

FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN KAKWAGOM-BOKI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE

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Abstract

Community development is a vital aspect of sustainable growth and social progress, requiring the active involvement of all members, regardless of gender. In many regions of the world, including Kakwagom in the Boki Local Government of Cross River State, Nigeria, women's participation in community development remains an issue of significant concern; women over the years contribute in the growth of their society in spite of the many limitations that are standing in their way. This study explores the complex web of factors influencing women's participation in community development initiatives. In order to appropriately tackle and capture the variables involved in the study, the qualitative research method was adopted for the study four focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were carried out. Findings in this study reveals a wealth of knowledge on factors affecting women participation in community development in Kakwagom Boki Local Government of Cross River State; ranging from inability to access financial and property ownership, lack of awareness and training and prevention from taking decisions in the community. It was recommended among others that there should be an Improvement of women's access to resources such as land, credit and healthcare facilities Mentorship programs, Collaboration and networking should be encouraged among women groups and other stakeholders so as to ease exchange of knowledge and resources.



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Introduction

In recent years, community development has emerged as a vital driver of sustainable progress and societal well-being on a global scale. It plays a crucial role in fostering economic growth, promoting social cohesion, and enhancing living standards. Within the intricate fabric of community development, ensuring the active and inclusive participation of all members, regardless of gender, is not only a matter of social justice but also a fundamental prerequisite for success.

In numerous regions worldwide, including Kakwagom in the Boki Local Government of Cross River State, Nigeria, the issue of women's full engagement in community development initiatives remains a significant concern. Kakwagom, like many other communities across Nigeria, is characterized by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles. These societal norms, while rooted in cultural heritage, often constrain women to actively engage in community development projects (Zanhi, 2016. Njenga, 2013). Understanding these norms and their impact on women's roles and participation is crucial for devising strategies that harness the full potential of the community's human resources. Understanding these norms and their impact on women's roles and participation is essential for devising effective strategies that fully harness the community's human resources. Also, persistent educational disparities further limit women's access to quality education in Kakwagom, perpetuating inequalities in knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary for assuming leadership roles in community development.

Economic factors, such as limited access to financial resources and property ownership, pose additional challenges for women in



contributing actively to community development. Economic independence significantly influences participation, making efforts to empower women economically crucial for their increased involvement in development activities in Nigeria and kakwagom-Boki in particular. Moreover, the percentage of women representation in decision making is still inadequate despite the 35% affirmative action representation of women in decision-making bodies at the community level remains a pressing concern. Without sufficient representation, women struggle to advocate for their interests, resulting in development projects that may not adequately address the needs and aspirations of the female population.

This study aims to examine the cultural norms and gender roles limiting women's involvement in community development in Kakwagom, Boki. It will explore the role of economic factors in shaping women's ability to contribute effectively to community development activities and assess the influence of women's representation in decision-making bodies on their participation in such efforts. Additionally, the study will explore the strength of networks as catalysts for community engagement, recognizing that limited social connections can isolate women and hinder their access to information and opportunities related to community development. Addressing the critical barriers limiting women's participation in community development is crucial for unlocking their full potential as active agents of development in Kakwagom, Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State. Moreover, promoting gender equality and inclusivity in community development efforts is essential for fostering sustainable and equitable development. Through this study, we aim to delve into these issues, identify their underlying causes, and provide evidence-based recommendations for more inclusive and equitable community



development practices.

Objectives of The Study

1. To identify the specific factors affecting women's participation in community Development in Kakwagom Boki.
2. To investigate the extent of women representation in decision –making bodies and their participation in community development efforts in Kakwagom Boki.
3. To suggest strategies to overcome the barriers and, promote women's meaningful engagement in community Development in Kakwagom Boki.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification

History of community development

Most scholars in the area of community development, rural sociology and social work including Lotz(1977) agrees that community development “is a child of hard times”. Though it had not always been easy to state adequately what it is. The history of community developments is closely linked with the history of society. Notion of community development owes a great deal to the effort of colonial administrators. After the Second World War, the British Colonial office became concerned with community development. Mayo (1975), suggests that administrators 'concocted' the term out of their attempts to develop basic education and social welfare in the UK colonies. For example, a 1944 report, mass education in the colonies, placed an emphasis on literacy training and advocated the promotion of agriculture, health and other social service through local self-help



(Midgley et al, 1986).

