

LIVING CONDITIONS OF WOMEN IN THE RURAL COMMUNITIES OF SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA: THE NEED FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING INTO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

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Abstract

This study unveils the socio demographic profile of rural women and their involvement in projects in communities of Southwestern Nigeria. The objectives of this study are to assess the living condition of the rural women in southwestern Nigeria, find out the types of projects that are initiated and implemented in rural communities of South western Nigeria and find out how interested these rural women are in these projects. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select seven hundred and twenty rural women from three states namely: Ondo, Osun and Ogun, using random sampling technique. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyse data. The findings show among others the myriad of problems faced by the rural women starting from their lack of capacity to initiate or significantly influence decisions that will impact their lives to neglect by decision makers and general disempowerment due to their poor economic status.

Keywords: Rural Women; Rural Communities; Gender Mainstreaming; Community Development

Introduction

It can be noticed that the conditions of the rural areas in Nigeria is nothing to write home about as many lack infrastructural facilities to live a good life.

They are faced with a lot of challenges that deprive them of good living standards. Notable among others as you take a community walk in any rural part of Nigeria is the bad roads that have almost or in some cases cut off the rural dwellers from civilization. Bearing in mind that the main occupation of the rural dwellers which is farming needs good roads to convey farm products to the cities where they can be sold. Ekong (2010) describes the rural communities in Nigeria as places in which half or more than half of the adult male population is engaged in farming. Equally of significance are the problems of inadequate health care, electricity, schools within reach and decline in income. Ekong further defines the rural communities in Nigeria as places with the absence of social amenities and various tapings of modernization.

It is common in Nigeria for community members to come together to solve community problems which translate to community development project. Development is central to any community because it is through development that communities can continue to exist. In fact, in the traditional society, everyone is their brother's keeper. Community is defined in *Webster Dictionary* as a group of people residing in the same region and under the same government. It is also defined as a class or group with common interests. Needless to say, the interests of the community pertaining to their means of livelihood, health, education, infrastructures and national resources are at their disposal. Haines (2008) defines community development both as a process and an outcome, as seen in the various

definitions from the literature. She defines community development as an asset building that improves the quality of life among residents of low - to moderate income communities, where communities are defined as neighborhoods or multi-neighborhood areas; "as a planned effort to produce assets that increase the capacity of residents to improve their quality of life"; as a place-based approach: it concentrates on creating assets that benefit people in poor neighborhoods, largely by building and tapping links to external resources" (Ferguson and Dickens 1999; Green and Haines 2007; Vidal and Keating, 2004 in Haines, 2008).

In every community, we have the population comprising of both male and female. In Nigeria as well as other parts of the world, women are the major managers of resources in the home, the community and in the society in general. Unfortunately, the level of participation of these women in community development programmes, especially, in the rural communities is nothing to write home about (Babalola 2013). It is expected that initiation of gender sensitive community development projects will make life better for these women. It has been noticed that Nigerian rural women face a lot of discrimination and obstacles which may prevent them from contributing maximally to these community development projects in Nigeria. Some of these constraints relate to age, religion and class, and may thus vary by region and by different rural contexts within countries. Aderinto and Akande (2003) conclude that women are discriminated in the planning and implementation of community projects.

Common concerns, however, include the time required to meet domestic responsibilities, economic pressures, stereotypical attitudes, limited education or literacy, security issues, and opposition from family and community members. Tsikata (2001) cited in Kwapong (2006) observes that societal arrangements make men control more resources, for example, land, labour, capital (both monetary and social) than women and also that as household heads, men have power to take important decisions, serve as controllers of lineages, communities, work places and ultimately the state. That is practically all the power structures of the society. Also, Babalola (2013) in a paper on “An Appraisal of Women Empowerment Programmes by Adult Education Departments in Two Local Government Areas in Osun State” accounts that women were not involved in the planning of the empowerment programmes. Programmes were initiated and implemented based on needs assessment procedures that were not systematically undertaken. Officials appeared to be focusing more on ascribed needs than felt needs.

Regrettably, women continue to face considerable obstacles when they attempt to participate in community development which can improve their life styles. Some of these constraints relate to religion and class, and may thus vary between regions and different rural contexts within countries. Common concerns, however, include the time required to meet domestic responsibilities, economic pressures, stereotypical attitudes, limited education or literacy, security issues, limited access to information, capital and other resources,

and opposition from family and community members. Equally of significance are the problems of inadequate and distant or diminishing health care and decline in income. In many areas, women also suffer from inferiority complex where women are not allowed to talk in the public thus they cannot make their opinion known in the society. All these contribute to the low social status of rural women and thus make them helpless and powerless. This is why Opeke and Okilagwe (2000) assert that the low status of women in African rural communities is a case in point.

