

CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS... IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN ENUGU STATE IN THE AREA OF PROVISION OF SAFE DRINKING WATER

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Abstract

Access to safe drinking water remains a pressing development challenge in Nigeria, particularly in Enugu State where rural and peri-urban communities often depend on unsafe water sources. While government and donor interventions have attempted to address these gaps, the contributions of women's organizations in water provision have received limited scholarly attention. This study examined the role of women's organizations in the implementation of community development projects in Enugu State with specific focus on safe drinking water. Guided by the participatory development framework, the study employed a mixed-methods design, combining surveys of 220 women leaders across six local government areas with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Findings revealed that women's organizations contribute significantly through resource mobilization for borehole construction, maintenance of community water facilities, and advocacy for improved sanitation and hygiene practices. However, challenges such as limited financial capacity, inadequate technical expertise, and weak institutional support were identified as constraints. The study concludes that women's organizations remain critical stakeholders in advancing Sustainable Development Goal 6 at the grassroots level. It recommends stronger government-community partnerships, capacity-building for women leaders, and gender-inclusive policy frameworks to enhance the sustainability of safe drinking water initiatives in Enugu State.

Keyword: Safe drinking water, Women's organizations, Community development, Enugu State, Nigeria, Borehole construction

Introduction

Access to safe drinking water is a fundamental human right and a central component of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 6), which seeks to “ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). Yet, global statistics reveal that over 2 billion people still lack access to safely managed drinking water services (UNICEF & WHO, 2021). The implications of this shortfall are far-reaching, leading to preventable deaths, stunted economic growth, gender inequalities, and recurrent cycles of poverty (WHO, 2021). Water insecurity has become not just a health issue but also a developmental and governance concern.

In sub-Saharan Africa, inadequate infrastructure, weak institutional frameworks, climate change, and population growth have intensified the water crisis. Studies by the African Development Bank (2020) show that rural and peri-urban communities in many African countries rely on unimproved water sources such as streams, ponds, and hand-dug wells. The consequences include outbreaks of cholera, typhoid, and diarrhea, which disproportionately affect children under five years and pregnant women (WHO & UNICEF, 2017). Thus, community-led initiatives have increasingly emerged as complementary solutions to government and donor-driven interventions (IFAD, 2018).

Nigeria’s Water Sector Challenges

Nigeria, with a population exceeding 200 million, faces acute challenges in the water sector. The World Bank (2020) reported that only 19% of Nigerians have access to safely managed drinking water, while about 60 million people rely on unimproved water sources. The situation is aggravated by rapid urbanization, deteriorating infrastructure, and limited investment in the water sector (Federal Ministry of Water Resources, 2019). Although successive governments have launched water supply projects through federal

and state water corporations, issues of poor maintenance, corruption, and lack of community ownership have undermined sustainability (NPC & ICF, 2019).

Enugu State mirrors this national reality. Despite its historical significance as the former capital of Eastern Nigeria and its relatively urban character, many communities still struggle with access to safe drinking water. The state water corporation is unable to adequately meet demand, leading to dependence on water vendors, boreholes, and community self-help projects (Nwankwo, 2016). For rural dwellers, particularly in Aninri, Uzo-Uwani, Isi-Uzo, and parts of Nkanu, fetching water involves trekking long distances to streams and rivers. The gendered burden of this crisis is evident, as women and girls are largely responsible for household water collection, which not only affects their health but also limits their time for education and economic activities (UNICEF, 2020).

The Role of Women in Community Development

Globally, women have long been recognized as critical agents of community development. Their lived experiences as caregivers, resource managers, and nurturers place them at the heart of social and economic transformation. Chambers (2012) notes that grassroots development is most effective when women are included as active participants, as they tend to prioritize community welfare, child health, and education. Women’s organizations—whether faith-based, professional, or community-based—have historically spearheaded initiatives in education, health, microfinance, and environmental sustainability (Akinbode, 2015).

In Nigeria, women’s organizations have been pivotal in mobilizing resources for community development projects. Through associations such as market women groups, age-grade unions, and cooperative societies, they have collectively invested in rural electrification, road rehabilitation, school building, and health facility support (Okeke, 2017). Within the water

sector, women's role is particularly strategic because they are the primary users and managers of domestic water. Hence, their involvement ensures that interventions are need-driven, culturally acceptable, and more likely to be maintained over time (IFAD, 2018).

Women's Organizations and Water Provision in Enugu State

Enugu State provides a compelling case for examining the nexus between women's organizations and safe drinking water provision. Local women's groups have initiated, co-funded, or managed numerous water projects, particularly in rural communities. Examples include drilling of boreholes through contributions from women's cooperatives, maintenance of water pumps, and advocacy campaigns for water hygiene (Nwankwo, 2016; Opara, 2019). These groups often operate informally, relying on voluntary labor, fundraising during cultural events, and diaspora contributions from members abroad.

