collected were subjected to chi-square statistical analysis for testing the study hypothesis.

Data presentation and analysis

Research Question: How do women groups generate their income for community development projects?

Table 1: Sources of income and funding for Christian women groups community development.

Ways of generating income	n-f	Mean	Standard deviation
Community reserve fund	51	1.4874	.50195
Through lunching/ceremonies	67	1.5583	.49867
Regular contributions	44	1.4417	.49867
Loans and grant from bank	66	1.5333	.50098
Donations from outsides bodies	44	1.4417	.49867
Levies on member	44	1.4417	.49867

Discussion of findings.

The results from the table above reveal that the highest mean score of 1.5583 recorded for respondent who believe that it is through lunching that the women generate income for community development, while donation from outside bodies and levies on members came last with the mean scores of 1.4417. these finding is in line with the social capital theory of Bourdieu (1986); Coleman (1988). That asserts that empowerment, education and human capital development are primary sources of community development. The theory emphasizes the ability of Non-governmental Organizations like the Women Christian groups and faith-based organisations to build social capital of the community relationship, trust and cooperation, which will help in providing efforts and enabling platforms for the development of their society and members of the group. This is usually through trust, norms, and social interconnections which enables them to achieve common goal and objectives of contributing to their community development initiatives.

Implication and opportunities for social work practice in the study

This being the case, the social workers can assist the women groups in their contributions to community development by influencing the policies in the area of community development programmes that favours the women groups. It allows them to build social connections and capital that promotes their participation to community development within their territory. More than any other groups in the country, voluntary association and town unions expand a major portion of their efforts to achieve “good life “through interactions with agencies of the government. Elekwa (1995). Social Workers and sociologists act as link between the grass root mobilisers and advocacy links to the government and non-governmental organization. Their experience in mobilization, facilitating and interacting with the women groups, places them in a better position to identify and deal with the problem of the women groups, like: how to raise money for their projects, better ways of tackling their most felt needs like gender inequality, educational inequality, etc. Sociologists can also organize seminar of family planning, methods in community development process, HIV/AIDS as worry of families etc. for women groups in Opobo to help them have four sights and know better ways of handling their problems. Sociologists can also help them to choose better option in tackling their problems by working with them and not for them.

Conclusion and recommendations

This research work on focuses on Christian women groups’ contributions and community development initiatives. This is because women groups are a critical mass in supporting and funding community projects and they do so by securing incomes from self-

contributions, loans, donations, launching and ceremonies as well as levies. Amongst other things the paper recommends critical stakeholders in the Community, government and non-governmental organizations should make more meaningful policies in favour of the women groups to help enhance them contribute and help them participate meaningfully in community development.

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