There was indeed a “social invention, which aimed at advancing the communities under the British colonial policy of indirect rule.” In 1948, the colonial office's annual conference on Africa administration was held in Cambridge, England. It had as its theme “Encouragement of initiative in African society”. It was at this conference that a definition of mass education was reached that in future the process of mass education should be known as “Community Development”. Community development was defined in one of UK government publication as:

A movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community, but if this initiative is not forthcoming spontaneously, by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to secure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement.

After the Ashbridge Conference in 1954, a shortened definition emerged and it defined community development as:

A movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and initiative of the community. Community development should include the whole range of development activities in the district whether these are undertaken by government or unofficial bodies. In the field of agriculture by securing the adoption of better care of livestock, in the field of health by promoting sanitation and water supplies, proper measures of hygiene, infant and material welfare, and in the field of education by spreading literacy and adult education as well as by extension and improvement of schools for children. Furthermore community development must



make use of co-operative movement and must be put into effect in the closet association with local government bodies (Colonial Office, 1954).

In 1959, the United Nation defined community Development as the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities into the life of the nation and to enable them contribute fully to national progress. And by the early 60s, there were over 40 Community development Advisers in over thirty counties in the world. This development naturally gave rise to new definitions. A survey of the literature reveals various but interrelated approaches to the definition including: Periman and Gurin (1972), community development is a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with the active participation and fullest possible reliance on the community initiative.

For Dunhan(1970), community development should be organized efforts to improve the conditions of community life and the capacity for community integration and self-direction. His approach stresses four basic facts about community development: That community development is a planned programme, It encourages self-help, The need of outside technical assistance (which may include funds, personnel supplies and equipment).The involvement of many specialists (experts) working together for the development of the community.

Batten (1975), agrees with other writers in defining community development as a process of social change in which the people of a community organize themselves for planning and action, define their common and individual problem, and execute these with a maximum of reliance upon the resources of the community.



Women's Participation in Community Development

Women's participation in community development is a multifaceted and pivotal aspect of sustainable growth and social progress (Maton, 2008). It embodies the active involvement of women in various community development activities, encompassing a wide range of initiatives that contribute to the well-being and progress of the community at large. According to Bayeh (2015), several research studies have demonstrated that sustainable development cannot be achieved without the empowerment of women and the establishment of gender equality. Bayeh emphasizes that sustainable development can only be attained when women are empowered and gender equality is realized, enabling women to actively contribute to economic, social, political, and environmental aspects.

The sustainable development Goals as set by the United Nation in 2015, as part of UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development goal 5 provides a blueprint for gender equity and equality. Relying solely on men's participation in these areas will not lead to the country's achievement of sustainable development. The active engagement of women in political processes serves as an essential requirement for achieving gender equity and fostering authentic democratic practices. Politics here generally refers to the broader realm of political participation, which includes involvement in political decision-making at various levels, including community development, local government, and national governance.

In the context of this study, women's participation is defined as their engagement in decision-making processes, economic ventures, education, healthcare campaigns, infrastructure development, social projects, and cultural activities. The role of women in community development is a matter of global significance, aligning with Sustainable



Development Goal 5 (Gysman 2018), which emphasizes achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. In Kakwagom, like many other regions across Nigeria, women's participation in community development activities remains a critical concern and a topic of extensive study. Understanding the dynamics of women's involvement in community development within this specific context is essential for fostering more inclusive and sustainable development.

Women's participation in community development brings about a multitude of benefits, not only for women themselves but for the entire community (Cornwall 2001). Women bring diverse perspectives, experiences, and priorities to community development initiatives, enriching the decision-making process and ensuring a broader range of issues are addressed (Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi 2023).

Active women's participation in community development plays a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of life within a community (Adenugba and Raji-Mustapha, 2013). When women are actively engaged in decision-making processes, they can advocate for and influence the allocation of resources towards critical areas such as healthcare, education, and social services. This, in turn, leads to improved access to medical care, better educational opportunities, and the development of essential social support networks, positively impacting the overall well-being and quality of life for community members.

