

**POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES AMONG RURAL -BASED WOMEN: A
STUDY OF THE POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY
SELECTED RURAL WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS IN
AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA**

BY

**UDOM, BASSEY SUNDAY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY & ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF UYO, UYO**

ABSTRACT

Rural women are women groups based in rural communities with the clear objective of bringing succour to themselves and the community and with a view to strategizing ways of reducing poverty starting from their immediate communities. These have culminated in the adoption of strategies to reduce poverty in the communities. This study therefore examines the poverty reduction strategies adopted by these women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. To give the study a direction, research questions were formulated based on the identified poverty reduction strategies adopted by these women via their income generation activities, financial interest accumulation, joint farm labour and group visitations with gifts. Relevant literature was reviewed with theoretical framework to concretize the study. The major instrument used for data collection was a 20—item structured questionnaire entitled; “poverty reduction evaluation questionnaire (PREQ)” as the primary data used to elicit questions from the response in the Likert scale. The multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to select respondents for the study (cluster, purposive and simple random). The population of the study was 12 (out of 650) registered rural-based women organizations with Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Women Affairs as reflected in the three Senatorial Districts of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A sample of three hundred and sixty (360) respondents from the 12 organizations was proportionally and randomly selected for the study. Two null hypotheses were formulated and all the formulated hypotheses were tested using population t-test analysis statistical instrument. The result of the findings shows that all the four null hypotheses were rejected, which also shows that all the identified variables of income generation activities, financial interest and joint farm labour, significantly influenced the adopted strategies of poverty reduction among women. The study found that if women are encouraged, they can do more exploit for the growth of their communities.

Key words: Poverty reduction, Rural-Based Women organizations (RBWOs), Akwa Ibom

INTRODUCTION

Rural women are groups based in rural communities with clear aims and objectives. They are non-profit and non-governmental organizations established to advance the cause of their members and non-members alike in the society. This is based on the fact that the rights of women have been tampered with and believing that something should be done to guarantee the rights of women in the society. Ering, Nwagbara, and Ushie (2006) writing on the rights of women opined that women were unaware of the rights specific to them but have now risen up to take advantage of the various legal institutions available for the protection of their rights, desirous to explore all legal means available for the protection of the rights of women. This brought about the formation of different women Associations, Clubs and Organizations

to assist themselves, and as a back-up to be heard and listened to in groups. Government also encourages the formation of groups for assistance. Women constitute about half of the world's population (Geohive 2010). By the United Nations estimation, the world's population was about 6.8 billion in 2010, and of this figure, 3.47 billion was male while females formed 3.44 billion. The estimated total population of Nigeria stood at 158.4 million at 2010, males constituted 80.2 million while 78.2 million were females (Geohive 2010). Women organizations formation was attributed to poverty. Oladeji and Abiola (1998) pointed out that poverty is defined relative to the standard of living in the society at a specific time. Thus people are poor when they lack income sufficient for their material needs which excludes them from taking part in certain critical activities in the societies they live.

Statement of the Problem

In some rural communities, aspirations for advancement are very low as some children in poor families often fail to aspire beyond the level of their parents (Ihejiamaizu 2002). This is largely because of the nature of the rural communities. While there are rural development policies (Periman and Gurin (1972), the magnitude of the problem of poverty seems to be increasing by each passing day. The policies were aimed at reducing poverty in the rural areas. Scholars (Ering, Nwagbara and Ushie (2006), Todaro (1995), Ouwainalam (1986) have maintained that while there are rural development policies, yet the problem of poverty, unemployment, income inequality and other social vices seems to increased. Thus, the rural sector is generally saddled with a great burden of poverty and its attendant consequences. The problem or phenomenon of poverty continues to grow unabated. The need to remove rural development in the country beyond the level of mere rhetoric has prompted this study.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this paper was to examine the poverty reduction strategies used by rural-Based women organizations (RBWOs) in Akwa Ibom State to reduce poverty.

