

Women Barriers and Empowerment Opportunities in The Nigerian Context

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ABSTRACT

This study examines women barriers and empowerment opportunities in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The study design was exploratory using quantitative and qualitative data. Data is obtained from 660 women from Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State. The research used a multi-stage sampling technique. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency tables, while the Chi-square was used to test the significance of relationship between the two hypotheses stated. The findings of the study revealed that 58.3% of the respondents' report that they were aware of the availability of women empowerment programmes in their community. While, 31.9% of the respondents reported the provision of agricultural facilities as the widely available empowerment programme for women, 38.4% indicated that non-governmental organizations were the major benefactors of women empowerment programmes. The findings of the study further showed that 39.5% of the respondents

acknowledged that they had benefitted from women empowerment programmes. Equality for all can be achieved when women are allowed to make their own decisions on issues that concern them and act on those opportunities without fear.

Keywords: Education, empowerment opportunities, patriarchy system, women barriers, women empowerment

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INTRODUCTION

Women have over time been relegated to the background in many societies of the world. All over the world, women have suffered various degrees of abuses, discriminations, marginalization and deliberate denial of their rights, but the dimension differs from society to society (Fiderikumo et al., 2017; Okeke, 2018). Even in the 21st century, women suffer battery, they are falsely accused of practicing witchcraft, they are lynched for indulging in sexual activities and they are also raped and tortured while the perpetrators of these crimes move about freely in the society (Uyang et al., 2016). Women are usually given minor roles to play, they are treated as second class citizens and are mostly paired as servants to the men (Fiderikumo et al., 2017). Women have thus, been deprived socially, culturally, economically, politically and psychologically (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010; Onyebuchi & Rafiu, 2020). Syed (2018) observed that in south-central Asia, women suffered cultural, racial, regional, economic, political and religious deprivations, stigmatizations and abuses. In Pakistan particularly, women are less educated compared to men, they are prone to sickness and they occupy the lowest social, political and economic status in the society (Raphel, 2014; Syed, 2018). In African culture, women remain silent while the men talk and take all the decisions that would be binding on women (Bako & Syed, 2017). In Ghana, women are denied access to land, and they are also not entitled to credit facilities, they are not permitted to register

as members of farmers' organisations, the same women are not allowed to access agricultural extension services and training (Atuase, 2018; International Centre for Research on Women, 2013). That is even on a lighter note. In most communities in Africa and Nigeria in particular, women are not allowed to attend extended family meetings, let alone to contribute to family matters. The domineering actions of men have conditioned women in traditional African societies into accepting their deprivations as their fate which cannot be altered (Bayeh, 2017; Oke, 2015).

In Nigeria, women are faced with a great challenge, as they constitute the poor and illiterate majority (Ayevbomwan et al., 2016). Their productive roles are considered as a share of their domestic responsibilities (Eze et al., 2016). The men are still responsible for the key management decision making even though the women constitute about 60 to 80 per cent of the agricultural labour force in Nigeria, and they produce about two-thirds of the food crops for the family (Alese, 2013; Obayelu, & Chime, 2020). These women who occupy a critical place in our economic development are in most cases ignored, underestimated, relegated to the background and rendered voiceless when production and management decisions are made even within the household (Ilavbarhe & Izeke, 2015). There is no empirical evidence to show that in human history men have been subjected to such dehumanizing and agonizing treatment like the women. Unfortunately, most women now resign themselves to the culture of

silence as a result of ignorance of what constitutes their rights in the family and the society at large (Amaechi, 2019; Duke, 2010). Literature in developing economics further highlights how class and gender has long been regarded as an important indicator in determining the patterns of oppression experienced by the women. For example, Armstrong's (2020) research on "Marxist and socialist feminism" reveals how class relations of capitalism enforced the gender hierarchies that anchored women's oppression. Elizabeth (2015) and Fasina's (2017) works on gender suggest a similar pattern whereby gender status becomes an important predictor of women oppression and travails. Though studies such as these underscore the important effects of class, gender status and women deprivation and oppression, the question that readily comes to mind is whether these relations remain constant for all women.

However, different factors have been identified as adversely affecting the process of women's all-around empowerment. These factors include the psychological make-up of women, their reproductive responsibilities, their total personality and external environment-categorized into the social, economic, educational, political and psychological and cultural values by which societies make the differentiation between men and women (Bako & Syed, 2017; Mandal, 2013). These impediments are sustained by the male-dominated social structure, high rate of poverty among women, and gender division of labour (Bako & Syed, 2017; Onyishi, 2011).

