

# **WOMEN MOBILIZATION IN THE EMPOWERMENT PROCESS, A RECIPE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

An independent questionnaire survey was carried out between middle of January and middle of February 2008, in various rural communities in Edo State to investigate the role of women in rural development. The survey was done in order to have a mental picture of the difficulties faced by the rural women in the state. The questions asked in the survey were to get an understanding of the multidimensional aspects of the process of mobilization and appreciate the magnitude of the development crises in Edo State. The analysis of the responses from the survey investigation revealed a number of issues which are related to women mobilization, the empowerment process and rural development in Edo State. Failures were reported in past approaches to development in Nigeria (including Edo State), because they overlooked or paid no attention to mobilizing the people, which is a crucial factor to rural development. A new approach in development is made for the integration of "women mobilization in the women empowerment process for rural development in the state".

**KEY WORDS:** Women, Mobilization, Empowerment, Rural Development.

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The status and the role of women are usually linked specifically to their position, being a woman; a woman usually lives together with a man who is her husband or her father and she is tied to her dwelling and to her household activities. Fatimah and Utami (1982) have indicated that women are tied to the economic situation and to a certain traditional value and to their social status as well, all of which is based on their relation with men. The crucial role of women in reproducing the farm family, providing labour, developing the economy and refining the technology did not mean that these important functions would necessarily be reflected in the literature of the time. Although, literature is the mirror of a people, it reflects only what those who write it wish to see. Literature extends the experience of life, hence it is a chief way of measuring the significance of one's life and beliefs or ideology. Also embedded in literature are the wishes and needs of the group that produces it so that it may provide only a distorted and indistinct mirror of the lives of those who do not control it.

To understand the role and status of women in development, it is necessary to understand how social groups have been incorporated in the market economy, the social stratification that has resulted and within this framework what specific responsibilities are assigned to men and women. This is important because the division of labour by gender, as a household strategy is a response to the changing conditions of production. It is neither static nor determined by biological or cultural factors alone; rather it is primarily an economic variable that evolves spatially and over time. A change in the gender division of labour therefore constitutes an

expression and manifestation of the position of women in both social production and human reproduction. Gender divisions also vary by social class, hence not all women are affected in the same way by economic change. However, women's participation in production is necessary for them to acquire status (i.e. a position of power within the family or society) it is no guarantee in such status.

By definition, development is a historical process, so one presumes direction in this process. A system is said to have "developed" and "evolved" from its previous history, meaning that, something can be learned about the system by the study of its past that cannot be learned in any other way. The notion of development, however, assumes the human ability to influence and control the natural and social environment.

Although many people confuse rural development with agricultural development; the latter should be part of the former. While the role the woman plays in the agricultural and economic development of most developing countries is hardly given any recognition, examination has revealed significant contributions of women in some rural localities of the sub-Saharan Africa (including Edo State of Nigeria) in the agricultural and economic growth of the region.

Pickstock (1993) pointed out that it is the piecemeal attempt to boost different sectors of agricultural production in the absence of a comprehensive development of the rural sector that has contributed to failure in sustained agricultural growth of Africa. Rural development implies the will to tackle the rural system as a whole, of which farming systems are only a part. In Nigeria as well as in various parts of the world, many different approaches to agricultural development have been proposed and tried in an

attempt to "develop" the rural farmer to such an extent that he could not only be self – sustaining but could also produce additional food for others. Some of the past approaches to development include:

- a) The Trickle – Down Approach,
- b) The Training School Approach
- c) The Agricultural Short course
- d) The Agrarian Reform Approach
- e) The Infrastructure Development Approach
- f) The Extension Education Approach
- g) The Green Revolution Approach
- h) The Rural Cooperative Approach
- i) The Appropriate Technology Approach
- j) The Agricultural Communication Approach  
e.t.c.

Despite that these approaches have increased our knowledge of what must be done if rural development is to accelerate they have generally over looked or paid no attention to mobilizing the people (the farmers in this case) which is a crucial factor to rural development (Nesman 1981).

No matter how much development may appear to have occurred through any development approach, unless persons involved have been motivated to actually change their behaviour, the "development" will only be superficial and most likely temporary.

