

SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF COMMUNITY-BASED WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS IN OBOLLO-AFOR, EDUCATION ZONE OF ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

Women when properly mobilized, attain control over the conditions of lives in which they live. One of the ways of achieving the mobilization of women is through the formation of community-based women organizations. The organizations when formed are encouraged to undertake both social and educational activities that will improve their standard of living. Therefore, the study examined the extent to which community-based women organizations have effectively carried out activities on the social and educational development of communities in Obollo-Afor Education Zone of Enugu State, Nigeria. Three research questions were posed to guide the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 610 members of the 12 registered community-based women organizations in the three local government areas in Obollo-Afor Education Zone. The sample of the study was 254, picked using simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a 10-structured questionnaire items called Socio-educational Activities of Community-based Women Organizations Questionnaire (SACWOQ). The instrument was face-validated by three experts and its reliability was determined using Cronbach alpha estimate with an overall reliability co-efficient of 0.78. Weighted mean was used to answer the research questions. Copies of the instrument were administered to the respondents through direct delivery technique. Findings of the study revealed settlement of clan/communal disputes and cleaning of rural roads were carried out to a moderate extent as social activities, while catering for their children's education, organizing literacy classes and building of school structures were carried out to a moderate extent as educational activities of community-based women organizations. Recommendations proffered included that Enugu State Government should actively involve more women in developmental programmes and projects that concern them, and that state government and local government councils should make functional literacy programmes available for women as an effective strategy towards empowerment.

Introduction

The contributions of women in national development are widely acknowledged. United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organizations, UNESCO (2005) noted that African women form an indispensable part of human resources for development. Without

their contributions, African countries cannot be expected to be maintained at the present low level not to talk of any development progress arising thereof. Women play active role in development (Asogwa, 2015). In the society, women are cleaners of rural roads, the regular visitors to the weekly market, the impartial arbitrators in family or clan disputes and disagreement, and the preservers of age-old customs of yam festivals, child birth, marriage feast and water collection. It follows therefore that any programme of rural transformation that ignores the women does so at its own risk (Ijere, 1992). This is because women have been principal actors in pre- and post-harvest food process as producers, processors, preservers, conservers, preparers and traders in food crops (Ekejiuba, 1991).

Therefore, mobilization of women towards the progressive attainment of control over the conditions of life in which they live is necessary. One of the ways of achieving the mobilization of women is through the formation of women organizations. Women organizations are integral part of voluntary associations, which Okeibunor (1995) took to encompass the different non-governmental organizations held together by a common group interest/ideology and goals. They include such organizations as the women organizations, community development/town union associations, and age-grades, peer groups, local thrift (ISUSU) and a host of others. Women organizations belong to many groups and institutions that are entirely and largely independent of government and that have primarily humanitarian or cooperative, rather than commercial objectives. They are also indigenous groups that are organized and run by female members in villages (Asogwa, 2015). According to Justice, Development and Peace Commission (2005), the objectives of forming women organizations include reducing high incidence of illiteracy among the women, including the entire populace; ensuring that high rate of poverty among the individuals is drastically reduced, ensuring peace and order in families and in society at large, through dialogue, ensuring adequate maintenance of culture of the land (through custodian), and assisting in the community development activities, by securing their rights.

Other objectives are to ensure that women are not marginalized in all spheres of life, rather full participation and to improve the standard of living of their members and others. Northern Ireland Women's Forum (2013) stated that the aims of women associations are facilitating and increasing the contribution of women to public life, promoting equality of opportunity for women in all aspects of life, encouraging debate on issues of public welfare, especially those affecting women and their families, and promoting and strengthening links between voluntary organisations. Others are ensuring that women's interests are taken into account in all policy making, encouraging affirmative action by Government to put women on equal terms within society, scrutinizing proposed changes in legislation to examine their impact on women, strengthening and developing relationships within the community, and motivating and activating members to achieve change in society. Therefore, the fundamental contributions of women organizations in the development of communities among others are prominent in the social and educational activities of women (Urama, 2010).

