

WOMEN IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A SOCIO- RELIGIOUS CONTRIBUTION IN IBIBIO LAND

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Abstract

Women have been regarded as fragile and should be subordinate to the men, but they can play important role for the betterment of the society. Across the country, women have created innovative and comprehensive programs to meet the needs of their communities. This study therefore seek to investigate the issue of women in community development: A socio-religious contributions in Ibibio land. The study adopted a historical research method. Findings from the research showed that women are instruments of social stratification and need to be integrated into community and national building and recommended that, women should be properly supported. Financially empowered and be granted equal educational opportunity with their male counterparts.

Keywords: Women, Community, Development, Socio-Religious, Contributions

Introduction

The role of women in community development according to Eze (2007) cannot be over-emphasized. The woman as an individual is an agent of production of life itself. This inevitable role places her in the position of the life blood of the entire humanity. A woman is the first teacher, the sustainer and maintainer of the home, the peace maker, and the symbol of beauty as well as the major character molders of the child. She is the mother to human race. As mothers and wives, women do avert considerable impact on the productivity: male workers. As workers in their own rights, they can be linked to the rejected stone in the Holy Bible which has definitely become the corner stone of the house. By their sheer psychological and intellectual make up, women do perform more than mere complementary roles in the production process (Jeminiwa, 1995). To be specific, most of the contributions by women globally had not been

recognized until recently when the United Nations declared: the Decade for Women (1976 – 1985), making it mandatory on governments to focus on the issue of women as an integral component of national development.

The concern for women in development of women's progress and women in emancipation is anchored in the practice that women are subordinate to men. Consequently, Anikpo (2000) contended that various rights were denied women and their contributions to National Development were either stifled or ignored. In fact, the contributions of women groups in community development projects can bring about significant positive changes. Thus, women groups have been proved to be one of the effective entry point for initiating activities or development projects in the community that are beneficiary to all the members of the community. Therefore, for effective development to occur, their contributions need not be disputed. In this research, women in community development: A socio-religious contributions in Ibibio land will be examined.

Hindrances to Women Contributions in Community Development in Ibibio Land

1. Ibibio Cultural Beliefs

The cultural beliefs of the Ibibio people that the education of a woman ends in the kitchen, makes it almost impossible for males to see the immense contributions of women to the community development. For instance, in some picture books, girls are taught to have low aspirations because there are so few opportunities portrayed as available to them. It is also believed that men's work is outside the home and women's work is inside the home. For example, women are seen at home washing dishes, cooking, cleaning, yelling at the children, takes care of babies, and does the shopping, while men are store keepers, house builders, story tellers, preachers, fishermen, fighters, adventurers, and suppliers of home needs.

Moreso, within the traditional Ibibio land, women were excluded from performing certain activities, especially those that concerned leadership and significant activities like construction works and clergy roles as these were considered as men's domain. The exclusion of women from some of these activities were due to the socio-cultural factors constraining them from participating in activities that were considered to be exclusively for men.

2. **Gender Inequality in Ibibio Land**

This also in Ibibio land contributed to the low contribution of women to community development. Thus, the slogan, “Do you know, you are a woman”? this question is due to the systematic gender bias in customs, beliefs and attitudes that confined women mostly to the domestic sphere and not in certain matters expected to be in the men’s domain.

3. **Laws and Customs in Ibibio Land**

These impeded womens’ access to credit, productive inputs, employment, education, information and politics. These factors affected womens’ ability and incentives to contribute in economic and social development activities in Ibibio community. For instance, it was a taboo for a woman to climb and plug even pears and oranges in the compound. Moreso, they were not allowed to sit and discuss issues that bothered on their interests.

A Socio-Religious Contributions of Women to Community Development in Ibibio Land

In spite of the hindrances shown above, the following are their religious and social contributions in Ibibio land.

1. **Social development:** Ibibio women served although inadvertently as instrument of social stratification. They socially constituted themselves in a judicial body with *Eka Iban* president. Every adult female of the village was regarded as members of *Iban Isong Idung* when they meet as a judicial body. They have the right to impose any form of sanction on offending members and such would be acceded to by the Village Head. Other forms of women social organizations like *Asian Ubo Ikpa*, *Nka Ifere* exist and performed vital control functions on morals of its members and also serves as mutual aid groups in some communities in Ibibio land.

2. **Food production:** In Ibibio land, women’s traditional roles were neither evident nor even acknowledged. The contribution of women to food production in Ibibio land cannot be overemphasized. Over time, women have paid their dues immensely both as individuals and as groups in Ibibio land in the food production process. They clear the land, till, plant and tend the crops. They harvest, store, preserve and even ensure that produced food ends up edible on the dining tables.

In Ibibio land, women work on the land and feed the population. Women are instrument to the development of most prosperous agricultural

regions in different parts of the country and Africa in general. The devaluation of women's work done in sustainable economies is the natural outcome of a system constructed by capitalist patriarchy.

3. **Food preservation and storage:** Apart from roles women play in the cultivation of crops and livestock domestication, they preserve and store food crops. For example, fruit, cassava, palm oil, cocoyam, among others are specially preserved by women. These foods that are preserved and stored provide food especially during planting seasons when food is in short supply.