Equality for all can be achieved if women are no longer treated as domestic workers, if they are liberated from all forms of generational discrimination, if the women are allowed political inequality with men, if the women are allowed full control over material resources accruable to them, if they are also given full protection against subtle male violence, male intimidation and male control (Bayeh, 2017; Onyishi, 2011). Put differently, empowerment, according to Amaechi (2019) and Fiderikumo et al. (2017), requires the transformation of the structures of subordination through changes in the law, changes in property rights and changes in other institutions that reinforce and perpetuate male domination. This could be done by improving the educational, political and economic status of women to enable them to participate actively in the socio-economic development of the society. The role of women empowerment programmes in achieving equality for women and liberating them from all forms of institutionalized discriminations, and pull them out of economic servitude, is still a subject of debate among scholars. Thus, this study empirically examined existing women empowerment opportunities and determine their strength in facilitating the achievement of equality for all women in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Explaining the Link

Participatory Approach. The participatory model propounded by Fiorino and Bowels (2001) advocates for a support system

which ensures that the women themselves get involved in the planning, execution and implementation of women empowerment programmes which will enhance and impact their lives for an all-round empowerment and development. The participation of women in the structural process of the women empowerment programmes is generally supported due to its potential for providing cost-effective and beneficial measures for the government. This approach is in agreement with the views of Fiderikumo et al. (2017), who opined that women empowerment programmes would increase the acceptance of such programmes and strengthen the confidence of the women in government decisions, with regards to empowerment programmes and the impact it would make in the lives of the women. The contention is that, the empowerment of women in Nigeria should be a function of the women themselves this will enable them to take their destinies in their hands in order to improve their socio-economic conditions (Onyebuchi & Rafiu, 2020).

However, socio-economic dynamics such as power differences and gender social relations have been identified as factors affecting women's participation in project planning and implementation. In addition to that, ineffective communication networks and inadequate capacity building among leaders are also identified as barriers to good flow of information and planning (Oke, 2015). The aim of women empowerment is to enhance the socio-economic status of women through creating an economic culture that will address the technical

know-how in the pursuit of women's multi-faceted roles, retooling them with various economic ventures as well as enhancing the emancipation of women from poverty. This is because women are "generally poor" and constitute majority of the population thus, targeting them will be a fundamental prerequisite for any poverty reduction strategy to be effective (Akpan, 2015; Danjuma et al., 2013).

METHODS

Study Setting and Population

The study was conducted in Yakurr Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State, Nigeria. It is one of the 18 local government areas that make up Cross River State. Yakurr LGA was created out of Obubra Local Government in 1987. Yakurr LGA headquarters is in Ugep. The area lies between latitude 5°40' and 6° 10' N and longitude 8°2' and 6° 10'E and 120km North of Calabar. Geographically, Yakurr shares boundaries to the West with Obubra LGA, to the East with Biase LGA, to the North with Abi LGA and to the South with Akamkpa LGA (Ugal, 2015). The major language spoken by the people is "Lokaa". The area comprises 13 wards and is inhabited by the people of Agoi, Ibami, Assiga, Mkpani, Ekon, Nko, Ugep and Idomi. The dominant language is Yakurr. The people of Yakurr LGA celebrate their new yam festival and the most pronounced festival in Yakurr is "Leboku" (Ibok et al., 2015). The choice of Yakurr LGA is because of the perceived high rate of patriarchal tendencies and low quality of life among

the women, especially, in the rural area. The target population to be studied was 158,674 women. The target population of the study was made up of women from 18 years and above residing in Yakurr L.G.A, comprising the married and the unmarried, the educated and the uneducated, the employed and the unemployed.

Design and Sampling

Quantitative data was obtained from 622 respondents, using a multi-stage sampling technique which in this study entailed the selection of community clusters, streets, villages, housing units and respondents through simple random and purposive sampling technique. Qualitative data were collected from six participants, purposively selected in houses for In-depth Interview (IDI), and thirty-two (32) participants were selected purposively for Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Six (6) participants were purposively selected for the In-depth Interview (IDI). This brought the total number of respondents to 660. For the in-depth interview (IDI) three women leaders and three chairpersons of cooperatives were selected. These categories of people were selected due to the vital position they occupy in the area and also their experiences. For the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), four FGD sessions were conducted with adult women who were 18 years and above; the FGD was made up of four groups. Sixteen (16) female participants were selected purposively from both wards in the urban area and 16 female participants were also selected purposively from Idomi

and Mkpani, which are rural areas. The combined approach is drawn from the potential strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data and it facilitates different avenues of exploration which enrich the evidence and enable research questions to be answered more deeply.