This is why gender mainstreaming into community developments is important.

"Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality (International labour Organisation 2013).

The poor condition of the rural women is pathetic and needs urgent attention. It is important for development projects that can change the lives of these women and improve their situation be initiated and completed. Do these women need these projects? Is the condition of women in

Nigeria, especially, the rural women as pathetic as has been recorded in literature? The aim of this study is to examine and describe the present state of the lives of women in the rural areas of Southwestern part of Nigeria, and underscore how women's capacity and capabilities can be harnessed to bring about greater opportunities for the rural women. This study will also provide an evident based overview of the involvement of women in community development process at the level at which they participate in community development. The specific objectives are to:

1. assess the living condition of the rural women in southwestern Nigeria;
2. find out the types of projects that are initiated and implemented in rural communities of South western Nigeria; and
3. determine how interested these rural women are in these projects.

Research questions

1. What is the living condition of the rural women in southwestern Nigeria?
2. What types of projects are initiated and implemented in the rural communities of Southwestern Nigeria?
3. How interested are these rural women in these projects?

Theoretical Framework

The theory from which this study has drawn significant insights is discussed below.

Social Action Theory

An action is social when one or more of the three conditions is fulfilled: first, the situation of the actor includes other actors whose presence is taken into account when the action is performed; second, the situation is such that others possess facilities, objects or characteristics which enable them in some ways to influence the conduct of the actor; third the actor shares with these others certain sets of expectations and possibly certain values, beliefs and symbols (Cohen 1969).

Cohen (1969) citing Weber (undated) distinguishes four main types of actions: Zweckrational, Wertrational, traditional and effectual. Zweckrational which may also be translated as instrumental rationality refers to actions which are planned and taken after evaluating the goal in relation to other goals, and after thorough consideration of various means (and consequences) to achieve it. Wertrational or value-oriented rationality, the second type of action, is taken because it leads to a valued goal, but with no thought of its consequences and often without consideration of the appropriateness of the means chosen to achieve it. The third, traditional actions are carried out due to tradition without considering alternatives, because they are always carried out in a particular manner for certain situations. The effectual actions are actions which are taken due to one's emotions, to express personal feelings (Cohen 1969).

Social action was an action carried out by an individual to which a person attaches a meaning; an action which takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby

oriented in its course. Thus, an action that persons do not think about is not a social action (Haralambos and Holborn 2004). Weber (undated) believes that social actions, particularly those involving large number of people behaving in similar ways, could lead to large-scale social changes such as the advent of capitalism (Haralambos and Holborn 2004).

Social action involves people working together to bring about change in the groups, communities and organisations that make up their social context. In effect, social activists want to influence the social histories of themselves and the people they may be working with. Some adult education processes are aimed at helping learners shift from a passive or reactive role in the affairs of their societies to a proactive role (Newman 2000).

This theory is applicable to this work in the sense that women need to come together to take actions that will benefit them in their communities; women should not stay back and accept the situation the society has put them as second class citizens. This has affected their lives negatively for a long time. It is high time women took actions that will put them in the rightful position in the society, especially in the rural communities.

Research Methodology

The research design adopted is the descriptive survey which was conducted in Southwestern Nigeria (one of the six geo-political zones of Nigeria). The study was restricted to this geo-political zone (Southwest) to ensure an in-depth study of the area. The population for the study

consists of all women in the rural areas of Southwestern Nigeria.

A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select seven hundred and twenty rural women from three states namely: Ondo, Osun and Ogun that were randomly selected from the south-western part of Nigeria. Two local government areas (LGAs) were selected from each of the three states and two rural communities were also selected from each of the selected local government areas by simple random sampling technique, making a total number of six LGAs and twelve rural communities respectively. From each of the rural communities, 60 rural women were randomly selected making a total number of 240 per state and 720 respondents all together. For the in-depth interview, the study used purposive sampling technique to select 2 women (literate and non-literate) from each of the local government areas selected, making a total of 12 women who had indicated participation in community development projects. The study also conducted Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in each of the selected states to elicit information on groups' opinions. In all, twelve (12) in-depth interviews and (12) FGD sessions were conducted, and these were considered adequate because of the qualitative nature of data sought and limited resources available for the study. This study used three instruments (A structured questionnaire, an in-depth interview guide and focus group discussion guide) to collect data. Quantitative data was analysed using frequencies and simple percentages, while the qualitative data was subjected to

content analysis. The information complements and strengthens the results of produced from the qualitative data the quantitative data.