In social spheres, women organizations indulge in various activities that help to ensure that there is peace, order and harmonious co-existence in the families and the society at large. According to Onwuasoanya (2002), the women group called *Umuada* are highly respected, petted and regarded with awe and respect. It is their duty to react against anything that disturbs the orderly nature of Igbo cultural life, particularly, when things are no longer normal and when the law of the land is violated. Njaka (1980) noted that *Umuada* organizations, among other organizations, are the angels of peace and harmony which transcend all units in the community. Another important contribution of women organizations to community development is in the aspect of settlement of controversial land disputes among their family kindred called *Umunna*. They are considered to be the custodians of rules and norms of the land among communities. Urama (2010) affirmed that

the judgments made by women organizations such as *Umuada* are accepted to be upright and final in Igbo communities.

The contributions of women in the area of environmental sanitation cannot be left-out in the struggle to ensure a healthy living. This is because cleanliness is next to godliness. This implies that clean environment helps to ensure happy life. In actual sense, construction of accessible roads and building of markets are veritable strategies and projects that testify community development. But it is the duty of the rural women to ensure that adequate maintenance culture is applied to ensure that their rural roads and markets are properly cleaned and swept (Ijere, 1992). This activity helps to get rid of environmental pollution such as land pollution and air pollution, through which many communicable diseases spread.

In the area of marriage counseling, women organizations have excelled in various communities. Marriage counseling is concerned primarily with the interpersonal relationship between spouses who are having difficulties in maintaining satisfactory marriage. The counseling is a crucial role of *Umuada* women organizations. Women organizations have excelled in various communities as they help in the formalization of the union for life of mature men and women for procreation of offspring (Nweke, 1989). The *Umuada* as marriage counselors normally adopt the methods that are peculiar to their environment. The presence of *Umuada* is a big encouragement to the men folk who do the strenuous aspects of the work. The women folk then indulge in the singing of songs with some musical instruments which serve as motivation to men. Thus, the presence of *Umuada* instills some elements of seriousness to the men and makes them work with high zeal. The *Umuada* as women organization is known to be seriously involved in almost all the religious sacrifices in the community, including burial/funeral ceremonies. The organization also performs certain functions during some ceremonies such as new yam festival and funerals (Ekwunife, 1990).

In the educational activities of women, many women organizations have succeeded in building both primary and post-primary school blocks and classrooms. This has helped to ensure that pupils/students are no longer studying under trees, uncompleted or roof-leaking classrooms. Women organization as a veritable tool has succeeded in putting smile on the faces of teachers and students/pupils as well as on government and parents as they try to safeguard the lives of the future which is indeed a practical form of community development.

In the same vein, women through their organizations have been able to organize literacy classes for their illiterate members. Onah (2004) stated that many women organizations have succeeded in establishing literacy centres to help minimize the high incessant of illiteracy, marginalization, intimidation, and poverty, among other negativities towards enhancement of livelihood and active participation/involvement. The provision and organization of literacy centres which women organizations embarked upon have made many individuals become self-employed through vocational skills they acquired in the centres; while some have acquired skills of reading, writing and calculating. Such skills would further enhance the women's access especially to public and education information. Literacy centres organized by women organizations leads to the acquisition of income-generating skills such as soaps, polish, custard, pomade (Vaseline), buns/chin-chin, detergents (Omo), and garment making, among others. Literacy programmes also enable farmers to understand new farming techniques and adopt agricultural innovation. Again, some literacy programmes in form of seminar help to expose the farmers to the dangers behind the practice of deforestation and continuous cropping. Organization of literacy centres by women organizations has helped business men and women to know how to read and sign invoices, dialogue with customers fluently either in English Language or native language, market goods/commodities, advertise their commodities in any form in order to boost productivity/profit.

