Original Article

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES AND PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study explored women empowerment initiatives and participation in community development in Abia State, Nigeria. Two research questions and two null hypotheses provided direction for the study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. A sample size of 384 women from Abia State was used for the study, the sample was determined using Cochran's formula Structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha coefficient which yielded 0.835. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 levels of significance with appropriate degree of freedom using t-test analysis. The results of the analysis revealed that women have contributed to the Community Development of Abia State, Nigeria through participation in local governance, educational initiatives, healthcare and wellness programs, environmental conservation efforts, social services, cultural and recreational activities, and mentorship/leadership roles. Furthermore, there is no significant difference in the mean scores of urban and rural women on their perception regarding was women can contribute to the Development of Abia State, Nigeria. Strategies of enhancing Women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria include equal opportunities to hold leadership positions, training programme women's participation in local government, women access to microfinance loan, mentorship and vocational programmes equal access to property ownership and inheritance rights, financial literacy programs, scholarships and grants, capacity-building workshops. Finally, there is no significant difference in the mean scores of urban and rural women on their perception regarding strategies of enhancing women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria. Consequently, location has no significant influence on the perception of Abia state women regarding strategies of enhancing women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria. The study among others recommended that governments at all levels, community leaders and NGOs should recognize and promote the diverse contributions made by women in various sectors of community development to inspire young girls and women to take up leadership roles and actively participate in community development initiatives.

Keywords: Women, Women Empowerment, Initiatives, participation, Community Development
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INTRODUCTION

Women have always played important parts in Nigerian society thus, contributing to the country's culture, economy and society. In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of the important roles women play in community development initiatives across the country. Community development is essential to creating sustainable and inclusive societies and women's active participation can lead to transformative change in the above cause (Ngozi & Okonkwo, 2023). Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa is experiencing rapid urbanization and development which creates opportunities and challenges for communities across the country. Traditionally, women have been at the center of community life but their contributions are often ignored or undervalued. It is important to not only consider the role of women in the development of societies but also to harness the enormous potential they possess to bring about positive changes in the homes, society and the nation at large. One of the major areas hrough which women contribute and can continue to contribute to societal development is in the area of empowerment.

Empowerment is a process that includes equal access to opportunities for utilizing society's resources, prohibition of gender discrimination in thought and practice, freedom from violence, economic independence, participation in decision-making bodies, and freedom of choice in personal matters. As a result, empowerment is defined as the result of a person's financially, socially, and emotionally strong status; it leads to happiness and satisfaction among a group of people" (Goel & Sah, 2015). This backs up Okpoko's (2000) assertion, cited in Obetta (2009), that "empowerment implies that the person or group being empowered has hitherto lacked power or authority due to circumstances, either by denial or fault. Moving from a position of powerlessness to one of power or authority is thus defined as empowerment.

Women's Empowerment is defined as a process in which women gain a greater share of control over resources – material, human, and intellectual resources such as knowledge, information, and ideas, as well as financial resources such as money, access to money, and control over decision-making in the home, community, society, and nation (Vaid & Kumar, 2015). Mandal (2015) defines Women Empowerment as the distribution of social power and control of resources in favor of women, particularly rural women. According to Maitra (2015), women empowerment entails certain basic factors such as women's sense of worth; their right to control their own lives, both within and outside the family premises; and their ability to influence the direction of social change in order to create a just social and economic order at regional, national, and international levels." In the context of this study, we define women's empowerment as a process by which women take ownership and control of their lives through the articulation of their own aspirations and change strategies, as well as the expansion of choice as women are closely linked to their socially defined gender roles, responsibilities, and social structure. Obetta (2019) pointed out that if women folk are properly empowered, adequate management of community development projects will be ensured. Community change cannot be effective unless rural women's activities and contributions to rural development, community project management, food availability, and household well-being are recognized. Women's empowerment entails improving the political, economic, and social conditions of rural women, alongside their educational status. This empowerment can be done through initiatives.

