



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation.

Influence of Gender Discrimination Practices on Women Participation in Community Development Activities among Ogoni People of Rivers State

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2582-7138

Volume: 06

Issue: 02

March-April 2025

Received: 13-01-2024

Accepted: 14-02-2024

Page No: 189-195

Abstract

This study examined the influence of gender discrimination practices on women participation in community development activities among Ogoni People of Rivers State. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 3,700 community leaders and women from community-based women organizations. They comprised 1,080 community leaders and 2,620 women from community-based women organizations who participated in community development programmes organized by the four Local Government Areas in Ogoni. The sample size of the study was 351 respondents determined by using Krejcie and Morgan table of sample size determination. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to sample the 352 respondents. The study used a self-designed questionnaire for data collection. The instruments were validated by three experts from Rivers State University. A test of internal consistency was carried out using Cronbach Alpha method to determine the reliability of the instrument. Reliability coefficients of 0.81, 0.89 and 0.91 were obtained for the three sections of the instrument respectively. From the data analyzed, the findings of the study revealed that tackling gender discrimination and promoting women's active involvement in community development are imperative for achieving broader socio-economic progress and equality among the Ogoni people of Rivers State. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among other things that the Rivers State Government and Local Government Councils in Ogoni should implement programmes that encourage and support women to take up leadership roles in community development activities. Also, leadership training workshops and mentorship programmes should be organized to build women's confidence and skills for leadership.

Keywords: Gender Discrimination, Women, Participation, Community Development Activities

Introduction

Gender discrimination is a global phenomenon that hinders the full participation of women in socio-economic, political, and community development activities. It is often deeply entrenched in cultural practices, institutional structures, and societal norms. In Nigeria, particularly in rural communities such as among the Ogoni People of Rivers State, women face significant barriers to participating in community development initiatives. These barriers are sustained by discriminatory practices in leadership, parental inheritance, decision-making processes, education, and economic empowerment. Over the years, women's representation in management and leadership roles in state and non-governmental institutions has been lacking. Not only have women's rights advocates expressed a great deal of worry about this issue, but regional and international organizations have also led to pressure for reforms in the shape of laws and regulations. Many women have experienced an increase in unemployment, poverty, underemployment, and helplessness because of this tendency (Osadebe, 2014) ^[8]. There have been numerous reports on women's limited participation in community development initiatives, which include cultural views on women's labor, family responsibilities, and a lack of equivalent education and skill training to their male counterparts (Bird *et al.*, 2015).

According to Okon and Essien (2023) ^[14], the male-dominated nature of African civilization makes it highly challenging for women to participate actively in community development. It is impossible to overstate the importance of women in the process of community development. In addition to their roles in reproduction and food production, women make up a significant portion of the industrial work force. According to Uko and Orji (2023) ^[17], cultural perceptions that men are more capable of leading than women are prevalent in the Niger Delta region, perpetuating gender inequities. Leadership exclusion denies women the ability to contribute their unique perspectives to communal governance, thus limiting the diversity and inclusivity of development initiatives. Hence, a low representation of women in Nigerian politics.

According to common customs, inheritance is the transfer of assets or money from parents or ancestors to their children. Legally speaking, both movable and immovable property that a person's ancestors have given them are often covered by the law of inheritance or property rights (Saleh, Sati and David, 2022) ^[15]. Sons are cherished and naturally inherit the family name and inheritance from generation to generation, according to the logic of male choice. Following their marriage, the daughters are viewed as guests and strangers living in the household. Allowing women to inherit entails tearing up the assets and giving them to strangers (George & Ukpong, 2013) ^[5]. The issue of inheritance rights significantly contributes to economic disparities between men and women in Ogoni LGAs. Patriarchal norms often deny women access to land and other forms of parental inheritance, which are critical resources for economic empowerment. Okafor (2023) ^[7] argue that discriminatory inheritance practices not only perpetuate economic dependency among women but also restrict their ability to invest in community development projects. This situation is compounded by weak legal frameworks and societal resistance to policy reforms that would ensure equitable inheritance rights for women.

