

# Women's Empowerment and Sustainable Development: A Quantitative Case Study of Ibesikpo Austan Community, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

This quantitative case study examines the role of women in promoting sustainable development in the marginalized Ibesikpo Austan Community of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The community has long faced issues of marginalization and disorientation, presenting obstacles to sustainable development. The study investigates the impact of women's empowerment initiatives on sustainable development outcomes within the community. A sample of 116 respondents was randomly selected, and data was collected through a structured questionnaire and interviews. The study analyzes key sustainable development indicators, including economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability.

Furthermore, it explores the factors influencing women's empowerment and their active participation in sustainable development initiatives. The findings underscore the presence of gender disparities that hinder women's economic productivity and impede sustainable development progress. The study highlights the potential of leveraging traditional women's networks as effective mobilization mechanisms toward desired goals. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the gender dynamics in sustainable development efforts. It gives valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders seeking to foster inclusive and sustainable development in marginalized communities. Based on the research findings, recommendations include empowering women through educational training, financial support, and community-based interventions to enhance their socioeconomic status.

**Keywords:** women, sustainable development, empowerment, gender disparities, gender dynamics, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

In Nigeria, as well as in many African societies, including the Ibesikpo Austan Community, there exists a prevailing myth that assigns women to the roles of childbearing and kitchen-tending, considering these as their essential and sole purpose. Consequently, women are often denied opportunities to pursue meaningful roles beyond their domestic and sexual functions, impeding their participation in sustainable development efforts. This myth has hindered progress throughout the continent, as the lack of empowerment for women hampers national advancement. Despite women's significant contributions and supportive roles in various spheres, their status and numerical strength have been overlooked in Ibesikpo and other African communities. It is essential to recognize that women constitute a substantial portion of the population and have been the sole breadwinners in 25 to 33 percent of all families, with the number of female-headed households rising (Oruwari, 1996).

### 1.1 Numerous Obstacles

Women in the Ibesikpo Austan Community and other similar contexts face various obstacles in pursuing economic empowerment. These impediments include limited access to financial resources, job opportunities, inadequate access to land, illiteracy, discrimination, and the burden of multiple roles as mothers and wives (Uduigwomen & Ozumba, 2007). Traditional societies, which are predominantly male dominated, not only relegate women to subordinated positions but also exploit their reproductive and productive roles (Akpan, 2004). Women are often constrained by patriarchal norms, compelled to fulfill arduous private and public responsibilities, and subjected to gender stereotypes.

#### 1.1.1 Neglected and Deprived of Land Ownership.

Women in these communities are often neglected and deprived of land ownership, experiencing bias and discrimination based solely on gender. The longstanding myth that portrays women as second-class citizens further perpetuates this marginalization. In Akwa Ibom State, for instance, women undertake seventy to eighty percent of the agricultural work and produce 90 percent of the total food crops. However, their contributions have not been recognized or supported (Nosike, 1992a). The agricultural planning initiatives need to

acknowledge women's roles and expertise, neglecting to provide them with access to technology, resources, and decision-making opportunities.

### 1.1.2 Gender Disparities and Empowerment

Challenges highlight the urgent need to address gender disparities and empower women in the Ibesikpo Austan Community. By recognizing and tapping into women's experiences, knowledge, and potential, sustainable development efforts can be significantly enhanced. Agriculture planners and policymakers must acknowledge women's contributions, provide them equal access to resources and technologies, and create an enabling environment that fully allows them to participate and thrive in sustainable development initiatives. Overcoming these barriers will uplift individual women and contribution to the advancement of the community and the achievement of sustainable development goals. (Nosike, 1992b).

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The role of women in the Ibesikpo Austan Community of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, has been largely unrecognized and undervalued. Despite their significant contributions, women have been marginalized, and their potential for promoting sustainable development has been overlooked. This lack of recognition and empowerment hampers the progress of sustainable development efforts in the community. The problem lies in the prevailing gender disparities and societal norms that perpetuate the subordination of women. Women face numerous challenges, including limited access to economic resources, job opportunities, land ownership, education, and decision-making processes. They are burdened with multiple roles as caregivers, often facing discrimination and stereotypes that restrict their opportunities for growth and development. However, the lack of recognition and empowerment of women hinders their progress and has broader implications for the community's sustainable development. Women's untapped potential in areas such as agriculture, entrepreneurship, and community leadership deprives the community of their valuable contributions. These perpetuate a cycle of marginalization and limit the community's ability to achieve social equity, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. Therefore, it is crucial to address the problem of gender inequality and the under-recognition of women's roles in the Ibesikpo Austan Community. Sustainable development can be fostered by empowering women, providing equal opportunities and resources, and challenging societal norms that hinder their progress.

