International Journal of Innovative Social Sciences & Humanities Research 12(4):82-93, Oct-Dec., 2024

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10.5281/zenodo.14084423

Women Assembly And Rural Development In Nigeria: A Study Of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated women assembly and rural development with specific focus on the extent women have participated in rural development, the factors and the impact of lack of women participation in rural development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area. The theory of structural-functionalism was adopted as the theoretical framework. The study adopted both primary and secondary data. Primary data include the use of questionnaire and interview while secondary data involves textbooks, academic journals and the internet. Findings revealed among others that women assembly participated and contributed significantly to increasing agricultural produces, fishery, animal husbandry, politics, distributive trades and health services in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area. The patriarchal nature of African society, stigmatization and sometimes low level education are significant factors that affect or challenge women assembly in rural development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area. The study among others recommended that more co-operative societies should be registered to encourage women in enhancing rural development. Also, laws should be enacted to liberalize patriarchal practices that discriminate against women and prohibit women stigmatization in all sectors of the economy to enable them freely contributes to rural development.
Keywords: Development, Rural Development, Patriarchal, Stigmatization, Low-level Education.

INTRODUCTION

In most developed climes, women have been in the forefront of development whereas; the reverse seems to be the case in Nigeria (Damisa and Yohanna, 2017). In fact, Nigerian women rarely have access to the resources that would make their work more productive and ease their heavy workload. Hence it has become difficult for these women to contribute meaningfully to rural development in their communities. Despite their many responsibilities, women have significantly less access to the resources and services they need to increase their productivity and their income and ease their burden of household duties. Many people believe that women are held back by lack of education, unequal property rights and limited control over resources. It is on this backdrop that this research will examine the role of women in rural development with particular attention to Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area.

In Nigeria and indeed the world-over, the society feels reluctant to assign duties of superior positions to women, but recent development has shown that women can perform as much as their male counterpart. Records have shown that some women are more than most men especially in administrative duties, rural development inclusive. Education of women which has hitherto been neglected by the society has received an upward attention and this has more importantly ignited women to be more aware of the roles

they could play in developing the nation through active participation in rural development, as they have come out en-masse to vote and be voted for (Agbalajobi, 2010). Women's education has been the only way to attain self-fulfilment. Furthermore, studies have shown that in many countries, the rights of women are enshrined in law, and there are no formal legal berries to women's political participation in election processes. In practice, however, there are often formidable obstacles to women's active participation in rural development. The hurdle to be overcome can be particularly daunting for women considering running for office, and may be overwhelming for women especially in developing countries. The political atmosphere has been identified as another factor militating against effective women participation in rural development in Rivers State and indeed Nigeria. The violent nature that has usually manned electioneering process in Rivers State especially in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government is such that such atmosphere will not encourage women to fully participate in political activities. These violence ranges from killings, abduction, intimidation etc. This violence tendency has grave consequences for political stability and good governance thus, inhibiting the participation of women in rural development in the community (Kolawole et al, 2013). Therefore, due to the above reasons, society still negates women in doing some jobs with the feeling that as weaker beings, they can only be reckoned with after the men. This has greatly affected the participation of women in most developmental programmes, rural development and administration in particular in rural communities. This study therefore explores the role of women in the rural development in Nigeria with particular focus on Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the functionalist theory. Functionalist theory is based largely on the work of Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parson, and Robert Merton. According to functionalist, society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. The functionalist theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of society by focusing on how each part influences and is influence by other parts. For example, the increase in single parent and dual-earner families has contributed to the number of children who are failing in school because parent have become less available to supervise their children's homework. As a result of changes in technology, colleges are offering more technical programs, and many adults are returning to school to learn new skills that are required in the work place. Functionalist use the term functional and dysfunctional to described the effects of social elements on society. Elements of society are functional if they contribute to social stability and dysfunctional if the disrupt social stability. Merton (1968), identified two functions perform by every society: manifest and latent function. Manifest functions are consequences that are intended and commonly recognized. Latent functions are functions are consequences that are unintended and often hidden. For example, the manifest functions of education is to transmit knowledge and skills to society youth, but public elementary schools also serve as babysitters for employed parents and colleges offer a place for young adults to meet potential mates. The baby sitting and mate-selection functions are not the intended or commonly recognized functions of education. Hence they are latent functions.