Ethical Consideration and Data Collection Procedure

The research complied with all known ethical principles guiding Social Science research. These include disclosure policy, informed consent, safety protocols, anonymity and confidentiality. Before the main instrument was administered, 10% of the sample size was used to conduct a pre-test in different locations not selected for the study. The instrument was also subjected to content and face validity. The researcher administered the questionnaires with the help of four research assistants who were fluent in English and Yakurr dialects. The test-retest reliability was adopted to determine if the responses were reliable. For the IDI and FGD, a researcher conducted the interview and discussion sessions using a recorder with the permission of the participants, while, one of the research assistants operated the recorder and took down notes as well. The respondents were duly notified and appointment scheduled before the interview. This was to avoid meeting them unprepared and to create a conducive environment that enhanced their full participation and also to guarantee the quality of information to be generated during the session.

Data Analysis

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. The quantitative data from the questionnaire were coded, computer-processed and analyzed using version 20 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency tables were used in presenting the results. The qualitative data were transcribed first in the local language and translated into English but the local language versions carry the same meanings with the English language version. In going through the transcription, phrases with special meanings were identified. They served as illustrative quotes to complement the statistical data.

RESULTS

A total of six hundred and twenty-two (622) copies of the questionnaire was distributed in the selected communities of the study area (Yakurr LGA) and 612 copies of the survey instrument were validly completed and retrieved which put the response rate at

98.4% response rate, while, 1.6% (10) were unusable because they were uncompleted and some were not returned. Table 1 shows that 50.2% of the respondents are from Ugep community. Other communities sampled were Mkpani (12.6%), Asiga (12.6%), Idomi (12.4%) and Ekori (12.3%). Fifty-two (52.0) % of the respondents were 45 years and above, 19.9% were within the age bracket of 36 – 44 years. This was followed by those aged 27 – 35 years (17.8%), while, those aged 18 – 26 years were the least (10.3%). This implies that majority of the respondents sampled were mature-(45 years and above). The marital status distribution showed that respondents who were married were noticeably more than those in any other category and they made up 55.7% of the sample, this was followed by singles (20.4%) and widowed women (18.0%). Divorced women were 3.3% and those who were separated (2.6%) were the least sampled. Data regarding the educational qualification of respondents revealed that 33.8% of the respondents had

Table 1
Socio-demographic data of respondents (N = 612)

S/N	Variables	Options	Response rate	Percentage
1.	Community	Ugep	307	50.2
		Mkpani	77	12.6
		Asiga	77	12.6
		Idomi	76	12.4
		Ekori	75	12.3
		Total	612	100

Table 1 (Continued)

S/N	Variables	Options	Response rate	Percentage
2.	Age	18-26 years	63	10.3
		27-35 years	109	17.8
		36-44 years	122	19.0
		45 years and above	318	52.0
		Total	612	100
3.	Marital status	Single	125	20.4
		Married	341	55.7
		Divorced	16	3.3
		Separated	20	2.6
		Widowed	110	18.0
		Total	612	100
4.	Educational qualification	No formal education	84	13.7
		Primary education	155	25.3
		Secondary education	166	27.1
		Tertiary education	207	38.8
		Total	612	100
5.	Residential area	Rural	305	49.8
		Urban	307	50.2
		Total	612	100

Source: Fieldwork (2020)

completed their tertiary education, 27.1% had obtained their secondary education certificate. Also, 25.3% were done with their primary education, while, 13.7% had no formal education. Urban dwellers made up 50.2% of the respondents, while, 49.8% were rural dwellers.

Knowledge of Women Empowerment Programmes

The results in Table 2 shows that a greater percentage of the respondents (58.3%) reported that they were aware of the availability women empowerment programmes in their community, 6.9% revealed that they were not aware of any

available women empowerment programme in their community, while, 34.8% indicated that they did not know if there was any available women empowerment programme in their community.

