

Full Length Research Paper

Women and development process in Nigeria: a case study of rural women organizations in Community development in Cross River State

Faith U. Ekong

Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Environmental Studies, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Corresponding Author e-mail: faith_ekong@yahoo.com

Accepted June 9, 2013

For many decades now, there has been an intense developmental attention devoted to the empowerment of women especially in the rural areas (where more than 70% of Nigerian live). In fact, specialized agencies have been established for this purpose. But impact analysis of these programmes show that the target groups have not always been reached. These had led to various initiatives by women themselves to improve their conditions. This paper is about the role of and extent of women involvement in the governance and the development process. It examines the problems and prospect of women in the governance and development of rural areas in Nigeria using community development organizations as a vehicle and organizational medium. This study uses the Cross River state as a case study. The ten major towns and its twenty five hamlets in the state were divided into twelve districts and two hundred questionnaire were distributed in each district. A survey of rural women organizations in the twelve districts shows a total of three hundred organizations. One hundred of these were closely studied. The result shows a genuine desire of the women to actively involve in governance and development process to improve their socio-economic status. Nevertheless, a combination of factors hinders their efforts to break through the cycle of poverty. Various recommendations and actions are therefore suggested on training and retraining of women especially on the HIV/AIDS and the current climate change.

Keywords: rural planning, women organisations, development process, community development.

INTRODUCTION

An outstanding feature of many developing countries is the magnitude of their internal disparities in the degree of economic development, expressed in their social structures. Of major significance are the contrasts between rural and urban areas. The rural areas in most parts exhibit great poverty, poor health condition and ignorance as a result of varying degree of geographical, social and political isolation. In Nigeria, more than 75% of the population live and work in rural areas though the emphasis of spatial planning has for a long time been on urban areas rather than regional problems whereby the rural areas would have benefited. This has led to the relegation of the rural areas to the background in the spatial economy of the country resulting in a wide spread

of rural-urban migration of able youth. This problem has been compounded by unattractive opportunities of generating income from agriculture.

The rural areas of Nigeria serve as the bases for the production of foods and fibre. As noted by Olatunbosun (1975) it is a major source of capital formation for the country and a principal market for domestic manufacturers. Yet, these areas lack basic amenities to make them attractive. There is the absence of social infrastructure such as potable water, electricity, and motorable roads. The rural dwellers have low purchasing power and standard of living is abysmal.

However, in recent times, there has been an intense developmental attention devoted to the rural areas

because of the perceived problems and the aspiration of the government and the people to become self-sufficient in the production of food and agricultural raw materials for the growth of the national economy. Consequently, specialized agencies have been established for the upliftment of the rural areas. Recent experiences in Nigeria as in other developing countries do show that governmental efforts and initiations though necessary are always insufficient to lift the rural areas from their problems - imaginary or actual (Agbola, 1990). At the same time, most rural areas do not leave the development of their areas to the government alone. They have revived, nurtured and increasingly relied on the virtues of community initiative and self-help to supplement government efforts – such initiatives have enabled communities to prioritize and execute community projects which are of direct and immediate benefits to them.

Unfortunately, the initial theories of development often excluded women on the assumption that 'man' acting in development, is male. This, noted by Agbola (1990) has brought western type of education, new set of social values, new concepts of property, land tenure and legal systems and the concept of patriarchy bring about women societal inferiority. Yet the Federal office of statistics estimated the rural women population to be higher than men in Nigeria. Also the 1991 national census figure shows that women were 49.6% while in 2006 women constituted 49.19% (NPC, 1991 and 2006). In the study area women constitute 49.12% of the state population just like the national figure. These figures show that women who are closer to the grassroots are mostly affected by the consequences of any developmental efforts in any rural community and their number will contribute to such projects. Perhaps this fact is responsible for the recent establishment of special agencies and organisations by government and individuals to stimulate rural development and invariably women development. These policies of government have seen the establishment of women commissions, ministries, etc and specialised agencies for women and rural development.

However, these agencies and organisations have not bettered the lot of the Nigerian rural women significantly because much of such project have political undertone allowing funds to be channeled into different but sometimes private projects. Instead, as Agbola (1996) noted, there has been distrust, disdain and outright indifference by the women to government projects to survive, therefore, the rural women have decided to take their "destiny" into their own hands and solve their problems by themselves. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to examine the efforts of rural women in development process through their community (rural) development organizations. Three objectives were set out to achieve this aim:

- Assess the socio-economic characteristics of women in small organizations,
- Examine the activities of these women organizations,
- Determine the community development effort of these rural women.