Their participation contributes to economic growth by expanding the local labor force and entrepreneurial endeavors, thereby increasing productivity and income levels. Additionally, as women generate income, they often reinvest in their families, education, and community development projects, leading to a multiplier effect that stimulates economic development and reduces poverty. This empowerment not



only lifts individual women out of poverty but also lifts the community as a whole, creating a path towards greater economic stability and improved living conditions.

Encouraging women's active participation in various community initiatives fosters inclusivity and social cohesion, resulting in a more equitable and harmonious community (Flecha, 2014). When women are engaged in decision-making, community projects, and leadership roles, diverse voices and perspectives are represented, ensuring that the needs of all community members are addressed. This inclusivity helps break down barriers, reduce discrimination, and promote social justice. As a result, the community becomes more cohesive, with a shared sense of purpose and a commitment to supporting one another. Ultimately, these efforts contribute to a more equitable and harmonious community where all members feel valued and have a stake in its development and well-being.

Empowering women in community development is a fundamental step towards achieving gender equality and dismantling traditional gender norms and disparities (Sen and Mukherjee 2017). It challenges and reshapes societal perceptions of women's roles and capabilities by actively involving them in leadership, decision-making, and development projects. This not only creates more opportunities for women but also serves as a powerful example to challenge existing gender stereotypes. By addressing the root causes of gender inequality and providing women with the tools and resources to thrive, community development initiatives can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society, where individuals are not limited by their gender but are empowered to contribute to their communities and society at large based on their skills and aspirations.



Factors Affecting Women in Community Development.

Socio-Cultural Norms and Gender Roles

Socio-cultural norms and traditional gender roles play a central role in shaping the dynamics of women's participation in community development, not only in Kakwagom but in many regions across Nigeria and beyond. These norms, deeply ingrained in the fabric of society, influence expectations, behaviors, and opportunities for women and men, impacting their roles in community development initiatives.

Socio-cultural norms encompass the shared beliefs, values, customs, and practices within the Kakwagom community. They reflect a complex tapestry of traditions and expectations that shape social interactions and relationships. These norms influence various aspects of community life, including the division of labor, family structures, and the distribution of power and responsibilities. In many cases, these norms reinforce traditional gender hierarchies, where men and women are assigned distinct roles and positions within the community. Culture plays a profound and intricate role in shaping gender-related behavior, values, roles, and identities. Best and Angelica (2019) emphasized that culture is inseparable from gender and is a critical factor influencing how individuals within a cultural group and across different cultures perceive and exhibit gender differences.

Within Kakwagom, socio-cultural norms may manifest in various ways, such as the expectation that women primarily fulfill domestic and caregiving roles, while men are often tasked with decision-making, leadership, and economic activities.

Traditional gender roles are closely intertwined with socio-cultural norms and delineate the responsibilities, duties, and behaviors expected from individuals based on their gender (Sokoya, 2003). In Kakwagom,



as in many communities, these roles are deeply entrenched and this is responsible for the gender-based disparities that exist in this community. Women are typically responsible for household chores, childcare, and maintaining the family, while men may assume roles as primary breadwinners and decision-makers (Poortman and Van Der Lippe 2009). Men are often expected to take the lead in community leadership positions, while women's roles may be limited to supportive or secondary positions (Eagly and Steffen, 1984).

Economic activities such as farming, trade, and entrepreneurship are dominated by men, restricting women's access to economic opportunities (Peters, Adelstein, and Abare 2019). Traditional gender norms and stereotypes can reinforce the idea that certain economic activities are more suitable for men, while others are reserved for women (Hentschel, Heilman, & Peus, 2019). These beliefs can restrict women from venturing into male-dominated sectors. Men often have greater access to resources such as land, capital, and business networks, which are essential for economic activities. This resource disparity serves as a strong hindrance for women's participation and success in these sectors.

Decision-making at the community level, whether within traditional councils or modern governance structures, frequently lacks gender diversity, which results in reduced women's influence in shaping community development policies and projects (Ilesanmi, 2018). Many traditional and modern decision-making bodies have historically been male-dominated, reflecting deep-rooted gender imbalances in power and authorities. The persistence of socio-cultural norms and traditional gender roles poses several challenges to women's participation in community development.



Economic Factors influencing Women's Participation

Economic factors constitute a significant dimension that influences the extent of women's participation in community development within Kakwagom. These economic considerations encompass a range of financial and resource-related variables that shape women's ability to contribute effectively to community development effort.