Findings and Discussions

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile

| Variables | Frequency (N=720) | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Age | | |
| 15-19 | 28 | 3.89 |
| 20-24 | 45 | 6.25 |
| 25-29 | 103 | 14.31 |
| 30-34 | 111 | 15.42 |
| 35-39 | 114 | 15.83 |
| 40-44 | 132 | 18.33 |
| 45-49 | 117 | 16.25 |
| 50-54 | 54 | 7.5 |
| 55+ | 16 | 2.22 |
| Mean= | 35.4 | |
| Standard deviation= | 13.36 | |
| Current marital status | | |
| Married | 412 | 57.22 |
| Living together | 229 | 31.81 |
| Divorced | 2 | 0.28 |
| Separated | 14 | 1.94 |
| Widowed | 63 | 8.75 |
| | | |
| Family type | | |
| Polygamous | 330 | 45.83 |
| Monogamous | 390 | 54.17 |
| | | |
| Number of living children | | |
| 1-2 children | 182 | 25.28 |
| 3-4 children | 308 | 42.78 |
| 5children+ | 230 | 31.94 |
| Religion | | |
| Christianity | 472 | 65.56 |
| Islam | 237 | 32.92 |
| Traditional | 11 | 1.53 |

| | | |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|
| | | |
| Ethnic group | | |
| Yoruba | 611 | 84.86 |
| Igbo | 87 | 12.08 |
| Hausa | 22 | 3.06 |
| Total | 720 | 100 |
| Source: Field Work, 2014 | | |

This study found out as presented in Table 1 that women's age ranged from 15 to 49 with mean age of 35.4 and standard deviation of 13.6. A significant number (80.14%) of the respondents are within the age bracket 25- 49 years. More than half (57.22%) of them are married, 31.81% are separated and 7.59% are widow at the time of survey, with almost half (45.83) of them in a polygamous families. Majority of the respondents (65.56%) are Christians with

Research Question 1: What is the living condition of the rural women in southwestern Nigeria?

about one third (32.92%) being Muslims. Distribution according to the number of living children revealed that more than one third (42.78%) of the women had up to 4 living children, 31.94% had 5 children and above, while about one fourth (25.28%) had 1-2 living children at the time of the survey. 84.86% of our respondents are predominantly Yoruba, 12.08% are Igbo while only 3.06% are Hausa.

| Table 2: Socio-Economic Status | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Primary occupation | | |
| Agriculture/Farming | 239 | 33.19 |
| Trading | 342 | 47.5 |
| Clerical | 16 | 2.22 |
| Teaching | 25 | 3.47 |
| Nursing | 14 | 1.94 |
| Artisan | 75 | 10.42 |
| Domestic services | 9 | 1.25 |
| Main source of water | | |
| River/ Stream | 212 | 29.44 |
| Pond "Adagun Odo" | 101 | 14.03 |
| Well | 158 | 21.94 |
| Borehole | 181 | 25.14 |
| Pipe borne water | 46 | 6.39 |
| Sachet water | 22 | 3.06 |

| | | |
|--|------------|------------|
| Main source of cooking | | |
| Fire wood | 545 | 75.69 |
| Coal Pot | 11 | 1.53 |
| Kerosene stove | 154 | 21.39 |
| Gas Cooker | 10 | 1.39 |
| Main source of lightening | | |
| Lantern with Shade | 363 | 50.42 |
| Local lantern without shade "Atupa" | 103 | 14.31 |
| Electricity | 158 | 21.94 |
| Rechargeable lantern | 62 | 8.61 |
| Others: local lantern "yahradua" | 34 | 4.72 |
| Literacy (can Read & Write) | | |
| Yes | 338 | 47.01 |
| No | 381 | 52.99 |
| Reading performance | | |
| Satisfactory (read whole statement) | 216 | 30.00 |
| Average (read almost whole statement) | 95 | 13.19 |
| Poor (read part of the statement) | 116 | 16.11 |
| Can't read at all | 293 | 40.69 |
| Total | 720 | 100 |