Mobilization can be called a key to all development approaches; recent findings from an investigation in different local communities in Edo State point to the fact that most rural development projects are likely to fail without the involvement of peasant farmers (particularly women).

### CONCEPT OF MOBILIZATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The concept of mobilization was first expressed by Deutsch (1961) in the context of the modernization and political development of a country. He defined social mobilization as an overall process of change, which happens to substantial parts of the population in countries moving from traditional to modern ways of life. It indicates a concept that ties more specific processes of change together, such as changes of residence, of occupation, of institutions, of roles and ways of acting, of habits and needs, including the need for new patterns of groups affiliation and new images of personal identities etc. Of more significance in this definition is that the changes tend to influence and sometimes to transform political behaviour.

Some people see mobilization as meaning out – and – out revolution. In standard usage, however, Friedmann (1981) considers to mobilize as meaning "to marshal, bring together and prepare people for action" which implies the presence of some external force that accomplishes this bringing together. In planning, Friedmann (1981) considered the external force or agent to usually be the state. In the context of this paper, mobilization has specific reference to women and rural development tied to Women Empowerment in Edo State, Nigeria. For this purpose, mobilization means "gathering the women together to act, uniting the women to solve a problem or to reach a goal". Here, mobilization is considered to be closely related to motivation, an essential element in behavioural change. Through mobilization the women will become active

participants in change, rather than passive objects affected by change.

While rural development has not always been adequately defined, it is accepted as a holistic concept which recognizes the complexity and interrelatedness of the many variables which influence the quality of life in rural areas. A popular concept of rural development has always been that of improving the living standards of the large number of the low income population residing in rural areas and making the process of their development self – sustaining. Self – sustenance here means involving, as distinct from simply reaching, the subsistence populations through rural development programs. Okpaga (2002) summed up rural development to involve a broad based mobilization of the people so as to enhance their capacity to cope with the daily task of living.

### PRINCIPLES OF MOBILIZATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROCESS

There is need to set out several principles of mobilization. Mobilization may occur in reaction to several things, such as widespread feelings of injustice and strong feeling of needs, which motivate persons to join with others who have similar feelings. Mobilization can be for meeting continuing needs, such as fire fighting and the formation of cooperatives for buying feeds or marketing produce. So the level of mobilization appropriate to a given situation depends on the problems faced and also the success of other mobilization efforts in that location.

However, mobilization may begin in any of several places. It can be imposed from the top, through government action or extensive outside financing; it can begin on an intermediate level, through change – agents working with a few selected well – to – do persons who then help mobilize their poorer neighbours; it can begin with the women themselves. Top – down mobilization carries official sanctions and built-in approval and make dealings with intermediate structures easier, mobilization from the middle can permit someone with a risk margin to attempt a new method and demonstrate it to those without a risk margin; whereas mobilization within the grassroot people (in this case the women) begins where the problems are most acute.

Mobilization imposed from the top may never reach the local rural women and mobilization initiated through well-to-do middlemen may perpetuate dependency structure; mobilization that begins with the rural women, while it can bring immediate control of local structures, may soon be squashed by larger, state or national structures. Therefore, successful mobilization must stimulate local organization and self-direction and at the same time take place in a natural climate favourable to its operation.

Motivation for change can come from gaining control over social structures so that the structures work for rather than against the rural women, and give some incentive to use new approaches, in order to improve their welfare.

The social structures which affect the rural women that may have to change include market structure, credit – structure, land – holding structure, information structure, transportation structure and external resource system. Although social structures

and the problems of initializing mobilization make changes difficult, it is not impossible. One basic reality of human behaviour is that all elements are both cause and effect. The interrelation of change variables has been described to indicate that a change in one aspect of life makes change more likely in another (Etzioni and Etzioni Halery 1973, Myrdal 1973). Therefore, Change – agents must begin in a circle of interrelated elements whenever they can, and that they must do whatever they can to provoke change. It should be noted that no one change, such as providing agricultural information, will solve all the problems, but that each change, when incorporated into everyday lifestyle, can open the avenue for other changes and can have impact on the entire fabric of life.

