

Grassroots Development Strategies and Rural Dwellers Wellbeing: The Women-centered Approach in Southern Cross River State, Nigeria.

By

Bassey, Glory Eteng
gloryeteng@yahoo.com**Ede, Victor Itita**
victorede85@gmail.com**Department of Social Work, University of Calabar, Calabar****Abstract**

The study examined development strategies and rural dwellers wellbeing, from the perspective of women in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined local women strategies in the areas of initiating vocational skill acquisition for small scale enterprises and encouraging membership in the cooperative society and their impact on wellbeing of rural dwellers. The quantitative and qualitative survey design were adopted. A 16-item questionnaire complemented by a 10-item Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide. With the aid of Taro Yamene (1967) the sample size of the study (for both quantitative and qualitative) was 1,648 from the population of 579,087 adult rural women selected through multistage sampling technique in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State. The generated data were tested using descriptive and parametric statistic using ANOVA and Independent t-Test. The result revealed among others that women development strategies of vocational skills acquisition for small enterprises and membership in cooperative significantly impacts on the wellbeing of rural dwellers. It was concluded that grassroots women-initiated development strategies enhanced the wellbeing of rural dwellers. The study recommended that more rural dwellers should be encouraged to engage in small scale and medium enterprises in order to foster their wellbeing.

Keywords: Grassroots development strategies, women approach, rural dwellers' wellbeing, Cross River State

Introduction

Wellbeing at the individual, family and community levels in all its dimensions is the primary objective of all development efforts. Specifically, the optimal functioning of the individual is tied to wellbeing. Wellbeing implies accessing societal resources, benefiting to a very significant extent from education, health, political and economic advantages. Achieving wellbeing translates to an improvement in quality of fundamental needs; economic progress contributing higher values at individuals and communities' levels together with significant expansion of choices (Thirlwall, 2021). Anam (2020) stressed that the rural economy consistently manifests socio-economic challenges such as low income, subsistence living, poor housing, poor source of potable water, low level of food security (due to land fragmentation and land tenure system, adversely affecting agricultural production) lack of basic infrastructure etc. The concern for improving the lives of rural dwellers has motivated governmental interventions for the past decades.

Nigeria's historical period between 1960 and 1985 witnessed the emergence of National Development Plans. In the 1970s were programmes and projects to stimulate grassroots socio-economic

development. The Green Revolution, for instance, was initiated in this era (Ihejiamaizu,2018). These programmes and projects were administration specific in that they did not outlive regimes that designed them. Also, past development efforts seemed to have concentrated on a lopsided platform, neglecting a vital labour force and sector in the nation. The role of women, especially the poor rural dwellers, has been regarded as unimportant in the socio-economic development of Nigeria (Nkpoyen, 2018). The role and status of rural women in overall development at local and national levels have not been adequately recognized. Moreover, as observed by Udobia (2013) more than 31 million people reside and work in rural areas; 70 per cent of these are women, and 51 per cent of those rural dwellers live below the poverty level (International Labour Organization, 2022).

Women constitute a veritable engine of development that cannot be ignored. Apart from being involved in agricultural production, rural women carry water for domestic purposes, collect firewood from the bush as fuel for cooking; process and prepare food for the family; nurture children and care for the aged. In most homes they take major decisions as household heads (Ogidefa, 2020). Rural women development activities have the potential to contribute towards improving socio-economic wellbeing. Encouraging and supporting membership in cooperative ventures (such as farmers' cooperatives, retailers, producers, etc.) provide opportunity for sustainable enterprise promotion in rural areas. Women cooperatives ensure economic security, financial integrity, acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, thus contributing to the wellbeing of rural dwellers. Also, besides producing and nurturing infants, the rural women contribute to the emotional work of maintaining a family and its social network. Thus, their strategy in domestic management cannot be underestimated. Their activities here have been translated to the well-being of families and rural communities. Their roles in water fetching, sanitation, firewood collection, food processing and preparation, childcare and upbringing, and household repairs are the production and maintenance of the next generation and their human capital.