### 1.3 Research Questions

1. Is there gender discrimination against women in Akwa Ibom State?
2. Does gender discrimination lead to economic deprivation against women?
3. Is there any correlation between gender discrimination and poverty in the country?
4. Are women the worst hit by poverty in the state?
5. Should women be given equal opportunities with men in the community?
6. Do government aids target poor women in the community?

## 7. Will greater women empowerment lead to sustainable development in the state?

These research questions aim to investigate the presence and impact of gender discrimination on women in Akwa Ibom State. The questions explore the relationship between gender discrimination and economic deprivation, poverty rates, equal opportunities for women, government aid targeting, and the potential of women's empowerment to contribute to sustainable development. By examining these aspects, the study seeks to uncover the challenges faced by women and the potential solutions for promoting gender equality and sustainable development in the state.

### *1.4 Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is multi-fold. Firstly, it aims to examine the role of women in promoting sustainable development in the Ibesikpo Austan Community of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. By exploring the contributions of women to sustainable development, the study seeks to shed light on the correlation between women's involvement and the overall progress of sustainable development in the community. Secondly, the study aims to identify and analyze the factors that impede women's effective contributions to sustainable development. It includes examining barriers such as limited access to economic resources, discriminatory practices, societal norms, and gender disparities that hinder women's empowerment and active participation in sustainable development initiatives. Thirdly, the study seeks to assess the potential of an empowered women's workforce in driving sustainable economic growth. By understanding the prospects of women's empowerment and their impact on the local economy, the research aims to highlight the benefits of including women in sustainable development efforts and the positive outcomes it can generate. Furthermore, the study aims to assess women's contributions to sustainable development comprehensively. Lastly, the study aims to challenge and change the mindset of the male population in the Ibesikpo Austan Community regarding women's capabilities and their potential contributions to community development. Overall, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between women and sustainable development, inform policy and decision-making processes, and advocate for greater gender equality and women's empowerment in pursuing sustainable development in the Ibesikpo Austan Community.

### *1.5 Significance of the Study*

The research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on women's empowerment and sustainable development, particularly in the context of a marginalized community in Nigeria. It provides valuable insights and empirical evidence that can be used for future research and academic discussions on gender dynamics, sustainable development, and community development. The study sheds light on the challenges and barriers that hinder women's effective contributions to sustainable development. By identifying these factors, the research provides insights into the areas where interventions are needed to empower women. The result can be used to develop targeted programs and initiatives that enhance women's access to education, economic resources, and decision-making, promoting empowerment and gender equality. The study focuses on a specific marginalized community, the Ibesikpo Austan Community and its findings directly affect the community's development. By understanding

the contributions and potential of women in sustainable development, the research can inform community-based interventions and initiatives that leverage women's skills, knowledge, and networks for the community's overall progress. The study aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly goal five on Gender Equality and Goal Eight on Decent Work and Economic Growth. The findings can contribute to monitoring progress toward achieving these goals by highlighting the importance of women's empowerment and their role in driving sustainable economic growth and social equity. Overall, the study's significance lies in its potential to generate evidence-based knowledge, inform policy and planning processes, empower women, promote community development, and contribute to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals.

### *1.6 Statement of the Research Hypotheses*

The following research hypotheses are formulated to guide the direction of this study:

Hypothesis 1:

Null Hypothesis (H01): There is no significant relationship between gender discrimination and poverty in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis 2:

Null Hypothesis (H02): The level of rural development is not significantly influenced by discrimination against women in Akwa Ibom State.

These hypotheses aim to test the relationship between gender discrimination and poverty (H01) and the impact of discrimination against women on rural development in Akwa Ibom State (H02). The null hypotheses propose that there is no significant relationship between gender discrimination and poverty, as well as no significant influence of discrimination against women on rural development. The study will analyze the data to either accept or reject these null hypotheses based on the evidence gathered.