In many African communities, including those in the Niger Delta, decision-making processes are predominantly controlled by men. This marginalization is particularly evident among the Ogoni people of Rivers State, where cultural norms often prioritize male opinions in communal discussions. Women are frequently relegated to secondary roles or excluded entirely, a phenomenon documented by Amadi and Worgu (2022) ^[11]. This exclusion has far-reaching consequences, as it limits women's ability to advocate for their needs and priorities in community development planning. Inclusive decision-making, according to Akinyemi and Ojo (2022) ^[2], is essential for fostering holistic and sustainable development outcomes.

Community development thrives on the active participation of all members, yet gender discrimination among the indigenous people of Ogoni undermines this principle. Women's exclusion from leadership, decision-making, and economic opportunities not only marginalizes them but also hampers overall community progress. Sustainable development, as conceptualized by the United Nations, hinges on inclusivity and equity. Nwosu *et al.* (2023) ^[11] argue that addressing gender disparities is integral to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). The pervasive influence of gender discrimination on women's participation in community development activities in Ogoni LGAs underscores the need for urgent interventions. Discriminatory practices in leadership, inheritance, decision-making,

education, and economic empowerment create systemic barriers that limit women's potential participation in community development activities. The problem with this situation is that the lack of women participation in the community development process stands against the attainment of the 2030 Global Development Goals. According to MeinzenDick, Quisumbing, Doss and Theis (2019) ^[6], women's participation in community development projects stands as a vital component of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which strive for gender equality, inclusion and sustainable development. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing strategies to promote gender equity and enhance women's contributions to community development. By addressing these challenges, stakeholders can pave the way for more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes in these communities. It is against this background that this study critically examines the influence of gender discrimination practices on women's participation in community development activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State.

Purpose of the study

This study examined the influence of gender discrimination practices on women's participation in community development activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State. The specific objectives of this research were to:

1. Find out the extent to which discrimination against women in occupying leadership positions influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni People of Rivers State.
2. Determine the extent to which discrimination against women in sharing from parental inheritance influence their participation in community development activities. Among Ogoni People of Rivers State.
3. Examine the extent to which discrimination against women in decision making process influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni People of Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does discrimination against women in occupying leadership positions influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni People of Rivers State?
2. To what extent does discrimination against women in sharing from parental inheritance influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni People of Rivers State?
3. To what extent does discrimination against women in decision making process influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni people of Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 significance level:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and women on how discrimination against women in occupying leadership positions influence their participation in community development activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and women on how discrimination against women in sharing from parental inheritance influence their participation in community development

- activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State.
- There is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and women on how discrimination against women in decision making process influence their participation in community development activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State.

Method

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 3,700 community leaders and women from community-based women organizations. They comprised 1,080 community leaders and 2,620 women from community-based women organizations who participated in community development programmes organized by the Local Government Areas in Ogoni. The sample size of the study was 351 respondents determined by using Krejcie and Morgan table of sample size determination. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to sample the 351 respondents. The instrument for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by the three experts, one in Measurement and Evaluation and two others in Adult Education and Community Development in Rivers State University. A test of internal consistency was carried out using the Cranach Alpha method to determine the reliability of the instrument.

A reliability coefficient of 0.84, 0.88 and 0.92, were obtained for the three sections of the instrument respectively. This shows that the instrument is reliable for study. For easy comparison of variables, the data gathered from the questionnaire were analyzed using mean and standard deviation statistics to answer the research questions. For easy comparison of variables, the data gathered from the questionnaire was analyzed using mean and standard deviation statistics to answer the research questions. Since the items were rated on a modified 4 point Likert scale, the decision rule for the research questions was based on the following rating scale: Very High Extent- 3.50-4.00, High Extent- 2.50-3.49, Low Extent- 1.50-2.49 and Very Low Extent- 1.49 and below A criterion mean of 2.50 was used to determine if a mean score indicates accepted or rejected. Therefore, any item whose mean score is less than 2.5 was rejected, while those with mean score of 2.5 were accepted as positive responses. The hypotheses were tested using z-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does discrimination against women in occupying leadership positions influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni People of Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Response on influence of Discrimination against Women in Occupying Leadership