**THE CASE OF RURAL WOMEN IN EDO STATE**

In considering the concept of mobilization, strictly in the context of rural development in Edo State, three things have become clear. First, the break – away of the rural women from the traditional organization of productive activities becomes a necessary pre requisite of any process of mobilization. Secondly, mobilization cannot be said to occur if there isn't a deliberate and highly structured process of inducing them into new and relatively stable organization, whose objectives are greater productivity, as well as higher levels of resilience in the current economic situation. Thirdly, that a situation which stimulates the first without the second process is

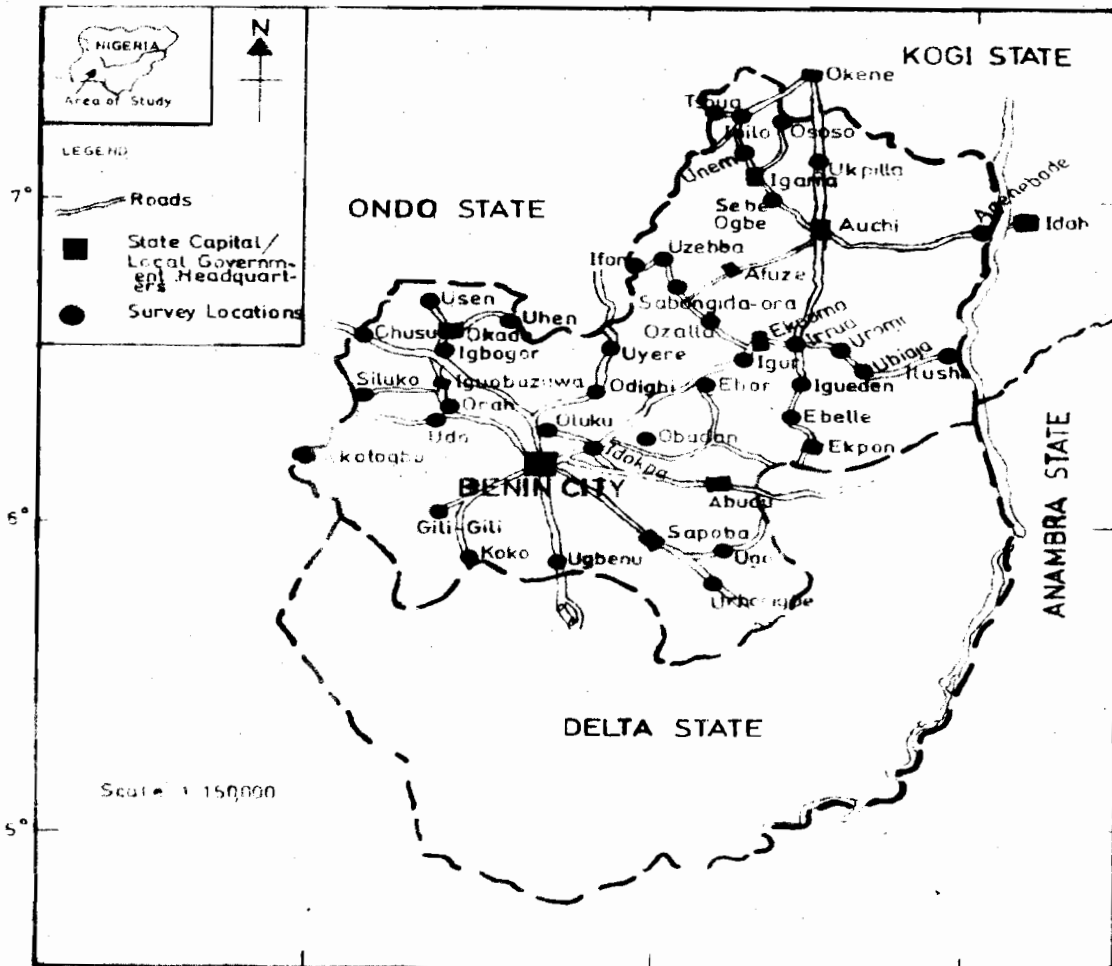
one of demobilization, rather than mobilization, which can be expected to generate negative rather than positive consequences.

**SURVEY**

A recent independent questionnaire survey was conducted in some rural communities in Edo State to have a mental picture of the difficulties faced by the rural women. It was also to understand the multidimensional aspects of the process of mobilization and appreciate the magnitude of the development crises in the state. The analysis of the respondents from the survey brought out a number of revelations which prompted the writing of this paper.