The wellbeing of rural dwellers in has assumed the enormous attention and interest of rural sociologists, community development experts and other concerned stakeholders. Rural dwellers lack access to economic resources, essential services, markets, poverty, hunger, and inequality. Apart from disadvantages experienced in the purely economic dimension, these rural dwellers cannot meet basic needs and cannot participate in economic, social, civil, and political life (Nkpoyen & Bassey, 2013). In materially backward societies women's economic and social roles remain underestimated both statistically and in policy formulation. This is a significant oversight, notwithstanding that they dominate the rural population. Improving the wellbeing and prosperity of rural dwellers may be inextricably tied to grassroots' women development strategies. Although existing literature indicates that women's empowerment and equal opportunities are fundamental in reducing poverty, none has specifically examined grassroots development strategies and wellbeing of rural dwellers from the women centered perspective in Cross River State, Nigeria. This present study filled up this knowledge gap. The question that this study answered was: to what extent is wellbeing of rural dwellers in Southern Senatorial District linked to women centered grassroots development strategy?

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What is the influence of the type of vocational skill acquired on wellbeing of rural dwellers?
- ii. (ii)What is the influence of membership in cooperative societies on wellbeing of rural dwellers

Objectives

The study investigated grassroots development strategy and wellbeing of rural dwellers: women centered approach in communities of southern Cross River State, Nigeria. It:

- i. Investigate the influence of the type of vocational skills acquired on wellbeing of rural dwellers.
- ii. Determined the influence of encouraging membership in in cooperative society on wellbeing of rural dwellers.

Research Hypotheses

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

- i. There is no significant influence of the type of vocational skill acquired on wellbeing of rural dwellers.
- ii. There is no significant influence of membership in cooperative societies on wellbeing of rural dwellers

Review of Related Literature

Today, achieving the sustainable development goals is inextricably tied to the activities of women. Their participation in the development process become an inevitable character of post-industrial society. However, in some societies, they have been subjected to various dimensions of marginalization. In development literature the available evidence shows that women, particularly in rural areas, play a significant role in helping to meet the core components of development (Akudo, 2012). Women farm, work for wages, provide food and custody essential community traditional knowledge (ILO, 2017). According to U.N. Women (2017), women have been involved in programmes to promote literacy, business skills, entrepreneurship and savings. Some are into cooperative such as cattle-raising cooperative, farmers' cooperative etc. These are indigenous women approaches. They are women's enduring and sustainable contributions to local development. These initiatives are bottom-up interventions as a response to governmental macro policies. These women harness and exploit available local resources for socio-economic sustenance (Fontana and Paciello, 2010). Socio-economic wellbeing is the cardinal goal of all processes of development. The ability to attain social and economic wellbeing facilitates the performance of the individual in the community, organizations and groups. Socio economic wellbeing is the consequence of improvement in basic needs and expansion of material conditions of life together with progressive political participation for better community life (Mehra & Rojas, 2018).

Smallholding farming is one area where the significance of women's socio-economic well-being in rural districts is mainly observed. Local food production is a central vehicle for ensuring the socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers (Marsden and Smith, 2003). The agricultural sector is the "seedbed" for the socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers. Agriculture is multi-functional in the socio-economic development process. Women are involved in this activity. The most basic one is the production of food and raw material for their consumption. An increase in women agricultural productivity can absorb the surplus population (Idisi, 2016). Rural women entrepreneurship initiative is about creating and building something of value from local resources (Umoh, 2019). The women entrepreneurs have innovative behaviour and employ strategic management practices in their micro-businesses. As entrepreneurs, rural women can create an enterprise where none existed before. They can produce a combination of ideas, skills, little money, equipment and market to make an enterprise successful (Umoh, 2009). Entrepreneurial initiatives of rural women have enhanced self-employment opportunities for women living in poverty. Well designed, though informal vocational training programmes by women Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in these communities has resulted in self-employment activities; women can escape the trap of low wage and low skill work. These entrepreneurial initiatives have helped to reduce the occupational segregation between rural women and men. Rural women have transformed impoverished rural communities (Watson, 2000). The promotion of small-scale enterprise is significantly linked to rural development. The entrepreneurial initiative is essential as means of guaranteeing families secure livelihoods and overall wellbeing.

Participation in cooperatives societies offers rural women the platform to play a vital role in developing the rural economies through accessibility to micro-credits for productive ventures. One of the merits is that it increases women's access to financial products, which translates to an increase in household income: this leads to improved wellbeing for rural women (Urowayini, 2022). Globally, women under the platform of cooperatives societies performs multiple functions especially providing farmers and entrepreneurs production financial capital (Ndifon, Agube & Odok, 2022). Nyong (2016). Rural cooperatives are intended to alleviate poverty by enhancing socio-economic wellbeing. It creates

opportunities for rural women to optimally engage in rural transformational process thus enhancing the living standard.

