Assessment of women's participation in leadership roles in rural community-based organisations in Gokana Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the participation of women in leadership roles in rural community-based organisations in Gokana local government area of Rivers state. Simple random sampling was used to select 126 respondents for the study while questionnaire complemented with interview schedule was used to collect data from these respondents. Both descriptive and inferential statistics, namely mean, frequency counts, percentages and Binary Logit regression analysis was used to analyze the data collected from the respondents. Result shows that only few women (30%) occupy leadership position in the community-based associations they belong to. The major leadership roles carried out by women as indicated by respondents include positively influencing and supporting capable women to take up leadership roles ($\bar{x}$ = 2.7), supporting women leaders in maintaining accountability (= 2.66) and influencing other members of the association towards achieving the group goal ($\bar{x}$ =2.57). General gender bias ($\bar{x}$ =3.69), traditional belief that women cannot lead men in mixed associations ($\bar{x}$ = 3.55) and the belief that men are better leaders than women ($\bar{x}$ = 3.33) were the major constraints to women participation in leadership roles. Socio-economic variables that influence women participation in leadership roles were age, educational status, household size and religion. The study recommends a re-orientation of the rural people and abolishment of traditional beliefs and practices that undermine women participation in community leadership by traditional rulers.

Keywords: Women participation, leadership roles, community-based associations, gender-bias

Background of the study

In developing and developed countries, women carry heavy burden in the sense that they are kept on the fringes of society. They are often denied a voice within their households, communities, markets and states in which they live especially where there are more male interests. (Agada & Ameh, 2017). This situation makes many of these women feel invisible and decision making tends to lean towards the male interests. There is inequality in every sector of the society and in other to reduce it, women have to be dignified, made visible and empowered to make them feel significant.

This is exemplified in the participation of women in Parliament in some countries. Though, having more women in leadership positions does not guarantee women's concerns will be on the agenda, there is evidence that once a critical mass of women like over one-third is in power, their shared interests as women start to come to the fore. Women's participation and leadership is a basic human right. International human-rights treaties and conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and the third Millennium Development Goal on gender equality, recognize that women have the right to participate equally with men at all levels and in all aspects of public life and decision-making, whether it is deciding how the household income

is spent or determining how the country is run, and such conventions commit signatories to realizing this goal. Despite these commitments to promoting gender equality in formal structures of representation and decision-making, women continue to be under-represented in all areas of decision-making and face significant barriers to their full and equal participation in the structures and institutions that govern, and directly affect, their lives (Organisation for economic Co-operation and Development, 2021)

Makama (2013) stated that in Nigeria, it is observed that womanhood is seen as a second-class citizen, hence, there is the commonality of general belief system that the best place for women is in the kitchen. This trend has brought about tremendous misinterpretation of women right at the level of the family down to the circular society. The Nigerian society is patriarchal in nature which is a major feature of a traditional society. Hence, in most cases, women are discriminated upon from, acquiring formal education, mistreated and kept as house helps (Makama, 2013). Rural women in Nigeria are known to contribute significantly to their their family survival, even with limited access to production and development resources (FAO & ECOWAS, 2018). This highlights the very important role rural women play in the upkeep of their family. In Rivers state, rural women play pivotal role in their family upkeep, providing over 65% of labor force, make significant contribution in home keeping, childcare, farm work and achievement of rural development programs (Sunday, 2017). Despite these important roles played by women in rural community development and family upkeep, there have not been commensurate opportunity given to women in leadership responsibilities of community organization.

Community based organizations are established with the intent of bringing people with similar interest together to share ideas, ideals so they can learn from each other and pool resources together for greater impact and development. For these organizations to function effectively as well as meet the desired goals, there is a need for members to view some of their actions and activities with a gender lens particularly in electing and appointing people to different leadership positions. Effort should be made for officers of these associations to have balance gender mix. This will help to ensure that each gender is well represented in decisions and practices of the organizations. An understanding of gender roles has been lacking in community development activities due to women's low literacy levels and absence in these activities (Eswarappa, 2021). This could be ameliorated by including women in community project planning and implementation as well as beneficiaries in rural community development programmes.