### *1.7 The Scope of the Study*

The geographical area and the target population define the scope of the study. Specifically, the study focuses on women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, emphasizing the Ibesikpo Austan Community. The research instrument, including the structured questionnaire and interviews, will be administered within the Ibesikpo and Austan Ekpe clans, which constitute the Local Government Area. The study aims to understand the role of women in promoting sustainable development within this community and to examine the factors that influence women's empowerment and participation in sustainable development initiatives. It will assess various indicators of sustainable development, including economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability, focusing on women's contributions. While the study provides valuable insights into the context of Akwa Ibom State and the Ibesikpo Austan Community, its findings may need to be more generalizable to other regions or communities. The scope is limited to the specific population and geographic area under investigation, ensuring a focused and in-depth analysis of the research objectives.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *The Issue of Marginalization and Brutalization*

The marginalization and brutalization of women in society, particularly in Akwa Ibom State, has attracted academic interest. However, the current situation has reached a point where it is no longer acceptable to the female population. It is believed that success should be attained through hard work and competition, but societal factors have made it more difficult for men than women (Udokang, 2004a). It is important to acknowledge that the marginalization and brutalization of women is a serious concern that needs to be addressed. Historically, Women have faced various forms of discrimination, inequality, and violence in many societies worldwide. These issues prevent them from fully participating and thriving in social, economic, and political spheres. While it is true that progress has been made in some areas towards gender equality, there is still a long way to go. Women continue to face challenges such as limited access to education, economic opportunities, and decision-making positions. They are also disproportionately affected by gender-based violence and other forms of abuse. Society must recognize and address these issues by promoting gender equality, creating supportive policies and legislation, and adopting a culture of respect and inclusivity. Efforts should be made to empower women, provide them equal opportunities, and ensure their safety and well-being. Additionally, it is essential to engage men as allies in promoting gender equality. Men can be crucial in challenging societal norms and attitudes, perpetuating discrimination, and violence against women. By working together, society can create a more equitable and just environment (Udokang, 2004b).

#### 2.1.1 The Significant Impact of Gender Inequalities

According to World Bank research (World Bank, 1998a), approximately 70% of the 1.3 billion people living on less than \$1 a day are women. This statistic underscores the disproportionate burden faced by women in poverty. Gender inequalities can limit women's access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and decision-making power, which in turn hampers overall development. The UNDP's analysis highlights a strong correlation between its gender empowerment measure and gender-related development indices, as well as its Human Development Index (HDI). The gender empowerment measure is an index that assesses women's economic and political participation, access to resources, and decision-making power. This analysis suggests that empowering women and promoting gender equality are crucial for development. Women can contribute significantly to economic growth and poverty reduction when provided equal opportunities and resources (World Bank, 1998b).

#### 2.1.2 Enhancement of Gender Equality

Gender equality enhances productivity, promotes innovation, and fosters inclusive and sustainable development. It also leads to improved health and education outcomes and increased political and social participation. However, recognizing the importance of gender equality, many development organizations and governments have been working to address gender disparities through various policies and programs. These efforts aim to empower

women, promote their rights, and create an enabling environment for full and equal participation in all aspects of society (World Bank, 1998c).

Additionally, United Nations reports indicate that in 1990 women's rights and gender equality were significant issues worldwide. Various organizations, including the United Nations, were working to address these concerns and promote women's rights. The UN held conferences and meetings throughout the decade to discuss women's rights and empowerment issues. The conference of the United Nations Decade for Women took place in 1985. The conference, officially known as the "World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development, and Peace," marked the culmination of a decade of efforts to advance women's rights and gender equality (United Nations, 1986a).

During the conference, discussions centered on assessing progress made during the UN Decade for Women, identifying remaining challenges, and developing strategies for further advancements. However, the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women was adopted as a plan of action to guide future efforts (United Nations, 1986b).

### 2.1.3 Traditional and Gender-biased

Chukukere states that a traditional and gender-biased view was prevalent in some societies, including Nigeria, at that time. It suggests that most men in Nigerian society believed that a woman's primary place was within the confines of the home, with her main role being in the kitchen. Additionally, women were seen as secondary citizens regarding national matters. Men, on the other hand, were expected to fulfill their duties of bearing and caring for children and engaging in agricultural work. It is important to note that societal views and gender roles are not static and can evolve. While these traditional gender norms may have been prevalent, Nigeria, like many other countries, has been trying to challenge and overcome such biases in recent years (Chukukere, 1995a)