It provides food security for the family and community. Women have continued in their struggles to the relevant in the development process of Ibibio land though their efforts are neglected in the nation's planning process. In professional technical occupations they are found mostly as teachers and nurses, some are also found in clerical occupations. Generally, women dominated the nonwage sectors. Okogie (2015), observed that women make their greatest contributions in the economy in the agricultural sector. Trading is another area of women's contribution socially in Ibibio land.

Women over the years have made several efforts to change their conditions but such efforts have been – sporadic, uncoordinated and unsustainable. Deliberate organized efforts aimed at changing the status quo of women is a recent phenomenon. World conferences with women issues top on the agenda have been held at various times. There was 1995 Beijing Conference and even the recent Women Summit held on 18th October, 2014 at Abuja at the instance of Dame Patience Jonathan, the wife of the Nigerian Former President. These conferences have succeeded in bringing gender issues to global attention. The international conferences gave the problem of women a global outlook and emboldened them to articulate the issues of critical concern and lobby for attention and assistance. These made the international and national institutions and agencies more responsive to women's needs and aspirations.

4. **Religious Development:** Ibibio women contribute to the development of their communities through fund raising to the church and other development projects. They feel they are the financial backbone of the Church. The money raised by women has been used to finance revival meetings, to build churches, to pay for salaries to teachers in church owned schools, to furnish the church and the minister's manse, to buy food for

church functions and to help the poor, the sick and the bereaved in the community, in other words, the functional leadership of the church was de facto in the hands of Ibibio women's organizations.

In their bid to contribute to the development of their community, women embark on praying for peace in time of war. They embark on praying and fasting, they become prayer warriors' in the fight against sickness and death in their families and in the community. They referred to the fighting groups as "our children" hence the intensive prayers for peace. They also pray about political violence. Christian women leaders from various church organizations gathers from time to time to pray for peace especially when elections approaches. They pray for peaceful elections with the hope that God will answer their prayers.

Factors that Affects the Socio-Religious Contributions of Women in Ibibio Land

- i. **Lack of funds:** Ibibio women lack funds for day to day running of their organizational goals. This problem has led to the abandonment of projects. Thus, they cannot contribute to the extent they should have contributed to the development of their community.
- ii. **Embezzlement of funds:** This is one of the problems facing various kinds of organization and the Ibibio women are not an exception. This problem is more disheartened and discouraging their morals due to mismanagement of funds. It disrupts the interest of people. Some of their projects as a result of this have even suspended.
- iii. **Inflexible work schedules:** This has posed a problem to a good number of Ibibio women. This is because, some women who are primary care givers find it difficult to take positions such as executive director or community organizer, which often require extensive attendance at night meetings which is difficult for women caring for young children or elderly parents. In a situation where they have to attend a conference out of town, they have to schedule their time around their families, and this is usually not easy for them and in turn posed problems and barriers to their contributions to community development.
- iv. **Illiteracy:** This has posed a lot of problem towards their contributions to the development of Ibibio land. Most of the citizens at rural areas are illiterates. Cultural traits skill persists because of illiteracy. This contributes to inadequate planning for the development of Ibibio land.

- v. **Limited access to political network:** Most of the Ibibio women do not have adequate access to political leaders, corporate executives and other powerful groups that generally consist of men - women's access to power brokers does, however, it vary from city to city and region to region. The male community lenders do control the money. This is as a result of limited access to political network or power in the community. This contribute to the problem encounters by women in Ibibio land towards the development of their community.
- vi. **Disunity:** There cannot be any meaningful development where there is disunity. Thus, the issue of disunity is a problem that hinders the contribution of women in their community development process. This is because, where there is disunity, the period of gathering together may be defeated.
- vii. **Land disputes:** Ibibio women at times experience land disputes as barriers to the development of the projects. This might be as refusal of the land owners to give out or sell the land out for the project at hand. And if the land in question is located at a very good site for the project, the dispute might hinder the progress of such project and might lead to the delay or abandonment of such project.
- viii. **Low level of community participation:** In Ibibio land, many community women cited issues related to personal, class and culture barriers to their participation in community development. The lack economic security, such as lack of child care, the lack of freedom to leave domestic responsibilities, and feelings of powerlessness. Family and other personal issues have posed significant obstacles to their contributions and involvement in the community development process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it could be said that Ibibio women play vital roles in the development of their communities through religious aspects. Ibibio women have been seen to break even and become a force to reckon with in the developmental processes of their communities. Ibibio women has over the years has proved that they possess the quality, talents and character traits required not only for growth and development of Ibibio land, but for the enhancement of the progress and wellbeing of the human society in general. Ibibio women despite severe constraints in their efforts, have played vital roles in their contributions to their community developments.

Thus, they should be encouraged and empowered to develop their potentials so as to contribute more to their community developments.

Recommendations

- i. Government should provide Ibibio women with financial supports so as to encourage them in their bid in developing their communities.
- ii. Educational opportunities should be given to Ibibio women so as to encourage them in their contributions to community development.
- iii. Other sources for revenue generation should be sourced for in their bid to developing their communities.
- iv. Community development initiatives should be developed since active involvement, leads to maximum success.
- v. Community development experts in government services should make policies in favour of Ibibio land towards their contributions to the development of their communities.
- vi. Government should recognize and encourage social work as a major instrument of people and the national development.

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