Ifeanyi-obi, Abuta, Familusi, Adesope and Agumagu, (2019) in their study of Intra-household conflict among rural dwellers in Anyaoha local government area of Anambra state noted that for conflict to be avoided or minimized to the barest minimum in rural community activities, it is important to ensure that women are represented in decision making process. For rural community organizations to move forward and be productive, there is need for women to be put in leadership roles. The contribution of women to agriculture and rural development could be made better if they are given equal access to resources and training (Anyaoha, Asiabaka, Chikaire, Ifeanyi-obi & Onoh, 2012; Ifeanyi-obi, Olatunji & Akpala, 2014). Women comprised major stakeholders in rural community development, neglecting such important composition in decision making will result in evolving decisions that are not holistic hence will not impact development meaningfully. One major way of ensuring that women's interest are accommodated in decision making is by ensuring that women form a representative proportion of leadership positions in these organizations. Unfortunately, culturally in many Southern states of Nigeria, leadership positions are seen to be for only the men folk to the extent that some men feel belittled when women head organizations they belong to. Even when it is obvious that a women possess better leadership qualities, men are preferred to lead the organization. This

could be as a result of cultural belief and poor understanding of rural people on contributions of women in rural community development. Ifeanyi-obi, et al (2019) noted that rural development goes beyond infrastructural development. They explained that development of the inhabitant's intellectual, better understanding and disposition to resources and project, increased respect for and acceptance of other humans as well as public projects, improved team working spirit, better understanding of ethics and etiquette, increased appreciation and acceptance of one's strength and weaknesses are important aspect of rural development. For rural communities to experience the desired development, it is important for inhabitants to understand the important place each gender occupy hence allow both gender the opportunity to participate in both the activities and leadership roles.

If the women are left out, they would not be able to contribute their important ideas as well as show commitment during project planning and implementation. Allowing women in leadership roles would go a long way in developing gender balance programs as well as meeting the problems faced by these women. Women have been known to be emphatic and sympathetic, if they are given an allocation in leadership roles, they would be able to see the problem better, look at it more critically and proffer more humane solutions. It is against this background that this study assessed women's participation in leadership roles in rural community organizations in Gokana local government area of Rivers state. Specifically, the study described the socio-economic characteristics of women in Gokana local government area; ascertained whether women participate in leadership position in rural community organization, identified the leadership positions in which women participate in, determined the level of women participation in leadership roles in rural community-based organizations, identified the constraints to women's participation in leadership roles and determined the strategies for improving women participation in leadership roles in the study area.

Hypothesis of the study
The Null hypothesis tested in this study is stated as follows:
The is a significant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of rural women and their participation in leadership positions in the study area.

Methodology
The study was conducted in Gokana local government area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The state is situated in the south of Nigeria. Gokana is one of the local governments in Rivers State and one of the six kingdoms of the Ogoni people in the Niger Delta region. Gokana Local Government area covers an area of 124km² with a population of 328,500 people with 115,591 being women as at 2016. It lies on the latitude 4.6792⁰ north of the equator and longitude 7.2969⁰ east of the Greenwich meridian and bounded in the east by Khana local government area, west by Ogu/bolo local government area, in the south by Andoni local government area and on the north by Tai local government area. The local government area is made up of twenty two (22) communities (B.dere, K.dere, Barako, Bera, Biara, Bodo, Boghor, Bomu, Deken, Deyor, Gbe, Goi, Goko, Kibanga, Kpor, Lewe, Mogbo, Nugbelo, Nwenbiara, Nweol, Yeghe, Nwuigra). Gokana administrative headquarters is in Kpor. There are many rural community organizations in Gokana local government area mostly formed to support members financially but this study is focused on only the registered community-based associations in Gokana local government.

The population of this study comprised all rural women who are members of community-based associations registered in Gokana Local Government Area. The total registered associations in the LGA are 21.