The concept of community development

Community development has been defined as a social action process in which people of the community organise themselves for planning and action. They identify their common and individual needs and problems, make group and individual plan to meet these needs, execute these plans with a maximum reliance upon community resources. Many researchers and authorities (Olarinde and Ayanwuyi, (2007) have defined community development in various ways. Ekong defined community development as a process by which efforts of the people themselves are united with those of the governmental authorities to improve economic, social and cultural conditions of the communities, to integrate those communities into the life of the nation and to enable them contribute fully to national progress. Community Development from this definition combines the idea of community with development.

A simple definition of community refers to it as a group of people living in a geographic location having common origin and customs and is considered as a whole. Researchers Marcia, (1974), Flora and Flora, (1993), Christen and Robinson (1989) etc had given various conceptual explanations of community Marcia (1974), for example, looked at it as a solidarity institution, primary interaction and as institutionally distinct groups. As solidarity institution community defined those spheres or institutions of the society whose functions are to produce solidarity. Such institutions could include the family, ethnic groupings, voluntary organisations and residential groups. Community may always refer to interpersonal interaction characterised by informal relationship. Thus the most basic criteria or element that defines a community are common ties and solidarity and these elements exist in both the rural and urban areas. However, communities in rural areas are simple and face to face contacts are possible while in the urban areas they are multi-dimensional.

Development on the other hand involves change, improvement and vitality which call for a directed attempt to improve participation, flexibility, equity, attitudes and quality of life. Development as noted by Shaffer (1989) is the creation of wealth, which means adding value to people's lives, not just money. Therefore, the basic elements of community include common ties and solidarity. These elements encourage communal or citizen participation in all facets of the community

development project.

Normally, Community Development activities and actions are aimed at promoting, sustaining, supporting and maintaining community action. Such activities and actions involve a broad range of issues such as housing, information acquisition and dissemination, provision of social services (like roads, water, etc), establishment and sustaining financial institution and so on (Agbola, 1997). As always the case, the project embarked upon by any community is a function of many variables most especially the severity of the absence and deprivation of that service to the community at that time.

Not only are women majority in rural communities, they are responsible for well over 50% of all productive activities, (80% of food production – Africa and 60% of food production in Latin America) yet they received only one-tenth of the world's total income (Annabel, 1994, Anikpo, 2000). For any meaningful development in the rural communities, rural women would have to be highly motivated and encouraged to become actively involved. Since women form the bulk of the rural populace (49.6%) in most cases and since they are the most intimate with the home (Anikpo, 2000) and the entire environment (Annabel, 1994), they are in a better position to articulate the most pressing needs of the community. Most often women's views have been trampled upon with severe consequences for the welfare of the womenfolk. Women, therefore, formed themselves into groups thus for the sole goal of initiating and executing their own development projects without the necessary domineering intervention of the men – women form groups and cooperatives.

Formation of women organization in Nigeria, like most developing countries, dates back to 1946 with the formation of the Nigerian Women Union. Other women organizations include Federation of Nigeria Women Societies (1953), National Council of Women Society (NCWS) (1959), Better Life for Rural Women (1987), National Women Commission (1990), Family Support Programme (1996), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) (1999) and recently Women for Change Initiative (2011) of Dame Patience Goodluck Jonathan, the Nigerian first lady. The ultimate goals of all these organizations and associations is to bring women together to improve their socio-economic life, raise their standard of living and bring about community development. Such goals are better realised much faster and easily when they are pursued within the context of a united force in the form of co-operative societies which we have tried to examine in this paper. These cooperatives and organisations are seen as one of the ways to integrate women into community development. In the study area, there are more than 300 registered women organizations and more than 100 smaller and unregistered ones (INSTRAW 2006). The number keeps increasing by day as women identified new issues.

Women involvement in community development efforts have been established to be of great significance in nation building especially in the performance of role in food production (FAO, 1987 Ekong and Olowu, 2002), sustenance of the environment for sustainable development and of course their reproductive role of child-bearing and training (human resource development). The success of many rural development projects or programmes in many parts of the world had been linked up with the use of participation of local groups – programme designing, implementation and evaluation (Atser and Ekong 2010).