Specifically, the study:

- i. Examines the challenges faced by women in poverty reduction.
- ii. Examines how rural women cope with incidence of poverty.

Hypothesis

On the bases of the specific objectives put forth in this paper, the following null hypotheses were formulated.

- i. The challenges faced by women in poverty reduction is not significantly high in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. Poverty reduction strategies of women are not significantly high in Akwa Ibom State.

Literature Review

Feminism is a social movement whose origin is traceable to England of the 18th century and whose aim was to achieve equality between the sexes by extending the rights of women. Then, there were men and women who campaigned for votes for more women to have access to education and the professions (Marshall 1999). It could thus be argued that feminism is, amongst others, an academic pursuit that appreciates gender studies and relationships, and a political facility potent enough to effect changes in the system for the betterment of the system. Umoh (2013) in his book “Elements of the sociology of Religion”, said when Charles Fourla coined the word “Feminism” in 1837, his supporting argument was that women’s rights was the general principle of all social progress. He said also that the concept of feminism is strongly noted on the philosophy of progress, development and change, and that feminism as a philosophy became an organized movement in the Nineteenth Century and culminated in women awareness of their rights and privileges. This awareness actually brought about the formation of different women groups in the country and Akwa Ibom State in particular.

The strategic roles women groups have played in the development of women towards the social, economic, political and educational development of African societies cannot also be underestimated. In fact, as St. Clair (1994) put it, traditionally African societies attach no importance to gender issues because every individual had a role to play both in the family as well as in the larger society; he went on to say that each gender had traditional role to play in the development of the society, hence interest was on nobody. By this statement of St. Clair, this researcher is forced to believe that men and women now decided to look at themselves and their roles as a result of either poverty or redundancy, else laziness or illiteracy. These may have triggered the gender studies that we have now.

However the position of women according to St. Clair was complimentary to that of men. According to him since there was non-existence of gender inequality, each role was considered equally important as far as each contributed to the fundamental goal of the community survival. St. Clair posits that, despite the complimentary role women played alongside men, the dynamism that prevailed ipso-facto the existence of the patriarchy system, man were still seen as heads of the family and leaders of the society.

Leith (2006) emphasized that culturally, Africans were the transmitters of the language, the history in oral culture, along with the music, the dance, the habits and the artisanal knowledge (work of arts). Women were said to be treated with unparalleled respect because, they were seen to be closer to the Creator than men. In the same view, Harkin and Hanson (2008) posit that, because women have special abilities to create things, such as ability to give birth, responsibility of caring for the needs of the next generations, they can be regarded as the originators of the idea that is now known as sustainable development.

Buttressing the above statement, Agawal (2009) said, it is an incontrovertible fact that society’s sustainable development and strategy depends essentially on a solid family structure. He says further that African families have always been characterized by strong women who usually held pertinent positions in the family. Dabson (2004) declares that as a result of the agrarian society system, the economy of traditional Africa encourages polygamy as socially necessary in order to ensure continuation of the society and to provide for the needs of the many women who might otherwise never enjoy the status and benefit which accompany becoming a mother, a bearer of children, and that, this is a vital link to the ancestor. Ikperha (2003) on explaining the role women play in Urhobo culture said, that they are highly respected as promoters of cultural values, as during festivities they adorn

themselves in many fashions, throughout their several clans. He emphatically praised women's role as not only that of care-takers but extends to other terms such as procreators, goddess, mothers, ancestress and sage.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The research design adopted for this study was the survey design. The survey research is a sub-division of the descriptive research. This research option always focuses on objective description of existing phenomena usually through associations, age grades, political affiliations, etc.

Area of the Study: The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State in the South-South geopolitical region of Nigeria. The state is one of the oil rich states in the region and also blessed with other resources, both human and natural. The state is in between the Atlantic Ocean in the South and Abia State in the North and Cross River State in the East. It has 31 political administrative areas and Uyo in the centre as the state capital. It also has three Senatorial Districts and ten Federal Constituencies.

Population of the Study: The population for this study consisted of 650 socially registered Women Associations in the entire 31 Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State, with at least 20 Associations per Local Government Area.