Asogwa (2015) stated that women's education is known to be associated with political emancipation. United Nations (1999) noted that when women are educated, they are

able to know and claim their rights to vote and be voted for. The more educated women's views and contributions are respected and followed especially in community affairs. Kiratz (2001) stressed that the higher the educational level of women, the higher their contributions to national development. Better educated population is likely to foster national development through changes that can be expected in the nature of political participation. They are also considered as having a sense of solidarity in the execution of projects. In many communities, women are found at primary, post-primary as well as higher institutions as teachers. The teachers are seen as the makers and propellers of community development because they are the ones that trained both presidents of country, governors, senators, commissioners, ministers, among other influential people in the corridor of power (Obetta, 2004). These women who are teachers have succeeded in refining both young and adult citizens towards becoming functional, active and productive members of the contemporary society. They have bred doctors, lawyers, engineers, pharmacists, among others.

Also, women through their women organizations have contributed to the educational development of their communities in the area of giving awards and scholarships to meritorious students/pupils. Obetta (2004) stated that many women organizations have succeeded in giving awards and scholarships to their children who performed well in primary, post-primary and even higher institutions. The award-giving and scholarship have helped to reduce the increasing rate of drop-outs from formal school among children.

In Obollo-Afor Education Zone of Enugu State, there are many community-based women organizations that are found virtually in every community. The activities of these organizations include among others the improvement of social and educational development of their communities. However, there seems to be discrimination against the women folk by their male counterparts in the areas of education, economy, socio-cultural, politics and labour force. Sometimes, the women's contributions in the society are not appreciated. This situation led to the coming together of some women to form community-based women organizations (Obetta, 2004). The associations pooled the efforts of the various women together to help in developing the places where they live. The formation of the various community-based women associations has brought tremendous changes in the communities within the zone. Many of the women have enrolled in education programmes. Through this, many of them are now self-reliant, and have obtained certificates for better jobs. They are now involved in settling family disputes and promotion of women's participation in politics. The formation of such organizations has led the women folk to more employment opportunities, improvement of their incomes and formation of co-operative societies.

In spite of all these, it seems that the lots of the efforts that community-based women organizations put into the development of their communities are not commensurate with the outcome. Their social and educational activities are still in doubt in some communities. Therefore, without detailed assessment of its effectiveness, it will be difficult to justify the activities of community-based women organizations in the development of communities in Obollo-Afor Education Zone. Hence, the problem of the study is to assess the extent to which community-based women organizations have carried out activities on the social and educational development of communities in Obollo-Afor Education Zones of Enugu State.

Purpose of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. determine the extent to which social activities of community-based women organizations contribute to the development of communities in Obollo-Afor Education Zone.

- ascertain the extent to which educational activities of community-based women organizations contribute to the development of communities in Obollo-Afor Education Zone.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- To what extent do the social activities of community-based women organizations contribute to the development of communities in Obollo-Afor Education Zone?
- To what extent do the educational activities of community-based women organizations contribute to the development of communities in Obollo-Afor Education Zone?

Methodology

The design for the study was descriptive survey design. The research design is suitable for the study as the researchers are interested in determining the extent to which socio-educational activities of community-based women organizations contribute to the development of communities in Obollo-Afor Education Zone of Enugu State. The population of the study was 610 members of community-based women organizations in the 12 registered community-based women organizations in the three local government areas that constitute Obollo-Afor Education Zone of Enugu State. The local government areas are Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area with 256 members from five registered community-based women organizations, Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area with 147 members from three registered community-based women organizations and Udenu Local Government Area with 207 members from four registered community-based women organizations. The sample size for the study comprised 254 members of the registered community-based women organizations in the three local government areas of Obollo-Afor Education Zone. In composing the sample, the researcher employed simple random sampling technique. With this technique, all the members of the 12 registered community-based women organizations in the three local government areas were adequately represented. The sample size represented 41.64 per cent of the entire population. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire that was designed and constructed by the researcher and titled, Socio-educational Activities of Community-based Women Organizations Questionnaire (SACWOQ). The questionnaire elicited information from the respondents on the extent to which social and educational activities of community-based women organizations contribute to the development of communities in Obollo-Afor Education Zone. It had 10 items grouped in two clusters based on the research questions formulated for the study. Cluster 1 with five items was on the extent to which social activities of community-based women organizations contribute to the development of communities, while Cluster 3 with five items was on the extent to which educational activities of community-based women organizations contribute to the development of communities. Each item in the questionnaire had a response option and numerical value of Very Great Extent (4), Moderate Extent (3), Little Extent (2) or Very Little Extent (1).

