

**ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND WOMEN'S  
PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES: A  
STUDY OF NSUKKA COMMUNITY IN ENUGU STATE,  
NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The study investigated the level of women economic empowerment and women's participation in development processes in Nsukka. Five hundred and ten (510) copies of questionnaire were administered to the female respondents who were randomly selected from the three autonomous communities in Nsukka Town. The findings show that factors such as restriction of women by their husbands, ignorance of the existence of empowerment initiatives and lack of interest among women have hindered women to take advantage of existing empowerment initiatives. It was found that Nsukka women participate in some development processes especially in agricultural production activities, and belonging to women's organizations. It was also discovered following the testing of the hypotheses that the higher the income level of women, the higher their participation in development processes. The study also showed that poor economic base, illiteracy, and discriminatory attitude of males have restricted women's participation in development processes. A major implication of these findings is that if women become economically empowered, that their participation in development processes will be greatly enhanced. It was recommended that programmes for women upliftment must integrate the vital dimensions of empowerment such as formation of social capitals, provision of financial and credit support systems, and enterprises and need-based skill development through training*

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## INTRODUCTION

Empowering women has become a frequently cited goal of development intervention (Mosedale, 2005). In 1970s when women empowerment was first invoked by the Third World feminist and women organizations, it was explicitly used to frame and facilitate the struggle for social justice and women equality through a transformation of economic, social and political structures at national and international levels (Bisnath & Elson, 2003). The need to empower women seems to centre on the fact that women have potentials to contribute to the development process but are constrained by some factors that render them powerless. While the reasons for any particular woman's powerlessness (or powerfulness) are many and varied, it may be necessary to consider what women have in common in this respect. The common factor is that, they are all constrained by their reproductive responsibilities, societal norms, beliefs, customs and values by which societies differentiate between them and men (Kabeer, 2000). These constraints are shaped by male dominated social structure (patriarchy), high rate of poverty among women, and gender division of labour.

Nevertheless, focusing on the empowerment of women as a group requires an analysis of gender relations, that is, the way in which power relations between the sexes are constructed and maintained. In patriarchal societies like Nigeria, men have ultimate authority over material resources in the household, such as land and cash crops, and over the labour of women and other household members. Women having no direct access to land and cash crops or men's labour, must request these resources from their husbands or from other males in the household to whom they are obligated (Adams & Castle, 1994). Women's level of education, poverty and men's attitude towards women have over the years posed a serious threat to women's participation in development. It is obvious that level of education and economic conditions of women most often determine their level of participation in decision making both at family, community, state and national levels. There is generally unequal burden of domestic maintenance and childcare responsibilities allocated to women as compared to men. Male dominance in sexual relations, with its consequence on women's lack of control over their sexuality in many societies has denied women right to determine the number of children they want. They have a low decision making power as compared with men. The prevailing patriarchal ideology, which promotes values of submission, sacrifice, obedience and silent suffering often undermines the attempts by women to assert themselves or demand for share of resources and right (Hawkesworth, 1990).

Empowerment therefore requires an analysis of women's subordination, the formulation of an alternative more satisfactory set of arrangements to those which exist. These can be achieved through the alleviation of the burden of domestic labour and child care, the removal of institutionalized forms of discrimination, the establishment of political equality, improving the economic status of women, freedom of choice over child bearing, and taking measures against male violence and control over women (Molyneaux, 1985). In other words, empowerment requires transformation of structures of subordination through changes in law, property rights, and other institutions that reinforce and perpetuate male domination (Batliwala, 1994). It is this realization of the need to have women run their own lives, be part and parcel of socioeconomic and political agenda in their countries, that the United Nations devoted a decade (1975-85) to issues concerning women and development. The ultimate goal was to empower women to develop their potentials, contribute to and benefit from development on equal basis as men (United Nations, 1975).

In 1990s, many agencies used the term women empowerment in association with a wide variety of strategies including those which focused on enlarging the choices and productivity of women (Bisnath, 2001). Many conferences had been held with the intention to advance the status of women and eliminate gender-based discrimination. Some of these conferences include Mexico Conference of 1975, Copenhagen Conference of 1980, Nairobi World Conference of 1985, and the 1995 Beijing World Conference. There had been other conferences on women across the globe.