With respect to membership in the 12 sampled Associations, a total of one thousand eight hundred (1800) were proportionally selected as shown in Table 1.

It was from this target/specific population that a total of 360 women were randomly and proportionally selected to constitute the representative number of respondents in this study. See Table 1 for details.

Sampling Procedure: The stratified, cluster, proportional and simple random sampling procedure were adopted separately in determining the sample of the study. Foremost stratified sampling was used in identifying the 3 Senatorial Districts-Northern as stratum 1, (Ikot Ekpene with 216 organizations), Central as stratum 2, (Uyo with 214 organizations) and Southern as stratum 3 (Eket with 220 organizations), totalling 650 organization. The next was cluster sampling. This was used in identifying Local Government Areas, while proportional and random sampling were used in identifying Women Associations in each Local Government Area, and then for actually selecting the proportions of respondents from each Association. The proportional and percentages were also adopted.

The study specifically focused on women based organizations in the three Senatorial Districts of Akwa Ibom State but proportionally selected twelve (12) women organizations, as assisted by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare, Akwa Ibom State. The locations of these twelve (12) sample groups were Etinan, Uyo, Ibesikpo, NsitUbiom, IkotEkpene, EtimEkpo, EssienUdim, Abak, Eket, Oron, Mbo, and Eastern Obolo. Details of proportional arrangement are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Population Distribution and the Sampled Population per Association

S/N	Association	Available Population	Sampled Population	%
1.	Professional Ladies Teachers Association, Etinan	300	60	16.666
2.	Mothers in Nigeria Foundation, Uyo	215	43	11.944
3.	Lucky Star Ladies Association, Ibesikpo	95	19	5.277
4.	EkpeneUdo Women Association, NsitUbiom	200	40	11.111
5.	Unwam-Abasi Widows Association, IkotEkpene	150	30	8.333
6.	MbohoNkaNtoAnnang, Essien-Udim	15	30	8.333
7.	Etim-Ekpo Women Association, Etim-Ekpo	150	30	8.333
8.	Fulfilled Ladies Association, Abak	60	12	3.333
9.	AmedakaIbiban-ijong Women Association Eastern Obolo	200	40	11.111
10.	Famous Daughters Forum. Eket	80	16	4.544
11.	Chosen Zion Ladies Association, Oron	100	20	5.555
12.	Utang-oyio Ladies Association, Mbo	100	20	5.555
		1800	360	100
	Total Ratio = 29.997 (30)			
	Targeted Population = 1800			
	Sampled Population = 360			

Source: Researcher's Field Survey

The Study Sample:

The study sample consisted of three hundred and sixty (360) members (all women) in Twelve (12) of these registered Associations. The sample was proportionally and randomly selected, based on the composition of members per Association. For instance from the Professional Lady Teachers Association in Etinan Local Government Area, with 300 members, 60 representing 17% of the total sample was proportionally selected; while from the Fulfilled Ladies Club of Abak Local Government Area and with membership strength of 60 members, only 12 (or 3.3%) were selected. See table 1, for other proportion.

Instrumentation:

Only one instrument- the questionnaire was used in generating data for the study. This was entitled Poverty Reduction Evaluation Questionnaire (PREQ) divided into 2 sections, A and B, with section A meant to elicit data on respondents demography, while section B was devoted to generate qualitative data on the extent of contribution of Women Association to poverty reduction among rural-based women groups. The items in section B were developed on the 4- Ponitlikert-scale type of “SA” for Strongly Agree; “A” for Agree “D” for Disagreed and “SD” for strongly disagree, for respondents to make their choice.

Data Collection Procedure: The questionnaire instrument was used to generate data for the study from the twelve sampled Women Associations. Foremost, the researcher visited each earmarked/sampled Local Government Area; through the State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare, the contact addresses of these Associations were obtained. From the addresses, the Association heads were also contacted. After concretizing arrangements with the heads, these Associations were approached separately, and the sampling exercise conducted.