Source: Field Work, 2014

Being rural areas, Table 2 shows that the primary occupation of most of the women are trading (47.5%) and agriculture (33.19%) followed by artisan (10.42%) and teaching (3.47%). This finding shows that the level of literacy of rural women is low and it is in agreement with UNESCO's (2002) report which states that 'In third World countries especially, Nigeria, women have been undergoing a very slow growth in the history of

Nigeria's development.' Distribution by socio-economic correlates (*living condition*) in Tables 2 revealed that majority of the rural women depends on river/stream (29.44%), well (21.94%), pond (14.03%) as their main source of water. Only (25.14%) listed borehole as their main source of water. The main source of cooking remains fire wood (75.69%) and kerosene stove (21.39%) while many depend on lantern with shade

(50.42%), electricity (21.94%) and local lantern (Atupa) (14.31%), rechargeable lantern (8.61%) and others (4.72%) as their main source of lighting. The above findings show the myriad of problems faced by the rural women. About half (47.01%) of the rural women claimed that they could read and write, out of which (30.00%) performed satisfactorily (read whole statement). (13.19%) performed averagely (read almost whole statement); (16.117%) performed poorly (read part of the statement) and (40.69%) could not read at all after conducting a simple reading test.

Problems faced by rural women

Some of the women complain bitterly about the scarcity of water.

“...we have only one borehole and it is not enough as you have also seen how big this Village is...” [a literate woman in Olugbo Village, Odeda LGA]

“...though we have well, but hardly can one find water in the well except during the raining season...” [a literate woman in Arege Village, Odeda LGA]

“...the government dug us a well after the election, but the well was not properly dug, we can only fetch water from it during the raining season....” [a non literate woman in Arege Village, Odeda LGA]

“...we sent some people to the Local govt. to lodge a complaint concerning our well, the Local govt. promised to assist us but we haven't seen them..” [a non literate woman in Aseigbo Village, Owena LGA]

“We have a borehole, a well, a maternity center, a transformer but not yet connected, other projects include- filling

of potholes, grading of roads, etc” [a non literate woman in Aseigbo Village, Owena LGA]

“... we have community development projects like borehole, primary and secondary school... some of the boreholes are working while some are not, we also have electricity, maternity center, etc. ..., [a literate woman in Okua village, Odo-Otin LGA]

Some do not have maternity centre but have some other amenities:

“... we have primary school, borehole, electricity ..., etc [a literate woman in Onse village, Ado –Odo Ota LGA]

Some others have transformer installed but not connected and have been waiting for them to come and connect it. *“...we have borehole, well, maternity center, transformer but not yet connected, filling of potholes, grading of roads, etc” [an illiterate woman in Aseigbo village, Owena LGA]*

The above findings show the myriad of problems faced by the rural women. This is supported by Opeke and Okwilagwe (2000) who state that the rural Nigerian woman typically operates in a harsh and hostile environment. She has to cope with all the conditions of her rurality as well as contend with her subordinate role in the society. According to Zechner et al. (2000) cited in Daw (2008), the responsibilities women undertake for household maintenance in rural areas not only impede their participation in decision-making processes, but also serve to facilitate men's participation in these processes. Low levels of education among rural women also limit their ability to participate. It is unfortunate that the state

of rural women in Nigeria still remains the same as recent data (Babalola; 2014) support the facts stated above.

This finding shows that the level of literacy of rural women is low and it is in agreement with UNESCO's (2002) report which states that 'In third World countries especially, Nigeria, women have been undergoing a very slow growth in the history of Nigeria's development.' In support of this claim, Folorunsho and Olusi (2005), making a particular reference to women in Osun State of Nigeria conclude that "about two-third of women's group are illiterates". Unfortunately, rural women continue to wallow in ignorance and remain in the state of silence which culture and other prejudices have put them. Most of these women are not aware of these problems. Ekong (2010) states that rural women are more pre-occupied with meeting their practical gender needs (i.e. the issue of day-to-day survival) than to bother about higher order needs. This is why Opeke and Okaligwe (2000) conclude that rural women in addition to project-related information needed relevant, accurate, and timely information to help them cope effectively with the conditions of their rurality and womanhood. It is unfortunate

that the analysis revealed that about one third of the rural women still depend on river/stream and pond as their main source of water. Also the main source of cooking remains fire wood despite the health problems associated with the use. Achidume (2007) opines that Nigerian women are not generally aware of fuel-wood smoke related illness. Through community development projects initiated and supported by the rural women, many problems like lack of portable water, good roads, non-availability of rural electrification, etc can be solved and maintained.