Several economic empowerment initiatives have been targeted towards enhancing women's status globally. Programmes such as increase in women's access to assets and resources have been found to increase overall empowerment of women (Rahman Women's empowerment has also been found to have positive impact on the society. For instance, Hogue and Itohara (2009) evaluated the empowerment of women through participation in the micro-credit programme in Bangladesh. In the study, it was found that 58% of the women who participated in the micro credit programme also participated in family decision making and have direct and significant contribution to household income compared to those who did not participate in the programme. In a study conducted by Garikipati (2008), it was found that loans procured by women had direct impact on household assets and income.

Many strategies had also been put in place to empower women in Nigeria. These strategies according to Okeke (1995) include widening women's access to education, encouraging their full participation in cash economy, getting women to participate in politics and reviewing laws on status of women. The 1999 constitution provided promotion and protection of women's right in Nigeria. The Federal government adopted the national policy on women in July, 2000. This policy provided, inter-alia, for affirmative action to increase to 35 percent women's representation in the legislative and executive arms of government. The Federal Government has also set up the National Women Development Centre as a parastatal to the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs. The Centre is primarily in-charge of research studies on women's issues (WomenAid Collective, 2008).

The Third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) focused on the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. The United Nations Millennium Projects Task Force on education and gender equality has outlined seven strategic priorities to achieve the Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals. These include: strengthening opportunities for secondary education of girls while meeting commitment to universal primary education; guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health and rights; investing in infrastructure to reduce women's and girls time burdens; guaranteeing women's and girls' property and inheritance right; eliminating gender inequalities in employment by decreasing women's reliance on informal employment, closing gender gaps in earnings and reducing occupational segregation; increasing women's share of seats in national parliaments and local governmental bodies; and combating violence against girls and women (International Centre for Peace Research on Women, 2005 Report).

Women's population of 68.3 million constitutes almost half of the entire country's population, of 140 million (National Population Commission, 2006). This numerical strength has not been translated to equal treatment in the society. Apart from numerical strength, women have great potentials to evolve a new economic order, thereby help in accelerating social and political development and consequently transform the society into a better one. Olawoye (1995) describes Nigerian women as a crucial factor in production. According to her, they are largely responsible for the bulk production of crops, agro-based food processing, preservation of crops and distribution of yields from farm centres to market in both rural and urban areas. Despite these contributions, disparities still exist between men and women in education, employment and income opportunities, control over assets, personal security and participation in the development

process (Rahman & Naoroze, 2007). This may be as a result of lingering constraints including poor economic condition of Nigerian women, lack of adequate legislation and policies to support the rights of women, unequal access to education, limited access to land, lack of assertiveness among women etc. Level of education, income level, and men's perception on the need for women's participation in development have been viewed as determining factors in women's participation in development processes.

Though some of these empowerment initiatives exist, the effectiveness of these initiatives in promoting the participation of Nsukka women in development processes has not been empirically examined and documented. This dearth of research has created the need for this study. This research will therefore assess the empowerment initiatives available to women in Nsukka and evaluate the role of these initiatives in promoting women's participation in development processes and identify the factors that limit empowerment and participation of Nsukka women in development processes.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design:

The research adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The survey research method according to Stark (2004) has two identifying features. First, it is based on a sample of the population. Second, the data are collected by personal interviews or by having each individual complete a questionnaire. The researcher obtained cross sectional data from the respondents by means of questionnaire.

### 3.2 Study Area and Population:

The study was carried out in Nsukka in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. Nsukka Local Government Area is bounded by Kogi State, Igbo Eze South Local Government Area, Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area, Udenu Local Government Area and Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area. The area has a total population of 309,633 with female population of 160,397 (National Population Commission, 2006). It is made up of 14 rural communities and one urban community, which is Nsukka.

Nsukka houses the main campus of University of Nigeria. The community practices the culture of patriarchy. Most of the women rely on petty trading and subsistence farming for their daily upkeep. The reason for choosing Nsukka as the study area is based on the fact that Nsukka



is more developed than other communities in Nsukka Local Government Area. The University of Nigeria is situated within Nsukka and has led to increase in population that has also resulted in increase in economic and social activities in this area.

### 3.3 Study population

The population of the study comprised of adult males and females in Nsukka from the age of 18 and above. The sample was drawn from the three Autonomous Communities that make up the Nsukka. The population of Nsukka women is estimated at 35,057, while the total population is estimated at 69,230 (National Population Commission, 1991).