Income disparities, often rooted in socio-economic conditions, have a direct bearing on women's participation in community development (McEwan, 2003). In many cases, women may have limited access to income-generating activities, leading to financial constraints that hinder their engagement in various community projects. Access to essential resources, including land, credit, and technology, can significantly affect women's economic empowerment and their ability to undertake income-generating initiatives (Hill, 2011). Constraints in resource access may curtail women's participation. Limited job prospects can have a ripple effect on community development. The degree to which women engage in entrepreneurship and business ventures can influence their economic status and, by extension, their capacity to invest in community development activities. Entrepreneurship and business ownership leads to increased income for women. This additional income can significantly enhance their economic well-being and financial stability. Women entrepreneurs often invest in their communities, supporting local businesses and contributing to community development. This can have a positive economic ripple effect within the community.

Therefore, economic disparities and constraints can undermine women's financial autonomy, subsequently influencing their decision-making when it comes to participating in community development projects. It often results in women having fewer financial resources at their disposal. Financial autonomy is closely tied to decision-making



power (Sangappa, Kavle, 2010). Women with limited financial resources may find it challenging to have their voices heard in community development planning and decision-making processes. This can lead to projects that may not fully address the needs and priorities of women and their communities.

Unequal access to resources, such as land for agriculture or capital for entrepreneurial endeavors, can hinder women's economic ventures and contributions to community development (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2009). Unequal access perpetuates gender inequality. Land access is vital for agriculture, a key source of income and food security for many communities. When women have limited access to land, they may face reduced agricultural productivity, which in turn affects their economic well-being and the availability of resources for community development projects.

The absence of suitable employment opportunities may lead to underemployment or unemployment among women, restricting their ability to allocate time and resources to community projects. As per the International Labor Organization (ILO) (2017), women face greater challenges in securing suitable employment worldwide compared to men. When women do find work, they often end up in low-quality positions under precarious conditions, and unfortunately, there doesn't appear to be a significant improvement on the horizon. This further restricts their ability to participate in community development. At present, the global labor force participation rate for women stands at slightly below 47%, while for men, it is 72%. This amounts to a substantial gap of 25 percentage points, and in certain regions, this gender disparity can be even more pronounced, exceeding 50 percentage points (ILO, 2017).

Limited access to financial services, such as savings accounts and



credit facilities, can prevent women from mobilizing resources for community development activities (Fletcher and Kenney, 2014). When women lack access to savings accounts, they have fewer opportunities to accumulate and grow their savings. This makes it challenging for them to invest in community development projects.

Representation in Decision-Making Bodies at the community level

The extent to which women are represented in formal and informal decision-making structures have a profound impact on their representation at the community level. This involves the presence and participation of women in various decision-making bodies, committees, councils, and other governance structures. The degree of representation encompasses holding positions in community councils, development committees, and other formal decision-making bodies where individuals have the authority to shape policies and allocate resources, being part of informal decision-making structures, such as community gatherings and meetings, provide opportunities for women to voice their opinions and contribute to community development discussions.

Theoretical framework

The study of factors affecting women's participation in community development in Kakwagom is informed by several key theoretical frameworks that provide a conceptual basis for understanding the dynamics at play. These theoretical foundations guide the study and contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interrelationships among variables.

Radical Feminist Theory

A perspective within feminism posits that women's oppression stems



primarily from the construction of social roles and institutional frameworks rooted in male supremacy and patriarchy. Originating in the late 1960s, this theoretical framework emerged in response to a deeper understanding of women's systemic subjugation. Central to radical feminist theory is the belief that within a dualistic societal paradigm, one group invariably subjugates another, thus revealing inherent inequalities in power dynamics (Idyorough, 2005). This theoretical approach constituted one of the ideological currents within the second wave of feminism that swept through the 1960s. Pioneered by Kate Millet, prominent figures in radical feminism also include Alice Walker, Andrea Dworkin, and Catharine Mackinnon. In New York, Carol Hanisch, Shulamith Firestone, and Robin Morgan played pivotal roles in the foundation of radical feminist thought. Concurrently, the United States experienced a sexual revolution that fostered newfound freedoms in sexual expression, while women's rights, including suffrage and increased labor force participation, were advancing. The central objective of radical feminist theory lies in the comprehensive restructuring of societal frameworks (Tong, 2009).