S/N	Items	Women N = 207			Community Leaders N=145		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1	To what extent are women excluded from leadership positions during community development activities?	3.25	0.90	HE	3.22	0.91	HE
2	To what extent do cultural beliefs prevent women from heading community projects in your community	2.45	1.14	HE	3.71	1.53	VHE
3	To what extent do men dominate leadership positions during community development activities	3.99	0.89	VHE	3.41	1.00	HE
4	To what extent does traditional norms undermine women's leadership capabilities during community development activities	3.49	0.89	HE	3.45	1.00	HE
5	To what extent do women leaders face resistance from their male counterparts during community development activities	2.98	1.13	VHE	2.94	1.15	HE
6	To what extent are women denied opportunities to lead community development initiatives in your community	2.44	1.41	HE	3.66	1.43	VHE
7	To what extent do traditional customs limit women's access to leadership training during community development activities in your community	3.11	0.95	HE	3.14	0.97	HE
8	To what extent are women's leadership roles restricted to women-only groups in your community	2.98	1.10	HE	2.93	1.12	VHE
Grand Mean		3.22		HE	3.34		HE

Table 1 above on research question one shows the mean responses of community leaders and women from community-based women organizations on the influence of discrimination against women in occupying leadership positions and their participation in community development activities among Ogoni people of Rivers State. The grand Mean scores of 3.22 and 3.34 for women and community leaders respectively falls within the decision mean of 2.50-3.49. This indicates that both groups agreed that to a high

extent discrimination against women in occupying leadership positions influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni people of Rivers State.

Research Question 2: To what extent does discrimination against women in sharing from parental inheritance influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni People of Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Response on Influence of Discrimination against Women in Parental Inheritance and their Participation in Community Development Activities

S/N	Items	Women N = 207			Community Leaders N=145		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
9	To what extent does denying women of inheritance affect their participation in community development activities	3.63	0.58	HE	3.57	0.60	VHE
10	To what extent are male children given preference as beneficiaries of community development projects in your community	3.22	0.97	HE	3.12	1.00	HE
11	To what extent do traditional inheritance laws favor men over women in benefiting from community development activities	3.25	1.22	HE	3.13	1.27	HE
12	To what extent does loss of parental inheritance rights upon marriage militate against women participation in community development activities	3.57	0.69	HE	3.49	0.72	HE
13	To what extent does denying women right to their husband property militate against their participation in community development activities	3.35	0.86	HE	3.27	0.89	HE
14	To what extent are Women's rights legally protected during communities' development activities?	3.76	0.54	HE	3.96	0.66	VHE
	Grand Mean	3.09		HE	3.42		HE

Table 2 above on research question two shows the mean responses of community leaders and women from community-based women organizations on the influence of discrimination against women in benefiting from parental inheritance and their participation in community development activities among Ogoni people of Rivers State. The grand mean scores of 3.09 and 3.42 for women and community leaders respectively fall within the decision mean of 2.50-3.49. This indicates that both groups agreed that to a

high extent discrimination against women in benefiting from parental inheritance influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni people of Rivers State.