Data Preparation and Analysis Procedures:

The generated data from field survey were first prepared by coding/scoring to yield numerical values/scores. These scores were extracted onto a table (person-by item matrix table, called data bank). It was from this data that the score/codes were extracted and used for all data analyses for the study.

Data Analyses:

Each null hypothesis was tested using the statistical package for social science (SPSS) windows, version 18. To do this, generated data (from the developed data bank) were keyed into the SPSS system according to each respondent (persons) and each questionnaire item. The means and standard deviation (descriptive statistics) was first performed, and the result presented in Table 2

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics (mean \bar{x} , and Standard Deviation SD) for all Major Variable in the Study, N=300

Variable	N	X	SD
A. Independent:			
(i) Income generating (thrift) (Saving)	300	15.632	3.3 65
(ii) Financial-interest generation activities	300	14.673	3.511
(iii) Technical aid/advice	300	15.302	3.714
(iv) Group visitation/gift	300	13.980	4.020
Total effect (extent poverty reduction)	300		
Hypothesized mean (\bar{X}) from study instrument		12.500	

Source: Researcher's field survey

From table 2, it could be inferred that the respondent's means responses for the extent of poverty reduction strategies adopted by rural-based women organization — RBWOs was higher than the hypothesized means of major variables in the study. This was shown by the means scores for income generation activities ($\bar{x}_1 = 15.632$), followed by financial interest activities of ($\bar{x}_2 = 14.673$), then by government technical aids or assistants of ($\bar{x}_3 = 15.302$), then group visitation activities with means ($\bar{x}_4 = 13.980$). On the whole, the hypothesized mean was given as 12.500 (from the research instrument). This further confirmed that the adopted strategies of women in poverty reduction are significantly higher in Akwa Ibom State.

Discussion of Findings

The statistical analysis of hypothesis One of the study led us to the understanding that the challenges faced by women in poverty reduction were enormous in that to fund women groups was not easy. Most of the women were not allowed to leave their houses by their husbands or parents because it was initially thought that the formation of the groups was politically motivated. These challenges are significantly high in Akwa Ibom State particularly among women organizations because patriarchy and other vital aspects of the culture of the people seem to affect the women. This finding is in consonance with Emerua (1992) who in his study asserted that women's role in olden days were more or less a dictate of the culture, values and beliefs of the people. To him, they were all reflections of the world view of men which was incorporated into the norms of the society.

In that order, the statistical analysis of hypothesis two of the study has also led us to the understanding that the extent of coping ability with the incidence of poverty reduction (of thrift Osusu and personal savings for interest generation for poverty reduction) is significantly high in Akwa Ibom State, particularly among the RBWOs members'

households. The findings are in agreement with Anderson and Taylor (2007) who asserted that women themselves have the ability to create things due to the fact that they are very close to the Creator. This means that they have creative ability to create things out of nothing. With respect to hypothesis three is the fact that women do not have any significant poverty reduction strategies to the extent of finance-interest generation activities of small-scale loans to members, and to their communities by RBWOs.

Conclusion

In general, this paper focused on strategies adopted by some selected RBWOs for poverty reduction strategies using some selected groups in 12 (out of 31) LGAs in Akwa Ibom State as study area. Two (2) null hypotheses were formulated on the basis of the identified major variables that revealed the adopted strategies of women in poverty reduction via thrift/Osusu contributions and personal savings, financial interest generation, joint farming/labour, and group visitation activities. Based on these findings, it was therefore concluded among others that since poverty reduction strategies adopted by RBWOs are highly significant in reduction of poverty in Akwa Ibom State, therefore government should motivate women through soft loans to encourage these women to do more.

Recommendations

The following are recommended:

1. Government should encourage formation of more RBWOs as well as men's organizations in the state, and in the entire nation, by motivating them through merit awards and financial back-up.
2. Income generation activities like small scale loans from bank, and thrift savings should be encouraged for rural-based women to enable them develop high financial base to use in reducing poverty among members and their communities.

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