Theoretical Framework

Endogenous development model constituted the framework. The model is associated with Bassand, Brugger, Bryden, Friedman and Stuckey (1986). The endogenous development model conceives development as a function of the utilization of the available resources found in the particular environment. The model sees development as territorially oriented at the micro level; benefits of development are meant for retention in the locality since the human and physical resources needed for the development process are extracted from the environment; development is localized based on the values, sentiments, capacity and the ethos of the ecology. The implication is that have the local people have the potential to assume responsibility for initiating the development activities that are in consonance with the peculiarities of their ecology. This means that rural women are empowered to unlock local resources as initiatives in food security, entrepreneurship, traditional health care services etc. These initiatives by the local people are ways of protecting rural values and enhancing the quality of rural condition.

Materials and Method

The research design adopted both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The designs allowed the researcher to adopt multiple methods of data collection. The researchers can triangulate the participants' response to the quantitative data with that of the qualitative. Primary data were obtained using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: section A elicited responses on socio demographic profile of respondents, section B, elicited responses on the independent variables while Section b addressed the dependent variable. The questionnaire was developed in a Likert Scale format and Focus Group Discussion guide. Before distributing both verbal and written consent as obtained from the respondents before the respondents were given the instrument.

The study area was the Southern Senatorial District with Biase, Akamkpa, Odukpani, Calabar South, Calabar Municipality, Akpabuyo and Bakassi, as local government areas with a population of 3,568,500 (National Population Commission, 2016 Population Projection). The women in these rural communities are very enterprising and have, over the years, identified themselves with several dimensions of economic endeavours. The study population comprised all adult women between the ages of 18 to 50 years inhabitants of the seven (7) local government areas, 579,087 (National Population Commission, 2016 projection). To determine the sample size, Taro Yamene (1967) formula was used. By computing with the formula, each Local Government Area yielded 399 approximated to 400 respondents. Thus, the sample for the study was made up of 1600 respondents selected from 4 out of the seven (7) local government areas (LGAs) and twenty-four (24) villages.

The study comprised rural women ranging from literate to non-literate farmers, traders, businesswomen, women engaged in fishing, community workers and the unemployed who reside in this study area irrespective of their status in their communities. The multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for the study. Firstly, the seven LGAs that make up the southern senatorial district constituted the seven strata of the study. The researcher studied only half of LGAs. This translated into four (4) which constituted the four minor strata. Thus, $\frac{1}{2}$ of the LGAs was selected using simple random sampling method. This yielded a total of 4 LGAs or strata.

Since the primary concern was on rural communities, the researcher purposively selected rural communities in these minor strata. The researcher picked $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of existing communities per minor stratum. This yielded between 5-8 communities because the communities are not uniform in numbers (that is, some communities are more in number than others). These constituted the clusters of the study. 24 rural districts (clusters) were selected. The actual respondents of the study were obtained by systematic random sampling procedure. Since the research focus was on women indigenous development strategies, only rural women were purposively selected. So, in a particular household, only one adult woman participated. The researcher selected five per cent (5%) of the respondents per cluster for all the 24 clusters. Because the population of each cluster is not homogenous, the proportionate to size sampling was adopted (that is, the number of

respondents being proportional to the overall population). This explained the differences in the number of respondents per cluster; some had more respondents while others had fewer. This yielded a total of 1600 respondents who participated in the study. One focus group discussion (FGD) was carried out per stratum, yielding a total of 4 FGDs. Since the maximum number per session was 12, this yielded a total of 48 participants. Therefore, the total number of respondents was one thousand six hundred and forty-eight. Two instruments (questionnaire and focus group discussion) used for data collection were subjected to face and content validity by Test and Measurement experts in the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar. The reliability of the instruments was ascertained through test re-test carried out with 50 adult women between the ages of 18 and 50 years in two Local Government Areas in Cross River State Northern Senatorial District. A Cronbach Alpha value of 0.70 and above was considered acceptable for internal consistency.