The findings in this study can also be likened to Sutherland (2008) cited in Adegun (2012) who submits that women face serious challenges in gaining access to their daily resources and bargaining power. These adversely affect the women, hence they are considered in the world as the most vulnerable to socio-economic depression. All these have culminated into huge gender gaps in literacy, education, health and access to power. Despite all these, women are still important and they constitute a visible force in terms of development and socio-economic changes of any society (Adegun 2012)

Research question 2: What types of projects are initiated and implemented in the rural communities of Southwestern Nigeria?

Table 3 Percentage distribution of respondents by availability of community development projects and means of participation

| Variables | Frequency (N=720) | Percentage (%) |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Availability of Community Dev. Project | | |
| Yes | 695 | 96.53 |
| No | 25 | 3.47 |
| Available community Dev. Project | | |
| Clearing of road side | 306 | 16.83 |
| Clearing of water ways | 148 | 8.14 |
| Construction of Bridges | 45 | 2.48 |
| Building of Community hall | 149 | 8.2 |
| Building of association house | 29 | 1.6 |
| Building of community .School | 379 | 20.85 |
| Construction of well/borehole | 441 | 24.26 |
| Building of community toilet | 29 | 1.6 |
| Others- construction/ Grading | 272 | 14.96 |
| Others- Installation of electricity | 20 | 1.1 |
| Means of Participation | | |
| Voluntary | 518 | 71.94 |
| Compulsory | 146 | 20.28 |
| Invitation | 56 | 7.78 |
| Ever involved in community development project | | |
| Yes | 488 | 67.78 |
| No | 232 | 32.22 |
| Total | 720 | 100 |

Source: Field Work, 2014

The research question 2 was posed to find out the level of women's involvement in community development projects in the

rural communities in Southwestern Nigeria. This study found out, as presented in Table 3, that almost all (96.53%) of the

respondents affirmed the presence of different types of community development projects in their villages ranging from: clearing of road side bushes (16.83%); clearing of waterways (8.14%); building of community hall (8.2%); building of community school (20.85%); construction of well/borehole (24.26%); construction/grading of roads (14.96%); to construction of bridges (2.48%) and building of community toilet (1.6%).

This distribution was also corroborated by the findings from the FGD and in-depth interviews in all the villages.

“... we are presently building a palace, other projects include a maternity, a borehole built by (UNICEF), a police station, both primary and secondary school, continuous grading of roads, electricity, ...etc.” (a non literate woman in Olugbo village, Odeda LGA).

Community Development Projects available or on-going

Almost all the respondents identified the rural community development projects/amenities in their communities as follows

“...we first built our school with mud block (bamu-bamu)... our husbands were building it while we were fetching water and mixing the mud, that was how we started before government assisted us after some years....” (a non literate woman in Arege village, Odeda LGA).

“...we have a Mega School, a borehole, a maternity center, electricity, a police station... the borehole was built by UNICEF and W.H.O...” [a literate woman in Oboto village, Ondo East LGA]

“...we have a borehole, a well, a maternity center, a transformer but not yet connected, other project include- filling of potholes, grading of roads, etc” [a non literate woman in Aseigbo village, Owena LGA]

“... we have electricity, a primary school, we do gather to clean our river and road side bushes, some dig borehole- ‘known as Terisi, though we pay for it’...” [a literate woman in Ajibawo village, Ado-Odo Ota LGA]

“... now we have electricity, pipe borne water (tap), a primary school, a maternity hospital ... etc” [a non literate woman in Iju village, Ado –Odo Ota LGA]

“... we have a borehole, electricity, we do join our husband to clear roadside bushes and river...” [a non literate woman in Ereje village, Ondo East LGA]

“... some of the available development projects are: borehole, well, primary school, electricity, maternity centre,etc..” [a literate woman in Oore village, Odo -Otin LGA]

“... we have community development projects like borehole, primary and secondary school... some of the borehole are working while some are not, we also have electricity, maternity center, etc. ..., [a literate woman in Okua village, Odo -Otin LGA]

“...we built our maternity ourselves, we have hall built by govt. borehole by UNICEF, electricity by govt. local govt. always grading our road, and whenever our road is bad, we do gather to repair it...etc.” [a literate woman in Idiaraba village, Oriade LGA].