Initiatives refer to proactive steps or actions taken to address a specific challenge, problem, or opportunity (Kotter, 2019). These actions are often innovative, bold, and require a willingness to take calculated risks. Initiatives can be launched by individuals, organizations, governments, or communities to drive positive change, improve outcomes, or achieve specific goals (Bryson, 2018). According to Kanter (2019), initiatives are often

characterized by a sense of urgency, a clear vision, and a willingness to challenge the status quo. Initiatives can take many forms, including social initiatives that focus on addressing social issues such as poverty, education, or healthcare (United Nations, 2020). Economic initiatives aim to promote economic growth, job creation, or entrepreneurship (World Bank, 2020). Environmental initiatives seek to protect the environment, conserve natural resources, or promote sustainability (IPCC, 2018). Community initiatives focus on building stronger, more resilient communities through initiatives such as community development, social cohesion, or cultural preservation (Putnam, 2000). The benefits of initiatives are numerous. They can drive positive change, foster innovation, build partnerships, and enhance resilience. According to a study by the World Economic Forum (2019), initiatives can also lead to significant economic benefits, including job creation and GDP growth. However, initiatives also come with challenges, including the risk of failure, sustainability, scalability, and evaluation (Kotter, in Bryson, 2018). As noted by Bryson (2018), initiatives require careful planning, effective implementation, and ongoing evaluation to ensure success. With reference to initiatives, this study will be limited to women empowerment initiatives.

Women empowerment initiatives refer to programs, policies, and actions aimed at promoting women's autonomy, self-determination, and equal participation in all aspects of life (Kabeer, in Bryson, 2018). These initiatives seek to address the social, economic, and cultural barriers that hinder women's ability to make choices and decisions about their own lives. Women empowerment initiatives can take many forms, including education and training programmes, economic empowerment projects, healthcare initiatives, and advocacy campaigns (UN Women, 2020). For instance, education and training programs can help women acquire skills and knowledge that enable them to participate in the workforce, start their own businesses, or take on leadership roles in their communities (World Bank, 2020). Economic empowerment projects, such as microfinance programs and entrepreneurship training, can provide women with access to financial resources, markets, and networks, enabling them to improve their economic status and independence (CGAP, 2020). Healthcare initiatives, such as reproductive health programs and maternal healthcare services, can help women maintain their physical and mental well-being, and exercise their reproductive rights (WHO, 2020). Advocacy campaigns, such as those focused on ending violence against women, promoting women's rights, and challenging discriminatory laws and policies, can help create a more enabling environment for women's empowerment (UN Women, 2020).

The benefits of women empowerment initiatives are numerous. They can lead to improved health outcomes, increased economic productivity, enhanced political participation and greater social cohesion (World Bank, 2020). According to a study by the McKinsey Global Institute (2015), advancing women's equality could add $12 trillion to the global GDP by 2025. However, women empowerment initiatives also face challenges, including resistance from patriarchal societies, inadequate resources, and lack of political will (Kabeer, in Bryson, 2018). Additionally, these initiatives may not always be inclusive, leaving behind marginalized women, such as those with disabilities, indigenous women, or women from minority ethnic groups (UN Women, 2020). In essence, women empowerment initiatives are critical for promoting women's autonomy, self-determination, and equal participation in community development and all aspects of life. These initiatives can take many forms, including education and training programs, economic empowerment projects, healthcare initiatives, and advocacy campaigns. While they face challenges, the benefits of women empowerment initiatives are numerous, and can lead to improved health outcomes, increased economic productivity, enhanced political participation, greater social cohesion and community development.