Simple random sampling was used to select sample for the study. From each of the 21 registered community-based association in the study area, 6 female members were selected, giving a total number of 126 respondents for the study. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire that was administered by the researcher during planned visits to the study area. Interview schedule was used for respondents who are not literate. Level of women participation in leadership roles was captured using a 3-point Likert Type scale of High (3), Moderate (2) and low (1) with a midpoint of 2.0 obtained, this implies that mean scores equal to or above 2.0 means high participation while mean scores of less than 2.0 implies low participation. Constraints to women participation and strategies for improving women participation in leadership roles in community-based association was captured using a Four-point Likert Type scale of Strongly agree (4), Agree (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1) with a midpoint of 2.50 (4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.5). This implies that mean scores equal to 2.0 or above means agreement with the statement while mean scores below 2.0 means disagreement.

The data obtained for objectives I to v was described using descriptive statistical tools, namely percentages, mean and frequency counts. The hypothesis was achieved using Binary Logit Regression analysis. The model specification is as follows:

$$C_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + \beta_7 X_7 + u$$

C_{ij}, = Dummy = 1 if the respondent participation in leadership position in community-based organizations and 0 otherwise.

X_1 = Age (Years)

X_2 = Marital status (Not married = 1, Married = 2)

X_3 = Household size (Actual number)

X_4 = Educational status (No formal education = 1, formal education = 2)

X_5 = Type of community-based organization (No formal registration = 1, formally registered = 2)

X_6 = Religion (Non-Christian = 1, Christian = 2)

X_7 = Major occupation (Non farming = 1, Farming = 2)

u = Stochastic error term.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 revealed that majority of the respondents were mostly married (70%). Implying that most mixed community-based associations comprised mainly of married people. Youth's nonchalant behavior towards rural community development and the increased cases of rural-urban youth migration could be part of the driving factors behind this. Mean age and household

size was 34 years and 4 persons respectively. The result shows that the respondents were mainly at their productive age which is characterized by increased appreciation and acceptance of one's strength and weaknesses, better understanding of ethics and etiquette, team working spirit and readiness to face the task before them. People at this age range are also known to be willing to take up leadership roles in their community. Also, majority had formal education (84.1%) while 16% of the respondents were not formally educated. As regards the level of education, 16% of the respondents only have First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC), 26.4% have B.Sc. while majority (44%) had only O`level certificate as their highest level of educational qualification. This indicates a relatively low level of education among the women and the need for more education (could be in the form of skill acquisition) for members of community-based associations as this will help to improve their ability for increased income generation. This is likely to enhance their contribution and participation in a social network such as community association. Result further showed that the respondents were majorly Christians (83.3%). This is not surprising as the research was done in the southern part of Nigeria, an area dominated by Christians.

Major occupation of the respondent was majorly farming (59.0%) with an average monthly of N58,782 indicating that the respondents are middle class.

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of Women

Variable Mean	Freq.	Percentages (%)
	(n=100)	
Age		
34years		
< 20	9	7.1
21 -30	14	11.1
31-40	34	27
41-50	25	20
51-60	21	16.6
Above 60	23	18.2
Marital status		
Single	39	30.2
Married	87	70
Educational attainment		
Informal	20	16.0
Formal	106	84.1
Level of formal educational		16
FSLC	20	44
O level	55	26.4
BSc	31	0
MSc	0	0
PhD	0	
Main occupation		
Non farming	74	59
Farming	52	41.3

Religion			
Christianity	105	83.3	
Non-Christian	21	17	
Household size			4 members
Below 5	95	75.4	
5-10	31	24.6	
Above 10	0	0	
Monthly income level			N58,782
≤ 20,000	1	8	
21,000-60,000	82	65.1	
61,000-100,000	30	24	
Above 100,000	13	10.3	

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Ascertain the status of women participation in leadership positions in rural community organizations in the study area

Table 2 showed that only 30% of the respondents were holding leadership positions in rural community-based organizations in the study area, while 70% of the women are not occupying leadership positions. This shows that women participation in leadership positions is still low in the study area.