**The survey**

A random survey was conducted from the middle of January to middle of February 2008 in selected rural communities throughout Edo State. The survey was conducted by interviewing some rural women and completing the questionnaires. The questions were on many issues such as occupation, welfare, economy, education e.t.c and covered periods ranging back to the last two decades. Interviews were conducted and questionnaires completed in different rural towns (FIG.1). Although the number of Respondents was low the summary of selected analysis of the crucial questionnaires are shown in Table 1.



SURVEY LOCATIONS

## SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

## INTRODUCTION

1. What is your full name? -----
2. How old are you (estimate if not sure)?-----
3. Are you (a) married (b) single  
(c) divorced (d) a Widower? Tick one
4. What is the highest level of education (schooling) you attained?  
(a) Primary (b) Secondary (c) Adult Education (d) Others (e) None? Tick one
5. How many children do you have  
(a) Female ----- (b) Male -----?
6. What do you do for a living (occupation)?  
(a) Farming (b) Trading (petty trading)  
(c) Others? Tick one
7. How many women live in this house? (a) 1  
(b) 2 (c) 3 (d) 4 (e) 4? Tick one

## FARMING

8. (a) Do you farm on your own land (Yes/No)?  
SEE TABLE 1.
8. (b) If you answered No, where do you go to farm?  
(i) Husband's farm (ii) Father's farm (iii) Others? Tick one.

RESPONDENTS: (112) (2) (1).

8. (c) What do you cultivate on the farm?  
(i) Cassava (ii) Pepper (iii) Plantain/Banana  
(iv) Corn (v) Vegetables  
(vi) Cocoyam (vii) Yam (viii) Others?  
Check all those applicable
9. (a) Do you work alone on the farm (Yes/No)?
9. (b) If No, who else assists you on the farm?  
(i) Husband (ii) Daughter/s (iii) Children  
(iv) Others? Tick one
10. (a) Were you working on the farm about twenty years ago (i.e. about 1988)  
Yes/No?
10. (b) Comparing what you do now to what you did twenty years ago, are you doing more work now or then?  
(i) Now-(R= 111) (ii) Then-(R = 2).  
R implies number of Respondents.

## PETTY TRADING

11. What do you trade on? (a) Farm produce (b) Chicken (c) Goats (d) Palm oil  
(e) Plates (f) Clothes (g) Beads

- (h) Others? Check all those applicable.
12. Where do you sell and/or buy your goods from?  
(a) The local market  
(b) Neighbouring markets (c) By the roadside? Check all those applicable.
13. (a) Do you own a stall in the local market? (Yes/No)?
13. (b) If No, do you rent from someone else? (Yes/No)?

## Taking you back to about twenty years ago (i.e. about 1988)

14. (a) Were you trading in the same goods then? Yes/No?
14. (b) If Yes, did you own a stall in the local market then? Yes/No?
14. (c) Was it easier to own a market stall then than now?  
(i) Now (ii) Then? Check one.

## TEENAGERS

15. (a) Do you have girls who are teenagers (14 - 22 years old)? Yes/No?
15. (b) If Yes are they living with you? Yes/No?

## WOMEN ORGANIZATION

16. (a) Is there any form of women organization in this village? Yes/No?
16. (b) If Yes Name two of them.  
Respondents: (i) Unions of different age mates (cohorts)  
(ii) Group meeting for monthly contributions ("Osusu" group)
16. (c) Do you have any women leaders? Yes/No?  
Respondents (i) No = 95% (ii) Yes = 5%

## AGRIC. EXTENSION WORKERS

17. (a) Are there Ministry of Agriculture or similar Workers in the vicinity of this village? Yes/No?
17. (b) If Yes, what do they do?  
Respondents: (about 10%) NIFOR people working on oil palm plantation.

Over 200 women were interviewed in 18 rural towns/villages across Edo State. 137 women cooperated fully in the completion of the questionnaires; the analysis of the summary of the responses to one of the questions is shown in Table 1.

Question; 8a. Do you farm on your own land? (Yes/No)?

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by age group.