The functionalist school of thought has from its inception been concerned with how society adapts and changes. The classic evolutionary view sees changes occurring slowly, allowing for adaptation and realignment of the various interrelated social institutions. The classic evolutionary adaptation of social systems has never posed a problem for functionalists, since such change tend to occur without disrupting the existing social system. More conflictive forms of change; however, has challenge functionalist explanations because they tend to lead to social disharmony (Ogunlela and Mukhar, 2019). This problem was address in various forms by sociologist from Max Weber (1864-1920), Emile Durkheim (1958-1917), Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) and Robert K. Merton (1863-1910). For Parsons (1952), social strain was natural: strain is the painful adjustment which results from society's continued growth, inevitably making each successive social stage more complex than earlier one.

Applying the functionalist theory in understanding women and rural development, it becomes imperative to state that society will be more stable and harmonious when all segments of the society are involved in the decision-making process. The women been an indispensable segment of the society must be encouraged and given the opportunity to contribute their inputs into the decision-making process by way of effectively participating in the process of development (Ngara and Ayabam, 2013). Thus, socio-economic, political stability and development will be more enhance when the atmosphere accommodates women to occupy positions of policy formulations and implementation. The political system that is gender sensitive (given equal opportunities to both male and female) is the best path towards development. The functionalist theory is more appropriate as theoretical framework as its emphasis on the various functions performed by the various segments of society so as to ensure stability and enhance development.

CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

The concept of development is very difficult to define because it is value-loaded. It is often equated with economic growth or economic development. Indeed the two concepts are often used interchangeably, they but they do not mean the same thing. Economic development is an essential component of development, yet it is not the only one. They are many other aspect of development. According to Rodney (1972), development is a many-sided process. At the level of the individuals, it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-disciple, responsibility and material well-being. On the other hand, Tudaro (1977) says that developments must therefore be conceived as a multi-dimensional process in involving changes in structure, attitudes and institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty. in essence, development must represent the entire gamut of changes by which the entire social system, turns to the diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within the system moves away from the conditions of life regarded as materially and spiritually "better". This means that development involves the reorganization and reorientation of the entire economic and social system. This also involves, in addition to improvements of income and output, radical changes in institutions, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, customs and beliefs. The implication of these two definitions is that development goes beyond economic indicators; it is both a physical process and a state of mind. The institutions of structures like construction of railway, schools, hospitals etc are aspect of development. The second aspect of development is that the people must change their attitudes for good (Olayinka and Adeleye, 2005).

Also, Seers (1969) asked certain questions regarding the concepts of development. He says that the questions to ask about a country's development are therefore, what have been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? if all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. if one or two of these problems has been growing worst, especially if all three have, it will be strange to call the result development even if per capital income doubled. It therefore means that development per say cannot be tied to economic advancement only but a general improvement in the living conditions of the people over time. Development also aimed at improving the living conditions of the people through then effective of both the human and material resources. thus, Mohammed and Zaid (2014) noted that development concerns the capacity and creative capability of a people to effectively transform the natural resources of their environment into goods and services through the imaginative and practical application of their creative talent and productive power. This implies that the people must be empowered to be able to meet their basic needs of food, housing, health, transport, education, employment, reduction in poverty level and increased per capital income among others. This is what is lacking in the rural area in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa where about eighty percent of the population live in the rural areas.

A critical examination of the definition of development by the scholars quoted above means that development must necessarily include, the reduction of elimination of poverty, illiteracy, disease, malnutrition, joblessness etc. it is a programme which has the objective and strategy aimed at transforming the citizens in the rural areas from being the victims of poverty, ignorance and disease into a contended human beings, able to earn an income capable of sustaining a reasonable standard of living for themselves and their families.