Community development is a process that aims to empower communities to take control of their own development, improve their quality of life, and address social, economic, and environmental challenges (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2017). It involves a collaborative and participatory approach, where community members, organizations, and stakeholders work together to identify needs, develop solutions, and implement initiatives that promote positive change (Taylor & Fransman, 2004). Women empowerment initiatives are intricately linked with community development, as empowering women has a ripple effect that can lead to positive changes in the community. When women are empowered, they are better equipped to contribute to the development of their communities, leading to improved social, economic, and environmental outcomes (Kabeer, in Bryson, 2018). Empowering women can lead to increased participation in decision-making, improved healthcare, enhanced economic development, better education, increased food security, and improved environmental management (UN Women, 2020). Community development can also reinforce women's empowerment by providing opportunities for education and training, creating economic opportunities, and promoting social inclusion (World Bank, 2020). For instance, community-based initiatives that provide women with access to microfinance, entrepreneurship training, and healthcare services can empower them to take control of their lives and contribute to community development (CGAP, 2020). Hence, community development and women empowerment initiatives are closely intertwined. Empowering women can lead to positive changes in the community, while community development can reinforce women's empowerment by providing opportunities for education, economic empowerment, and social inclusion. By working together, communities and organizations can promote a more equitable and sustainable development process that benefits everyone through women participation.

Participation in development projects implementation across the globe has gained popularity as the sure way of ensuring that development projects success and sustainability is achieved (UN, 2017). According to World Bank (2014), as the world moved to conclusion of the Millennium development Goals that were access their achievements by 2015, the world development strategists found that in countries where the communities were actively involved in development projects implementation, the millennium development goals had been achieved to greater percentage as compared to countries where passive participation was employed in development projects implementation. UN (2017) has also indicated that involving all the community members in development projects design, plans, resources mobilization and prioritization influences the rates at which economic development is achieved since the development projects implemented in countries are directly tied to community needs and perceptions. However, despite the fact that studies in developed countries like the USA, China, Europe and Parts of Russia (Abdulkadir & John Bosco, (2018) have shown that women empowerment has been accepted and women are involved actively in development projects implementation, a number of countries in the developing continents like parts of Asia, Africa and South America have shown that women are left out due to a number of reasons (UNDP, 2015).

In Africa, women face significant disparities and biases in various aspects of life. Despite their substantial contributions to community development, women are often excluded from decision-making processes and leadership positions. For instance, women are frequently denied the right to own property, inherit land, and participate in major community development committees (Laboso, 2014). The African Development Bank (2017) highlights the pervasive nature of gender bias, noting that even when women are included in development meetings, their ideas are often dismissed, and they are reminded of their traditional roles in cooking and serving men. However, African countries are making strides in promoting gender equality and empowering women

to take on leadership roles and contribute to their community development. Hence, in countries like South Africa and Liberia, women's empowerment programs have enabled women to take on leadership roles and make notable contributions to community development (Murunga, 2017).

In Nigerian traditional culture, women have historically been marginalized and dominated by men, relegated to domestic roles and silenced in public spheres. Despite changes in contemporary society, literature suggests that women continue to face oppression and marginalization. In patriarchal societies like Nigeria, men's contributions are valued over those of women, leading to the silencing or discrediting of women's viewpoints (Open Stax College, Rice University Publication, 2013). Women's marginalization in Nigeria is attributed to cultural and religious affinity, with persisting stereotypes, abuse of religious and traditional practices, and patriarchal societal structures perpetuating their subjugation (Agbalajobi, 2010). However, despite these challenges, women have played a vital role in Nigerian society throughout history. Women like Moremi Ajasoro, Queen Amina of Zazzau, and Queen Idia of Bini Kingdom have served as agents of change, bringing positive impact to their communities (Eme, Onyishi, and Nwaoha, 2014). In modern Nigeria, women like Margaret Ekpo, Gambo Sawaba, and Funmilayo Ransome Kuti have fought tirelessly against women's suppression and taxation. These examples demonstrate the significant contributions women have made and continue to make to Nigerian society, highlighting the importance of promoting gender equality and challenging patriarchal norms.

In Abia State, the issue of women marginalization is not different from that of women in other parts of the country. However, recent governments have recognized the importance of women in community development and have implemented various initiatives to empower them. These initiatives include economic empowerment programs, education and skills development, healthcare and family planning services, and social protection initiatives. Additionally, efforts have been made to promote women's rights, prevent gender-based violence, and support women's leadership development. The government has also established institutions such as the Women Development Centre in Umuahia to support and empower women in the region (Nwachukwu, 2019). Overall, these initiatives aim to enhance women's participation in community development and promote their overall well-being.

