

**AN ASSESSMENT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT
PROGRAMMES IN RURAL AREAS OF BENUE STATE**

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ABSTRACT

The study examined and appraised the programmes and projects of government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and international agencies in empowering women in the rural areas of Benue State. It also identified the various problems and prospects associated with the empowerment of the rural women, with a view to examining the trend of women empowerment and effectiveness of the policy and programmes in the rural areas of the state.

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through questionnaire, in-depth interviews, participant observations, and focus group discussions (FGDs). The study area covered six rural local government areas (LGAs), namely, Katsina-Ala, Ushongo, Gwer, Guma, Oju and Ohimini which were purposively selected from the three senatorial zones in the state. A random sampling technique was used to select three wards from each of the six LGAs, making a total of 18 wards. A total of 720 respondents were randomly drawn from a target population of 7,200 through Lottery method. Another set of questionnaire was administered on leaders and outstanding members of CSOs, while top officials of government ministries, NGOs, and international agencies involved in the programmes were interviewed. Twelve FGDs were conducted in four villages - Okpiko, Oglewu, Mbagba and Ikov – which were purposively selected because these were the most rural communities in the study area. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The ZY Index Table was utilized to analyze the FGDs.

The results showed that majority of the rural women (61%) were farmers with 51% earning less than N5000 per month. It also revealed that 49.4% of the women had

no formal education. The study further showed that the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and international agencies' programmes in agriculture and health did not achieve their desired objectives of empowering women in rural areas of Benue State. Agricultural inputs were not sufficiently provided to women farmers. Processing and storage facilities as well as extension services were also not adequately provided. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of the women respondents were of the opinion that agricultural programmes did not produce any noticeable impact on their crop yield, income, and their standard of living. The study showed further with regards to health programmes of the four organizations, that the poor attendance of women in antenatal clinic was due to inaccessibility of medical facilities ($\chi^2 = 69.5, P < 0.05$). Also, 65% of the respondents claimed that family planning services had no impact on them. Furthermore, 71% of the respondents claimed that the campaign against female genital mutilation were administratively ineffective. However, the educational programmes of the four organizations succeeded in sensitizing parents to enrol and retain girls in schools. This was evident in the significant relationship in the enrolment figures for girls into primary and post primary schools between 1991 and 2005 ($r = 0.95, p < 0.05$ and $r = 0.63, p < 0.05$), respectively. The enrolment of the rural women in adult literacy classes and the vocational education had increased between 1995 and 2005 ($r = 0.997; P < 0.05$). It was also revealed that the problems confronting the programmes were inadequate funding and lack of operational facilities by government, NGOs and CSOs.

It was concluded that the programmes of empowering women in rural areas of Benue State succeeded in education but failed in agriculture and health.