CONCEPT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Development thus according to Jarollahi (2000) refers to growth, evolution, stage of inducement or progress. This progress or growth is gradual and had sequential phases. Always there is increasing differentiation. It also refers to the overall movement towards greater efficiency and complex situations. Rural development on the other hand, according to Lamba and Solan (2022) is a process which aims at improving the well-being and self-realization of people living outside the urbanized areas through collective process. Ngara and Ayabam (2013) define rural development as a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of rural poor. Meaning of development is growth or evolution, stage of advancement Mohammed and Zaid (2014). In the context of rural background it means developing better physical, social and economic conditions of a specific group of people, the rural poor living in the rural areas. This group includes small scale farmers, tenants and the landless. Improving the living standard or well-being of the people providing them security and basic needs like food, shelter, clothing and employment; making the rural areas more productive and less vulnerable to natural hazards like poverty and exploitation; giving them mutually beneficial relation and ensuring them, that development is self-sustaining, involving the mass of people with little disruption of traditional customs and administrative decentralization (Okoronkwo-Chukwu, 2013).

According to Vessey, Badsar and Mohammed (2019), the word 'rural' means an area which is marked by non-urban style of life, occupational structure, social organization and settlement pattern. Rural is noticeably agricultural, its settlement system consists of villages or homesteads. Socially it signifies greater inter dependence among people, more deeply rooted community life and a slow-moving rhythm of life built around nature and natural phenomenon; and occupationally it is highly dependent on crop farming, animal enterprises, tree crops and related activities FAO, (2015). The term development means quantitative as well as qualitative change. Since it means change, which has meaning only when seen against something at a particular time, it carries a meaning which is not only relative but also subjective. Only a given type of quantitative cum-qualitative change is considered to be development in a positive sense. If the change is not of appreciable quality, and quantity, it is either mal development or negative development. In the same sequence of thinking, rural development would essentially mean desired positive change in the rural areas-both in a quantitative as well as qualitative sense. Thus, rural development is an area-concept it is a complete term which means a variety of elements (Social, Economic, Technological and Natural) of human life and activities (FAO, 2015).

The concept was borne in the context of agriculture and for a long time it encompassed agricultural development (Ogunlela and Mukhar, 2019). Since 1970s, the concept has become more definite in its interpretation and it is being regarded as a design to improve the economic and social life especially, by extending benefits of development to the poorest, small farmers, tenants and landless (Little, 2017). Now, rural development is not exclusively restricted to any single activity or area, it travels many or all areas which anyway affect upgrading, enlisting and petrifying improvement of transformation in socio-economic lives of rural people. Rural development means overall improvement of die quality of life for rural people. It is about reduction of poverty, increasing productivity, providing basic services like health, education, drinking water, sanitation, extending infrastructure, attempt to reverse distorted land distribution and ownership and host of other aspects redressing inequality, exploitation and deprivation in any conceivable sense. The general credence is that for breaking the 'interlocking log-jam' and disadvantages, it will surely require attacking several barriers through concerted action and multi-pronged

strategy (Jarollahi, 2000). Women are often the poorest and most vulnerable members of the rural community and female children are often subject to greater neglect than their male siblings. Like poverty, gender concerns are not exclusive to rural development; however, gender-related poverty is often hardest to tackle in rural areas. Firstly, the cultural norms governing the division of labour and resources between men and women (which often disadvantage women) are usually more deeply entrenched in rural areas. Secondly, the wider difficulties of rural transport and communications keep women isolated from the support that they might get from each other or outside agencies were they to live in a town or city (Amain, 2018).

Rural development generally refers to the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. It has traditionally centred on the exploitation of land-intensive natural resources such as agriculture and forestry. However, changes in global production networks and increased urbanization have changed the character of rural areas. Increasingly tourism, niche manufacturers, and recreation have replaced resource extraction and agriculture as dominant economic drivers. The need for rural communities to approach development from a wider perspective has created more focus on a broad range of development goals rather than merely creating incentive for agricultural or resource based businesses. Education, entrepreneurship, physical infrastructure, and social infrastructure all play an important role in developing rural regions. Rural development is also characterized by its emphasis on locally produced economic development strategies. In contrast to urban regions, which have many similarities, rural areas are highly distinctive from one another.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey research design is adopted for this work. The design allows the researcher to focus on the use of both primary and secondary data. Primary data involves the use of questionnaires and interview while secondary data include information from textbooks, journals, and internet. Taro Yamane's formula is adopted to determine the sample size of 400 in a population of 137,968 women in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government area (NPC, 2006).