Recognizing the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment, Nigeria has promoted women's participation in various spheres of life, including politics, education, and the workforce. Efforts have been made to enact legislation, such as the National Gender Policy and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, to protect women's rights and address gender-based violence and discrimination. Civil society organizations and advocacy groups in Nigeria have also been actively working to challenge gender stereotypes and promote women's rights. These initiatives aim to increase women's access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and decision-making positions, ultimately striving for gender equality. While progress has been made, it is important to acknowledge that there may still be existing gender disparities and challenges in achieving full gender equality in Nigeria and many other parts of the world. However, through continued efforts to challenge traditional gender norms and promote women's empowerment, societies can move toward a more inclusive and equal future (Chukukere, 1995b).

### 2.1.4 Analogy Between a Nation and a Living Organism.

Eboh states that a nation can be seen as a living organism, and for its integral growth, the

health of every part of its body is essential. If any part of the body that is society is hindered or underdeveloped, it affects the overall functioning of the nation. In the context of underdevelopment, he suggests that addressing the crisis requires mobilizing human and material resources to bring about beneficial socio-economic changes (Eboh, 1996a). Additionally, he argues that the emancipation of women becomes a decisive factor in the development of a nation. As Nigeria strives to become a developed nation, advancing Nigerian women becomes a categorical imperative, emphasizing its importance (Eboh, 1996b).

According to Onuoha (1994), sustained development will remain elusive unless women are effectively mobilized to embrace and promote the ideals of development. Onuoha highlights that women have faced discrimination within the family structure, particularly in areas such as production and education. Their contributions to socio-economic development in their communities are often overlooked and considered irrelevant. Her perspective underscores the need for gender equality and the recognition of women contributions to society. By addressing the discrimination faced by women within the family and acknowledging their valuable input in various sectors, communities can harness the full potential of women for overall development.

#### 2.1.5 The Traditional Concept of Women

According to Anthony (1996), the traditional concept of women, which entails grossly unfair treatment, has had a detrimental impact on their psychological well-being. This treatment has subtly eroded their sense of self, personality, and self-esteem. As a result, women may feel dehumanized, perceive themselves as inferior, and believe they cannot contribute to community decision-making processes. His perspective sheds light on the negative effects of gender inequality and the oppressive treatment of women within traditional societal structures. The limitations imposed on women's roles and their exclusion from decision-making can lead to feelings of diminished self-worth and hinder their active participation in community development.

#### 2.1.6 Akwa Ibom State Total Population

The total population of Akwa Ibom State is 2,359,736, with women comprising 50.75% of the population. It is also stated that 85% of the population resides and works in rural communities. Additionally, it is suggested that women play a significant role in food crop production, with approximately 90% of the food crops produced by women (Donatus, 1996 & Iniodu, 1993). These statistics highlight the substantial presence of women in rural communities and their significant contribution to the agricultural sector, specifically in food crop production. The data indicates that women in Akwa Ibom State play a vital role in ensuring food security and sustaining agricultural productivity. In addition to their involvement in agricultural production, women in the Ibesikpo Asutan community are also engaged in other areas, such as trading and cottage industry, and a small percentage of them pursue civil service jobs (Bender & Keddie, 1979). They suggest that women in the community have diverse economic activities and contribute to the local economy through their participation in various sectors.



### 2.1.7 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework employed in this study is the liberal feminist theory, and the perspective emerged from John Locke's social contract theories and seeks to challenge male dominance while advocating for social, political, and economic equality between women and men in society (Blake, 1998). The primary goal of the liberal feminist perspective is to bring about changes in laws that discriminate against women. Liberal feminism perceives women as active participants in development, rejecting the notion of passivity. It acknowledges women's significant role in society and aims to address gender disparities through direct state intervention. It includes granting women political and economic autonomy and reducing inequality between men and women. The theory seeks to rectify the traditional concept of grossly unfair treatment of women and encourages women's involvement in the sustainable economy. It aspires to restore women's sense of self-worth, personality, and self-esteem, allowing them to fully engage in economic planning and roles that are not taken for granted. In the context of the Ibesikpo Austan Community, it is argued that women should be provided with the necessary education and training to become leaders in their respective fields, including sustainable development, utilizing their intellectual, moral, and physical capabilities (Redclift, 1993).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Population of the Study

The research was conducted in the Ibesikpo Austan Community, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study population consisted of 73 females and 43 males selected from various organizations and groups such as the National Council of Women Empowerment Forum, Ibesikpo Asutan Women Development Association, Nka Unwana Iban Nung Udoe, churches, market women, farmers association, and women in the community. In total, there were 116 participants included in the study. The researchers utilized a survey methodology, employing a questionnaire as the primary and secondary data collection instrument. This approach allowed them to gather data efficiently and systematically from the selected sample, providing insights into the perspectives and experiences of the participants on the research topic.