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study concerns itself mostly with small women cooperatives and organizations in various villages/communities of 10 Local Government Areas of Cross River State, with 3 geopolitical zones: - Calabar, Ikom and Ogoja. Administratively the state is divided into 18 Local Government Areas with subdivisions into communities or villages and wards. The data for the study was obtained from the administration of questionnaire. Information on socio-economic, organizations affiliation, sources of funds and activities of organizations were obtained. The villages or communities were smaller settlements of which some had 1,000 inhabitants though not more 3000 inhabitants. These villages were randomly sampled based on the availability of women organizations/cooperatives. This was made easy through the offices of the Honourable Commissioner for Women Affairs and the Bureau of Cooperatives. Based on the Agricultural Development Programme, the State was zoned into three namely:- Calabar (Odukpani, Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Calabar Municipality, Akamkpa and Calabar south), Ikom (Biase, Yakkur, Abi, Ikom and Etung) and Ogoja (Obubra, Ubanliku, Yala and Bekwara). Information was, therefore, obtained from all women available who belong to one organization or the other. The test retest method was used for measuring the reliability of the instrument. A reliability co-efficient of $r=0.85$ was obtained.

Two hundred copies of the questionnaire, sixty (60) each in Ikom and Ogoja and eighty (80) in Calabar, were administered on all women of not less than 18 years of age found in the community who assured us that they belong to organizations. Calabar had the highest since its had more organizations than others. A total of 182 questionnaire were eventually retrieved and the analysis in this study is based on that. In choosing which organization to study, a complete inventory of all organizations irrespective of type was taken from the Ministry of Women Affairs, Bureau of Cooperatives and Local Government Area Women Officers. The data was analysed using numbers and percentages for reporting

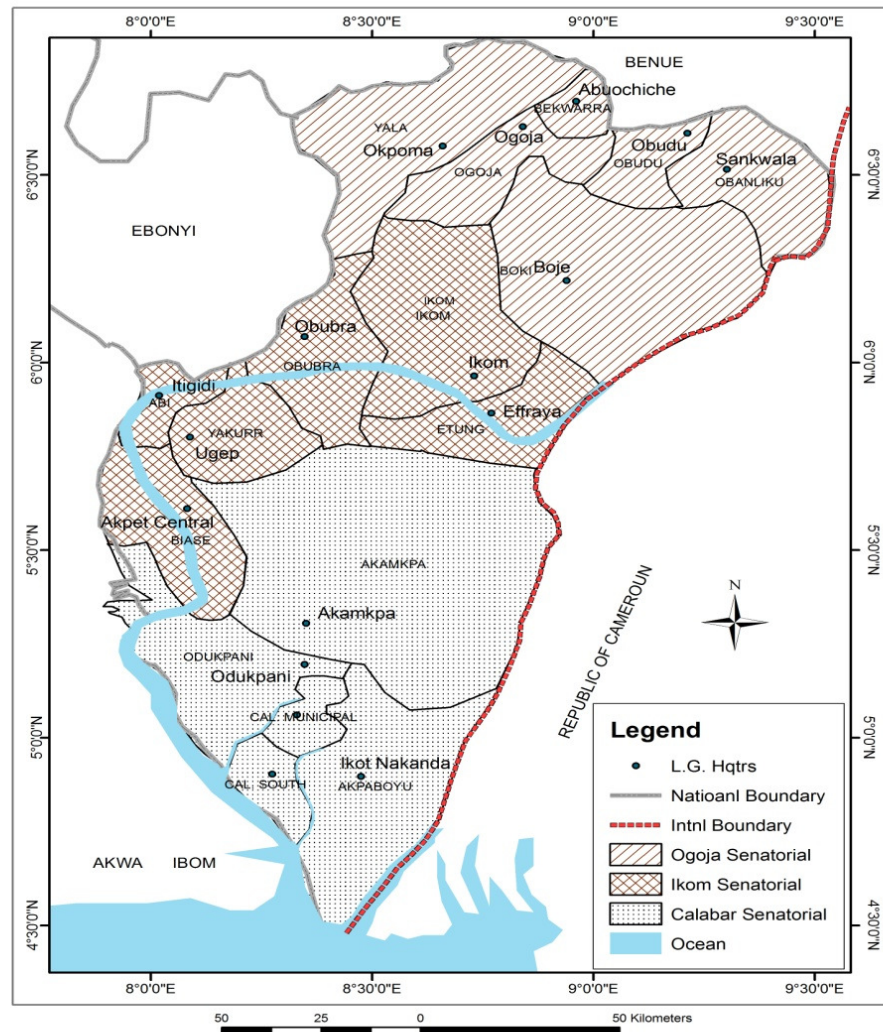


Figure 1: Cross River State showing Senatorial Districts

Figure 1. Map showing the Location of Study Area (Cross River State)

results and drawing conclusions. The percentages were worked out from the total sample from each zone and then for each participating community.