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT

Table 1: Methodological Analysis of Response Rate

Administration of Questionnaires	Frequency	Percentage
Number of questionnaires administered	400	100
Number of questionnaires not returned	50	12%
Number of questionnaires valid for the study	350	88%

Source: Field Work, 2024

The table above reveal that out of the 400 questionnaires administered to respondents, 50 making 12% of the questionnaires were not returned while 350 were successfully completed and valid for proper analysis. The response rate is 88% which is good for the study.

Table 2: Social and Demographic Background of Respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency (F)	Percentages (%)
Age bracket	18 – 40	230	66
	41 – 60	120	34
	Total	**350**	**100**
Education	SSCE/ND/NCE	150	43
	HND/BA/B.Sc/PGD	120	34
	MBA/MPA/M.Sc/Ph.D	80	23
	Total	**350**	**100**

Source: Field Work, 2024.

Table 2 above shows that 230 respondents representing 66% are within the age bracket of 18-40 years while 120 (34%) are within the age bracket of 41-60 years. This indicates that stakeholders are abreast with the issues under investigation. Finally, the table above depicts that 150 (43%) have SSCE/ND/NCE; 120 (34%) respondents possess HND/BA/B.SC/PGD while 80 respondents representing 23% are holders of MBA/MPA/M.SC/Ph.D. This shows that the respondents are dominated by different levels of graduates with various certificate holders. This suggests that the respondents have good knowledge about the impact of women in rural/community development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area.

Table 3: Examines the relationship between women and rural development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area.

Computation of the response rate on the relationship between women and rural development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area.

Questionnaires	Strongly Agreed f (%)	Agreed f (%)	Strongly Disagreed f (%)	Disagreed f (%)	Total
Women participation led to stability in rural development.	130 (52%)	70 (28%)	20 (8%)	30 (12%)	250 (100%)
Women participation reduces conflict and enhance regional peace in rural development.	95 (38%)	85 (34%)	50 (20%)	20 (8%)	250 (100%)
Women participation in rural development process engender adequate wealth management.	125 (50%)	55 (22%)	50 (20%)	20 (8%)	250 (100%)

Source: Field Work, 2024.

Table 3 shows the views of respondents on the relationship between women participation and rural development. The table shows that 130 respondents which represent 52% of the 250 respondents strongly agreed with 70 respondents representing 28%. However, 20 (8%) "Strongly disagreed" while 30 (12%) "disagreed" This infers that women participation led to rural development. The table also reveals that 95 (38%) and 85 (34%) respondents confirmed to "strongly agreed" and "agreed" women participation reduces conflict and enhance regional peace in rural development. 50 respondents representing 20% strongly disagreed with 20 respondents which represents 8% disagreed. It indicates that women participation reduces conflict and enhance regional peace in rural development. 125 (50%) respondents strongly agreed, with 55 respondents representing 22% agreed while 50 respondents represent 20%

strongly disagreed with 20 respondents representing 8% disagreed. This implies that women participation in rural development process engender adequate wealth management.

Table 4: What is the impact of women assembly on rural development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area?

Computation of response rate on the dimension of women empowerment in rural development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area.

Questionnaires	Strongly Agreed f (%)	Agreed f (%)	Strongly Disagreed f (%)	Disagreed f (%)	Total
Educational empowerment of women facilitates or enhances rural development process.	125 (50%)	52 (21%)	50 (20%)	23 (9%)	250 (100%)
Women prefer even distribution of resources in rural development.	110 (44%)	100 (40%)	10 (4%)	30 (12%)	250 (100%)
Women participation in politics have consolidated on good governance.	130 (52%)	60 (24%)	10 (4%)	50 (20%)	250 (100%)

Source: Field Work, 2024.