#### 3.1.1 Approval and Ethical Consideration

It is commendable that the study followed ethical considerations and obtained necessary approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from the Department of Political Science and Public Administration Faculty of Social Science, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, before conducting research in Ibesikpo Austan Community. The approval indicates that the study was reviewed to ensure compliance with ethical standards and protect the rights and well-being of the participants. Obtaining informed consent is a crucial ethical requirement, and it is positive to hear that the researchers obtained informed consent from the participants. This process ensured that participants were provided with clear and comprehensive information about the study, including its purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Allowing participants, the right to withdraw from the study without

consequences further demonstrates respect for their autonomy and ensures voluntary participation (American Psychological Association, 2020a)

Maintaining confidentiality is an essential ethical consideration, and it is reassuring that the researchers emphasized protecting the participants' privacy. By employing measures to safeguard the demographic information and ensuring that the collected data is used solely for research purposes, the researchers demonstrated their commitment to data protection and confidentiality. The reference to the APA guidelines for ethics in research reinforces the importance of adhering to ethical principles and following established guidelines. American Psychological Association provides comprehensive guidelines for ethical conduct in research, which include considerations for obtaining informed consent, protecting participant confidentiality, and ensuring the overall welfare and rights of the participants (American Psychological Association, 2020b). By following these ethical considerations and guidelines, the researchers have demonstrated their commitment to ethically conducting research, upholding the principles of autonomy, confidentiality, and respect for participants' rights.

### 3.1.2 Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique used in research where participants are purposefully selected based on specific criteria that align with the research objectives. It allows researchers to intentionally choose individuals with the desired characteristics or qualities necessary for the study (Creswell, 2014). It involves selecting participants who meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. In this case, the researchers purposefully selected individuals from different groups and organizations within the Ibesikpo Asutan Community, such as the National Council of Women Empowerment Forum, Ibesikpo Asutan Women Development Association, churches, market women, farmers association, and other community members. By selecting participants based on their relevance to the study topic, the researchers aimed to obtain a sample representing different perspectives and experiences.

### 3.2 Data Collection

In the data collection process, the researchers used a survey methodology and a questionnaire as the primary and secondary data collection instrument. The questionnaire was designed to assess the contributions of women to sustainable development and to investigate the correlation between women's involvement and the overall progress of sustainable development in the community of Ibesikpo Austan. Using a survey methodology, the researchers aimed to gather data from a representative sample of participants within the community. The questionnaire was designed to include relevant questions that would provide insights into the specific areas of women's involvement in sustainable development and include roles in various sectors such as education, healthcare, economic activities, community development, and environmental conservation. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and open-ended questions, allowing quantitative and qualitative data to be collected. Closed-ended questions typically offer response options that participants can choose from, providing structured data that can be easily analyzed. However, the open-ended questions allow participants to provide more detailed and subjective responses, offering valuable

qualitative insights into their experiences and perspectives.

#### 4. Result

The research employed a combination of primary and secondary data sources. The primary data was gathered through structured questionnaires administered to members of various women's organizations in Ibesikpo Austan Local Government. These organizations include the Women Empowerment Forum, Ibesikpo Asutan Women Development Association, Nka Unwana Iban Nung Udoe, as well as women in churches, markets, and farmer's associations within the community. The structured questionnaires likely contained specific questions related to women's involvement in sustainable development, their contributions, challenges faced, and opportunities for empowerment. Additionally, the research also utilized secondary data from various sources. These sources include World Bank reports and UN newsletters. Secondary data sources provide existing information and data that can supplement the primary data collected from the questionnaires. These sources may contain relevant statistics, case studies, research findings, and expert opinions that support the research objectives and provide a broader context for the study.