However, despite these efforts, women's participation in community development is hindered by various challenges, including cultural and social barriers, lack of education and skills, economic dependence, and gender-based violence. These problems intersect and compound each other, creating a complex web of challenges. Notwithstanding, to enhance women's participation in community development in Abia State, Nigeria, several strategies can be adopted such as sensitization, capacity building, economic empowerment, leadership roles, changes in policies and programs and so on. A number of similar studies have been carried out to this effect. For instance, Agarwal (2019), studied women's participation in community-driven development projects in rural India and found that women's involvement in decision-making processes, resource management, and project implementation led to improved access to basic services, enhanced social cohesion, and overall community development. Additionally Gebru, and Endale, (2017) studied women empowerment and community development: a case study of Meshenti Semen Tiwlid Women's Association in Ethiopia. The study revealed that collective action, economic development, leadership development, and collaboration with community leaders and stakeholders were significant contributors of women's participation in community development. While Khan, and Hussain, (2018) study on women's political participation in local government revealed that political parties' support for female candidates and the implementation of gender quotas are important factors in promoting women's political

participation while enhancing women's education, leadership skills, and knowledge of political processes are key strategies for increasing their engagement in local governance.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Women in Abia State, Nigeria, face significant barriers to fully participating in community development projects, hindering their ability to contribute to local government initiatives. Despite outnumbering urban women, rural women in Abia State still face challenges in defending their rights. Societal norms and expectations often limit women's opportunities for participation in public life, perpetuating gender inequalities (UN Women, 2020). Financial constraints also limit women's participation, as most rely on their husbands or other sources for economic support. This highlights the need for women's economic independence to effectively contribute to community development. Recent efforts to empower women in Abia State have yielded some progress, but challenges persist, including limited access to education and resources, gender-based violence, and sociocultural barriers. The effectiveness of women's empowerment initiatives in promoting community development remains unclear, necessitating a comprehensive evaluation. This raises some major questions such as; how have women participated in community development in Abia State, Nigeria? What strategies can enhance women's participation in community development in Abia State, Nigeria?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to investigate women empowerment initiatives and participation in community Development in Abia State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Identify ways Women have participated in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria.
2. Identify the problems that hinder Women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study

1. What are the ways Women have participated in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria.
2. What are strategies for enhancing Women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria?

HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses are formulated to guide the study and will be tested at 0.05 level of significant.

$H0_1$: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of urban and rural women on their perception regarding women participation in community development in Abia State.

$H0_2$: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of urban and rural women on their perception regarding strategies of enhancing women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This study was conducted in Abia State, Nigeria. The population of study consist of all. A sample size of 384 women from Abia State was used for the study, the sample was determined using Cochran's formular. The Cochran formula is an appropriate method for determining the sample size of respondents for the study on women empowerment initiatives on community development in Abia State. This is because the formula accommodates the unknown population size of women impacted by empowerment initiatives in the state. Additionally, it allows for specifying the desired level of precision and confidence level, ensuring reliable findings. The research adopted a multi stage sampling technique to select the sample respondents used for the study. Structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha coefficient which yielded 0.835. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 levels of significance with appropriate

degree of freedom using t-test analysis. The hypotheses of no significant difference were retained if the p-value is greater than 0.05 level of significant if otherwise the null hypothesis was rejected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What ways have women have participated in community development in Abia State, Nigeria

Table 4.3: Mean and standard deviation on ways women have contributed to the Community Development of Abia State, Nigeria

