

Social inclusion of women in development and rural poverty reduction in Southern Senatorial District, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined social inclusion of women in development and rural poverty reduction in Southern Senatorial District, Cross River State, Nigeria. The specific focus of the study was on the domains of engagement in entrepreneurship, food production involvement and cooperative society involvement. The study was built on women's equality and empowerment model and endogenous development model. The research design adopted was survey. Data for testing the hypotheses were generated from using questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The sample for the study was made up of 600 respondents selected using the Cochran sample determinant. The generated data were statistically tested using Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient and Chi-square. The tested hypotheses revealed that: engagement in entrepreneurship, food production involvement and cooperative society involvement relate significantly with rural poverty reduction. It was concluded that social inclusion of women in development activities have moderating impact of rural poverty reduction. Since rural women have made immense contribution in food security at subsistence level, more resources should be invested by government in its rural development programme to supplement the efforts of these women in food production.

Keywords: Social inclusion, women, development and rural poverty reduction

Introduction

Rural poverty accounts for nearly 63 percent of poverty worldwide, reaching 90 percent in countries like China and Bangladesh and range from 65 percent to 90 percent in Sub Sahara Africa (World Bank, 2020). The exception are several countries in Latin America in which much of poverty is in urban areas. In almost all countries, there is a higher incidence of poverty in rural areas and the conditions of the rural poor are far worse than those of the urban poor in terms of personal consumption levels, access to education, health care, potable water and sanitation, housing, transport and communication. Rural poverty is not only a state of existence; it encompasses many dimensions and complexities. It is almost always characterized by high levels of deprivation (dispossession), vulnerability (high risk and low capacity to cope) and the powerlessness (World Bank, 2020). In Nigeria, 40.1 percent of people are poor according to the 2018/19 national monetary poverty line and 63 percent are multi-dimensionally poor according to the National MPI, 2022. Multi-dimensional poverty is higher in rural areas where 72 percent of people are poor, compared to 42 percent of people in urban areas (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Persistently high levels of rural poverty, both with or without overall economic growth have been feeding into rapid population growth and migration of people to urban areas. Much of the urban poverty is a reflection of the poverty alleviation strategies of the rural poor. The urban informal sector act as a sponge for the labour that cannot find jobs in the formal sector and has a strong rural links. Transient labour and remittances are a link between the rural and urban poor households in many countries. Rural underdevelopment constrains sustained growth of industries in urban areas because it raises the cost of food and raw materials and reduces the size of the market for industrial goods (World Bank, 2020).

Successive Nigerian governments have initiated various rural development programmes to attack the scourging nature of poverty among rural dwellers. However, many of the initiatives are not well articulated and are not directly targeted at rural poor. As a result, a large proportion of the

population still live below the poverty line, with poor nutrition, food insecurity, ill health, short life span etc. This has given impetus to the rural women as a critical sector of the population to become players in the rural development domain with the aim of ameliorating rural poverty.

Women are important human resources not only in Nigeria but also in other parts of the world. According to the UNDP (2006) report, there are more than one billion people in the world today, the great majority of whom are women. Nwogu (2004) stated that about 31 million of these women reside and work in rural areas and they constitute 70 to 80 percent of the agricultural work force in the country. The Nigeria woman constitute the core of socio-economic activities. Since they carry multiple burdens of resource management and house hold responsibility as well as care for the most vulnerable within the family. Tende (2013) stated that women nurture and provide for children. Despite their numerical strength and responsibility, women have been socially excluded in the development process.

Rural women have featured prominently in development discourse in recent times because of their being ‘‘systematically blocked from rights, opportunities and resources, examples, housing, employment, healthcare, civil engagement, democratic participation and due process that are normally available to members of society and which are keys to social integration Prakash (2006) asserted that the disenfranchisement of women is linked to women’s status educationally, socially and economically. Women as such do not freely take part in all dimensions of societal life. Avorny (2013) argued that it is regrettable to note that prevailing conditions ‘‘locally and globally aggravate the vulnerability of women and consequently result to continuous increase in the number of females or women living below poverty line.