A trader at Ugep market during the IDI interview had this to say about her awareness of any available women empowerment programmes in her community:

Yes, there are various types of empowerment programmes in my community, but what is available is not adequate for everybody. Only a few people from the community have benefitted from some of the existing empowerment programmes in the community. (IDI/Trader/Ugep community).

One of the beneficiaries of women empowerment programmes in an IDI interview reported that:

I am aware that from time to time philanthropists, religious organisations, even politicians come to my community

to specifically empower women, mostly, those who are helpless and vulnerable. In my church women are taught how to make soap, detergents, pastries and other things which they can start up with small capital. (IDI/woman leader/Mpkani community).

An excerpt from an informant in an FGD session who shared a contrary opinion about the knowledge of existing women empowerment programmes in her community:

I cannot categorically confirm to you whether empowerment programmes exist for women or not. But I have not seen anybody from this community that has benefitted from any empowerment programmes, be it woman or man. During the 2019 elections, some group of politicians from my community attempted empowering women but could not continue with the programme for reasons best known to them.

Table 2

Percentage distribution of respondents on the awareness of any available women empowerment programme in their community

Available programme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	357	58.3
No	42	6.9
Do not know	213	34.8
Total	612	100.0

Source: Fieldwork (2020)

Existing Empowerment Programmes in Yakurr

Data in Table 3 reveals that the most commonly mentioned empowerment programmes was the provision of agricultural products (31.9%), followed by skill acquisition/development (29.4%). Another 25.3% reported clearing of farm roads, 24.5% said establishing of small-

scale businesses, while, 21.7% mentioned renovation of market stalls. A total of 14.5% respondents said the availability of adult literacy programmes, 12.9% mentioned of the availability of scholarship programmes for children of widows, 5.9% said there was the availability of micro-credit facilities, while, only 1.5% had other views.

Table 3

Percentage distribution of respondents by the type of women empowerment programme available in their community

Available programmes	Mentioned	Not mentioned	Total
Micro-credit facilities	36 (5.9)	576 (94.1)	612 (100.0)
Renovation of market stalls	133 (21.7)	479 (78.3)	612 (100.0)
Clearing of farm roads	155 (25.3)	457 (74.7)	612 (100.0)
Establishing of small-scale businesses	150 (24.5)	462 (75.5)	612 (100.0)
Scholarships for children of widows	79 (12.9)	533 (87.1)	612 (100.0)
Provision of agricultural products	195 (31.9)	417 (68.1)	612 (100.0)
Skill acquisition/development	180 (29.4)	432 (70.6)	612 (100.0)
Adult literacy	89 (14.5)	523 (85.5)	612 (100.0)
Others	9 (1.5)	603 (98.5)	612 (100.0)

Source: Fieldwork (2020)

An indication of the availability of women empowerment programmes as reported in the study is evident from the response of a woman leader:

I have heard of many women empowerment programmes such as

microcredit facilities (loan). It is an empowerment programme by Ugeg community bank designed to help women access loan to carry out their small scale businesses. Also, Livinus Ofem foundation is a religious organization

saddled with the responsibilities of empowering women, especially, widows by giving scholarships to their children. (IDI/Female/30/Urban/ Chairlady of Cooperative society).

An excerpt from the view of a participant of the availability of women empowerment programmes is transcribed below:

Women in my community have had access to different empowerment programmes, which has boosted their productivity, increased economic diversification and income equality. Agricultural products like fertilizers, farm seedlings etc., have been provided to women farmers, especially, the vulnerable among them. Training has also been organised for widows on how to increase their yields, how to apply the fertilizers and other chemicals given to

them. Money has also been distributed to widows to enable them to hire labour and get other things, which they may need during planting season. (FGD with a 43-year-old Civil servant in Mkpiani community).

Benefactors of Women Empowerment Programmes

In Table 4 the greater percentage of respondents (38.4%) indicate that non-governmental organizations have provided the empowerment programmes, 14.2% mentioned Government, 3.3% said philanthropists, while, 2.5% state others Faith-Based Organizations (FBO).