Majority of the respondents in all rural parts of Ogun, Ondo and Osun States confirmed the availability of at least two or more community development projects in their villages. Many mentioned projects initiated by the Local, State and Federal government. Some of these projects are Parakoyi House, hospital, police station, borehole, grading and construction of roads, installation of transformer, erection of electric poles, etc. Some of the projects were initiated by individuals, friends and relatives as well as the community and these include: King's Palace, building of primary schools, building of police station, building of maternity hospital, installation of transformer via monetary contributions, erection of sign boards, digging of well, etc. Other projects were initiated or implemented by women associations, Parent Teachers Association P.T.A and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), as well as international bodies, such as W.H.O, UNICEF, E.U, etc and these also include: private hospitals, digging of boreholes in primary and secondary schools, as well as building of maternity hospital, etc.

Meanwhile, some of the developmental projects initiated or embarked upon by the

community were supported and completed by the government, NGOs, as well as international bodies, most especially in the area of building primary and secondary schools, building of maternity hospitals, and provision of portable drinking water, (borehole) etc. However, of all the projects identified in most of the rural areas, rural electrification, provision of drinkable water, grading of roads and filling of portholes are the major development projects initiated and implemented by the government and international bodies. Meanwhile, majority of those projects were still under implementation; some of them have been completed while others were abandoned

The information above shows the presence of different types of projects in the communities visited, but the availability of these projects and the fact that they were not sufficient and the fact that most of them do not solve the problems of the rural women is a case in point. In a nutshell, the problems with these rural communities are not lack of community development projects, but lack of relevant projects that can better the lot of the rural women.

Research question 3: How interested are these rural women in these projects?

Table 4 Percentage distribution of respondents' involvement in solving community development problems

| Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| What would you do if you noticed an abandoned or undone developmental project in this village? | | |
| I will do nothing. | 108 | 15.00 |
| Discuss in the community meeting | 253 | 35.14 |
| Inform the community leaders | 277 | 38.47 |

| | | |
|--|------------|------------|
| Discuss with my children | 27 | 3.75 |
| Discuss with my friends/relatives | 53 | 7.36 |
| Discuss in the coop-society | 2 | 0.28 |
| Total | 720 | 100 |
| Ever noticed such developmental problems before | | |
| Yes | 479 | 66.62 |
| No | 241 | 33.38 |
| Total | 720 | 100 |
| Ever reported such a problem before | | |
| Yes | 348 | 74.36 |
| No | 120 | 25.64 |
| Total | 468 | 100 |
| Developmental project abandoned or uncompleted project noticed and reported | | |
| clearing of road side bush and filling of potholes | 86 | 17.84 |
| Clearing of water ways | 69 | 14.32 |
| Construction of bridges | 28 | 5.81 |
| Building of community hall | 19 | 3.94 |
| Building of association house | 7 | 1.45 |
| Building of community school | 45 | 9.34 |
| Construction of community well | 77 | 15.98 |
| Building of community toilet | 23 | 4.77 |
| Grading and Construction of roads | 122 | 25.31 |
| Installation of transformer and electric poles | 3 | 0.62 |
| building of community maternity | 3 | 0.62 |
| Total | 482 | 100 |
| Was anything done to such project when reported? | | |
| Yes | 195 | 58.38 |
| No | 139 | 41.62 |
| Total | 334 | 100 |

Source: Field Work, 2014

Table 4 shows that more than one third reported that they would inform 38.47% and 35.14% of the women community leaders or discuss abandoned

projects at a community meeting respectively while 7.36% and 3.75% said they would discuss it with their friends/relatives and children respectively as against 15.00% of those who said they would do nothing. Meanwhile, 66.62% of the women reported to have noticed such problems before while 74.36% reported that the problem was noticed. However, some of the development projects noticed to have been abandoned and reported were: grading and construction of roads

(25.31%); digging of community well (15.98%); clearing of road side bushes and filling of portholes (17.84%); building of community school (9.34%); building of community hall (3.94%); installation of transformer and electric poles (0.62%) and building of community maternity (0.62%). Having reported such abandoned projects, more than half (58.38%) of the women said that something was done after those problems were reported.