Table 4 reveals that out of 250 respondents, 125 (50%) respondents strongly agreed, and 52 (21%) respondents agreed that educational empowerment of women facilitates or enhances rural development process. This indicates that educational empowerment of women facilitates or enhances rural development process. The table also indicates that 110 (44%) respondents "strongly agreed" and 100 (40%) of the respondents "agreed" that women prefer uneven distribution of resources in rural development. This indicates that women prefer uneven distribution of resources in rural development. Finally, it is observed that 130 respondents representing 52% "strongly agreed" and 60 representing 24% of the respondents and "agreed" that women participation in politics have consolidated on good governance while 10 respondents representing 4% "strongly disagreed" and 50 respondents representing 20% "disagreed" Women participation in politics have consolidated on good governance.

Table 5: What are the factors responsible for limiting women participation in rural development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area?

Computation of responses on the factors responsible for limiting women participation in rural development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area.

Questionnaires	Strongly Agreed f (%)	Agreed f (%)	Strongly Disagreed f (%)	Disagreed f (%)	Total
The nature of patriarchal belief limits women in rural development process	95 (38%)	85 (34%)	50 (20%)	20 (8%)	250 (100%)
Women stigmatization negatively affect women participation in rural development	100 (40%)	125 (50%)	20 (8%)	5 (2%)	250 (100%)
Low level education limits the envisage prowess of women roles in enhancing rural development	102 (41%)	101 (40%)	37 (15%)	10 (4%)	250 (100%)

Source: Field Work, 2024.

Table 5 reveals that 95 respondents representing 38% "strongly agreed" with 85 representing 34% "agreed" that the nature of patriarchal belief limits women in rural development process. This submits that the nature of patriarchal belief limits women in rural development process. Stressing further, the table shows that 100 respondents representing 40% strongly agreed that women stigmatization negatively affect women participation in rural development, as 125 (50%) confirmed to it. Finally, investigation reveals that 102 (41%) of the respondents strongly agreed that low level education limits the envisage prowess of women roles in enhancing rural development, 101 (40%) of the respondents "agreed" Of course, low level education limits the envisage prowess of women roles in enhancing rural development.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Women Assembly and Rural Development: Data analysis reveals that women rarely have access to the resources that would make their work more productive and ease their heavy workload. Ultimately, it is not just women who are held back, but also their families, their communities and local economies. A respondent who corroborated the above claim states that:

> Women in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government have demonstrated capacity to exact rural development. We are mostly engaged in trade, farming and other meaningful economic activities. However, we have been subjected to undue discrimination. Even the local government that is supposed to enhance our services by providing enabling tools and financial support required to drive economic expansion is missing. This is a bane facing women assembly in rural development (T. Amara, personal communication, July 20, 2024).

In line with the above statement, Okoronkwo-Chukwu (2013) notes that rural women have many roles, and they have responsibilities and knowledge that differ from those of men. As farmers, they plant, weed and harvest food crops and tend livestock. As caretakers, they look after children and relatives, prepare meals and manage the home. Many women earn extra income by working as wage labourers, producing and selling vegetables, or engaging in small-scale trading and enterprises. Added to these multiple tasks, they spend long hours fetching water and collecting firewood.

According to Vishwanathan (2014), in developing countries in Africa such as Nigeria, Asia and the Pacific, women typically work 12 more hours per week than men. In poor and marginal areas and areas affected by climate change, where men have been forced to migrate in search of work, women often have the sole responsibility for farming and raising the children. Despite their many responsibilities, women have significantly less access to the resources and services they need to increase their productivity and their income and ease their burden of household duties. Women are held back by lack of education, unequal property rights and limited control over resources. Labour intensive and time-consuming activities further hinder women's ability to improve their income-earning potential. In order for poor communities to prosper and grow, women's needs and rights must be addressed. The study discovered that women play a key role in food production and form a large proportion of the agricultural work force globally given equal resources, women could contribute much more.