Radical feminist theory in the context of studying factors affecting women's participation in community development would critically examine the root causes of gender- base inequalities and oppression in kakwagom Boki. This ideology acknowledges that gender inequalities intersect with other forms of discrimination, such as race, class, and sexuality (Anthias, 2014). It underscores the importance of empowering women to challenge and transform these inequalities.

Central to this theory is the concept of patriarchy, which refers to a social system where power and authority are predominantly held by men (Bahlieda, 2015). This can lead to gender based hierarchies. Patriarchal structures like traditional gender roles, social expectations, and unequal



opportunities, power dynamic have been challenged of impeding the growth and development of female gender by placing women in a subordinate position (Acker, 1992) Each society socializes its young ones into gender roles that is why scholars have argued that since gender roles are societal construct hence the same society can equally change or restructure them.

Economic factors intersect to constrain women participation. Economic inequalities include factors such as unequal access to resources, land and property. For Günseli, Yana and Stephanie (2009), the interaction between the macro economy and gender relations is a complex and multifaceted process influenced by several factors. These include the structure of the economy, patterns of job segregation, the specific measure of gender inequality used, and a country's international relationships. This suggests that the impact of gender inequality on economic growth and development is not uniform and can vary significantly depending on these contextual factors.

The nature of job segregation, as mentioned above, plays a role in how women can participate in community development. If certain fields or industries in a community are traditionally dominated by men, women may face barriers to entry, limiting their involvement in related development projects (Barrios and DiDona, 2013). Construction and infrastructure development projects are often male-dominated fields (Wright 2016). Women face barriers when seeking opportunities in roles like engineering, construction, or project management, limiting their involvement in community infrastructure projects.

The technology sector, including information technology and software development, has a notable gender imbalance (Simonsen and Corneliussen, 2020). Women's participation in these fields can be limited, affecting their ability to engage in community development



projects related to digital literacy, e-governance, and access to technology. The energy sector, particularly in areas such as energy production, also exhibits gender disparities.

Women's involvement in renewable energy projects, such as solar or wind energy initiatives, may be hindered, impacting their role in environmentally sustainable community development. The IEA highlight a significant gender disparity in the traditional energy sector. While women constitute nearly 39% of the global labor force, their representation in the traditional energy sector is substantially lower, at just 16% (IEA 2019). This underrepresentation becomes even more pronounced when looking at management levels within the sector, where the numbers are even lower, indicating a severe lack of gender diversity in leadership and decision-making roles.

Lacey (224), maintained that by recognizing women's experiences and perspectives, radical feminist theory seeks to empower women to assert their rights and agency by challenging oppressive structures and identifying empowering strategies that can enhance their participation especially in community development. The theory can assist this research to propose strategies for transformative change as well as advocating for structural reforms and promoting women's agency in community development.

However, radical feminism has been criticized for its focus on the public sphere and neglecting the potential for women's empowerment within the private sphere (McIntosh, 1998). Due to the limitations of the radical feminist theory, an exploration of intersectional perspectives that acknowledge how other forms of oppression, such as race and class, can further marginalize women in community development efforts.



The critical minimum effort theory

The Critical Minimum Effort Theory, as formulated by Harvey Stain in 1957, offers a conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics of economic development within societies. Stain posited that the underdevelopment of a society results from the dominance of income-depressing forces over income-raising ones. He conceptualized economic change as a struggle between these opposing forces, wherein the outcome hinges on the relative strength of each. Stain identified factors conducive to development as the availability of human and natural resources, as well as the presence of a large market conducive to economies of scale.

In contrast, Leibenstein highlighted factors inhibiting development, such as embezzlement, inflation, corruption, and low per capita income. He argued that overcoming these inhibiting forces requires substantial efforts, as minor or incremental changes are insufficient to induce meaningful development. Leibenstein emphasized the necessity of significant endeavors to address societal challenges, asserting that only large-scale efforts can effectively address the underlying obstacles to development. He contended that investments, particularly those involving human capital, require time to yield tangible benefits, underscoring the importance of sustained and substantial commitment to development initiatives.