S/N	Item Statement	$\overline{X}$	SD	Remark
1	Local governance (e.g., town meetings, local councils)	2.98	.859	Agree
2	educational initiatives (e.g., scholarship, teaching, tutoring, and organizing educational events).	3.06	.844	Agree
3	healthcare and wellness programs (e.g., volunteering at clinics, health awareness campaigns)	3.05	.794	Agree
4	Economic development projects (e.g., building of market stalls, starting businesses, participating in cooperative societies)	2.96	.830	Agree
5	in environmental conservation efforts (e.g., tree planting, waste management campaigns)	3.06	.848	Agree
6	social services (e.g., volunteering at shelters, supporting vulnerable groups)	3.01	.825	Agree
7	cultural and recreational activities (e.g., festivals, sports).	3.00	.801	Agree
8	Women have taken on mentorship or leadership roles (e.g., mentoring young women, leading community groups)	2.95	.891	Agree
9	Women's contributions have led to significant improvements in educational opportunities in the community	2.89	.841	Agree
10	Women's participation has strengthened social cohesion and community bonds	2.86	.851	Agree
	Grand mean	2.982	.8384	Agree

Data in table 4.3 show that the mean responses of all the items fall within the real limit of 2.450-3.49. Also the grand mean value of 2.982 which is within the real limit of 2.50-3.49, indicates that majority of respondents are agreed that women have contributed to the Community Development of Abia State, Nigeria through participation in local governance, educational initiatives, healthcare and wellness programs, environmental conservation efforts, social services, cultural and recreational activities, and mentorship/leadership roles. The table further revealed that the cluster standard deviation of all the items was .8384. This also shows that the respondents were not far from the mean and the opinion of one another in their responses on ways women have contributed to the Community Development of Abia State, Nigeria.

A corresponding hypothesis tested to further address the research question is

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of urban and rural women on their perception regarding ways women can contribute to the Development of Abia State, Nigeria.

Table 4.4: **t-test** analysis of significant difference in the mea

n rating of urban and rural women on their perception regarding way women can contribute to the Development of Abia State, Nigeria.

Teachers	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	DF	t-cal	P-value	Remarks
Urban Women	188	2.9775	.59188				
				378	-.008	.994	NS
Rural Women	192	2.9780	.56120				

The data in Table 4.4 indicates a t-calculated value of -0.008 and significant p-value of .994. Since the p-value of .994 is greater than 0.05 level of significant, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. Hence, there is no significant difference in the mean scores of urban and rural women on their perception regarding way women can contribute to the Development of Abia State, Nigeria. Consequently, location has no significant influence on the perception of Abia state women regarding way women can contribute to the Development of Abia State.

Research Question 2: What are strategies for enhancing women's participation in community development in Abia State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation regarding strategies of enhancing Women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria.

S/N	Item Statement	$\overline{X}$	SD	Remark
1	Women should be given equal opportunities to hold leadership positions in community organizations	3.00	.815	Agreed
2	Training programmes should be provided to women to enhance their leadership skills	3.19	.775	Agreed
3	Women's participation in local government should be actively promoted and supported	3.04	.773	Agreed
4	Access to microfinance loan should be increased to support women entrepreneurs.	3.02	.809	Agreed
5	Mentorship programs should be established to help women advance into leadership roles	3.00	.786	Agreed
6	Vocational training should be provided to women to improve their job prospects	3.13	.791	Agreed
7	Women should have equal access to property ownership and inheritance rights	3.22	.783	Agreed
8	Financial literacy programs should be available to educate women on managing their finances	3.08	.787	Agreed
9	Scholarships and grants should be provided to encourage women's education at all levels	3.13	.794	Agreed
10	Community centers should offer educational programs specifically targeted at women	3.03	.758	Agreed
11	Capacity-building workshops should be organized to help women develop professional skills	3.17	.756	Agreed

Group Mean	**3.092**	**.7843**	**Agreed**

Data in Table 4.9 show that the mean responses of all the items fall within the real limit of 2.450-3.49. Also the grand mean value of 3.092 which is within the real limit of 2.50-3.49, indicates that majority of the respondents are agreed that strategies of enhancing Women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria include but equal opportunities to hold leadership positions, training programs, women's participation in local government, women access to microfinance loan, mentorship and vocational programs, equal access to property ownership and inheritance rights, financial literacy programs, scholarships and grants, and capacity-building workshops. The table further revealed that the cluster standard deviation of all the items was .7843. This also shows that the respondents were not far from the mean and the opinion of one another in their responses on strategies of enhancing Women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria.

