

Factors affecting Women's Participation in Community Development in Kakwagom-Boki Local Government Area - 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 Boki Local Government of Cross River State of Nigeria, women's participation in community development remains an issue of significant concern. This is even as women over the years, contribute to the growth of their society in spite of the many limitations standing in their way. This study explored the complex web of factors influencing women's participation in community development initiatives and specifically investigated the extent of women's representation in decision-making bodies and their participation in community development. To appropriately tackle and capture the variables involved in the study, the qualitative research method was adopted. Two focus group discussions (FGDs) and four in-depth interviews (IDIs) were carried out. Findings revealed a wealth of knowledge on factors affecting women's participation in community development in Kakwagom Boki Local Government of Cross River State, ranging from inability to access financial and property ownership to prevention of women from taking decisions in the community. The study recommends among others, improvement in women's access to resources such as land, credit and healthcare facilities and appointment into positions of leadership and decision-making bodies in the community. Mentorship programmes, collaboration and networking should be encouraged among women's groups and other stakeholders to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and resources.

Keywords: Community development; Sustainable growth; Women's group; Women's participation; Mentorship programmes

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. At the global level, women are under-represented in formal decision-making structures that are closely linked to community development and governance. According to the UN Women (2025), women hold only about 35.5% of elected seats in local deliberative bodies worldwide, which serve as a key platform for planning and delivering community services.

Women also occupy about 27.2% of seats in national parliaments, highlighting persistent gender gaps in political leadership that constrain women's influence on policies affecting community development processes and priorities. Regionally, in Sub-Saharan Africa and particularly Nigeria, women's participation in governance and community development exhibits similar patterns of exclusion and marginalisation. According to the Women's Political Participation in Africa Barometer 2024 report, women's participation in national parliaments across Africa increased slightly, with women accounting for 26% of the seats in African legislatures, although Nigeria is among the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa for women's parliamentary representation (4.4% in the House of Representatives, with 16 women out of the 360 seats in the House of Representatives and 4 women out of the 109 seats in the Senate). Whereas the 2024 local government elections in Nigeria produced 23 women out of 618 chairperson seats available, giving women about 3.7% representation in grassroots leadership. This indicates a low female participation at the decision-making level (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre report 2024).

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 characterised by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles. These societal norms, while rooted in cultural heritage, often constrain women from actively engaging 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. Moreover, the percentage of women's representation in decision-making is still inadequate; despite the 35% affirmative action representation of women in decision-making bodies at the community level, it 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 (Olorunfemi & Olorunfemi, 2021)

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

- (a) To identify the specific factors affecting women's participation in community development in Kakwagom Boki.
- (b) To investigate the extent of women's representation in decision-making bodies and their participation in community development efforts in Kakwagom-Boki.
- (c) To suggest strategies to overcome the barriers and promote women's meaningful engagement in community development in Kakwagom Boki.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification

Most of the scholars in the area of community development, rural sociology and social work, including Lotz (1977), agree 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 development is closely linked with the history of society. The 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 services 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 the UK government publications 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. (Great Britain Colonial Office, 1948, p. 19).

After the Ashridge 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, and infant and maternal welfare, and in the field of education by spreading literacy and adult education as well as by extending and improving schools for children. Furthermore, community development must make use of co-operative movement and must be put into effect in the closest association with local government bodies (Colonial Office, 1954, p. 14).

In 1959, the United Nations 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 in the life of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress. And by the early 60s, there were over 40 community development advisers in over thirty countries 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: According to 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 Dunham (1970), community development should be organised 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 organise themselves for planning and action, define their common and individual problems, and execute these with a maximum of reliance upon the resources of the community.

Women's participation in community development is a vital driver of sustainable growth and social progress; it entails their involvement in economic ventures, healthcare, and infrastructure (Maton, 2008). This implies that women's contributions are necessary across economic, social, and political spheres and that sustainable development is unattainable without female empowerment and gender equality (Bayeh, 2015). This aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5, which posits that excluding women from political and decision-making processes prevents the achievement of authentic democratic practices and national development goals (United Nations, 2015; Gysman, 2018).