Despite the cumulative challenges confronting women in rural areas (agrarian communities), they have substantially contributed towards improving the standard of living through various development activities. For instance, their participation in productive, distributive and retail food ventures etc. in rural areas had long been acknowledged (Avorny, 2013). Women in Nigeria, as elsewhere in other parts of the world, have been the front liner in poverty alleviation through active participation in both farm and non-farm activities. They are involved in activities such as livestock production, crafting, weaving, spinning, tie and dye, retail trade, food processing, subsistence farming in fruit, vegetable and cassava production etc. (Ekanem, 2014) reported that African women generally are responsible for 70 percent marketing, 90 percent of water supply and 80 percent of fuel wood supply for household use. Rural women micro enterprises have contributed to pro-poor economic growth in the rural communities suggesting employment creation, income generation, income diversification with obvious improved standard of living. Rural women involvement in cooperative ventures (such as farmer’s cooperative, retailers, producers, etc.) has provided them the opportunity to sustainable enterprise promotion in rural areas. Organizing into cooperative enterprises opens avenue for women saving, *osusu* loan group, remittance pooling etc. (Nkpoyen and Bassey 2012). All these results to increased economic security, acquisition of entrepreneurial skills and increased contribution to poverty reduction in families and communities. It was against this background this paper investigated social inclusion of women in development activities and rural poverty reduction in Southern Senatorial District, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Rural poverty has made communities unable to achieve transformational economic, social and environmental changes required for improved standard of living. The continual poor living condition and quality of livelihood of rural population has negatively affected the wellbeing of

individuals, families and communities. The experiences of poor sanitation, disease, hunger, food insecurity, poor literacy status, deprivations are indicators of poverty crisis in rural communities of Cross River State Southern Senatorial District. The low level of wellbeing has manifested in a significantly less access to services.

In Cross River State, rural communities are affected by low incomes and living standards. Their earning capacity from the informal sector or non-wage employment is also significantly poor. Additionally, very few assets are owned by households, prevalence of families eating not more than one meal per day; a high proportion of malnourished children, lack of vocational skill acquisition centres to promote self-employment, long distances to nearest produce markets especially during rainy season and all along the year for riverine areas; a huge proportion of children walking long distances to fetch water and to attend school etc. Rural communities have endured serious socio-economic disadvantages despite the long tradition of Federal, State and local government interventions. These conditions have collectively affected their wellbeing in the agrarian communities of the state in terms of reduction in life expectancy, literacy, level of employment, health status; also changes in less tangible factors such as personal dignity, freedom of association, personal safety and extent of participation in community governance and civil society. The overall quality of life is poor.

Past successive Nigerian governments rural development programmes posed serious challenges because of adoption of top-bottom model without the much-desired trickle- down effect (Nkpoyen, Mbat & Bassey, 2013). One recurring factor in rural poverty reduction is that of failure by planners to involve the rural people and women in particular in measures, strategies and plans meant for their development. Thus, local resources are not adequately mobilized and utilized and new techniques are forced on the rural people resulting to resentment and apathy. It is this top-bottom approach that constrains reduction in rural poverty. Thus, these agrarian communities of Southern Senatorial District, Cross River State are still characterized by poor and unavailable basic infrastructural services, perceived deprivation, poverty particularly due to inability to secure financial capital for small venture, agro-allied ventures etc.

Therefore, this improper strategy triggered a rethink which resulted in projecting women development intervention as alternative approach to rural poverty reduction. Women development intervention being a bottom-top approach implements development activities from the indigenous model of development perspective. Available literature suggested that women development intervention have successfully reduced rural poverty in several communities globally. Although existing studies in Nigeria support the contributions of rural women to rural wellbeing, there is a dearth of studies in Cross River State Southern Senatorial District supporting this particularly when examined within the back drop of challenges such as patriarchal influence, cultural characteristics, limited income, land fragmentation etc. Therefore, this study filled up this gap in literature/knowledge. Thus, the question it attempted to addresses was: to what extent have rural social inclusion of women in development impacted on rural poverty reduction in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria?

Objectives of the study

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the relationship between women food production involvement and poverty reduction in terms of household food security.

2. Determine the association between women entrepreneurship engagement and poverty reduction in terms of improved household income.
3. Investigate the association between women cooperative organization involvement and poverty reduction in terms of improved household consumption of goods and services.

Research Hypotheses

1. Women involvement in food production has no significant relationship with poverty reduction in terms of household food security
2. Women entrepreneurship engagement has no significant association with poverty reduction in terms of household income.
3. Women involvement in cooperative organization has no significant association with poverty reduction in terms of household consumption of goods and services.