Table 5 Percentage distribution of respondents who initiated community development projects

| Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|------------------|-------------------|
| Which of the following ever initiate development project in this village? | | |
| Individual men within the community | 158 | 8.03 |
| Individual women within the community | 4 | 0.20 |
| Cooperative society | 5 | 0.25 |
| Children elsewhere | 10 | 1.13 |
| Personal, friends & relatives elsewhere | 96 | 4.87 |
| Community as a whole | 582 | 29.57 |
| LGA/State government | 490 | 24.99 |
| Federal government | 330 | 16.77 |
| Association within the community | 290 | 14.74 |
| Others- religious bodies | 3 | 0.15 |
| Total | 1968 | 100.00 |
| How interested are you in participating in community development project? | | |
| Very interested | 591 | 82.43 |
| Fairly interested | 89 | 12.41 |
| Slightly interested | 33 | 4.6 |
| Not interested at all | 4 | 0.56 |
| Total | 717 | 100 |
| Have you been dissatisfied with the way your village is developing? | | |

| | | |
|----------------------|-----|-------|
| Most of the time | 223 | 31.02 |
| Some of the time | 204 | 28.37 |
| Rarely | 63 | 8.76 |
| Never | 220 | 30.6 |
| Would rather not say | 9 | 1.25 |
| Total | 719 | 100 |

Source: Author's work.

From the table above, it can be concluded that at the individual levels, many of the rural women in Southwestern Nigeria have never initiated any project. The implication of this is that many of the women are not aware of the need to seek for help to solve their problems. Furthermore, information on how interested the women are on community development revealed that majority of the women are much more interested in their community development (82.43% very interested; 12.41 fairly interested) while more than half (31.02%; 28.37% & 8.76%) of the women express dissatisfaction most of the time, some of the time and rarely as against (30.6%) of those who said they have never been dissatisfied with the way their village is developing. However, our discussion revealed that only their children and relatives living elsewhere have been initiating and implementing community development projects in most of the

villages like Ereje, Onse, Iju. The following illustrates the point being made.

"... when the govt. representatives came, they asked us what we want, we called an impromptu meeting and I raised an idea of electricity and they accepted.." [a literate woman in Aseigbo village, Owena LGA]

"... some individuals do dig borehole though, it is not free, we do pay for it..." [a literate woman in Ajibawo village, Ado-Odo Ota LGA]

"... at individual level, we usually contribute money towards any developmental project..." [a literate woman in Oore village, Odo - Otin LGA]

As noticed above, the rural women's living condition is still appalling. Opeke and Okilagwe (2000) submit that "much more serious is the extent of the rural women's unawareness of their deprivation. This is attributed to a near-total lack of knowledge of who they are, who they can be or how they can attain the level of self-actualization".

Table 6: Percentage distribution of respondents by availability of community development project, reasons for participation and non-participation

| Variables | Frequency (N= 720) | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Reasons for not participating | | |
| I don't see any reason why I should participate. | 73 | 31.47 |
| I'm not physically fit to participate. | 33 | 14.22 |
| I don't have the financial capacity. | 34 | 14.66 |
| My work does not allow me. | 38 | 16.38 |
| I will not be treated well by my co-women. | 10 | 4.31 |
| Others - not around at the time. | 44 | 18.97 |
| Total | 232 | 100 |
| Reasons for participation | | |
| Mobilized to participate | 72 | 14.88 |
| I see the importance to participate. | 259 | 53.51 |
| My interest in community development motivates me to participate. | 141 | 29.13 |
| My level of education influences me to participate. | 4 | 0.83 |
| My friends/mates' participation motivates | 2 | 0.41 |
| Others | 6 | 1.24 |
| Total | 484 | 100 |

Table 6 shows that majority (53.51%) of those who participated claimed to have seen reasons for participation; 14.88% were mobilised, while interest in community development motivated 29.13% of the women to participate. Meanwhile, information on the categories of women that usually participate in community development project revealed that majority (46.11%) of them are women who are physically fit, 22.36% are educated women, 17.08% are traders and farmers, while the rest are financially buoyant (6.67%) and women political office holders (7.78%). However, the majority reported reasons for not participating in community development projects to be ranging from: inability of the women to see reasons to participate (31.47%); not physically fit (14.22%); not having financial capacity (14.66%); not allowed by the nature of their primary occupation

(16.38%); to perception that they will not be treated well by their co-women (4.31%).