Research Question 3: To what extent does discrimination against women in decision making process influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni people of Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean Response on influence of Discrimination against Women in Decision Making Process and their Participation in Community Development Activities

S/N	Items	Women N = 207			Community Leaders N=145		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
15	To what extent are women excluded from decision-making meetings during planning for community development projects	3.45	1.41	HE	3.38	1.43	HE
16	To what extent are women's opinions not valued during implementation of community development projects	3.22	0.16	HE	2.88	1.06	HE
17	To what extent do men dominate decision-making processes in utilization of community projects	2.77	1.14	HE	2.58	1.12	HE
18	To what extent are women's suggestions often ignored during mobilization for community development projects	2.72	1.13	HE	2.96	1.03	HE
19	To what extent does cultural norms restrict women's voice in decision-making during community development activities	2.63	1.15	VHE	2.56	1.12	HE
20	To what extent are women not consulted on important community matters during community development activities	2.44	1.16	HE	2.69	1.17	VHE
22	To what extent do traditional practices limit women's role in decision-making during community development activities	3.35	1.41	HE	3.38	1.43	HE
23	To what extent are women's participation in decision-making for community projects seen as challenging authority of men in your community	2.32	0.16	HE	2.88	1.06	HE
	Grand Mean	2.90		HE	2.99		HE

Table 3 above on research question three shows the mean responses of community leaders and women from community-based women organizations on the influence of discrimination against women in decision making and their participation in community development activities among Ogoni people of Rivers State. The grand mean scores of 2.90 and 2.99 for women and community leaders respectively falls within the decision mean of 2.50-3.49. This indicates that

both groups agreed that to a high extent discrimination against women in decision making process influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni people of Rivers State.

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and women on how discrimination against women in occupying leadership positions influence

their participation in community development activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State.

Table 4: Analysis of Hypothesis 1 Using the Z-test Statistics

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	Z-cal	Z-crit	SL	Decision
Women	207	3.22	1.04	350	1.07	+1.96	0.05	Significant
Community Leaders	145	3.47	1.06					

Table 4 above shows that z-calculated value of 1.07 is less than the z-critical value of +1.96 at 0.05 significant level for 350 degrees of freedom indicating that, there is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and women on how discrimination against women in occupying leadership positions influence their participation in community development activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted

and the alternate hypothesis rejected

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and women on how discrimination against women in sharing from parental inheritance influence their participation in community development activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State.

Table 5: Analysis of Hypothesis 2 Using the Z-test Statistics

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	Z-cal	Z-crit	SL	Decision
Women	207	3.09	0.80	350	0.50	+1.96	0.05	Significant
Community Leaders	145	3.42	0.81					

Table 5 above shows that Z-calculated value of 0.50 is less than the Z-critical value of +1.96 at 0.05 significant level for 350 degree of freedom indicating that, there is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and women on how discrimination against women in sharing from parental inheritance influence their participation in community development activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted and

the alternate hypothesis rejected.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and women on how discrimination against women in decision making process influence their participation in community development activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State.

Table 6: Analysis of Hypothesis 3 Using the Z-test Statistics

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	Z-cal	Z-crit	SL	Decision
Women	207	2.90	1.16	350	0.32	+1.96	0.05	Significant
Community Leaders	145	2.99	1.08					

Table 6 above shows that Z-calculated value of 0.32 is less than the Z-critical value of +1.96 at 0.05 significant level for 350 degree of freedom indicating that, there is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and women on how discrimination against women in decision making process influence their participation in community development activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted and the alternate hypothesis rejected.

Discussion of results

The results of the findings in research question one indicates that to a high extent, discrimination against women in occupying leadership positions influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni People of Rivers State. The corresponding hypothesis indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and women on how discrimination against women in occupying leadership positions influence their participation in community development activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Nwosu and Agbasi (2022) ^[10] when they revealed that in Nigeria, women occupy less than 20% of leadership positions in rural community development organizations. This underrepresentation is attributed to entrenched cultural beliefs that perceive women as incapable of leading effectively. Similarly, Eze and Nwankwo (2023) ^[4] observed that women are often excluded from key decision-making processes due to gender biases, further perpetuating inequalities in resource allocation and project

implementation. Amadi and Worgu (2022) ^[1] notes that in traditional African societies, leadership is perceived as a male prerogative, with women's involvement limited to auxiliary roles. Nwachukwu and Okeh (2023) ^[9]. Opined that even when women are allowed to participate in leadership, they are often assigned roles with minimal influence, such as secretarial or support positions, rather than decision-making roles. These practices hinder their capacity to advocate for gender-responsive development policies.