The instrument was face validated by two experts in community development and one expert in measurement and evaluation, all from Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. In order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, 20 copies of the instrument were distributed to members of community-based women organizations in Eha-Alumona Community in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State based on similarity in historical and socio-cultural backgrounds. Ascertaining the internal consistency of the instrument using Cronbach alpha estimate, reliability co-efficient of 0.78 was obtained which showed that the instrument was reliable. Finally, out of the 254 copies of the questionnaire administered on the registered community-based women organizations through the help of 3

research assistants, only 217 copies were duly filled and returned. It gave a return rate of 84.65 per cent. The data collected were analyzed using weighted mean for answering the two research questions. Real limit of numbers were assigned to each of the numerical values. Therefore items with mean values of 2.50 – 4.00 were considered as accepted while items with mean values below 2.50 were considered as rejected. The statistical tool used for the analysis of the collected data was weighted mean.

Results

Table 1: Mean responses of the respondents on the extent of the contributions of social activities of community-based women organizations to the development of communities.

Social activities	Total Score	\bar{x}	Decision
Settlement of family/village disputes.	675	3.14	Moderate Extent
Cleaning of rural roads	661	3.07	Moderate Extent
Cleaning of rural markets	615	2.86	Moderate Extent
Conducting of marriage counselling	641	2.98	Moderate Extent
Being the custodians of culture	528	2.46	Low Extent
Grand Mean		3.01	Moderate Extent

Table 1 above based on the contributions of social activities of community-based women organizations to the development of communities indicated that settlement of disputes had a mean score of 3.14, while cleaning of rural roads had 3.07 as the mean score. Conducting of marriage counselling, cleaning of rural markets and being the custodians of culture respectively had 2.98, 2.86 and 2.46 as the mean scores. Also, the grand mean score of 3.01 indicated that on the average, community-based women organizations have contributed to a moderate extent to the educational development of communities.

Table 2: Mean responses of the respondents on the extent of the contributions of educational activities of community-based women organizations to the development of communities

Educational activities	Total Score	\bar{x}	Decision
Building of school structures (classrooms).	574	2.67	Moderate Extent
Organization of Literacy classes.	588	2.74	Moderate Extent
Working in schools as teachers.	507	2.36	Low Extent
Giving of award and scholarship to pupils/ students	555	2.58	Moderate Extent
Catering for their children's education	712	3.31	Moderate Extent
Grand Mean		2.81	Moderate Extent

Table 2 above which is on the contributions of educational activities of community-based women organizations to the development of communities revealed that catering for children's education had a mean score of 3.31 while organization of literacy classes scored 2.74 as the mean. Others are building of school structure (classrooms), giving of award and scholarship to pupils/students, and working in schools as teachers had mean scores of 2.67, 2.58 and 2.36, respectively. On the whole, a grand mean of 2.81 was recorded showing that on the average, community-based women organizations contribute, to a moderate extent, to the educational development of communities.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of the study showed that the major social activities of community-based women organizations towards the development of communities are settlement of dispute, cleaning of rural roads, conducting marriage counseling and cleaning of rural markets. On marriage counseling, women organizations have excelled in various communities as they help in the formalization of the union for life of mature men and women

for procreation of offspring (Nweke, 1989). On settlement of disputes, Njaka (1980) stated that women organizations indulge in various activities that help to ensure peace and order harmonious co-existence in the families and the society at large. For instance, Umuada organizations are the angels of peace and harmony which transcend all units in the community.