Furthermore, findings reveal that FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) estimates that if women farmers (43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries) had the same access as men, agricultural output in 34 developing countries Nigeria inclusive would rise by an estimated average of up to 4 per cent. This could reduce the number of undernourished people in those countries by as much as 17 per cent, translating to up to 150 million fewer hungry people. Again, many of the world's most poor are women. Poverty eradication is a key challenge for rural women. New poverty estimates from the World Bank show that the proportion of people living on less than USD 1.25 a day fell from 47 per cent in 1990 to 22 per cent in 2010, across every developing region. Yet, 1.2 billion people are still living in extreme poverty. The study discovered that the national average of women's political participation in Nigeria has

remained 6.7 percent in elective and appointive positions, which is far below the Global Average of 22.5 percent, Africa Regional Average of 23.4 percent and West African Sub Regional Average of 15 percent.

The Role of Women in Rural Development: Data reveals that out of 250 respondents, 125 (50%) respondents strongly agreed, and 52 (21%) respondents agreed that educational empowerment of women facilitates or enhances rural development process. This indicates that educational empowerment of women facilitates or enhances rural development process. The table also indicates that 110 (44%) respondents "strongly agreed" and 100 (40%) of the respondents "agreed" that women prefer uneven distribution of resources in rural development. This indicates that women prefer uneven distribution of resources in rural development. Finally, it is observed that 130 respondents representing 52% "strongly agreed" and 60 representing 24% of the respondents and "agreed" that women participation in politics have consolidated on good governance while 10 respondents representing 4% "strongly disagreed" and 50 respondents representing 20% "disagreed" women participation in politics have consolidated on good governance. In line with the above, a respondent reveals that:

> We have played major roles in the political sector; we were mobilized to support electioneering campaign, presiding/assistant presiding officers and all that concerns elections management. In social life, we have demonstrated adequate skills in management of health-care facilities, schools, social engagements and socio-economic activities. We have also made contributions in house chores, family upbring, support our husbands with the provision of economic welfare, farming, etc (J. Eyeudie, personal communication, July 25, 2024).

According to Vishwanathan (2014) official statistics rarely makes any effort to measure it, even though it is more than clear that not just unpaid household work but the farming and trading activities of women that make a significant contribution to the well-being of poor rural households. All the evidence suggests that the poorer the household, the more hours women work and the greater their investment in both economic production and family welfare. From a situation of multiple disadvantages often as single parents, women can move to one in which they contribute and benefit three – fold – in the home, in society at large and, not least in the development of the next generation. The study has also revealed the role of women assembly in the following:

Agriculture: Women form the bulk of peasant farmers in the rural areas who feed local communities and the teeming population of the cities. According to Vishwanathan (2014) agricultural work done by women includes pre-planting activities, such as land preparation, digging and ploughing, followed by planting the seeds, cutting grasses and trees, hoeing and weeding. Women account for between 60 to 80 percent of agricultural labour force in rural areas in Nigeria. According to Damissa and Yohanna (2017), in the case of women the combination of farm and household responsibilities may amount for as many as 15 hours or more. Rural women do not have the luxury of coming home from work and putting their feet up to rest. Straight from the farm, there are children and household chores to attend to. Even at bedtime; they are disturbed by men with sexual requests and advances. Processing of food is the preserve of women. They process cassava into Garri, Fufu or Abacha or flour; maize into flour or Akamu. Cocoyam can be dried and grounded into flour and host of other crops.

Animal Husbandry: Little (2017) observed that women often gather leaves and other items that animals feed on. Their work also includes grazing sheep and goats and in some places, cattle which means women trekking long distances in search of pasture or water. In the case of cattle, women milk them and do other preservation processing that might be required in both agriculture and animal husbandry. In some areas, women own animals either by buying them or through arrangements to rear female animals for somebody so that if the animals reproduce, they could share proportionally.

Women Organizations and Agriculture: Lamba and Solan (2022) observed that the Better Life Programme which was launched in 1987 as well as the Family Support Programme of the Abacha administration did a lot to enhance women's participation in development process. In spite of their attendant circumstantial and congenital constraints, some specific achievements can be attributed to the programmes in some parts of Nigeria.