The results of the findings in research question two indicates that to a high extent, discrimination against women in benefiting from parental inheritance influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni People of Rivers State. The corresponding hypothesis indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and women on how discrimination against women in benefiting from parental inheritance influence their participation in community development activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State. This agrees with the findings of Nwosu (2023) ^[11] who found out that women who are denied land inheritance are less likely to engage in income-generating activities, limiting their contributions to local development projects. Economic empowerment is closely linked to women's ability to participate in decision-making and leadership roles. Eberechi and Amadi (2022) ^[2] note that economically disempowered women are often excluded from community development activities, as they lack the resources and influence to contribute meaningfully. This exclusion reinforces gender inequalities and undermines the potential for inclusive

development. The exclusion of women from inheritance rights not only affects their individual well-being but also has broader implications for community development. Women play a critical role in addressing issues such as education, health care, and environmental sustainability, which are central to community development. However, their exclusion from inheritance limits their ability to invest in these areas. Okafor and Adebayo (2023) ^[12] argue that women with access to inherited resources are more likely to invest in community development initiatives, such as cooperative societies, educational programs, and health care services.

The results of the findings in research question three indicates that to a high extent, discrimination against women in decision making process influence their participation in community development activities among Ogoni People of Rivers State. The corresponding hypothesis indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and women on how discrimination against women in decision making process influence their participation in community development activities among the Ogoni People of Rivers State. This is in line with the findings of Uche and Chika (2023) ^[16] who argued that inclusive decision-making enhances community development outcomes by ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered. For example, women are often more attuned to issues such as maternal health, child education, and water and sanitation, which are critical to community well-being. However, their exclusion from decision-making processes limits the incorporation of these priorities into development plans. Eze and Nwankwo (2023) ^[4] highlight that patriarchal norms often dictate that men dominate decision-making roles, relegating women to peripheral or passive roles. This marginalization excludes women from shaping policies and initiatives that address community development issues. Amadi and Okeke (2022) ^[1] assert that the perception of women as less capable decision-makers perpetuates their exclusion. This bias is particularly evident in rural communities, where traditional customs dictate male dominance in family and community matters. In their view, these practices not only suppress women's voices but also limit the diversity of perspectives in decision-making, leading to less inclusive development outcomes. However, Eberechi and Amadi (2022) ^[2] document cases where women-led initiatives in rural Nigerian communities led to significant improvements in health and education outcomes, highlighting the importance of their involvement in decision-making.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that deeply rooted cultural norms and systemic inequalities continue to marginalize women, limiting their contributions to community development initiatives. Discrimination in leadership roles, restricted access to decision-making processes, denial of parental inheritance, limited educational opportunities, and economic disempowerment are all significant barriers that perpetuate gender disparities in these areas. Despite these challenges, the study also highlights the resilience of women and the potential for positive change when gender-inclusive policies and practices are implemented. Promoting women's participation in community development requires a multi-faceted approach that includes advocacy for gender equality, legal reforms to address discriminatory inheritance and property rights, and programs to enhance women's access to education, leadership training, and economic resources. Addressing these issues will not only empower women but also

contribute to more inclusive and sustainable community development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. The Rivers State Government and Local Government Councils in Ogoni should implement programmes that encourage and support women to take up leadership roles in community development activities. Leadership training workshops and mentorship programmes should be organized to build women's confidence and skills for leadership.
2. The Rivers State Ministry of Justice should collaborate with traditional councils to enforce statutory laws that protect women's inheritance rights. Awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate families and communities about the legal entitlements of women to inherit property.
3. Community leaders and local governments should institutionalize policies that mandate the inclusion of women in decision-making bodies for community development. This can be achieved through gender quotas and the establishment of women-led committees.

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