Involvement in community development project

“... we do participate in community development together, for instance when the E.U. brought the borehole, we contributed money and we also participate physically in terms of carrying blocks and fetching water...” [a literate woman in Ereje village, Ondo East LGA]

“... when we were building the school and the maternity hospital, all of us participated, some were carrying blocks while some were fetching water...” [a literate woman in Olugbo village, Odeda LGA]

“...we are also contributing to community purse from which the community sometimes takes money to execute any development project...” [a literate woman in Arege village, Odeda LGA]

“... when I became Iya-loja, we didn't have any market so I started moving from house to house and we organize a market...” [a literate woman in Oboto village, Ondo East LGA]

“... during the installation of that transformer, electric poles and building of that maternity hospital in collaboration with UNICEF, I joined my colleagues and we helped by carrying loads and blocks, we even cook for those that are working...” [an illiterate woman in Aseigbo village, Owena LGA]

“... we usually go to clean up our river together, the little we can do, we normally do it like clearing the debris...” [an illiterate woman in Ajibawo village, Ado-Odo Ota LGA]

“... on several occasion, we do gather to clear road side bushes, fill the roads, even during the borehole project, we all went there to assist them by fetching water and cooking for them..., you know we are the one that is always at home...” [an illiterate woman in Okua village, Odo - Otin LGA]

“... when we want to have the market, they make announcement and we all contribute financially to it...” [a literate woman in Okua village, Odo - Otin LGA]

“...of recent, our transformer developed fault..., both men and women also contribute to it repair...” [a literate woman in Okua village, Odo - Otin LGA]

“...when we were building the maternity and hall, we all participated by carrying sand, stone and also contribute financially...” [an illiterate woman in Idiaraba village, Oriade LGA]

“... we do fetch water, carrying stone and also contribute money for this project...” [an illiterate woman in Onikoko village, Oriade LGA]

Results of the In-depth Interview (IDI) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) carried out showed that majority of the women in most of the rural areas are only involved in community development projects, most especially, when it involves physical participation in terms of clearing of roads side bushes, cleaning of market place, filling of portholes, building of community or association hall (carrying of blocks, fetching of water and cooking for their husbands during the projects) and clearing of waterways, streams and rivers. Almost all the women do participate financially through their monetary contribution.

Whereas, some of them do contribute by supplying the necessary materials either personally or in the name of the association to the primary schools and maternity centers in their villages. In some cases, majority of these rural women do contribute money to repair some of the damaged projects. The IDI revealed this as women recount their experiences on their involvement in community development project.

In the opinion of Aderinto and Akande (2003), “women are not independent of their husbands in several important activities including participation in community development but are treated as a factor in male implementation of community development projects.” This was confirmed in this study as women were forced to be involved in community development projects that men decided. In the words of Mejiuni (2012), “we cannot take the submission of women to the will of men in the private sphere as a given while we advocate for equitable involvement of women in the public sphere...men who have been socialized to see women as their subordinates in private cannot move to the public sphere and see women as equals.”

Babalola (2013) in a paper on “An Appraisal of Women Empowerment Programmes by Adult Education Departments in Two Local Government Areas in Osun State” finds out that women were not involved in the planning of the empowerment programmes. Programmes were initiated and implemented based on needs assessment procedures that were not systematically undertaken. Officials

appeared to be focusing more on ascribed needs, than felt needs. Beneficiaries who were making use of skills they had acquired could not access the needed materials, because they were not available in their locality, and were expensive. The problem of female farmers abandoning skills acquisition programmes for oil palm production in Ede local government is a symptom of the problems that haunt adult education provisions when officials focus on ascribed rather than felt needs. Babalola (2013) therefore concludes that women do not need to be objects of development programmes; they need to gain control of the development process, and therefore local governments should involve women and their representatives in the assessment of their felt needs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It can be concluded that the situation of the rural women in the western part of Nigeria is pathetic and needs urgent attention. More worrisome is their attitudes to community development projects that could change their lives and improve their standard of living. It is, therefore, necessary to mainstream gender into community development practices. Projects like bore holes for enough water supply in the rural communities, rural electrification and supply, functioning functional literacy centres etc. that will lessen the women’s burden should be initiated, executed and maintained. It is also necessary to create awareness among the women of the need to show more interest in community development projects so as to influence these projects to favour them.

It is bad enough that the rural areas visited lack some infrastructural facilities that women need to make their lives better, but worst still is the fact that these women seem satisfied with their current status and seem not to see anything bad in it. They do not show much interest in getting involved in community development, not to talk of initiating projects that could change their lives. It is important that rural women should be sensitised to get involved in community development projects for better life in these rural communities. Unfortunately, rural women continued to wallow in ignorance and remained in the state of silence which culture and other prejudices have put them. Most of these women are not aware of these problems. Projects that can solve most problems of rural women including low level of literacy, non-availability of rural electrification, etc can be initiated and supported by the rural women and other networks they may have outside the locality. Finally, men have to be sensitised to the need to embrace equality between men and women in the community.

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