Table 2: Women participation in leadership positions in rural community organization in the study area

Statement	Variables	Frequency (n=126)	Percentage (%)
Do you occupy any leadership position in the organization?	Yes	38	30

Source: field survey, 2021

Level of women participation in leadership roles in rural community-based organizations in the study area

Result in Table 3 showed that respondents in the study area mainly participate in the following leadership roles; influencing other members of the association towards achieving association goals ($\bar{x}=2.57$), attending meetings to keep abreast of association proceedings in leadership roles ($\bar{x}=2.74$), encouraging women in leadership positions to ensure financial accountability and overall competence in their association ($\bar{x}=2.66$) and in training women to better manage their family responsibilities so as to have more time to engage in community association leadership ($\bar{x}=2.54$).

A critical look at the findings revealed that women in the study area highly participated in leadership roles that are mainly concerned with productivity of the organization but had low participation in leadership roles concerned with improving women empowerment and

participation in leadership. Olinga and Lubyayi (2014) noted that societal pressures of a patriarchal system discourage women from political positions. Similarly, Chithtalath (2017) confirmed that women mostly have roles in the family circle, while men take active roles in the community and social activities. This is also in line with the views of Karunwi (2016) which stated that women are have little or no control over decision-making as well as access to information and resources for decision making. It noted that women are politically marginalized, denied rights to vote or be voted for into some sensitive positions hence, lack decision-making power to participate on equal basis with men in political and public life.

Table 3: Level of women participation in leadership roles in rural community-based organizations in the study area

S/N	Leadership Roles	Mean	Remark
1	I attend meetings to keep abreast of associations proceedings and leadership roles	2.74	High
2	I encourage women in leadership positions to ensure financial accountability and overall competence in the association	2.66	High
3	I influence other members of the association towards achieving association goals	2.57	High
4	I participate in training women to better manage their family responsibilities so as to have more time to engage in community association leadership	2.54	High
5	I commit to empowering women to improve their income generating activities through empowerment and skill acquisition programmes so as the financially capable to compete for leadership position	2.51	High
6	I ensure meetings are held on suitable days to ensure more participation by women	2.50	High
7	I help maintain peace and order during our community based meeting	2.46	High
8	I participate in ensuring peace and order in my community-based association to help ensure conducive environment for leaders	2.46	High
9	I commit to educating rural authority and governance on giving women the opportunity to occupy leadership positions in the rural based association	2.45	High
10	I support eligible women to occupy leadership positions in community based associations	2.11	High
11	I contribute in restructuring of rural based community association's structure to support women leadership	2.08	High
12	I serve in committees instituted by the associations as a way of developing my leadership skills	2.05	High
13	I participate in amending rural community-based association's constitution to support women leadership	1.93	Low
14	I educate women on the importance of participating in leadership roles in community-based associations	1.91	Low
15	I help other women understand and develop their natural talent and strength in leadership	1.54	Low
16	I participate in stoppage of traditional beliefs, practices and cultures that are against women participation in leadership in rural community based associations	1.42	Low
17	I participate in training potential women leaders to improve their capacity and skill on leadership	1.41	Low

Source: Field survey, 2021

Constraints to women's participation in Leadership roles in the study area

The major factors constraining women participation in leadership roles in study area are the believe that women are not supposed to lead men in associations ($\bar{x}$=3.55), rural people are gender biased ($\bar{x}$=3.69), believe by rural people that men are better leaders than women hence should be elected rather than women. This also confirms the view of Deji (2017) which noted that a woman's place is in the kitchen, the colonial masters and administrations thought it strange to find the African woman involved in substantial economic and political activities outside the home (kitchen). Enemuo (2015) also confirmed that Nigeria women, like women all over the world and especially in most parts of the developing countries continue to face various forms of discrimination which limit their potential on a basis of equality with men. Umar (2015) confirmed that media will rarely find time to report on issues where women make significant political contributions and would much rather focus on their personal lives.