Also, the inclusion of women yields extensive benefits, particularly through the introduction of diverse perspectives and priorities that enrich the decision-making process (Cornwall, 2001; Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). When women influence resource allocation, there is a measurable improvement in the quality of life, especially regarding access to healthcare, education, and social support networks (Adenugba & Raji-Mustapha, 2013). Economically, women's participation expands the labour force and stimulates a multiplier effect; as women reinvest their earnings into their families and local projects, they drive productivity and create a sustainable path toward poverty reduction and economic stability for the entire community.

Furthermore, empowering women serves as a transformative tool for fostering social cohesion and dismantling entrenched gender disparities (Flecha, 2014). By actively engaging in leadership and development projects, women challenge traditional societal norms and stereotypes, paving the way for a more equitable society (Sen & Mukherjee, 2017). This inclusive approach not only addresses the root causes of inequality but also strengthens

community bonds through shared purpose, ensuring that all members, regardless of gender, can contribute to their society based on their unique skills and aspirations.

Factors Affecting Women's Participation in Community Development

Socio-cultural norms and traditional gender roles play a central role in shaping the dynamics of women's participation in community development 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 (Gysman, 2018)

Socio-cultural norms encompass the shared beliefs, values, customs, and practices within the 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 labour, 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 (Gysman, 2018). Culture plays a profound and intricate role in shaping gender-related behaviour, values, roles, and identities. Best and Angelica (2019) emphasised 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.

Traditional gender roles are closely intertwined with socio-cultural norms and delineate the responsibilities, duties, and behaviours expected from individuals based on their gender (Sokoya, 2003). 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 (Gysman, 2018).

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 authority. The persistence of socio-cultural norms and traditional gender roles poses several challenges to women's participation in community development

Economic factors constitute a significant dimension that influences the extent of women's participation in community development within these economic considerations encompass a range of financial and resource-related variables that shape women's ability to contribute effectively to community development efforts (Gysman, 2018).

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 lead 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 (Gysman, 2018).

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, 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 (Gysman, 2018).

Unequal access to resources, such as land for agriculture or capital for entrepreneurial endeavours, 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 (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2011, p. 5).

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. The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2017) maintained that 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. This further restricts their ability to participate in community development.

At present, the global labour force participation rate for women stands at 48.7%, while for men, it is 73.0% (ILO, 2024). This represents a substantial gap of 24.3 percentage points. While the gap has narrowed slightly since 2017, progress remains slow; in regions such as the Arab States, Northern Africa, and Southern Asia, this gender disparity remains extreme, with participation gaps exceeding 50 percentage points (ILO, 2025).

Limited access to financial services, such as savings accounts and credit facilities, can prevent women from mobilising 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 has 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, provides opportunities for women to voice their opinions and contribute to community development discussions (Gysman, 2018).

Theoretical framework

Radical Feminist Theory

The radical feminist theory is a perspective within feminism which 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 labour force participation, were advancing. The central objective of radical feminist theory lies in the comprehensive restructuring of societal frameworks (Tong, 2009).

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 and power dynamics have been challenged of

impeding the growth and development of female gender by placing women in a subordinate position (Acker, 1992)

Economic factors intersect to constrain women's 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 highlights a significant gender disparity in the traditional energy sector. While women constitute nearly 39% of the global labour force, their representation in the traditional energy sector is substantially lower, at just 16% (IEA 2019). This under-representation 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 (2024) maintained that by recognising 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 in proposing strategies for transformative change as well as advocating for structural reforms and promoting women's agency in community development.

However, radical feminism has been criticised 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 liberal theory identifies the various barriers affecting women's participation in community development activities.

Methodology

The Kakwagom community is located in the Boki local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The community consists of four units (Ajirija, Abedebede, Dishishua and Ekagbe). The participants were purposively selected. The qualitative research method was adopted for the study. It enabled us to explore the factors that influenced women's participation in community development in Kakwagom Boki local government, Cross River State. The qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs).