Presentation of results

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant influence of the type of vocational skill acquired on the socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and One-Way ANOVA Showing the Influence of Type of Vocational Skill Acquired on the Socio-Economic Wellbeing of Rural Dwellers (N = 1,600)

Vocational skills Acquired	N	Mean	SD
Arts and craft	666	44.9694	8.05618
Fashion designing	521	43.9735	8.92674
Home cleaning	155	42.4740	11.03229
Other skills	258	44.5595	9.62319
Totals	1600	44.6071	10.26157

One- Way ANOVA Result

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean squares (MS)	F	Sig.(p)
Between Groups	11,428.536	3	477.179	5.227	.005*
Within Groups	145,399.884	1,596	91.103		
Total	146,828.420	1,599			

*Significant at $p < .05$

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) examining the influence of the type of vocational skill acquired on the socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers. The descriptive results reveal variations in wellbeing across the different vocational skill categories. Beneficiaries who acquired Arts and Craft skills recorded the highest mean score on socio-economic wellbeing ($M = 44.9694$, $SD = 8.05618$), indicating that they experienced the greatest improvement in their overall wellbeing. This was followed by respondents who acquired Other Skills ($M = 44.5595$, $SD = 9.62319$) and those trained in Fashion Designing ($M = 43.9735$, $SD = 8.92674$). Respondents who acquired Home Cleaning skills recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 42.4740$, $SD = 11.03229$), suggesting comparatively lower socio-economic wellbeing outcomes.

To determine whether these observed differences were statistically significant, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The result showed a statistically significant difference in socio-economic wellbeing among beneficiaries of the various vocational skill categories, $F(3, 1596) = 5.227$, $p = .001$. Since the obtained probability value (.001) is less than the alpha level of .05, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The implication of this finding is that the type of vocational skill acquired significantly influences the socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers. Specifically, beneficiaries of Arts and Craft programmes appear to derive greater socio-economic benefits in terms of healthy living, housing improvement, income enhancement, and poverty reduction compared with beneficiaries of Home Cleaning, Fashion Designing, and some other vocational skill programmes. The finding underscores the importance of promoting vocational skill programmes with stronger income-generating potential and greater market demand as a strategy for improving rural livelihoods and enhancing socio-economic wellbeing.

Decision on Hypothesis 1: The null hypothesis stating that there is no significant influence of the type of vocational skill acquired on the socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers is **rejected**. Therefore, the type of vocational skill acquired has a significant influence on the socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers. Hypothesis 2: There is no significant influence of membership in cooperative societies on the socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Independent t-Test Analysis of Membership in Cooperative Society and Socio-Economic Wellbeing of Rural Dwellers (N = 1,600)

Wellbeing Indicators	Cooperative membership status	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Decision
Healthy living	Member	714	22.2577	2.93434	1.321	.056	Not significant
	Non member	886	20.5813	2.69078			
Housing	Member	714	22.9939	3.05236	4.280	.000*	Significant
	Non member	886	21.5732	2.88287			
Increased income	Member	714	22.1288	3.05770	4.445	.000*	Significant
	Non member	886	18.4472	3.08043			
Poverty reduction	Member	714	22.2209	2.85447	1.956	.058	Not significant
	Non member	886	22.4268	2.57475			
Overall socio-Economic Wellbeing	Member	714	44.6319	9.76049	5.480	.000*	Significant
	Non member	886	40.8130	8.97375			

Significant at p < .05; df = 1598

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and independent t-test analysis examining the influence of cooperative society membership on the socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers. The descriptive statistics reveal notable differences between members and non-members of cooperative societies across the various dimensions of wellbeing.

Regarding healthy living, members of cooperative societies recorded a higher mean score (M = 22.2577, SD = 2.93434) than non-members (M = 20.5813, SD = 2.69078), suggesting better health-related wellbeing among cooperative members. However, the independent t-test result showed that the observed difference was not statistically significant (t = 1.321, p = .056 > .05). This implies that cooperative membership does not significantly influence healthy living among rural dwellers.

For housing wellbeing, cooperative members obtained a higher mean score ($M = 22.9939$, $SD = 3.05236$) than non-members ($M = 21.5732$, $SD = 2.88287$). The independent t-test result revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups ($t = 4.280$, $p < .05$). This finding indicates that membership in cooperative societies significantly contributes to improved housing conditions among rural dwellers. In terms of income enhancement, members of cooperative societies recorded a substantially higher mean score ($M = 22.1288$, $SD = 3.05770$) compared to non-members ($M = 18.4472$, $SD = 3.08043$). The t-test result showed that this difference was statistically significant ($t = 4.445$, $p < .05$). This suggests that cooperative society membership plays a significant role in increasing the income levels of rural dwellers through improved access to credit facilities, savings schemes, and income-generating opportunities. Concerning poverty reduction, non-members recorded a marginally higher mean score ($M = 22.4268$, $SD = 2.57475$) than members ($M = 22.2209$, $SD = 2.85447$). Nevertheless, the t-test result indicated that the difference was not statistically significant ($t = 1.956$, $p = .058 > .05$). Therefore, cooperative membership does not significantly influence poverty reduction among the respondents.