The respondents strongly disagreed that only married women are considered responsible enough to hold leadership positions ($\bar{x}$=1.72), women who have the capacity to hold leadership positions are considered too old for such positions ($\bar{x}$=1.73) and women can occupy leadership positions but not as president or main leader ($\bar{x}$=1.75). This implies that women can hold leadership positions regardless of their age or marital status.

Table 4: Constraints to women's participation in leadership roles in the study area

Statements	Mean	Remark
Rural people are generally gender biased	3.69	Agree
It is traditionally believed that women are not supposed to lead men in associations	3.55	Agree
General believe by rural people that men are better leaders than women hence should be elected rather than women	3.33	Agree
Lack of cooperation among women folks	3.29	Agree
Men are generally preferable to women in handling leadership roles in mixed rural community associations	3.15	Agree
Women are not courageous enough to make decision relating to some sensitive traditional issues in leadership	3.10	Agree
Women lack needed support to motivate them into taking leadership positions	3.07	Agree
Men are often given more opportunities to hold leadership positions than women	3.04	Agree
Women low level of income incapacitates them of being elected to leadership roles	3.03	Agree
Men are more knowledgeable than women in election campaign hence win them in elections	2.92	Agree
Lack of/low level of access to resources and information affects women participation in leadership roles	2.90	Agree
There is generally gender insensitivity in leadership positions in our community associations	2.79	Agree
Women folk prefer to focus on family chores rather than participate in leadership positions	2.75	Agree
Most women are not educated enough to hold leadership positions	2.53	Agree
Associations led by men are more recognized and respected in rural communities than the ones led by women.	2.48	Disagree
Women are only good for leadership in Christian groups than in conventional mixed community associations leadership roles	2.41	Disagree

General believe in rural communities that leadership responsibility will be too much for a women to handle	2.41	Disagree
Women are naturally believed to be weak for leadership roles	2.36	Disagree
Leadership responsibilities will distract a woman from fulfilling her domestic chores	2.36	Disagree
Gender disparity among rural people discourages women from participating in leadership roles	2.25	Disagree
Women who have the capacity to hold leadership positions are considered too old for such positions	1.73	Disagree
Only married women are considered responsible enough to hold leadership positions	1.72	Disagree

Source: Field survey, 2021

Strategies for improving women participation in leadership roles in rural community associations

The major strategies indicated by the respondents for improving women participation in leadership roles were: planned support and encouragement to potential women leaders ($\bar{x}$=3.95), capacity building ($\bar{x}$=3.79), involvement of women in community development projects ($\bar{x}$=3.74) and women empowerment through skill acquisition ($\bar{x}$=3.17).

This result is in line with CEDPA (2017) which asserted that education increases women's understanding which in turn enhances their ability to take control over their lives and take advantage of development programs targeted at them. Similarly, Mpofu (2016) revealed that Participation is necessary to allow adequate representation of different groups, opinions and interests. Mann (2017) further revealed that political empowerment of women does not mean that power should be handed over to them but giving them equitable opportunity to lead organisations. Akintunde (2016) noted that women can improve their livelihood through accessing micro-credit. It helps low income women to establish their businesses and ensure quality life for them and their family. Similarly, Olinga and Lubyayi (2016) stated that access to loans and other incentives encourage women to engage in profitable economic ventures hence improved their standard of living and better participate in community life and activities.

Table 5: Strategies for improving women participation in leadership roles in rural community associations

Strategies for improving women participation in Leadership roles in rural community associations	Mean	Remark
Planned support and encouragement to potential women leaders	**3.95**	Agree
Capacity building such as vocational training to build women capacity in livelihood activities hence increased income generating power	**3.79**	Agree
Involvement of women in planning and implementing community development projects	**3.74**	Agree
Empowerment of women through skill-based education	**3.49**	Agree
Sensitization/orientation of rural people on the benefits of women participation in leadership roles	**3.40**	Agree
Training of women on leadership skills	**3.40**	Agree
Skill acquisition program that can enhance their income generating activities would help improve women participation in leadership roles	**3.17**	Agree

Abolishment of traditional practices that are gender biased	**2.95**	Agree
Establishing supportive networks and women forum	**2.65**	Agree
Applying and maintaining quota for women in leadership positions	**2.44**	Disagree

Source: Field survey, 2021

Relationship between women socio-economic characteristics and their participation in leadership positions.