### 3.4 Sample size and sampling procedure

#### 3.4.1 Sample Size

Three autonomous communities that make up Nsukka (Nru, Nkpunanor and Ihe/Owerre) were chosen for the study. Five villages were selected from each autonomous community making a total of 15 villages. In each of the villages selected, 34 women were selected. This means that each autonomous community was represented by 170 women making a total of 510 women for the questionnaire survey. Majority of the women who participated in the study were married representing 79.80% of the sample. Out of the 510 participants, 57 (11.18%) were single, 34 (6.67%) were widows while 12 (2.35%) were divorced or separated. With regard to the participants' ages, 106 (20.78%) of the respondents fall between the age bracket of 18 and 27, while 139 (27.25%) are between the ages of 28 and 37. One hundred and forty two (27.84%) were in the 38-47 age bracket, 103 (20.19%) were between the ages of 48 and 57 while 20 (3.92%) are 58 years and above. As shown in Table 4.1.3 above, 75 (14.7%) of the respondents had no formal education, 33 (6.5%) had first leaving certificate, 201 (39.4%) had secondary school certificate, and 90 had Ordinary National Diploma (OND) or National Certificate in Education (NCE), 92 (18%) had university degree or Higher National Diploma (HND), while 19 of the participants had higher degrees. The above table shows that 258 (50.58%) of the respondents are self-employed women, 109 (21.37%) are civil servants, 48 (9.41%) of them work in private establishments while 95 (18.63%) are unemployed. Table 4.1.5 above shows that 496 (97.25%) of the participants are Christians while 14 (2.75%) are of the African Traditional Religion (ATR). None of the participants is a Muslim. With regard to the participants income levels, 75 (14.7%) have income level of below N10, 000 per month, 53 (10.39%) participants have income level of between N11, 000 and N30, 000 per month, 181 (35.49%) are

in the income range of N31, 000 – N50, 000 per month, 94 (18.43%) earn between N51, 000 and 70,000 per month, 92 earn N71, 000 – N90, 000 per month while 15 respondents earn N90, 000 and above per month. The income distribution of the respondents is presented in a bar chart below.

### 3.4.2 Sampling procedure

Multi stage sampling technique was used to select the sample. These include cluster sampling, simple random sampling, and availability sampling. All the villages in Nsukka were grouped into three clusters, representing the three autonomous communities. After grouping them into clusters, the researcher conducted a simple random sampling (balloting) to select the five villages to be studied in each of the autonomous communities. In the 15 selected villages, the houses were numbered and another simple random sampling was conducted to enable the researcher select the households that will represent the village. Seventeen (17) households were selected in each of the villages and in each household two women were picked for the study. The reason for choosing random sampling for this study is to ensure that all the three autonomous communities were equally represented and also to give every village in the communities an equal chance of being selected for the study in order to reduce biases (Stark, 2004). There were cases where there was only one woman who was up to 18 years in the household selected. In cases like this, what the researcher did was to select another woman from another household which did not fall into the sample to make up the number required.

### 3.5 Data Collection:

Questionnaire was used for data collection in this study. The copies of the questionnaire were administered to 510 women aged 18 and above in the three autonomous communities surveyed. Three research assistants who were trained by the researcher and who are also indigenes of Nsukka helped in the administration of the instrument. The questionnaire was other administered to the respondents. The administration of the instrument was done household by household at weekends. All the copies of questionnaire were duly completed.

### 3.6 Method of data Analysis:

Data collected with the instrument were edited to ensure accuracy. The quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Statistical means

such as percentages, bar chart, pie chart and frequency tables were used to reduce the raw data into manageable proportions. Weighted means were used in analysis of research question 5 (In what areas have Nsukka women participated in the political, educational and economic development processes?). The testing of hypotheses was done using regression analysis.

### DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

In this section we present the analysis of data collected from the field through the research instrument.

**Table 1: Respondents Indications of Existence of Empowerment Initiatives in Nsukka Town**

Question: Are there empowerment initiatives for women in this community?	No of Respondent	Percentage (%)
Yes	510	100
No	0	0
Total	510	100.0

In responding to the question: Are there empowerment initiatives for women in this community? All the participants as shown in Table 4.2.1 agreed that there is one form of economic empowerment initiative or the other in their communities. With regard to the results of the IDIs, all the respondents who were interviewed also agree that there exist some empowerment initiatives in Nsukka town.