The research aimed to gather comprehensive information on women's involvement in sustainable development in the Ibesikpo Austan Community by utilizing primary and secondary data sources. The primary data collection through questionnaires allowed for direct input from women in the community, while the secondary data provided additional insights and contextual information from reputable sources. Combining primary and secondary data sources can enhance the reliability and validity of the research findings, as it allows for data triangulation and validation of results. The primary data reflects the specific perspectives and experiences of the participants, while the secondary data provides broader insights and supports the overall analysis.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	43	37.1
Female	73	62.9
Total	116	100

Table above shows that out of 116 respondents used, 37.1 % of the respondents were male and 62.9 % of the respondents were female.

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage	Mid-Point
16-20	11	9.5	18
21-25	13	11.2	23
26-30	12	10.3	28
31-35	16	13.8	33
36-40	18	15.5	38

41-45	15	12.9	43
46-50	14	12.1	48
51-55	9	7.8	53
56-60	8	6.9	58
Total	116	100	

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of Respondent by Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	33	28.4
Married	43	37.1
Widowed	40	34.5
Total	116	100

Table 4. Percentage Distribution of Respondent by Level of Education

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Primary Education	40	34.5
Secondary Level	36	31.0
Tertiary Level	23	19.8
Master's Degree and above	17	14.7
Total	116	100

Table above shows distribution of respondents by level of education with tertiary level having the lowest percentage and primary level the highest.

Table 5. Percentage Distribution of Respondent by Religion

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Catholic Churches	25	21.6
Protestant Churches	48	41.4
Pentecostal Churches	27	23.3
Traditional Religion	16	13.8
Total	116	100

Table above shows distribution of respondents by religion with Protestant churches having the highest frequency.

#### 4.1 Test of Hypothesis One

H0: There is no correlation between gender discrimination and greater poverty.

H1: There is a correlation between gender discrimination and greater poverty.

Table 5. The Chi Square ( $\chi^2$ ) Table

Q8	SA	A	D	SD	Total
	29 (29.0)	16 (23.3)	32 (22.0)	20 (22.7)	97
Q10	31 (34.7)	28 (27.8)	26 26.4	31 27.1	116
Q15	36 (32.3)	33 (25.9)	15 (24.6)	24 (25.2)	108
Total	96	77	73	75	321

 Table 6. Chi Square ( $\chi^2$ ) Calculation

R-C	FO	FE	FO-FE	(FO-FE) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{(FO-FE)^2}{FE}$
1-1	20	22.7	-2.7	7.29	0.32
1-2	32	22.0	10	100	4.55
1-3	16	23.3	-7.3	53.29	2.29
2-1	29	29.0	0	0	0.00
2-2	31	27.1	3.9	15.21	0.56
2-3	26	26.4	-0.4	0.16	0.01
3-1	28	27.8	0.2	0.04	0.00
3-2	31	34.7	-3.7	13.69	0.39
3-3	24	25.2	-1.2	1.44	0.06
4-1	15	24.6	-9.6	92.16	3.75
4-2	33	25.9	7.1	50.41	1.95
4-3	36	32.3	3.7	13.69	0.42
Total					$\chi^2 = 14.30$

Calculate  $\chi^2$  value =14.30

Degree of Freedom (df) = (c-1) (r-1)

Where c= column, r = rows

Df = (3-1) (4-1)

= (2) (3)

Degree of Freedom = 6.

Table value = 12.59

#### 4.2 Test of Hypothesis Two

The insignificant nature of rural development is directly related to discrimination against women in Akwa Ibom State.

Testing attributes on women managerial capabilities using arbitrary norms for comparison purpose to test questions 3, 4, 5, 9, 12, 16, 17.

Table 7. The Questionnaire Questions Used

S/N	Item	A	SA	D	SD	U
1	There is gender discrimination against women in Akwa Ibom State					
2	Such discrimination is common in Ibesikpo Austan Local Government Area					
3.	Government policies are also discriminatory against women					
4	Discriminatory traditional belief influences community policies concerning women					
5	Gender discrimination lead to economic deprivation against women					
6	Gender discrimination hampers sustainable development in the country					
7	There is a correlation between gender discrimination and widespread poverty					
8	The government has done enough to empower women in the Local Government Area					
9	The women potentials are underutilized in the Local Government					
10	Women should be given an equal place with men in the society					
11	Women will not be submissive to men anymore if empowered					
12	Women are the worse hit by poverty in the Local Government Area					
13	Women are not good managers of resources					
14	Government package like soft loans, training, farm, and non-farm inputs etc. do not get to the targeted poor women					
15	Greater women empowerment will lead to sustainable development in the Local Government and state at large.					
16	Women are contributing greatly to the economic sustenance of the Local Government and the state					
17	The State and Local Government can never attain true development if women are not properly empowered.					