A binary logistic regression was performed to ascertain the relationship between women socio-economic characteristics and their participation in leadership positions in community-based associations in Gokana local government area, Rivers state as presented in Table 6. The dependent variable (participation in leadership position) was captured as: Participate =1 and Do not participate =0. The model is statistically significant indicating that the explanatory variables estimated reliably distinguished between women that participate and those that did not participate in leadership roles (Chi-square =89.942, P =0.000). Nagelkerke R-square value is .690 indicating that 69 percent of the variation in the participation in leadership role were explained by the combined effects of all independent variables in the model specified.

Out of the seven examined explanatory variables in the model, four factors, age, educational status, household size, religion, were statistically significant in affecting women's participation leadership positions in the study area.

The coefficient of age is positive and significant at 1%. This result suggests that the older a woman is, the more likely she is to participate in leadership positions in community association. This could be possible because women aged around 34years are fit to engage in community-based association activities, can access and utilize available resources, and are ambitious.

The coefficient of educational status is positive and significant at 1% level of probability. This implies that the more educated a woman is, the more likely she is to participate in leadership positions. Women who are educated have high self-esteem, can approach complex social, economic and cultural needs of the community-based organization at the individual and community level. The coefficient of religion is positive and significant at 1%. This could be possible because majority of the respondents are Christians who believe in women leadership hence women who are Christians are more likely to participate in leadership roles. This result corroborates Balachandran (2018) which found poor education, religious beliefs and other factors including socio cultural influences, domestic and family responsibilities as factors hindering the women's participation in CBOs. In same vein, Yemenu (2020) also found that socio-cultural factors such as educational background influences women participation in leadership positions in Debre Markos City Administration.

The coefficient of household size is positive and significant at 1%. This implies that the more the number of persons in the household the more interest to participate in leadership roles. This could imply that those with a greater number of persons in their households have more responsibility to cater for and are more likely to participate in leadership positions as a way of getting things done right to ensure their responsibility are carried with ease. Also, people believe that women who can manage a large household, can as well manage leadership positions well. Similar to this finding, Dawa and Ugyen (2022) found family responsibility as an influencing factor to women in taking up leadership positions in education

From the findings, the null hypothesis stating that socio-economic characteristics of rural women do not significantly affect their participation in leadership position was rejected and the alternate hypothesis that states the socio-economic characteristics of rural women significantly affect their participation in leadership position in Gokana local Government was accepted.

Table 6: Result of the Binary Logistic Regression

Variables	Coeff	Std. Error	Z-Stat	P-Values
Age (X_1)	.282	.065	18.938*	.000
Marital status(X_2)	1.532	.848	3.263	.071
Educational status (X_3)	-4.368	1.332	10.750*	.001
Major occupation (X_4)	1.740	.696	6.241	.012
Household size (X_5)	-1.794	.403	19.793*	.000
Religion (X_6)	3.999	1.008	15.722*	.000
Type of community-based organization (X_7)	20.709	16965.387	.000	.999
Constant	-49.349	33930.774	.000	.999
Omnibus Test Chi Square	**89.942**			
Prob > Chi Square	**0.000**			
Nagelkerke R-square	**.690**			

* Significant at 1% level

Conclusion and recommendations

This study concludes that women participation in leadership roles in the study area is low but could be enhanced through planned support and encouragement to potential women leaders, capacity building and involvement of women in the planning and implementation of community development projects. Based on the results, it was recommended that;

1. There should be sensitization and orientation of rural people particularly traditional chiefs on the negative effects of traditional practices that are gender bias. This will help to empower them towards abolishing such practices.
2. Training and workshops that could help women improve their leadership skill should be organized by both government and intervention agencies.
3. Capacity building programme that will build the skill and knowledge of the women for more income generation should be implemented as this will help improve their standard of living hence enable them participate more leadership roles.

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