Research by Opara (2019) highlights that women's associations in southeastern Nigeria often engage in "self-help development," a strategy rooted in Igbo communal traditions. These associations view water provision not merely as a health intervention but as a social responsibility tied to the well-being of the entire community. Women's groups in Nsukka and Udi, for example, have been documented to organize annual levies for borehole maintenance and to negotiate with local councils for water supply extensions (Okeke, 2017).

Despite these contributions, scholarly attention has largely focused on government or NGO interventions in water supply, leaving the role of women's organizations underexplored. This gap undermines recognition of grassroots actors who often ensure the success and sustainability of community projects. Furthermore, challenges such as limited financial capacity, lack of technical expertise, and weak institutional support frequently constrain women's

organizations, yet their resilience and innovation remain evident (Akinbode, 2015; Opara, 2019).

Rationale for the Study

The persistence of water scarcity in Enugu State, coupled with the central role of women in household and community water management, underscores the importance of systematically studying their contributions. Documenting the strategies, achievements, and challenges of women's organizations will not only enrich academic discourse but also inform policy and practice. Moreover, by foregrounding gender-inclusive development, such research aligns with global calls for women's empowerment and participatory governance in sustainable development (UNICEF & WHO, 2021; United Nations, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to ascertain the contributions of women organizations in the implementation of community development projects in Enugu state. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the contribution of women organizations involved in the implementation of community development projects in the area of providing safe drinking water.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated and guided the study;

1. What are the contributions of women organization involved in the implementation of community development projects in Enugu state in the area of provision of safe drinking water?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance.

H0₁: There is no significance difference between the mean ratings of women in North Senatorial Zone and East Senatorial Zone on the contribution of women organizations involved in the implementation of community development projects in Enugu State in the area of safe drinking water.

Method of Data Analysis

For data analysis, weighted mean and standard deviation (SD) were used to answer the research questions. The null hypotheses postulated for the study were tested using t-test statistics at 0.5 level of significance. The four point scale of the instrument was assigned values as follows:-

Strongly Agree (SA) - 4 points
 Agree (A) - 3 points
 Disagree (D) - 2 points
 Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1 point

Mathematically, the average of the scores was obtained by adding up the values of each of the four point scale, and then dividing the total with the number of the response options thus;

$$= \frac{10}{4} = 2.50 \text{ (Average)}$$

Table 1

Mean ratings with standard deviation on contributions of women organizations in the implementation of community development projects in Enugu State in area of provision of safe drinking water

S/N	Contributions of women organizations in the implementation of community development projects in provision of safe drinking water	East Senatorial Zone			North Senatorial Zone			Overall(Both)		
		\bar{x}	SD	Dec	\bar{x}	SD	Dec	\bar{x}	SD	Dec
1	Construction of boreholes	3.39	0.88	A	3.25	0.76	A	3.31	0.82	A
2	Improvement of existing wells	3.32	0.77	A	3.33	0.73	A	3.32	0.75	A
3	Properly protected spring water	3.53	0.64	A	3.29	0.72	A	3.39	0.70	A
4	Provisions of cisterns	3.63	0.67	A	3.40	0.72	A	3.50	0.71	A
5	Provision of dug and drilled wells	3.11	0.89	A	3.31	0.70	A	3.22	0.79	A
6	Training on how to sanitize rain water	3.92	0.27	A	3.63	0.56	A	3.76	0.48	A
7	Construction of water board	1.39	0.91	D	1.25	0.44	D	1.31	0.68	D
	Cluster Mean/SD	3.18	0.72	A	3.07	0.66	A	3.12	0.70	A

Note; \bar{x} = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; A= Agree; D = Disagree

From the Table 1 above, data obtained and presented above after analysis show that both women organizations from Enugu North Senatorial Zone,

Decision Rule

In answering the research questions, any item with a mean of 2.50 and above was regarded as agree, while those with a mean of less than 2.50 were regarded as disagree. In testing hypotheses, when the value of the t-calculated was equal to or more than the critical (table) value, the hypothesis were accepted. On the other hand, when the value of t-calculated is less than the critical (table) value, the hypothesis were rejected.

Research Question One

What are the contributions of women organizations in the implementation of community development projects in Enugu State in area of provision of safe drinking water?

(WOENSZ) and their counterparts in Enugu East Senatorial Zone, (WOEESZ) are of the opinion that the contributions of women organizations in the State towards implementation of CDP in the state in area of provision of safe drinking water includes construction

of bore holes and improvement of existing wells among others.