With respect to overall socio-economic wellbeing, members of cooperative societies recorded a higher mean score ($M = 44.6319$, $SD = 9.76049$) than non-members ($M = 40.8130$, $SD = 8.97375$). The independent t-test result showed that the difference was statistically significant ($t = 5.480$, $p < .05$). This finding demonstrates that membership in cooperative societies significantly enhances the overall socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers. Overall, the results indicate that cooperative society membership exerts a positive influence on the socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers, particularly in the areas of housing improvement and income enhancement. Although no significant differences were observed in healthy living and poverty reduction, the significant difference in overall socio-economic wellbeing suggests that cooperative societies remain important mechanisms for promoting rural development, economic empowerment, and livelihood improvement.

Decision on Hypothesis 2

Since the probability value associated with the overall socio-economic wellbeing score ($p = .000$) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, membership in cooperative societies significantly influences the socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers. This finding underscores the importance of encouraging participation in cooperative societies as a strategy for improving living standards and fostering sustainable rural development.

Discussion

Analysis from the first objective revealed that grassroots women development strategy of initiating vocational skill acquisition for entrepreneurial promotion is positively associated with the wellbeing of rural dwellers. The involvement of women in entrepreneurship has greatly benefitted the community. Women who are now entrepreneurs have acquired managerial skills for community development. The calculated F-value for socioeconomic wellbeing in terms of Healthy living ($F=20.620$; $df=2$, 1598; $p < 0.05$), Housing ($F= 4.276$; $df=1598$; $p < 0.05$), increase income ($F = 5.665$; $df=1598$; $p < 0.05$), Reduction of poverty ($F= 4.276$; $df=1598$; $p < 0.05$), ($F = 4.255$; $df=1598$; $p < 0.05$) and overall socioeconomic wellbeing ($F = 3.222$; $df=1598$; $p < 0.05$) are each significant at 2, 1598; degree of freedom and .05 Alpha level. Thus, with this result, the type of vocational skill acquired positively translates into healthy living, housing, increase income and poverty reduction.

The findings agree with Udom (2011) that women's role in activating the small enterprise sector through vocational skill acquisition has significantly changed lives of rural people. The importance of local women vocational skills acquisition promotion has been stated by Noe (2004), who admitted that women locality development is important for socio-economic wellbeing. As proven by the study, Skill acquisition is an instrument of empowerment that seeks to provide the people with skills, vocations, and abilities to be involved in entrepreneurial activities such as soap making, hat making, sewing, etc. of this help to enhance socio-economic wellbeing. Focus Group Discussion was held in Biase local government area. The participants collectively reported that: We know the importance of self-employment for our young ones. Therefore, the campaign for the opening up of many skill acquisition centres where rural women could

acquire knowledge in hat making, fashion designing, hair making, bead making etc., is ongoing, so our women have participated fully well in the local production of goods and services (FGD). In Akamkpa, the FGD participants observed that the involvement of women in development activities locally has helped to better the general social and economic conditions of community life. “Our village women here can make various products such as hats, soap, pottery, cane chairs etc. which could be sold to raise money for the family's upkeep. The outcome of the vocational skills is the various hairdressing salons, beer parlours, patent medicine shops etc., sprout all over the community. Many of our women have been an apprentice in fashion designing establishment in urban areas. Now, they can design beautiful dresses” (FGD). In Esighi community in Akpabuyo local government area, the participants expressed optimism about the ability of the women to sustain their development efforts in their communities. According to them: As entrepreneurs, our women have been able to create new job opportunities for themselves and even their husbands. Their overall economic and social wellbeing has improved through their new sense of achievement in entrepreneurship. The days of idleness are gone. Now we are the breadwinners of our homes.