A -Agree

SA- Strongly

D- Disagree

SD- Strongly Disagree

U- Undecided

Table 8. The Grading indicates the Response of the Respondents and the percentage.

Score Grouping	Grading	Respondents	Percentage
1-7	Very Poor	17	14.7
8-17	Average	21	18.1
18-27	Good	53	45.7
28-35	Excellent	25	21.5
Total		116	100

### 4.3 Result Description

The study results indicate that many respondents perceive gender discrimination against women in Akwa Ibom State. In question 1, which asked if there is gender discrimination against women in the state, 50 respondents strongly agreed, and 25 respondents agreed, making up 64.7% of the population. It suggests that most participants believe gender discrimination is prevalent in the region. Regarding the impact of gender discrimination, question 5 explored whether gender discrimination leads to economic deprivation against women. Among the 116 respondents, 28 disagreed (24.1%), while 60 strongly agreed (51%), indicating that a substantial proportion of the participants see a link between gender discrimination and economic deprivation faced by women.

In question 7, the study examined the correlation between gender discrimination and widespread poverty. Of the respondents, 42 agreed (36.2%), and 28 strongly agreed (24.1%), making up 60.3% of the population, suggesting a perceived association between gender discrimination and poverty. However, it is worth noting that respondents disagreed or were undecided on these issues. For instance, in question 1, 11 respondents disagreed, and 15 respondents were undecided, making up 22.4% of the population. In question 5, 28 respondents disagreed (24.1%); in question 7, 23 disagreed, and 16 strongly disagreed, accounting for 33.6% of the population.

Overall, the findings of the study support the hypothesis that gender discrimination is perceived to be prevalent in Akwa Ibom State, and there is a perceived link between gender discrimination, economic deprivation, and widespread poverty among women. The results suggest that gender-related issues need attention, and there is a need for further research and actions to address gender disparities and promote gender equality in the region.

The study results indicate mixed perceptions on issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment in society.

In question 10, which stated, "Women should be given an equal place with men in society," 31 respondents strongly agreed, and 28 agreed, making 59 positive responses. On the other hand, 26 respondents disagreed, and 31 strongly disagreed, resulting in a combined 49% of negative responses, slightly lower than the 50.9% positive response. It suggests that while a significant portion of the respondents support women's equal place in society, a considerable proportion also have reservations or disagree with the notion. Regarding question 12, which examined the perception that "Women are the worst hit by poverty in the Local Government

Area," 36 respondents strongly agreed, and 24 agreed, representing a total of 51.7% positive responses. Conversely, 20 respondents disagreed, 18 strongly disagreed, and 18 were undecided, accounting for 32.8% of the population combined. It implies that a majority of the participants see women as disproportionately affected by poverty, but there are still respondents who hold differing opinions or are uncertain about this issue.

In question 14, the study explored the perception that "Government packages like soft loans, training, farm, and non-farm inputs, etc., do not reach the targeted poor women." Here, 78 respondents (67.2%) expressed positive views, indicating that these government packages do not adequately reach the targeted poor women. Conversely, 21 respondents (18.1%) disagreed, expressing confidence in the effectiveness of these government initiatives, and 17 respondents were undecided. It indicates that a significant portion of the respondents doubt the effectiveness of government programs in reaching their intended beneficiaries. Overall, the findings show that perceptions of women's equal place in society, the impact of poverty on women, and the effectiveness of government initiatives for women are mixed among the respondents. The results suggest the need for further exploration and targeted interventions to address these issues and foster gender equality and women's empowerment in the Local Government Area.

In question 16, which states, "Women are contributing greatly to the economic sustenance of the Local Government and the state," the results show that a majority of the respondents (57.8%) hold a positive view, agreeing that women are making significant contributions to the economic sustenance of the Local Government and the state. This finding aligns with the alternative hypothesis, suggesting that there is a perception among the participants that women play a crucial role in the economic development and well-being of the region. On the other hand, a smaller proportion of respondents (18.9%) disagreed with the statement, indicating that they do not share the same perception of women's economic contributions. This percentage represents those who held a negative view, suggesting a diversity of opinions among the respondents regarding this particular aspect.