On maintenance of roads and markets, Ijere (1992) asserted that it is the duty of the rural women to ensure that adequate maintenance culture is applied to ensure that their rural roads and markets are properly cleaned and swept. This activity helps to get rid of environmental pollution such as land pollution and air pollution and prevent the spread of many communicable diseases. Though being the custodians of culture was rated 2.46, Urama (2010) noted that women organizations, especially the *Umuada* are known to be the custodian of culture. They react against anything that disturbs the orderly nature of cultural lives of the people particularly when the laws of the land are violated.

In related development, the findings of the study showed that the major educational activities of the registered community-based women organizations include catering for their children's education, organizations of literacy classes, building of school structure such as classrooms, and giving of awards and scholarships to pupils/students. On catering for their children's education and organization of literacy classes, Onah (2004) affirmed that many women organizations have succeeded in establishing literacy centres to help minimize the high incessant of illiteracy, marginalization, intimidation, and poverty, among other negativities towards enhancement of livelihood and active participation/involvement. This implies that the women value education even though they are not adequately educated. Many women organizations built primary and post-primary school blocks and classrooms to ensure that pupils/students do not study under the trees, uncompleted and classrooms that are leaking. Supporting the findings, Obetta (2004) noted that many women organizations embark on giving awards and scholarships to their children who performed well in primary, post-primary and even higher institutions. These activities of award-giving and scholarship have helped to reduce the increasing rate of drop-outs from formal school among children. Findings of the study showed that working in schools as teachers was rated low. However, Obetta (2004) stated that women are found at primary, post-primary as well as higher institutions as teachers. They are seen as the makers and propellers of community development because they are the ones that trained both presidents of country, governors, senators, commissioners, ministers, among other influential people in the corridor of power.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were proffered:

1. State government and local government councils should make functional literacy programmes available for women as an effective strategy towards empowerment. It should be done by intensifying campaign aimed at enlightening women and the society in general on the need to harness the talent which abounds in our women for overall socio-economic and political development.
2. Enugu State Government should actively involve more women in community developmental programmes and projects that concern them. This should be done by involving more women in decision-making processes and in the implementation of the community development programmes in the various communities.
3. Federal, state and local governments should provide legislative polices that will foster the effective implementation of women empowerment. This should be done through the abolishment of some obnoxious cultural and religious practices that constitute hindrance to women's involvement and contributions to the development of rural communities.

4. Enugu State Government through the State Women Affairs Commission should organize motivating programmes to help the women understand the need to obtain higher levels of education for the acquisition of higher certificates other than First School Leaving Certificate. This would go a long way towards securing and attaining higher positions for livelihood.
5. The Enugu State Commission for Women Affairs should mobilize the rural women towards forming more cooperative societies and community-based women organizations. This would enable them to unite and work as a team in undertaking community development projects.
6. Enugu State Agency for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (SAME) should propagate the adult literacy programme for the rural women. The programme should be done using intensive mass literacy campaign, literacy by radio programme or any other innovative strategy.

Conclusion

Women organizations have embarked on various social and educational activities with the aim of improving their standard of living. Some of these activities include settlement of disputes, clearing of both rural roads and markets and marriage counseling. They also indulge in upliftment of education through building of school structures, organization of literacy classes and giving of awards and scholarship to the well-performed pupils/students, including catering for their children's education. On the basis of the data collected and analyzed, the study showed that women organizations are veritable tools for improving the standard of living of the poor and dejected; and ensuring progress in the community. The women organizations also work as tools that help to ensure oneness, happy living and clean environment. Such organizations have systematic plans for unifying the people's activities in order to accomplish a unified purpose.

In essence, women organizations have evidently contributed towards ensuring sustainable development. However, their contributions are to a moderate extent. Therefore, they need to be empowered to contribute to a very great extent to the development of communities, especially in the areas of social and educational activities. This means that if adequate support is given to them, they would do more in salvaging the entire society from illiteracy and poverty among other frowning conditions that ravage human life.

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