The result of the statistical analysis of the second objective revealed that grassroots women development strategy of encouraging membership in cooperative societies has a significant positive impact on rural socio-economic wellbeing. the calculated t-value for healthy living ($t = 1.321$; $df = 1598$; $p > 0.05$) is not significant, housing-related issues ($t = 4.280$; $df = 1598$; $p < 0.05$) was significant, income ($t = 4.445$; $df = 1598$; $p < 0.05$) was significant, poverty reduction ($t = 1.956$; $df = 1598$; $p > 0.05$) was not significant. However, the overall wellbeing of rural dwellers ($t = 5.480$; $df = 1598$; $p < 0.05$) was significant at .05 Alpha level. With the results, the membership status of cooperative society significantly influences the socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers.

The formation and management of cooperatives societies are vital instruments adopted to tackle the increasing challenges of rural neglect, poverty and deprivation. It is stressed that cooperative societies provide goods and services at a reasonable cost to both patrons and clients. The rural communities have benefitted both qualitatively and quantitatively from the activities of the rural woman. According to Elemi (2010), cooperatives contribute to food security by improving the self-help of women. Through cooperatives, rural women can better understand the development needs of their families and work towards meeting those needs. Most of these are met through women cooperatives. In the Focus Group Discussion carried out in various communities of Bakassi and Odukpani local government areas, all the groups agreed to the socio-economic wellbeing role of rural cooperatives: Cooperatives did not exist in our communities many years ago. But today, we have them such as poultry farmers' cooperatives, farmers' cooperatives, livestock cooperatives etc. The availability of cooperatives organizations has helped us live well both in our family and in our communities. Because we are cooperatives, we have become more independent, especially in economic aspects and responding to household needs. The quality of life locally has improved as we can now access loans to boost our businesses (FGD). In Biase, the discussants admitted thus: We are the new crop of rural entrepreneurs because of our participants in cooperatives. Our women are now better equipped to some extent to live independently without begging men every time. Our women are self-employed now and are breadwinners of the family. This community has made me understand that our women are very knowledgeable in handling health issues. They can traditionally access health care services themselves even when trained community health workers are unavailable. The women rely on themselves, and surprisingly, many deaths are not recorded as expected in rural environments like ours, where medical personnel are lacking. Those who are more knowledgeable are now able to enlighten others on healthy living. This has boosted health conditions of women and children (FGD). Participants from Odukpani community still expressed views similar to those from other areas within the study coverage. According to them: Our community has been used to herbal medicine. It is an integral part of our traditional practice. These medicines are available in our backyards. We prefer herbal medicine to 'western medicine' because it is not expensive to obtain. Its low cost. We use plants, seeds, roots, leaves, the bark of flowers as medicine. These work for us. We are surviving and living well.

Conclusion

Grassroots development strategies, the women approach have significantly enhanced the rural dwellers wellbeing in Southern Senatorial District, Cross River State, Nigeria. Strategies of involvement in initiating vocational skill acquisition for small scale enterprises and encouraging membership in cooperative societies have individually and collectively exerted significant impacts on rural dwellers wellbeing. Findings revealed that the outcomes of grassroots development strategies from women perspective have manifested in increased income, improved household food and nutrition security, enhanced educational opportunity, increased purchasing power, enhanced decision-making power, higher self-reliance access to health services, fulfilled household responsibility etc. Their involvement in vocational skill acquisition has afforded women the opportunity to utilize their potentials to positively affect community lives. Their strategy of encouraging membership in cooperative societies enables women to access savings and credit, thus facilitating a greater economic role in decision making in terms of optimizing their household welfare. The overall goal of grassroots development strategy is to mediate in rural poverty by strengthening their livelihoods. Thus, all cultural barriers such as land fragmentation and land tenure etc. should be dismantled.

Recommendations

The following recommendations was based on the findings

- i. Since the vocational skill acquisition for small enterprises have the potential to generate self – employment and improve household income, the government should step in to provide skill acquisition centers in rural communities to promote the women agenda.
- ii. Since membership in cooperative societies offers rural dwellers the platform to play a vital role in the development of the rural economies, the local government and Non- Government Organizations (NGOs) should embark on wider enlightenment and sensitization about the benefits of vocational skill acquisition and membership in cooperatives as development strategies for enhanced condition of rural dwellers.