AGE GROUP OF RESPONDENTS	YES		NO	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
25-35 years old married with/without children	0	0	10	07
35-45 years old married with/without children	2	1	72	53
45-55 years old married with/without children	10	7	30	22
55-65 years old married with/without children	6	4	5	3
Over 65 years married with/without children	2	1	0	0

While there may be biases in the survey analysis, the responses generally indicate that:

- (i) Their lives were worse off now than they were twenty years ago.
- (ii) They are doing more work now than they did twenty years ago.
- (iii) Women now find it more difficult to gain access to land as well as to get a store in the market.
- (iv) Market stalls are now controlled by middlemen which makes it more difficult for women to obtain any.
- (v) Some of the women also indicated that they lack basic education as most parents (fathers) never encouraged the girls to go to school.
- (vi) There were serious complaints by the women that in recent years most of the rural girls and teenagers have joined the rural – urban drift resulting in rural women being saddled with all the farm work.
- (vii) The women also complained that they can not identify themselves with anyone who speaks for or represents their interest in the past or recent governments.

While the problems are numerous the highlights are in the areas of access to land, agricultural marketing, transport and communication facilities, the middlemen, lack of education and non-participation in decision – making.

#### ACCESS TO LAND

In most parts of Nigeria women's access to land varies within and between ethnic groups. For most groups both women and men living in their home areas have land – use rights as community members. But in Edo State communities, women's access to land is mainly through inheritance from their fathers. Women who are away from their home areas, as strangers, acquire rights through others, usually their husbands or they may purchase land (if they have the money). It was discovered that in most parts of Edo State the dual practices of exogamy and patrilocal residence place most married women in the position of strangers and independent farming is never emphasized as an activity for them. Consequently women are culturally disadvantaged with difficulties in buying land. Households use various means for assisting individuals to fulfill their obligations despite differences among them in terms of access to land and labour resources. In some cases more than one household member may plant the same piece of land with different crops. Women often plant vegetables and other crops to meet daily subsistence requirements, while the man may plant the basic staple, a root or cereal crop. Where more than one woman is involved, a farm may be shared between them.

#### WOMEN AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

Rural women in Africa do roughly 70 percent of the agricultural work and provide most of the services needed for feeding the family (UNECA, Savanne (1986). However, the degree of participation of women in agricultural work varies with the type of farming and basic natural resources. In West Africa and other areas where mineral wealth was lacking, the colonial powers were obliged to turn to the large scale production of

tropical goods for export under terms that would be attractive to the investors of the core.

Women had been central to the effort to overcome hunger and malnutrition in Africa because they predominate in food production for consumption. In the past, however, widespread polygamy traditionally made it possible for men to bring more hand under cultivation with the women primarily responsible for farming. Women generally took pride in their productive activities because of the status attached to food production. Hence changes that have affected any part of these activities may have undermined female status and food supplies alike. The alteration of land tenure system may have restricted control of productive agricultural land, and an increase in the amount of crops grown for cash may have left women with fewer resources and more work. Throughout Edo State as in other parts of Africa changes are rapidly transforming women's tasks at every stage of the food cycle. Investigation from this report indicate that in some parts of the state, a new economic pattern of an export economy based on cocoa, and the oil boom led to predominantly male migration and a general change in sexual division of labour with women taking over more responsibilities for food crop production. Moreover to fulfill their role as providers of subsistence, the women had to combine a lot of different productive activities like farming, petty trading, processing of agricultural crops etc.

#### WOMEN AND AGRICULTURAL MARKETING

All over Edo State as it is in most places worldwide women are highly active as traders, hawkers, street vendors and marketers. In Africa as a whole women are highly visible in all stages of food marketing but then women's marketing activities are capable of achieving only low profit margins, since they are generally carried out close to home. Oluwasanmi (1968) indicated that there is a place set aside in all Nigerian towns and villages where buyers and sellers meet daily to exchange the surplus produce of their farms. Marketing activities are so important in the indigenous economic system that in many Nigerian communities the immediate environment of the residence of the head of the community is often designated as market area. In most, if not all, Edo towns and villages the markets like Oba market, Benin City are known as "king markets", both as a significance of royal assent in such trading activities and of keen interest of the political and spiritual head of the community in the economic intercourse among his subjects. Each village has its "market day" often set at intervals of five or nine days when marketers from far off places come to the village for the dual purpose of selling and buying produce. Within a district or a political division there is a carefully worked out calendar of "market days" which strives to avoid clashes with the "market days" of adjoining towns and villages.