Data from FGD conducted in Mkpiani buttresses this point. According to them, NGO's are the major providers of empowerment programmes in this community. A 45-year-old housewife

Table 4

Percentage distribution of respondents by the group that provides women empowerment programmes/projects in their community

Benefactors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Government	87	14.2
Non-governmental organization	235	38.4
Philanthropists	20	3.3
Faith-Based Organizations	15	2.5
Not applicable	255	41.6
Total	612	100.0

Source: Fieldwork (2020)

narrated how they benefited from scholarship “well we thank God that the Livinus Ofem foundation, which is a religious group, found us worthy of granting a scholarship for us since it was meant for children of widows, they empowered my children and today they are in school.” Additionally, an IDI conducted in Idomi revealed thus:

.....some time ago in this community, I was among those that were privilege to have received training from Richard Foundation a non-governmental organization. We were trained on hair making for about one year and six months. Thereafter, we were given a sum of one hundred thousand naira each

to set up our saloon and by the grace of God I am living well and meeting up my demands. (IDI/cooperative society leader/ Idomi community).

Access to Women Empowerment Programmes

The result in Table 5 reveals that a significant percentage of the respondents (39.5%) indicated that they had benefitted from women empowerment programmes. Unfortunately, only 58.3% said they had not benefitted from women empowerment programmes, while, a few 2.1% mentioned that they did not know if what they had benefited in the past was an empowerment programme or not.

Table 5

Percentage distribution of the respondents on whether they had benefited from women empowerment programmes

Benefited	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	242	39.5
No	357	58.3
Don't know	13	2.1
Total	612	100.0

Source: Fieldwork (2020)

Congruently, the FGD with the women of Ijom ward revealed that there were a few empowerment programmes women could benefit from. She said:

As for me, the only women empowerment programme I have benefited from is that

of the micro-credit facility sponsored by the Microfinance bank. As I am talking to you now I collected fifty thousand naira with less interest rate of one hundred naira per month. I used that money to open a restaurant where I sell

food like garri and soup, rice, beans, etc. And I have been making a lot of profit out of the business. That money has helped me take care of my children, especially, as regards their feeding, education and health matters (FGD with a 41-year-old trader in Ijom ward).

Additionally, data from the FGD has a contrary view. Three participants indicated that they were yet to benefit from any women empowerment programme in their community. Below are excerpts of their responses:

These programmes when they come, are only shared among the women executives and their friends. We have not benefitted from any free skill acquisition or any other type of empowerment programme. We only hear about these things on the television but in reality, I have not seen or benefited from any of these programmes. The last time they asked us to pick up forms from the secretariat for skill acquisition programmes I did but no one called me. Even my application for a loan to help my business has not been attended to. (FGD session with younger women; 39-year-old trader in Idomi community).

Factors Hindering Women Empowerment Programmes in Yakurr

As can be deduced from the first row in Table 6, 97.2% of the respondents agreed that education affected women participation in empowerment programmes, while, 2.8%

disagreed. In the second row, 56.2% pointed out that women who were educated partake more in empowerment programmes, while 43.8% disagreed. This is also the case with data presented in the third row, in which, 50.3% of the respondents agreed that women reproductive responsibilities had acted as a strong impediment to women empowerment. However, this was not upheld by 49.7% of the respondents who disagrees to that view. In the fourth row, 62.1% of the respondents agreed that the patriarchal social structure that favoured the men more than women was also a factor working against the empowerment of women. On the contrary, 37.9% of the respondents disagreed, noting that such was not applicable in their community. In the fifth row, 72.4% of the respondents agreed that the location of the women affected their participation in empowerment programmes. On the contrary, 27.6% of the respondents disagreed. The sixth row equally showed that majority of the respondents (85.7%) agreed that certain social norms, beliefs, customs and values in rural communities did not encourage women empowerment, while, 14.2% disagreed. In the seventh row, 93.1% of the respondents agreed that a high level of poverty among women works against their all-round empowerment but on the contrary, 6.8% of the respondents disagreed with that position. The last row equally showed that majority of the respondents 94.1% agreed that lack of employment opportunities for women prevented their empowerment, while, 5.9% disagreed with

them. A summation of all data presented in this section shows that majority of the respondents are of the view that certain socio-economic cum cultural factors are working against the empowerment of women in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Table 6
Percentage distribution of respondents on factors hindering women empowerment programmes