The implications of the Critical Minimum Effort Theory extend beyond economic development to encompass various societal endeavors, including initiatives aimed at women's empowerment. Leibenstein's assertion that small efforts yield limited results suggests that comprehensive and concerted actions are imperative to foster meaningful progress. However, challenges such as embezzlement, corruption, and bureaucratic inefficiencies may impede the effectiveness



of development efforts, particularly those targeting marginalized groups like women. Despite criticisms and refinements by modern theorists, the Critical Minimum Effort Theory remains a relevant and insightful framework for understanding the complexities of development dynamics.

Contemporary discourse on development acknowledges the imperative of rapid and substantial efforts to address pressing societal challenges. However, the reality of constraints such as financial limitations underscores the need for innovative approaches and strategic interventions. Remedial measures may include leveraging alternative funding sources, enhancing transparency and accountability mechanisms, and fostering partnerships between governments, civil society, and the private sector. By embracing a holistic and proactive approach to development, stakeholders can mitigate the barriers identified by the Critical Minimum Effort Theory and advance sustainable progress towards inclusive and equitable development outcomes.

Methodology

The qualitative research method was adopted for the study. It enabled us explore the factors that influenced women participation in community development in Kakwagom Boki. Primary data were obtained from focus group discussion (FGD) and the In Depth interview (IDI). Two focus group discussions (FGD) consisting of 8-12 participants were carried out. The first segment comprises female gender and the second segment consists of male gender. Separating the different gender is to allow the participants to discuss freely without any intimidation. In-depth interviews (IDI) were carried out in each unit (Ajirija, Abedebede, Dishishua and Ekagbe) in Kakwagom Boki. Participants are leaders of



family women groups, youths leaders and village heads. Secondary source of data was collection from academic journals articles textbooks newspaper and relevant position papers.

Study area

Kakwagom community is located in Boki local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Kakwagom according to the 1991 census comprises seven thousand, one hundred and fifty five (7, 155) people. Since the population grows at the ratio of 1.19% (NPC), at thirty three (33) years the projected population of Kakwagom for 2024 is about ten thousand five hundred and twenty two(10,522)people; five thousand seven hundred and fifty eight (5,758) males and Four thousand seven hundred and sixty four (4,764) females respectively. Kakwagom community is a Christian dominated area. The seat of catholicity in Boki Local Government of Cross River State. Kakwagom community is blessed with a good soil that is suitable for both cash and food crops like cocoa, banana, maize, yams, cocoyam etc. as result of early contact with the Christian missionaries Kakwagom people are enlighten and they engage in several works; teaching, catering, governance etc.

Discussion of findings

The findings of this study revealed that women's active participation in community development activities can engender development in our society. This is in line with the arguments of Bayeh (2015) who argued that sustainable development can only be attained when women are empowered and gender equality is realized, enabling women to actively contribute to economic, social, political, and environmental aspects. For him, relying solely on men's participation in the socio-economic and political space will not lead to the country's achievement of sustainable



development.(Arop & Ejue, 2013).

Women's Community Development in Kakwagom.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted with adult women in Kakwagom revealed a compelling narrative of female agency and community development. Participants, specifically members of the Detiem age grade residing in Kakwagom-Boki, highlighted their contributions through the establishment of a garri processing factory. This project demonstrably empowered women, enabling them to process significantly larger quantities of garri in a shorter time frame. Furthermore, the group proudly cited their role in constructing new market stalls within the Kakwagom market.

These self-reported initiatives resonate with Cornwall's (2001) assertion regarding the multifaceted benefits of women's participation in community development. Cornwall argues that such involvement fosters positive outcomes not only for women themselves, but for the entire community. The successes outlined by the Detiem women align with the theoretical framework of functionalism, which posits that women's organizations act as crucial social units (Parsons & Bales, 1955). These organizations are seen as fulfilling specific societal functions, contributing to the overall well-being and progress of the community.

In the context of Kakwagom, the established garri processing factory can be viewed as fulfilling an economic function. By enhancing processing efficiency, the factory enables women to increase production and potentially generate greater income. Similarly, the construction of market stalls can be seen as fulfilling a social function, by providing improved infrastructure for trade and potentially stimulating local economic activity.



Socio-Cultural Norms and Women's Participation in Kakwagom

While the findings highlight women's participation in community development within Kakwagom-Boki, the study also reveals underlying limitations that impede their full engagement. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with female participants in Kakwagom-Boki Local Government Area shed light on these constraints.