Eight (8) in-depth interviews (IDIs) were carried out with two (2) from each unit: Ajirija, Abedebede, Dishishua and Ekagbe in Kakwagom Boki. Participants for the in-depth interviews were leaders of women's groups, youth leaders and village heads. Pre-determined structured and, unstructured questions were asked to find out their opinion about factors that influenced women's participation in community development, sixteen (16) focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, two from each unit, consisting of 8-12 participants in each of the units. Participants consist of men and women in Kakwagom, family heads, women leaders, civil servants and youth leaders. The first segment comprises the female gender, and the second segment consists of the male gender. Separating the different genders is to allow the participants to discuss freely without any intimidation. The FGDs discussion guide contained open-ended questions centred on two themes: the factors that limit women's participation in community development activities and the impacts of women's representation

in decision-making bodies at the community level. Each discussion lasted 30-60 minutes. All the sessions were recorded and transcribed using the OpenAI Whisper model, implemented by a Python script in Google Colab. The transcripts were analysed through systematic content and thematic analysis.

Results

The qualitative study from the IDIs and the FGDs conducted shows that Kakwagom women participate in community development activities. Most of the respondents agreed that women have been involved in one community development activity or the other. Some women's groups in the Dishishua community had self-help projects carried out in their community. During the focus group discussion a participant maintained that:

“We, the members of the Detiem Women Association residing in the Dishishua community of Kakwagom-Boki, have established a garri processing factory. This project has empowered women, enabling them to process very clean garri significantly in larger quantities in a shorter time frame.” (A member of the Detiem Women's Association)

Complementing the above, a participant during the focus group discussion posited that:

“Our meeting group have tried to contribute our little way to develop Kakwagom. We built a market stall within the Kakwagom market. Most times we join the men and youths in the sanitation around the market area. We are really interested in the development of our community even as our efforts most times are not noticed.” (Secretary, Detiem Association)

However the interviews with the heads of the women's groups in the four (Ajirija, Abedebede, Dishishua and Ekagbe) units of Kakwagom Boki attributed the inability of women to participate in community development to underlying constraints which include socio-cultural norms, lack of financial access and a historical influence of Christian missionaries in Kakwagom, crediting the above factors with instilling values of domesticity. A participant during the interview stated that:

“Our culture has caused us enough backwardness. Since I was a child, I often hear, ‘You are a girl; your education ends in the kitchen.’ Even when in primary school, I used to do better than men in my class, especially in mathematics. My parent will rather insist I learn domestic skills so that my would-be husband will love me and appreciate the family for grooming me well. I feel really bad when I see those we grew up together in big cities while I remain in this community as a housewife.” (IDI Female Respondent Ajirija unit).

An officer of the Catholic women's organisation also supported the above claim during the IDI; she further stated that:

“Christian missionaries for me even help to worsen the case of women and their ability to compete with men in community development ventures. Women were basically taught skills centred on homemaking, such as knitting and decorating. Where can this take them to? Women are socialised to believe that their domestic roles were somehow divine; the women who struggled to occupy leadership roles, even in the church, were seen as bad women. (IDI female Respondent Abedebede unit)

The study attempted to examine the extent of women’s representation in decision making in Kakwagom Boki. Findings revealed a complex interplay between visibility, power dynamics, and women's actual participation in shaping the community. This generated heated arguments during both (male and female) sessions of the FDGs, with many female participants maintaining a dominant position that women's voices is always excluded in the community when important decisions are made, even when the decision affects the female gender. The opinion of a woman leader during an IDI summed up this perception:

“Yes, it is very true that women’s voices are excluded from important decisions taken in the community. It’s an unfortunate thing that as a ward women leader, most times I am left behind and am not carried along; even getting to this position was not easy at all – it was a fight.” (FGD woman ward leader Dishishau)

A male participant during the FGD session supported the above position that:

“I know that patriarchal systems have greatly contributed to women's voices being excluded from key decision-making processes in Kakwagom. We the men still hold firmly to the beliefs of male supremacy in all things. This is the reason for marginalisation of women in both formal and informal leadership roles, which is responsible for a skewed distribution of power and influence within the community.” (FDG male respondent Ekagbe unit).