## **5. Discussion of Findings**

The study findings indicate that most participants recognize and appreciate women's economic contributions to the Local Government and the state. It aligns with the viewpoint expressed by Eboh (1996), emphasizing that the emancipation of women is a crucial factor in a nation's development. As Nigeria aspires to become a developed nation, advancing Nigerian women becomes imperative, underscoring its importance. The study's findings are consistent with (Onuoha,1994) perspective that sustainable development can only be achieved if women are effectively mobilized to embrace and promote development ideals. The study reveals that women have faced discrimination within the family structure, particularly in areas such as production and education. Consequently, their contributions to socioeconomic development in their communities are often disregarded and overlooked. It highlights the need for gender equality and the recognition of women's contributions to society. By addressing the discrimination women face within the family and acknowledging their valuable input across various sectors, communities can fully harness the potential of women for overall



development.

Additionally, the study aligns with the viewpoint of Anthony that the traditional concept of women, which entails unfair treatment, negatively affects their psychological well-being (Anthony, 1996).

The study suggests this treatment has subtly eroded women's sense of self, personality, and self-esteem. Consequently, women may feel dehumanized, perceive themselves as inferior, and believe they cannot contribute to community decision-making. It underscores the significance of addressing gender-based discrimination and promoting women's empowerment to improve their well-being. Moreover, the study reveals that women play a significant role in food crop production, with approximately 90% of the food crops being produced by women, as supported by sources like Donatus and Iniodu (Donatus, 1996 & Iniodu, 993).

In addition to their involvement in agricultural production, women in the Ibesikpo Asutan community are engaged in other areas, such as trading and cottage industry, and a small percentage of them pursue civil service jobs, as indicated by Bender and Keddie (Bender & Keddie, 1979). It highlights the diverse economic contributions of women in the community.

The study's findings emphasize recognizing and empowering women in Nigeria. By addressing discrimination, promoting gender equality, and acknowledging the valuable contributions of women, communities can fully utilize their potential for overall development. The study also highlights the significant role played by women in food crop production and their involvement in various economic sectors, further underscoring their contributions to the socioeconomic development of their communities.

### *5.1 Limitation*

The study may have relied on participants' perceptions and subjective opinions regarding women's economic contributions and the discrimination they face. The study has relied on most previous literature and sources from the 1990s, which could need to be updated. Socio-economic dynamics and gender roles may have changed over time, and using outdated sources may not fully capture women's current realities and perspectives in the community. Furthermore, the study's findings may have been limited to a specific geographic location or context, such as the Ibesikpo Asutan community. It could limit the generalizability of the findings to other communities or regions within Nigeria, which may have different socio-economic dynamics and gender norms. Future research could address these limitations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the economic contributions and challenges faced by women in the Local Government and the state.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the research highlights the impact of the stagnated economy on the neglect of women's contributions in Nigeria. Discrimination against women persists in Akwa Ibom State, despite their vital role in food production and other sectors. The study also reveals a need for long-term agendas or institutional structures to support women in most Local Government

communities to address these challenges and promote sustainable development; there is a pressing need to integrate women into the development process through gender partnership. By recognizing and valuing the contributions of both men and women and ensuring their complementary roles, accelerated and sustainable development can be achieved in the state and the country. Efforts should be made to eliminate discrimination, provide equal opportunities for women, and establish institutional mechanisms that empower and support women's economic participation. It can include policies that promote gender equality, education, and training programs, access to financial resources, and creating a supportive environment that enables women to thrive in various sectors. By harnessing the full potential of women and ensuring their active involvement in decision-making processes, Nigeria can overcome the challenges posed by the stagnated economy and work towards inclusive and sustainable development.

### *6.1 Recommendation*

Free, improved, and compulsory education should be introduced in the community for both male and female children. Financial assistance for scholarships, loans and bursaries should be increased. Mobile training workshops should be provided for training rural women on new technologies. The Government should improve the lending capabilities of people's and community banks. The Government should be committed to establishing workable research centers for women in rural communities. Access roads should be opened to link the farms to the markets in rural communities. The Government should provide special farm vehicles such as tricycles and boat for women in riverine areas to assist them in fishing. The provision of electricity is the biggest issue and challenge for rural communities. The Government should establish multipurpose women's centers in Local Government Areas where functional and vocational education classes can occur. Additionally, more rural women should be encouraged to participated in politics.

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