The study area

Cross River State is located between latitude 4°37' and 6°52' North of the equator and Longitude 7°16' and 9°21' East of the Greenwich Meridian. It is located on Nigeria's Southeastern border land (Figure1) from its name, it is apparent that Cross River State occupies the catchments of the Cross River.

The State has a population of 2,892,988 (NPC, 2006). The state spans a total area of 21,481 sq. km, which is equally divided into basement and sedimentary basins. The Basement Complex, which forms the Oban Obudu hills, consists of Precambrian schist and gneisses, with

intrusive of igneous rocks such as granodiorite, diorite, gabbro and dolerite.

Humid tropical climate (1300-3000mm rainfall; 30°C mean annual temperatures) prevail over Cross River State, except on the Obudu Plateau, where the climate is sub temperate, with temperatures of 15°C-23°C. There are about 620 recognized human settlements, 89.36 per cent of which contain less than 5,000 inhabitants. Calabar the capital of the State has the largest population of 375,196. Other major towns with great potentials for future growth and functional integration are Ogoja, Ikom, Obudu, Ugep, Obubra, Akamkpa and Odukpani.

The dominance of Calabar as the administrative, cultural, Port and Industrial centre has continued to attract new immigrants and investments to the State capital. Calabar has therefore recently emerged as a primate city in a state of diminutive urban centres. The vast majority of the population lives in rural areas, in small

nucleated settlements. Along the creeks and swamps of the lower Cross River valley, many of the small settlements consist of fishing camps which are occupied for only a few months of the year. Ribbon types of street settlements are common along motor able rural roads and footpaths in Akamkpa, Yakurr, Ikom and Ogoja LGAs with an average population density of about 65 persons per sq km. Cross River State is about the most sparsely settled state in Southern Nigeria. Vast area of land remain virtually uninhabited and but occupied by a concentration of tree crop plantations in the state.

A greater proportion of the labour for these plantations is migrants coming from outside the state. The migrant are concentrated in rural areas made up of greater number of women. Self employed migrants, tenant farmers, constitute the second largest category of rural migrants in the State. It is these migrant farmers that have helped to make Cross River State one of the food surplus areas in the country. The main occupation of the people are; fishing, farming, palm oil milling, lumbering, trading, palm wine tapping, local gin distilling and civil service.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of this study is presented in two parts based on the information obtained. Part one reports on the socio-economic attributes of the women interviewed while part two give analysis of the characteristics of the organizations and their activities.

Women Participation in the Development Process in Cross River State.

It has been noted by various scholars that the willingness, enthusiasm and the ability of women to actively participate in development process is often conditioned by many factors majority of which are socio-economic. Some of these are exogenously imposed because of unequal access to opportunities. The factors according to Agbola (1996) became mutually reinforcing overtime and severely limit the extent and effectiveness of women participation in the development process.

Table 1 show that the majority of the rural women do not have basic education which is normally considered as an embodiment of human capital (Ekong 1998). Persons with higher education according to this interpretation, would be bearers of more human capital, and would, therefore, earn higher income than persons with low or no formal education.

These levels do not provide sufficient skills for gainful employment. This can be compared with occupation and income level to explain why 116 (63.5%) of the respondents are engaged in farming and trading with 129 (70.8%) earning less than 5,000 Naira a month. The

implication of the above is that the level, intensity and effectiveness of women to meaningfully contribute to the development process may be severely hampered.

Characteristics of Women Organisations

More than 80% of the women belong to one organisation or the other. From Table 2 five types of organizations were identified from their responses, 74 (40.5%) belong to the age grade followed by religious 52 (28.5%) and trade union 25 (13.5%). Only 9 (5.1%) belong to the educational organization. The large number of women in age grade organization shows or reflects a real rural life. In a typical rural setting as is reflected here women (even men) who were initiated into puberty, associate with each other in most activities. Also the high number of women in religious association can be explained by the fact that women in the region believe in one form of deity or the other.