References

- Agba, (2020). *Women self-help initiatives: A paradigmatic shift in rural development approach in Cross River State, Nigeria*.
- Akudo, C.O (2012) Empowering Nigerian Women in the 21st Century: Measuring the gap. Munich. GRIN Publishing GMAT. Retrieved on March 11, 2012 from <http://www.grin.com/en/e-book/192007/empowering-Nigerian-women-in-the-21st-century-measuring-the-gap>.
- Anam, B (2020) Understanding rural development- Concepts, theories and strategies, Calabar: Kings View Publishing House.
- Elemi, S.O. (2012) First Ladies involvement in poverty alleviation: appraisal *Journal of Agric-business and rural Development* 5, 2, 47-61
- Fontana, M &Paciello, C. (2018) Gender dimensions of rural and agricultural employment: differential pathways out of poverty: A Global perspective, In Gender dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: differentiated pathways out of poverty, Rome: FAO/IFAD/Ko
- Idisi, P. I. (1996) Involving women in sustainable agricultural production techniques: Critical points of note, In women and the Nigerian Environment, Ibadan: Voltage Publishers
- International Labour Organization (2022): Rural Skills Training: A generic manual on training for rural economic empowerment.
- International Labour Organization (2020): Thematic Labour overview, working in rural areas in the 21st century – Reality and prospectors of rural employment in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Kalia, B. T. (2012) Women economic empowerment and participation in agricultural production. *Journal of Sustainable development*, 14, 5, 24-37
- Marsden, I. W. & Smith, R. S. (2017) Community Organization and Poverty Reduction, London: Profile Books.

- Mehra, R & Rojas, M. H (2008) Women, food security and agriculture in a global market place: a significant place: a significant shift, International Center for Research on Development (ICRW).
- Ndifon, H. N., Agube, E. I., & Odok, G. N. (2022). Sustainability of Agricultural Cooperative Societies in Nigeria: The case of South-South Zone, Nigeria. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(2), 19. Retrieved from <http://www.richtmann.org/journal/index.php/mjss/article/view/10997>
- Nkpoen, F. (2008) Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and rural community development: A study of NDDC assisted Projects in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, Nigeria. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to Department of sociology, University of Calabar, Calabar.
- Nwaogu, N. J (2014) Women as catalysts for change, a paper presented at the workshop on women in Nigeria. 24-27, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.
- Nyong, E. E (2016) Creating an enabling environment for sustainable development of Niger Delta region, thematic workshop on sustainable development of the Niger Delta region, Port Harcourt.
- Obinna, T (2001) Community livelihood Resources and Development Implications. *Development in practice* 3, 2, 113-122.
- Ogidefa, I. (2020) Rural development in Nigeria; concept, approaches, challenges and prospect. Retrieved July 11, 2013 from <http://socyberty.com/issues/rural-development-in-nigeria-concept0approaches-challenges-and-prospect>.
- Okoye, C. O (2019) Women and rural development in Nigeria, University of Jos *Journal of Political Science*, 11, 11, 57-67.
- Sathiabama.I. (2012). Vocational Skill Development and Women Empowerment European Economic Review, 5, 3, 47-59.
- Thirlwall, A. P. (2021) Growth and Development, London: Macmillan Press.
- Udobia, M. (2013) An appraisal of women empowerment program in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *Journal of Sociology*, 12, 3, 22-41.
- Ukpong, B. A (2009) Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Roles of Women and Strategies for their improvement. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 10, 4, 269.
- U.N. Women Press Release (2017) Empowering rural and indigenous women to achieve food, security and nutrition: The CEDAN General recommendation 34 on the rights of rural women, organized by FAO, IFAD, WFP and OHCHR, March 15, www.unwomen.org/2017/09/un-women-fao-ifad-and-wfp-empowerment-of-women-in-rural-areas-is-pre
- Umar, M. Z (2003) Women empowerment and Nigeria's Development Perspective. Challenges and Prospects, *Journal of Research in National Development* 5,2.
- Umoh, G. (1997) Sustainable microfinance systems and economic development in Nigeria, *South-South Journal of Culture and Development* 1, 2, 110-117
- Umoh, I. (2009) Rural women empowerment through small and medium enterprise promotion, *Journal of rural development* 7,3,21-33
- Urowayini, M. (2022) The Changing Role of Women in Community development, *Journal of Agriculture and Social Research*, 14, 4, 41-53
- Watson, W. (2000) Women entrepreneurs and economic self-reliance. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 1, 3, 27-39
- World Bank, (2020) Empowerment and Poverty reduction: A Source Book, Washington DC, World Bank 10, 10-20
- World Bank, (2019) Food and Agricultural Organization and International Fund for Agricultural Development gender in Agriculture Source Book, Washington DC.