Statements	Agree	Disagree	Total
Level of education does affect participation in women empowerment programmes	595 (97.2%)	17 (2.8%)	612 (100.0%)
Women who are educated partake more in empowerment programmes	344 (56.2%)	268 (43.8%)	612 (100.0%)
Women reproductive responsibilities have acted as a strong impediment to women empowerment	308 (50.3%)	304 (49.7%)	612 (100.0%)
The patriarchy social structure that favours the men more than women is a factor working against the empowerment of women	380 (62.1%)	232 (37.9%)	612 (100.0%)
The location of the women affects their participation in empowerment programmes	443 (72.4%)	164 (27.6%)	612 (100.0%)
Certain social norms, beliefs, customs and values in rural communities do not encourage women empowerment	525 (85.7%)	87(14.2%)	612 (100.0%)
High level of poverty among women works against their all-round empowerment	570 (93.1%)	42 (6.8%)	612 (100.0%)
Lack of empowerment opportunities prevent women from empowerment	576 (94.1%)	36 (5.9%)	612 (100.0%)

Source: Field survey (2020)

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One.

Substantive hypothesis (H₁): Women with

a higher level of education are more likely to feel the positive impact of women empowerment programmes than those with a lower level of education

Null hypothesis (H₀): Women with a higher level of education are less likely to feel the positive impact of women empowerment programmes than those with a lower level of education

Table 7

Percentage distribution of respondents by the level of education and the impact of women empowerment programmes

Level of education	Feelings/impact of women empowerment programmes		Total
	Positive impact	Negative impact	
Low education	154 (64.4%)	85 (35.6%)	94 (100.0%)
High education	203 (54.4%)	170 (45.6%)	373 (100.0%)
Total	357 (58.3%)	255 (41.7%)	612 (100.0%)

$\chi^2= 6.007^a$ df=1, $p \leq 0.014$ critical/table value=3.841
Source: Fieldwork (2020)

The Chi-square test result in Table 7 shows that computed χ^2 is 6.007, while, the critical/table χ^2 value is 3.841 and df = 1. The test showed that there was a statistically significant relationship ($P < 0.014$) between education and the impact of women empowerment programmes. From the decision rule, since the chi-squared calculated (6.007^a) is greater than the chi-squared tabulated (3.841), we, thus, accept the substantive hypothesis which stated that women with a higher level of education were more likely to feel the positive impact of women empowerment programmes than those with a lower level of education, while, the null hypothesis which stated that women with a higher level of education were less likely to feel the positive impact of women empowerment programmes than those

with a lower level of education is, hereby, rejected.

Hypothesis Two.

Substantive hypothesis (H₁): Women in urban communities are more likely to feel the positive impact of women empowerment programmes than those in rural communities

Null hypothesis (H₀): Women in urban communities are not more likely to feel the positive impact of women empowerment programmes than those in rural communities

To gain clarity on the data presented in Table 8, given the computed $\chi^2 = 27.680^a$ and critical/table χ^2 value of 3.841; df = 1, the test showed that there was a statistically significant relationship ($p \leq 0.000$) between the place of residence and the impact of

Table 8

Place of residence and impact of women empowerment programmes

Place of residence	Feelings/impact of women empowerment programmes		Total
	Positive impact	Negative impact	
Urban area	147 (47.9%)	160 (52.1%)	307 (100.0%)
Rural area	210 (68.9%)	95 (31.1%)	305 (100.0%)
Total	357 (58.3%)	255 (41.7%)	612 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 27.680^a$ df=1, $p < 0.000$ critical/table value=3.841
Source: Fieldwork (2020)

women empowerment programmes. Therefore, we conclude that the substantive hypothesis which states that women in urban communities are more likely to feel the positive impact of women empowerment programmes than those in the rural communities is hereby accepted while the null hypothesis which states that women in urban communities are less likely to feel the positive impact of women empowerment programmes than those in the rural communities is hereby rejected.

DISCUSSION

The study showed that the majority (58.3%) mentioned that they knew about the women empowerment programmes available in the study area. Amongst the available women empowerment programmes, the majority (31.9%) mentioned the provision of agricultural inputs. On the issue of benefactors of the empowerment programmes majority (38.4%) mentioned non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, the majority

(58.3%) of the respondents' stated that they had not benefitted from the available empowerment programmes. Their reason for this is traceable to the uneven distribution of these programmes when they arrive in the community. Findings from this study further revealed that the majority (97.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the level of education affected participation in women empowerment programmes.