Distributive Trade: In a number of African countries, notably Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Benin, the role of market women has been well documented. In these places, they account for up to 80 percent of trade in foodstuffs and the provision of rural areas with essential commodities (Olayinka and Adeleye, 2005). Women are mostly responsible for effective distribution and supplies of goods, particularly food items and services to and from the cities. Thus, women play indispensable roles in the commercial life of nations. Where women are secluded, they process foodstuffs and other items for their little children to sell for them. Women also dominate such industries as pottery, cloth weaving and catering services in most rural areas.

Health Services: Little (2017) noted that women play very important roles in the environmental sanitation of the rural societies by keeping homes, village squares, village shrines, market places, churches, and other social centres clean-thereby playing indispensable role in enhancing the public health of the rural communities. Many of the nurses, midwives and other para-medical staff in the dispensaries, health centres and hospitals in most rural areas are females.

Factors affecting women assembly in rural development: Table 5 reveals that 95 respondents representing 38% "strongly agreed" with 85 representing 34% "agreed" that the nature of patriarchal belief limits women in rural development process. This submits that the nature of patriarchal belief limits women in rural development process. Stressing further, the table shows that 100 respondents representing 40% strongly agreed that women stigmatization negatively affect women participation in rural development, as 125 (50%) confirmed to it. Finally, investigation reveals that 102 (41%) of the respondents strongly agreed that low level education limits the envisage prowess of women roles in enhancing rural development, 101 (40%) of the respondents "agreed" Of course, low level education limits the envisage prowess of women roles in enhancing rural development.The challenges facing women are enormous, however, researchers have shown that the under listed are likely responsible for the huge marginalization of Nigerian women in politics. A respondent who has also confirmed the above position asserts that:

> Apart from the above claims, we have also suffered from the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society. By default, the system is programme to favour the men. They have occupied major political positions, administrative, operational and support offices are manned by the men. Decision making responsibility is most time left in their hands. This has further led to discrimination and stigmatization against women. Our male counterpart sees us as weaker vessels thus prefer to underrate our strength (O. Akudo, personal communication, August 1, 2024).

Following the above, patriarchal refers to a society ruled and dominated by men over women, which in turn has given rise to women being looked upon as mere household wives and non-partisans in decision making process in households not to talk of coming out to vie for political positions (Daniel and Faith, 2013). Also, following the way politics in Nigeria is played, it is being perceived that it is for individuals that have no regards for human right and are quick at compromising their virtue for indecent gains. Therefore, women aspirants who ventured into politics are looked upon as shameless and promiscuous. The low participation of women in education is also part of the shortcomings. The National Adult Literacy Survey, 2010 published by National Bureau of Statistics revealed that the adult literacy rate in English in Nigeria is 50.6 per cent while literacy in any other language is 63.7 per cent (female adult age

15 and above). This explains why most women are least qualified for political offices due to low educational attainment. This is also an effect of colonialism, where men were more favoured than women (Agbalajobi, 2010). Finally, the time scheduled for caucus meetings to strategize and map out political plans either for the pre or post- election periods are odd and are not conducive for responsible and family women. The slated time are often time which women are expected to take care of their children and family. This method of schedules is viewed as an attempt to side-lining women from engaging in political process.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rural women are key agents for rural development. They play a catalytic role towards achievement of transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. But limited access to credit, health care and education, discrimination and stigmatization against women are among the many challenges they face. Politically, women have been relegated to the background despite the tremendous effort put forward by government and non-governmental organizations following the declaration made at the fourth World Conference on women in Beijing, which advocated 30% affirmative action and National Gender Policy (NGP) recommendation of 35% affirmative action for a more inclusive representation of women both in elective and appointive positions. It is worthy to note that Nigerian women are still being marginalized due to the style of leadership inherent in the country. Following the trends and the role of women assembly in rural development, the following recommendations are made:

1. More co-operative societies should be registered to encourage women in enhancing rural development.
2. The local government should create craft centres in various communities and equipped them with modern machines to enable women participate in craft competition and businesses in an open market.
3. Laws should be enacted to liberalize patriarchal practices that discriminate against women and prohibit women stigmatization in all sectors of the economy to enable them freely contribute to rural development.

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