**Table 2: Respondents Frequency Report on the Availability of Empowerment Initiatives Available for Women in Nsukka Town**

Empowerment initiatives	Frequency
Women organizations	403
Cooperative societies	389



Right to use land and other cash crops	293
Provision of Agricultural facilities	280
Micro Credit Programme	138
Awareness programme	135
Access to skill and capacity building centres	56

In the questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate the availability of several empowerment initiatives for Nsukka women. The respondents were asked to tick as many as possible, the initiatives they have benefited from. The results of their responses as indicated in Table 4.2.2 above shows that the most available initiative in the town is the existence of women organizations with 403 participants indicating their availability. Frequency of the respondents on the availability of other initiatives follows in this order: cooperative societies, right to use land and other cash crops, provision of agricultural facilities, micro credit programme, awareness programme, and access to skill and capacity building centres. All the interviewees also indicated that the above listed empowerment initiatives are available. The initiatives that the women have benefited from are further presented in Tables 4.2.6, 4.2.7, and 4.2.8.

**Table 3: Respondents' Rating of Women's Involvement in Economic Empowerment Initiatives in Nsukka Town**

	No of Respondent	Percentage (%)
High	62	12.16
Low	448	87.84
Total	510	100.0

As shown in Table 4.2.4 above, 448 (87.84%) of the respondents rated women's involvement in the empowerment initiative low while 62 (12.16%) rated women's involvement high. Reasons given by the respondents for this low involvement are presented in Table 4 below

**Table 4: Respondents' Indications of Major Causes of Women's Low Involvement in Empowerment Initiatives**

	Frequency
Ignorance of the existence of the	429

initiatives	
Restrictions from husbands and other relations	301
Lack of interest	236
Women's lack of willingness to take advantage of the empowerment initiatives	98

With regard to the reasons for the low involvement of women in existing empowerment initiatives, 429 respondents rated ignorance of the existence of the initiatives (429 respondents) as the major reason. This was followed by restrictions from husbands and other relations (236 respondents indicated this as a major reason). Two hundred and thirty six (236) respondents indicated that lack of interest on the part of women was the major reason for such low involvement while 98 respondents attributed low involvement to women's lack of willingness to take advantage of the empowerment initiatives.

**Table 5: Participants' Responses on How They Have Been Economically Empowered**

Type of economic empowerment benefited from	Frequency
Access to land and cash crop	369
Cooperative societies	354
Provision of agricultural production facilities	180
Access to micro credit facilities	162
Skill/technical training	56

With regard to the level of economic empowerment of the respondents, 369 of the participants indicated that they have access to land and cash crops, 354 indicated that they have been involved in cooperative societies, while 180 indicated that they have been provided with agricultural production facilities. Among the 510 participants surveyed, 162 indicated that they

have access to micro credit facilities while 56 indicated that they have benefited from skill/technical training.

**Table 6: Participants' Responses on Categories of Women Who Benefit Most from the Empowerment Initiatives**

Categories of women	No of Respondent	Percentage (%)
Women Leaders	110	21.57
Women who are civil servants	81	15.88
Women who are related to those occupying political offices	242	47.45
Poor Village women	77	15.10
Total	510	100.0

With regard to the categories of women who benefit most from the empowerment initiatives, Table 4.2.9 above shows that 242 (47.45%) indicated that women who are related to individuals occupying political offices are the major beneficiaries of the empowerment initiatives, 110 (21.57%) indicated that women leaders benefit most, 81 (15.88%) respondents indicated that women who are civil servants benefit most while 77 (15.10%) respondents listed poor village women as the major beneficiaries.

**Table 7: Table Showing Frequency of Participants' Responses on the Factors that have Contributed to Low Empowerment of Nsukka Town Women in Development Process**

Militating Factors	Frequency	Rank
Lack of time due to domestic and reproductive role of women	427	1
Discriminatory attitude of men	408	2
Illiteracy	331	3
Poor economic base	313	4
Lack of group coalition among women	296	5
Patriarchy	252	6
Lack of efficient and trustworthy women leaders	204	7

Lack of sustained process of empowerment	167	8
Religious belief	64	10
Lack of assertiveness among women	12	11

The result in Table 4.2.14 above shows the frequencies of the participants' responses on the factors that limits women's participation in development processes in Nsukka. Among the major problems indicated by the participants is lack of time due to domestic and reproductive roles of women (427). This was followed by the discriminatory attitude of men (408). Out of the 510 women surveyed, 331 indicated that illiteracy is a major limiting factor while 313 listed poor economic base of women as a major factor. Other limiting factors listed in order of ranking by the participants include, lack of group coalition among women, patriarchy, lack of efficient and trustworthy women leaders, lack of sustained process of empowerment, rivalry among women, religious belief, and lack of assertiveness among women.