Most of the organisations were engaged in various activities such as food processing (especially palm oil/kernel, grain/root milling) poultry; goatry, piggery, and snail farming, etc. The proceeds from these projects are used for the maintenance of roads, classroom blocks, street lighting, purchase and donation of books to schools etc. All projects are funded by the women themselves without any support from the men or any agency of government. So women made contributions like financial, labour, materials etc towards any project they jointly agreed to execute. The women show great enthusiasm and are willing to continue to contribute to the success of their organizations and the communities. In terms of membership strength, most of these organizations are small with members between 10-50. It was observed that these organizations did not received funds from any arm of government or agency, yet they participated fully in the development process of their communities by making individual contributions through registration fees, dues and levies.

Community Development Efforts

Community Development efforts in Africa is as old as many rural communities themselves. Village groups have always cooperated among themselves to provide communal labour for construction of roads, housing, markets, etc. Women sometimes gathered to clear weeds on the roads leading to drinking water sources or market areas, palace and worship places. They also engage in exchange of labour, in which groups of farmers bond themselves together and work on group members' farms in rotation as a way of improving output on their farms. The percentage distribution of women efforts in the study area were concentrated on six major sector of the

Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age (years)		
<31	26	14.2
31-40	65	35.6
41-50	56	31
51-60	24	13.2
>60	11	6
Total	182	100
MARITAL STATUS		
Single	62	34
Married	116	64
Widowed	4	2
Total	182	100
RELIGION		
Christian	167	92
Non-Christian	15	8
Total	182	100
LEVEL OF EDUCATION		
No formal	60	38.5
Prim./Adult Literacy class	68	37.5
Secondary School	41	22.5
Post Secondary	4	2
TOTAL	182	100
OCCUPATION		
Farming	60	32.5
Trading	56	31
Civil Service	10	5.8
Schooling	12	6.7
Artisan/Technician	44	24
TOTAL	182	100
INCOME LEVEL		
1-5	129	70.8
6-10	38	21.1
11-15	15	8.1
TOTAL	182	100

Source: Field Survey (2012)

Table 2. Types of Organisation

Type	Frequency	%
Age grade	74	40.5
Religious	52	28.5
Trade Union	25	13.5
Educational	9	5.1
Others	22	12.4
TOTAL	182	100

Source: Field Survey 2012

Table 3. Major Development Sectors of Women Organisations/cooperatives

S/N	Sector	Frequency	Percentage
1	Transportation	9	5.1
2	Water supply and Sanitation	27	15
3	Health/ Nutrition	22	11.3
4	Income generating	93	51.2
5	Housing	13	7.4
6	Educational	18	10

Source: Field study (2011)

economy (Table 3).

The Table shows that 51.2% of the organisations were on income generating which included such activities as agro-processing mills for grains and roots, building of market stalls, farming (pineapple, snail, periwinkle, fish, etc.), micro-irrigation for market gardening (vegetables), micro-credit to start small businesses. Other sectors include water supply and sanitation (15%), health/nutrition (11.3%), educational (10%), housing (7.4%) and transportation (5.1%). Health and nutritional issues centered around the traditional form of insurance of helping members who were severely affected by natural disasters, sickness, death and other ceremonies. Water and sanitation see such projects as spring box (in communities with severe shortage of water), clearing of the roads and filtering of the stream during rainy seasons. Educational activities revolved around distribution of books in primary schools and supports to teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS/CONCLUSION

Women's role in development process through participation in Community Development has increasingly gained significance over the years. The zeal of the women to break through the cycle of poverty imposed on them by the poor state of the rural communities in Nigeria has been demonstrated by their commitment to the self-help through membership in organisations and cooperatives. These efforts as we can see are not paying off as expected due to a variety of constraints afflicting them as women and their organisations. Principal among these problems are those emanating from their socio-economic characteristics.