The findings of Karabona (2015) indicates that adult education empowers women through the use of skills in various economic sectors, and for this case, adult education is relevant to women in generating income. It can be deduced from the study also that adult education does empower women and equip them with adequate skills that help generate income for them, which, if not in place will hinder their access to women empowerment programmes from making the intended impact in the lives of the women. A sizeable 56.2% said that women who were educated partook more

in empowerment programmes. From the study of Hora (2014), it can be deduced that an improved educational status of women will aid their access to leadership and decision-making processes and access to empowerment programmes which is needed for their well-being. Of the respondents, 50.3% agreed that women reproductive responsibilities had acted as a strong impediment to women empowerment, while 62.1% of the respondents agreed that the patriarchal social structure that favoured the men more than women was a factor working against the empowerment of women.

According to Onah (2011) and Osita (2016), patriarchal societies ensure that the woman is under the control of some men in the image of her father, brother or husband. If a woman is not ruled as daughter or sister, she is of necessity, governed as a wife. Hence, marriages are still male-propelled in Nigeria. A total of 72.4% respondents agreed that the location of the women affected their participation in empowerment programmes, majority of the respondents (85.7%) agreed that certain social norms, beliefs, customs and values in rural communities did not encourage women empowerment, 93.1% of the respondents agreed that high level of poverty among women worked against their all-round empowerment, while, the majority of the respondents (94.1%) agreed that lack of employment opportunities for women prevented their empowerment. This is supported by the findings of Uwantege and Mbabazi (2015), and Mbara et al. (2015) as they reported that lack of employment opportunities or participation

in such opportunities encouraged abuse and prevented empowerment of the women. Their study concluded that employment opportunities would empower women and reduced the incidences of abuse and domestic violence.

The emphasis of the participatory model by Fiorino and Bowels (2001) is the active involvement of people (women) in the decisions that affect their lives; through initiating, planning, negotiating, and implementing programmes that have direct bearing to their development. The findings of the study reveal how women barriers can be eliminated by allowing women to take part in initiating, planning, executing and monitoring development programmes that directly affect their lives. The findings further show that women who have benefitted from empowerment programmes that boost their income and enhance their literacy level, easily overcome social barriers, and they attain self-fulfillment and gain the ability to achieve their highest personal aspirations and goals in life. This, by implication, means that involving the women for whom empowerment programmes are meant for in the planning, initiation and decision-making processes, will increase the overall impact of the women empowerment programmes.

More so, the test of Hypothesis One revealed that 54.4% of respondents with a high level of education indicated that empowerment programmes had positive impacts on them. This finding is in lieu with that of Sperling et al. (2016). From their finding, quality education was closely related to a woman's ability to access decent

work subsequently and effectively utilized any empowerment programme made available. Also, in the test of Hypothesis Two, 68.9% of the rural dwellers indicated that they had positive feelings towards women empowerment programmes and the chi-square value ($\chi^2= 27.680^a$ df=1, $p < 0.000$) showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between residence and positive impact of women empowerment programmes. Tabassum et al. (2019) reached some conclusions that corroborated with the above findings that the place of residence played a significant role in the women empowerment in Bangladesh. Similarly, Josephat et al. (2018) and Kazembe (2020), reported that the number of lived in years in the area (residence) and residence area positively influenced women empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Recommendations

The study examined women barriers and empowerment approaches in Nigeria, using Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State as a case study. Based on the empirical evidence emanating from both descriptive and inferential statistics employed in the analysis of the data, it has been observed that majority of the women (58.3%) were aware of the existing women empowerment programmes. Although, the study found that majority of the women were aware of the existing empowerment programmes, the frequency of those that had benefitted was however reported to be low

by almost half of the respondents (39.5%). However, women that had benefitted from various empowerment programmes in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria had had access to microfinance, skill acquisition, and agricultural programmes. These had helped in reducing poverty, increasing household income, reducing child mortality, and increasing education delivery in the study area. However, several factors such as psychological make-up of the individual woman and the socio-cultural, economic, educational and political realities that made up the external environment had served as impediment to women's all-around empowerment. The study, therefore, concludes that in order to have more women's participation in politics, eliminate gender inequality, and strengthen women economic power more support services should be made available and accessible to women. It, therefore, becomes imperative to create more awareness on the issue of women empowerment and men should be encouraged to take an active part in this campaign. Equality for all can be achieved when women are allowed to make their own decisions around issues that concern them and act on those opportunities without fear.

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