In testing the hypotheses, regression analyses were employed and the results are presented below.

**Table 8: Results of the Regression Analyses Showing the Relationship between Income Level of and Participation in Development Processes**

Model	B	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
1	.30	.37	.14	.14

\* p < .05

Table 4.3.2 shows the regression coefficient illustrating the relationship between income level and women's participation in development processes. The regression results shows that income level was significantly related with women's level of participation in development processes ( $B = 3.04$   $p < .05$ ). Income level of accounted for 14% variance in women's participation in development processes.

The result illustrates the importance of income in women's participation in the community. It is obvious that income is a strong empowerment for women. This is consistent

with Rahman and Naoroze (2007) findings that economic independence makes women to become self-reliant and this enhances their participation in family and societal affairs.

**Table 9: Results of the Regression Analyses Showing the Relationship between Women’s Employment Status and Level of Participation in Development Processes**

Model	B	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Employment Status	.02	.02 <sup>#</sup>	.00 <sup>#</sup>	.002

# Not significant

The regression coefficient table above reveals that employment status of the women was not significantly related with women’s level of participation in development processes ( $p > .05$ ). This means that irrespective of where a woman is working (self-employed, civil servant, employed in a private firm, unemployed), they tend to participate similarly in development processes. This result demonstrated that women could participate actively in development processes wherever they may find themselves.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

Women can be described as an indispensable group in the development of any nation. Women’s empowerment creates a powerful influence on community, family and the nation at large. Thus, women empowerment can be seen as a vital strategy for any development effort. Although some initiatives have been established by government, non-governmental bodies and individual, some factors have constituted constraints to women’s involvement in these initiatives. Ignorance of the existence of these initiatives, lack of interest among women and restriction from husbands and other males have denied women access to these initiatives.

The study revealed that income level has significant relationship with women’s participation in development processes. This supports the view of Lasiele (1999) that poor economic bases of women have also affected women’s participation in development processes. Thus, to help improve the participation of Nsukka women in development processes, they should be empowered economically.



The study also reveals that women's participation in development is still low. It was observed that many factors still constitute barriers to active participation of women in development processes. There is need for government, non governmental bodies and individuals to work hand in hand in eliminating or reducing these constraints in order to create a conducive environment for women to actively participate in the development process. This will lead to sustainable development in Nigeria.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendation were made:

- The National gender policy should be enacted into laws to provide a legal framework for gender mainstreaming in the national development plans and strategies.
- There should be coalition among women organizations and groups. This will help them share experiences and be able to tackle problems facing women. Women groups could be used as an effective mechanism for information dissemination, social and mutual learning, institutionalized process for capacity building and empowerment.
- Considering the relationship between income level of women and their participation in development processes as illustrated by the findings of this study, programmes for women upliftment must integrate the vital dimensions such as formation of social capitals, provision of financial and credit support systems, and enterprises and need based skill development through training. This should also include regular monitoring of women to ensure that they invest their resources in something meaningful to give them some degree of economic independence.
- Re-orientation of men's mind set on women's empowerment and participation could greatly enhance women's empowerment. This could be achieved through seminars, training and workshops.
- Women should be given unlimited access to education and media. Through these, women will come to realize the scopes and opportunities through which they can improve their status in the society.
- The empowering agents (e.g. governments, non-governmental bodies, individuals) should create necessary awareness on the availability of the existing empowerment initiatives so that women can take advantage of these initiatives to empower themselves.
- Finally, women leaders and other highly educated women should make effort to sensitize and educate their fellow women. They should write about women achievers and their

achievement in order to educate the public on the immense contributions of women to the socio-political and economic evolution of Nigeria.

### Suggestions for Further Research

- It will be interesting to conduct a research that will discover the available empowerment initiatives in rural communities in Nsukka local government area since this study was carried out in an urban community.
- The existing economic empowerment initiatives should be evaluated to determine the problem which the organizers encounter in the process of executing these initiatives.
- Other researches should be carried out in other rural communities in Nsukka local government to assess the level of women's participation in development activities in the rural areas.

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