The local markets are limited in scope by the range of goods offered for sale and by poor transportation and communication facilities. Goods traded in the village markets consist principally of agricultural products and of the products of the weaver, smith and hunters. Livestock such as goats, sheep, fowls and birds are also sold. The products are carried to the markets on the heads of the wives and children of

producers who in return carry back to their villages some of the goods available in the markets.

In Edo State as a whole the rural market is the point where most locally produced staple foodstuffs enter the supply system. These markets typically meet every four days and are attended by assemblers from the towns seeking supplies from farmers who bring in their own produce for sale. Rural markets therefore function primarily as "feeder markets" for the towns.

It is convenient to treat the organization of agricultural markets at two levels: markets for food crops and markets for export crops. The internal trade in locally produced food crops is for the most part left completely in the hands of women and large numbers of middlemen. Marketing of export crops is the only important stage in the peasant economy where foreign entrepreneur has played a significant role by providing the capital and the technical and managerial skills that are required both in the assemblage of the products of large numbers of farmers scattered over wide geographic areas and in shipping them to the world market.

The domestic trade in agricultural products is dominated by small scale middlemen, particularly by women. The peasant production, organization and local marketing arrangements are typified by small - scale units, lacking the necessary capital, technical knowledge and managerial experience to create larger units of operation. As a result the production and marketing of food crops suffer from all the disadvantages of smallness and primitive techniques (La-Anyane 1988).

Being largely illiterate and lacking the capital to employ clerical help, the small seller, like the small scale peasant producer keeps no record of transactions and the volume of yams, cassava, rice, maize, beans, palm oil, fish, onions, vegetables and fruits exchanged for money in markets all over the state is not known with any degree of certainty for any given year.

#### WOMEN'S DECISION - MAKING ROLE

Food production and distribution are political as well as economic questions and as such they are subject to the policies of numerous institutions, the most important being national or state governments. To enhance female roles in food production we have to first sensitize the people who have authority and resources to the fact that something should be done.

This awareness is emerging in Edo State as planners and development workers are beginning to acknowledge the pivotal role of women and children not only as victims of inadequate food but also as producers, sellers and processors of food. Although politics does not grow food, politics does influence who grows the food, what kind of support the farmers will receive and where and how food is distributed. Bringing women into the market economy is an effective step towards a more efficient use of local resources as well as a means of improving women's status and economic security.

The lack of access to land still remains the major obstacle to the full participation of women in rural development. In Edo State as in many developing countries women still face disabilities in terms of access

and ownership rights, which usually derive from custom and inheritance laws. Land ownership is often the key to having control over major decisions such as what crops to grow, what techniques to use, what to consume and what to sell of the land's produce.

In Africa by and large women are currently the major food producers. Women's relation to land as conceptualized in different African societies is a critical factor in their ability to produce for themselves and their families. At the same time, however, women increasingly have a need to generate income for commodities and services they cannot provide.