However, another male respondent during the FGD session offers a vital counterpoint, recognising the power of visible female leaders to serve as inspirations for other women, particularly younger generations. He posited that:

“We are in the 21st century; we must stop these beliefs that continually limit our women. They should be given opportunities to showcase case their talents. Some of us have girls; we must promote gender equality so that the younger women can always look up to the older women who are doing well in their positions of leadership as their role models and mentors” (FGD male respondent Abedebede unit).

This study also attempted to suggest various strategies that can increase women’s participation in community development in Kakwagom. Participants in the FDG sessions

and some of the interviewees expressed their divergent views on what could be done to promote meaningful engagement of women in community development ventures in Kakwagom. An aged female participant during an IDI summed it all up:

“As a retired primary school teacher, I understand all the challenges women in this community face that limit them from fully engaging in community development activities. As a matter of urgency, we must promote girl child education, because for me, education remains the key that can unlock the cycle of poverty, backwardness and stagnation.” (IDI, retired female school teacher Ajirija unit)

Corroborating the above suggestion, a male participant during an FDG session agrees that:

“Yes, I support that education is the key... If a woman is properly educated and occupies a high position, she will have the financial capability to support projects that are going on in the community, and she can also be involved in certain decision-making within and outside this community. Yah...her voice must definitely be heard.” (FDG, male respondent Ekagbe unit).

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 realised, 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)

On women's participation in community development in Kakwagom, findings showed a compelling narrative of female agency and community development. With participants, specifically members of the Detiem age grade residing in Kakwagom-Boki, contributing through the establishment of a garri processing factory and their role in constructing new market stalls within the Kakwagom market as well as participating in sanitation of the marketplace.

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 organisations act as crucial social

units (Parsons & Bales, 1955). These organisations 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.

On socio-cultural norms and women's participation in Kakwagom, the study reveals underlying limitations that impede their full engagement. The various Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with both male and female participants in the Kakwagom shed light on these constraints.

The women reflected on the historical role of Christian missionaries in Kakwagom, noting that they promoted ideals of domesticity. They explained that missionary teachings focused largely on household-related skills, including knitting and home decoration. According to the women, this training strengthened the belief that women's responsibilities were mainly confined to the home. In addition, they identified limited access to formal education as a significant constraint, which further curtailed their opportunities outside the domestic setting. 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. From a feminist and sociological perspective, findings on women's involvement in decision-making in Kakwagom reveal a structural constraint rooted in their limited visibility and social recognition. Women's marginal positioning within both formal and informal leadership institutions produces an asymmetrical distribution of power and authority, privileging male dominance in community governance, silencing women's voices and excluding their knowledge and perspectives from key

decision-making arenas. This is in line with the views of Ilesanmi (2018), who maintained that many traditional and modern decision-making bodies have historically been male-dominated, reflecting deep-rooted gender imbalances in power and authority.

However, the interview shows that women's representation in leadership is important because it makes their participation more accepted and helps reduce power imbalances in decision-making. Future studies should focus on how female leaders in Kakwagom overcome cultural barriers and inspire others. This understanding can help promote gender equality and strengthen women's involvement in community leadership.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the various factors that limit women's participation in community development activities, including cultural norms and gender roles, economic factors, and lack of women's representation in decision-making bodies at the 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 encouraged to be more involved in development initiatives of their communities. It will give them a sense of ownership and general wellbeing and promote sustainable growth and development in the Kakwagom community, Boki, Cross River State.

Recommendations

A lot of factors limit women's involvement in community development initiatives. Most times the contributions of the women are unnoticed and devalued, resulting in diminishing interest in community development activities. The study suggests the following measures that can enhance women participation in community development ventures.

- i. The contributions of women in kakwagom should be acknowledged and celebrated. This will be an inspiration to other women, especially the younger ones.
- ii. The government and other stakeholders should provide financial resources to grassroots women as well as organising training and skill development programmes that can empower women to take on leadership roles and participate actively in community development initiatives.
- iii. The leaders of women groups in kakwagom should encourage their members to attend the Boki women worldwide annual submit as this submit can serve as an

avenue for exchange of knowledge and resources as well as collaboration and networking.

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