The women discussed the historical influence of Christian missionaries in Kakwagom, crediting them with instilling values of domesticity. They described being taught skills centered on homemaking, such as knitting and decorating. These experiences, they contend, reinforced the notion that their primary role lies within the domestic sphere. Furthermore, limited access to formal education was perceived as another barrier, restricting their opportunities beyond the household.

These findings align with broader sociological discourses on gender roles and cultural expectations. The women's narratives illustrate how historically entrenched beliefs can constrain women's aspirations and limit their participation in public life, including community development initiatives. The focus on domestic skills and limited access to education can create a sense of incompetence regarding participation in community affairs.

Efforts to promote gender equality should encompass challenging traditional gender norms and advocating for increased educational opportunities for women. By supporting women's empowerment, communities can unlock the full potential of their human resources and foster more inclusive development processes.

The focus group discussions revealed tensions surrounding women's gatherings in Kakwagom-Boki. While women highlighted the importance of spaces like the Boki Women's Annual Summit



(established in 2020), they also acknowledged discomfort among men regarding such events.

The annual summit functions as a platform for Boki women from across the region to convene and discuss issues of pertinence. The women perceive this summit as evolving into a significant force within Boki society. However, the frequency of these gatherings appears to cause unease among some men. The discussants suggested that these concerns stem from fears of a potential feminist movement gaining grounds.

The desire for women's spaces and collective action is met with resistance from certain segments of the male population in Kakwagom Boki.. These concerns may indicate a threat to perceived hierarchies and traditional gender norms.

However Investigating the specific issues discussed at the Boki Women's Annual Summit could provide deeper insights into the concerns of both women and men. Understanding the agenda of these meetings could shed light on potential areas of contention and collaboration.

Women's Roles in Kakwagom's Decision-Making Landscape

While the potential benefits of female representation in decision-making are well-documented, a closer examination of Kakwagom reveals a complex interplay between visibility, power dynamics, and women's actual participation in shaping the community. This passage delves into these challenges, drawing upon the insights of a community leader, Ajumjum, from Ekagbe.

The interview highlights a critical barrier: the lack of visibility and recognition afforded to women. This marginalization within both formal and informal leadership roles leads to a skewed distribution of power and



influence within the community. This reinforces a patriarchal system where women's voices and perspectives are often excluded from key decision-making processes.

However, Ajumjum offers a vital counterpoint, recognizing the power of visible female leaders to serve as inspirations for other women, particularly younger generations. These role models can serve as catalysts, motivating and empowering other women to actively participate in community initiatives. Through their engagement, a culture of inclusivity and gender equality can be fostered within Kakwagom.

This interview snippet underscores the importance of representation as a key driver of change. When women are visible in leadership roles, it normalizes their participation and sends a powerful message to the broader community. This can have a ripple effect, gradually eroding the power imbalances that currently limit women's voices in decision-making processes. Future research can explore the specific strategies employed by successful female leaders in Kakwagom, illuminating how they navigate cultural norms and inspire others to advocate for change. By understanding these dynamics, we can develop more effective strategies to promote gender equality and empower women to become active participants in shaping the future of their communities.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the various factors that limit women's participation to community development activities to include; cultural norms and gender roles, economic factors, lack of women representation in decision making bodies at community level. By addressing these challenges that hinder women's participation in community development and by implementing the various strategies recommended



to support and empower women, they will be encourage to be more involved in development initiatives of their communities it will give them a sense of ownership, general wellbeing and promote sustainable growth and development in Kakwagom community Boki, Cross River State.

Recommendation

A lot of factors limit women's involvement in community development initiatives. Most times the contributions of the women are unnoticed and devalued this result to a diminishing interest in community development activities.

The contributions of women in community development should therefore be acknowledged and celebrated. This will be an inspiration to other women especially the younger ones.

Training and skill development programs can empower women to take on leadership roles and participate actively in community development initiatives.

Providing access to financial resources and land ownership can increase women's agency and enable them to contribute more effective

Mentorship programs, Collaboration and networking should be encourage among women groups and other stakeholders so as to ease exchange of knowledge and resources

Community development initiatives should address the issue of gender-based violence to create a safe and inclusive environment for all participants.

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