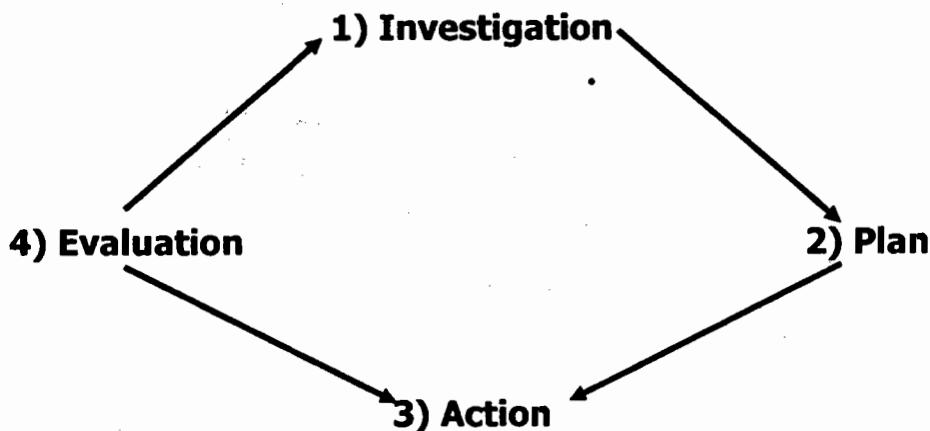
#### DISCUSSION

In Edo State as it is elsewhere in Africa women produce roughly 70 percent of staple food. Also in most cultures women are allocated fields from their fathers or husband's land, they are, however, responsible for specific crops and operations. The migration of men to work in cities, following the oil boom, increased women's responsibility to manage farms. Despite their predominant role in marketing farm products, very little has been done to help women in their marketing activities either by way of improved transportation or better market facilities.

If we formalize women's rights to land and increase their representation in agricultural training as well as encourage extension workers among farmers, it will go a long way to make women's contribution to agricultural and economic growth of Edo State. Extension workers and agricultural training in the state is restricted to the Ministry of Agriculture which does not include the rural women farmers. Women should be brought into the market economy so that Edo State can be making better use of the local resources and improve women's status and economic security in the region.

One important item on the agenda of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) of Nigeria and in particular the present government in Edo State is "Women Empowerment". Bamidele(2004) describes Empowerment as a political process because the concept tends towards changing the existing power relationships. Women Empowerment is therefore a dynamic process that enhances women the ability to change those structures and ideologies which kept them subordinate. The process enables them to gain more access to resources and decision-making as well as to gain more control over their lives and "autonomy". The Edo state Chief Executive has done well to have appointed a Woman's Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Women Development. So Women empowerment is a very laudable idea and it will be most effective if the process can mobilize the women in rural development. For most of the time in development programmes, good ideas will die either untried or somewhere along the route to completion. However, the success of any idea depends on careful planning, while a project that depends on the good will of many people should have clear objectives that enable each person taking part to see how his or her particular part fits into the whole.

At this point four steps necessary to ensure an orderly process of rural development in Edo State are suggested as follows:



**In Step 1:** An investigation of the community must be conducted to discover problems and resources

**Step 2:** A plan of work must be developed that includes a listing of goals, activities and necessary resources and a schedule of activities.

**Step 3:** The actual work must be organized and someone chosen to coordinate and direct activity.

**Step 4:** All involved must evaluate the results of the project.

As the diagram indicates, when the project enters the evaluation stage, it leads to the next project which repeats the stages of the circle.

All over the state it was noticed that there were abandonment of projects and replacement with entirely different and unrelated projects. Genuine effort must be made to reverse that trend of development.

## CONCLUSION

A more successful rural development any where in the developing world, such as Edo state of Nigeria has to involve the participation of the grass roots. This will in effect create the potential for maximum involvement of the marginalized communities in the process of development for all, in other words, self-development. Self-development occurs when the people themselves are able to define and discover their own problems, set goals for change, look for resources necessary to solve these problems, work together on solutions and evaluate results to determine new directions for action. An ultimate goal for all the development efforts is the mobilization of the people for self-development.

In the rural communities of Edo state as elsewhere in the developing world women do most of the agricultural work and provide most of the services needed for feeding the family. Hence women mobilization is a critical factor which should be tied into the women empowerment process for rural development in the state.

The whole rhetoric of women empowerment should be that the rural women must by their own exertions free themselves from poverty, underdevelopment and dependency and gain control of their economies and politics.

What is needed is an alternative approach to rural development which focuses more closely on the "process" and "actors". The process of creating "women empowerment" must be different from previous attempts in that it should take place at the grassroots level, involve a broad range of participants and simultaneously spread through the length and breadth of the state.

A way must be found to encourage functional organization to express specific interests women may have, particularly among the poorer strata. There should also be a formation of territorial assemblies where problems common to a group of adjacent villages can be discussed.

Women mobilization and the women empowerment must achieve the difficult task of meshing planning "from above" with planning "from below". If rural women are to be mobilized, however, the politicization of women must be pursued wherever decisions affecting them are made; beginning with the village and the local government area, so that as it moves up and down different levels, the contributions of planning are linked to the political process.

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