A corresponding hypothesis tested to further address the research question is

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of urban and rural women on their perception regarding strategies of enhancing women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria.

Table 4.10: t-test analysis of significant difference in the mean rating of urban and rural women on their perception regarding strategies of enhancing women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria.

	N	$\bar{\mathrm{X}}$	SD	DF	t-cal	P-value	Remarks
Urban Women	188	3.0919	.52632				
				378	.028	.978	NS
Rural Women	192	3.0904	.47338				

The data in Table 4.10 indicates a t-calculated value of .978 and significant p-value of .280. Since the p-value of .978 is greater than 0.05 level of significant, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. Hence, there is no significant different in the mean scores of urban and rural women on their perception regarding strategies of enhancing women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria. Consequently, location has no significant influence on the perception of Abia state women regarding strategies of enhancing women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Finding of the study revealed that women have contributed to the Community Development of Abia State, Nigeria through participation in local governance, educational initiatives, healthcare and wellness programmes, environmental conservation efforts, social services, cultural and recreational activities, and mentorship/leadership roles. Furthermore, there is no significant difference in the mean scores of urban and rural women on their perception regarding ways women can contribute to the Development of Abia State, Nigeria. Consequently, location has no significant influence on the perception of Abia state women regarding ways women can contribute to the Development of Abia State. This validates the findings of Agarwal (2019), on the impact of women's participation in community-driven development projects in rural India. The findings showed that women's involvement in decision-making processes, resource management, and project implementation led to improved access to basic services, enhanced social cohesion, and overall community development. The study further validates the findings of Agarwal (2019) on the impact of

women's participation in community-driven development (CDD) projects on their well-being and empowerment in rural India which revealed that women's participation in CDD projects was positively associated with increased empowerment, including greater decision-making power, mobility, and access to resources.

The study revealed that strategies of enhancing Women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria include equal opportunities to hold leadership positions, training programs, women's participation in local government, women access to microfinance loan, mentorship and vocational programmes, equal access to property ownership and inheritance rights, financial literacy programmes, scholarships and grants, and capacity-building workshops. Finally, there is no significant difference in the mean scores of urban and rural women on their perception regarding strategies of enhancing women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria. Consequently, location has no significant influence on the perception of Abia state women regarding strategies of enhancing women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria. This is in line with the findings of Gebru, and Endale, (2017) study on women empowerment and community development: a case study of Meshenti Semen Tiwlid Women's Association in Ethiopia. The study revealed that collective action, economic development, leadership development, and collaboration with community leaders and stakeholders were significant contributors of women's participation in community development. The study is also in agreement with the findings of Khan, and Hussain, (2018) on women's political participation in local government which revealed that political parties' support for female candidates and the implementation of gender quotas were cited as important factors in promoting women's political participation. Enhancing women's education, leadership skills, and knowledge of political processes were recognized as key strategies for increasing their engagement in local governance.

5.2   CONCLUSION

The following conclusions are drawn from the findings of the study.

1. Cooperative societies, Nigeria for Women project, Renewed Hope Initiative (RHI), Women's organizations, Abia State Governor's Empowerment Fund and Nigeria for Women Project (NFW) initiatives are the women empowerment initiatives for community development in Abia State.

2. Strategies of enhancing Women's participation in Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria include equal opportunities to hold leadership positions, training programmes, women's participation in local government, women access to microfinance loan, mentorship and vocational programmes, equal access to property ownership and inheritance rights, financial literacy programmes, scholarships and grants, and capacity-building workshops

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and educational implications of this study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Governmens and non-governmental organizations interested in women's participation in community development should strengthen partnerships among these existing women empowerment initiatives to enhance their reach and impact, and encourage collaboration with educational institutions, local governments and other stakeholders

2. A multi-faceted approach is recommended to enhance women's participation in Abia State's community development. Key strategies include promoting equal opportunities for leadership, strengthening women's involvement in local governance, improving access to financial resources, providing education and training programmes, establishing mentorship initiatives, and advocating for equal

property rights. This comprehensive approach will empower women and foster sustainable community development.

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