For example 38.5% of the women have no formal education at all while 37.5% had only primary education. This necessarily determines the types of jobs women could do and by implications the amount of income earned by them. These three variables – education, employment and income – have been known to determine to a greater extent, the level of success of the women groups since these will determine the types of

projects such group of women could undertake to enable them actualize their desire for higher standard of living. The study result also shows that membership of most of the organisations/co-operatives were between 10-50 and since the funding of the organisations' projects came mainly from members donations, this further enforce the speculation that the effectiveness of these organisations/cooperatives for ensuring better standard of living is very low. From the various projects undertaken by the women organisations/cooperatives in the study area, none seem to identify and address the fundamental problems militating against them and their organizations that is the development of their potentials. Their efforts were centred instead around increase in income generating capacity (51.2%), religious and social obligations. They forget themselves because there is no single programme devoted to the training and retraining of women in terms of women training centres, village/county libraries or adult education training centres. Since these are vital and indispensable issues to getting women into the mainstream of development process, the following recommendations are made:

- Women and their organisations should begin to think of developing their capacity by concentrating on training and retraining programmes and keying into the government project of adult/girl child education. This will mean investing in people as a strategy to the rapid reduction in poverty.
- The study results show that about 63.5% of the women were involved in farming and trading; and with the recent realities of climate change there is need to train women on how to develop their coping mechanisms to problems of climate change.
- Another major issue derivable from this study is the level of awareness of scourges like HIV/AIDS, Cancer, Tuberculosis, etc among these illiterate women. Studies have shown disparities in knowledge and information on HIV/AIDS between urban and rural communities in the world. For effective control/reduction in the number of women affected by this diseases there should be re-focus of attention on the rural communities.
- Government should come in and strengthen these

organizations through the provision of soft loans and macro-credit in addition to effective rural development programmes.

In conclusion and in line with the theme of this conference, we in the higher education sector should not just go home but should develop a network that will focus on the rural areas and specifically women in small communities of the developing countries. Now is the time for action and women should stop acting like the black sheep in the poem:

Ba - ba black sheep

Have you any wool?

Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full

One for the master (husband)

One for the kids (children)

One for the little girl who lives down the street (community)

but none for the sheep who produced the wool.

REFERENCES

- Agbola T (1990). "Women, Self-Actualisation and Theories of Development" *African Urban Quarterly*, 5 (1&2) pp. 170-175.
- Agbola T (1994). "NGOs and Community Development in Urban Areas: A Nigerian Case-Study" *Cities* 11(1) pp.59-67.
- Alabi IO (1987). "Community Participation in Development: A case of Irepodun Local Government Area, Oyo State" unpublished URP Dissertation, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- Anikpo M (2000). "Perspectives in Gender Studies and Women Development Programmes" Agenda for the new millennium. Keynote Discussion paper at the 1st Gender Studies Conference organised by the Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt May 11-13, 2000.
- Annabel R (1994). Women and the Environment, Women World Development Series, Zed Books Ltd, London .
- Atser J, Ekong F (2010). "European Union and the MPP6 in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. An overview" *J. Environment and Design* 5(1) pp 46-51.
- Christen JA, Robinson JW (1989). "*Community Development in perspectives*", IOWA State University Press, Ames IOWA.
- Ekong EE (2010). *Rural Sociology: An Introduction and Analysis of Rural Nigeria* (3rd ed.), Dove Educational Publishers Uyo, Nigeria.
- Ekong EW, Olowu TA (2002). Women access to Agricultural Production resources in Akwa Ibom State Nigeria *Journal of Rural Sociology*. 4(1) pp. 85-90.
- Ekong FU (1998). Poverty Profile of Akwa Ibom State and Its Implications for Housing Affordability, Unpublished MURP Dissertation, Centre for Urban Regional Planning, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- Flora LB, Flora JL (1993). "Enterpreneurial Social Infrastructure: a necessary Ingredient" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 539 : 48-58.
- INSTRAW (1970). International Research and Training Institute for the Development of Women Studies Series, United Nations. Investors Digest. 3(6) p. 33.
- Marcia CL (1974). *The Community: Approaches and Applications*, London, Free Press.
- National Population Commission (1991). 1991 Census Federal Republic of Nigeria, Lagos, Nigeria.
- National Population Commission (2009). *Legal Notice on Publication of 2006 Census Final Results*, Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, Federal Government Printer, Abuja.
- Shaffer RE (1989). "Community Economics". *Economic Structure and Change in Smaller Communities*, IOWA State University Press, Ames, IOWA.
- Ukpong EA (2006). "Rural Women in Food Production: A Review of Agricultural Policies in Cross River State; In: Ebong, M. O (ed.) *Mobilisation of Resources for Rural Development in Nigeria* (2nd ed) MABASS Printing Company, Calabar, Nigeria.