Items in this cluster after analysis also presented means with standard deviations ranging from 1.31 to 3.76 within the means of overall (that is both WOENSZ and WOESZ). While the cluster means for overall, WOENSZ and WOESZ are 3.12, 3.07 and 3.18 respectively. The implication of the above cluster means indicates that women organizations in both senatorial zones agree on items presented from research question one. The low overall standard deviation of 0.70 depicted that the respondent's responses to the items are homogenous.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study from the analysis of data collected are as follows;

1. Women organizations from Enugu North Senatorial Zone, (WOENSZ) and their counterparts in Enugu East Senatorial Zone, (WOESZ) agree that the contributions of women organizations in the State towards implementation of CDP in the state in area of provision of safe drinking water includes construction of bore holes and improvement of existing wells.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study were discussed according to the research questions and null hypothesis that guided the study.

The findings of the study according to research question one showed that women organizations involved in the implementation of community development projects contribute in the area of provision of safe drinking water. The study indicated that contributions of women organizations involved in the implementation of community development projects in the area of provision of safe drinking water includes Construction of boreholes and improvement of existing wells. The findings is in agreement with the views of Clement (2009) who observed that providing safe drinking water to the population especially for those in rural communities where there is scarcity of safe drinking water. The author believed that the important of safe drinking water in poverty

reduction and implementation of community development projects cannot be over emphasized. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation are part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of reducing poverty and scarcity of water by the year 2030. Supporting the finding, World Bank (2001), stated that access to safe drinking water prevent the spread of water borne and sanitation related diseases. Lack of access to safe water and adequate sanitation service especially in developing countries often result about two million infant death annually. Edwards (2010) opined that women organizations are directly providing certain community services or supporting the state to providing in diverse areas ranging from education, provision of credit facilities, gender (girl empowerment protection against violence), economic empowerment, visiting inmates, physically challenged and other community services. The author, further stated that there are numerous self-help and self-development associations that provide economic belief and support services to members. Ikelegbe (2013), observed that women organizations have made tremendous contributions in the aspects of provision of safe drinking water in various rural communities in the study area, to promote social welfare, poverty alleviation, and sanitation and health environment. This is in line with the findings of the present study which confirms that women organizations contribute in the provision of safe drinking water in the study area.

Implications of Findings

The findings of the present study have wide implementation for contributions of women organizations in the implementation of community development projects in Enugu state. The following are the implications of the findings:

1. The respondents agree that contributions of women organizations in the implantation of community development projects in the area of provision of safe drinking water was adequately provided in selected communities where the project is

located. This will reduce long distance searching for water.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and implications of the study as already highlighted, the following recommendations were made;

1. The women organizations should do more through sustained media campaigns, advocate for more children enrollment and provision of textbooks and other facilities needed.
2. Scale up gender-responsive, women-led WASH projects across more communities—building on the success in Mboshi-Aji, Eke Ozzi, and Ukwuinyi.
3. Government should deepen partnership with women's networks for sustainability—to maintain and monitor water infrastructure over time.
4. Expand rights-based water education—through school programs and community mobilization, leveraging networks like WASH Rights Network.
5. Government should Support integrated development models—linking water with health, education, livelihood, and empowerment.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that women's organizations in Enugu State play a pivotal role in addressing one of the most pressing community development challenges—the provision of safe drinking water. Through collective action, resource mobilization, and advocacy, these organizations have contributed to the establishment and maintenance of boreholes, sensitization on hygiene practices, and the creation of sustainable systems for water access in their communities. The findings affirm that women's organizations are not merely beneficiaries of development but active agents who bridge the gaps left by government and donor interventions.

Despite these notable contributions, the study also revealed persistent challenges, including financial constraints, inadequate technical expertise, and weak institutional support, which limit the scope and sustainability of women-led water projects. These challenges underscore the need for stronger partnerships between women's organizations, government agencies, and development partners.

The conclusion that emerges is that sustainable progress toward achieving universal access to safe drinking water in Enugu State—and by extension, Nigeria—requires deliberate recognition and support of women's organizations as critical stakeholders. Their grassroots structures, deep community trust, and gendered perspectives uniquely position them to ensure that water interventions are inclusive, culturally appropriate, and sustainable.

Therefore, policies and programs aimed at enhancing water security should integrate women's organizations not as peripheral actors but as central partners in design, implementation, and monitoring. By strengthening their capacity and providing enabling environments, Enugu State can harness the collective potential of women's organizations to advance Sustainable Development Goal 6 and promote holistic community development.

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