Literature review

Social inclusion of women in development and rural poverty reduction

Women are resourceful economic agents who contribute to the income of families and the growth of communities in multitude of ways. They work as entrepreneurs, as farm and non-farm labourers, in family businesses; for others, as self- employed. In 2008, two thirds of employed men and women in sub-Saharan Africa worked in agriculture mainly as contributing (unpaid) family workers or own account workers. In Asia, 44 percent of men and 70 percent of women workers were engaged in agriculture (FAO, IFAD & ILO, 2010). Women play crucial roles ensuring food and nutrition security, eradicating rural poverty and improving the wellbeing of their families (Women Watch, 2012). They have recorded substantial contribution to their wellbeing, families, rural communities and overall economic productivity (UN Women, 2016).

The informal sector is where women's collaborative and self- help initiatives in production presented a vital economic resource in poverty reduction. Women initiatives are their contributions in terms of participation in economic, political, social, psychological and spiritual affairs of society. These outcomes are responsible for the revolutionary transformation of the place of women as seen in the number of women activists, associations and cooperative societies. Women have contributed in no small measure to the wellbeing of their homes and villages developmentally (Ekanem, 2014). Women have been observed to be fundamental to rural poverty reduction due to their potential to strengthen (World Bank FAO and IFAD, 2009). For instance, women in rural communities in Cross River State are involved in socio-economic development activities such as garri processing mill, palm kernel mill, fish ponds etc. In riverine communities of Akpabuyo local government area, women have ventured into traditional male fishing activities as sources of livelihoods. They are also involved in maternal and health care services as traditional birth attendants, herbalists etc. A study in Brazil showed that the likelihood of a child survival increased by 20 percent when the mother controlled household income (Anam, 2011).

According to the Department for International Development (DFID) (2010), women initiatives matter for pro-poor growth. Higher female earnings and bargaining power translate into greater investment in children's education, health and nutrition which lead to socio-economic wellbeing and growth in the long term. DFID (2010) further stated that total agricultural outputs in Africa could increase by up to 20 percent if women's access to agricultural inputs was equal to

men. Further, it reported that women-owned businesses comprise up to 38 percent of all registered small businesses worldwide. The number of women-owned businesses in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America is growing rapidly and with that growth come direct impacts on job creation and poverty reduction.

Theoretical framework

Women's Equality and Empowerment Model

Prior to 1970, the perception was that the development process affected men and women in the same way. Productivity was equated with the cash economy and so most of women's work was ignored. When it became apparent that economic development did not automatically eradicate poverty through trickle-down effects, the problems of distribution and equality of benefits to the various segments of the population became of major importance in development theory. Research on women in the Third World countries challenged the most fundamental assumption of international development by adding a gender dimension to the study of the development process. Consequently, a new theoretical approach was demanded (Sainsbury, 1996). The women's equality and empowerment framework was thus introduced by Sarah Longwe (1995) for use in recognizing and analyzing gender issues in the development process

Participation in various development activities is used for the purpose of achieving increased control over the factors of production and to ensure their equal access to community resources and the distribution of benefits. Women inclusion in development initiatives is a means of creating self-reliance. It is a process by which unequal power relations between genders can be overcome. The model is a framework for understanding women contribution to rural poverty reduction through their participation in subsistence food production, entrepreneurship, involvement in cooperative organization. This framework provides a perspective on the process of socio-economic transformation. It strongly provides a more "bottom – up" perspective to women's development. The strategic interests of rural women can be recognized and pursued only by the grassroots community themselves

Endogenous Development Model

The model is associated with Bassand *et al.*, (1986). The model was put forward in opposition to traditional understanding or in other words the 'modernist' notion of development. Endogenous development model hypothesizes that improvements in the socio- economic wellbeing of disadvantaged areas can best be effected by recognizing and animating the collective resources of the territory itself (Ray, 2000). The model implies that the activities of rural women have made these communities have greater control of their relationship with the environment. The resultant development has a positive effect on the total human condition. These rural women have been able to develop their knowledge, skills and entrepreneurial abilities within their local environment. The collective and cumulative impact of these initiatives is improvement in socio-economic wellbeing.

Methodology

The research design adopted for the study was the mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative. Southern Senatorial District is one of the three Senatorial Districts in Cross River State. It is made up of seven (7) local government areas: Biase, Akamkpa, Odukpani, Calabar South, Calabar Municipality, Akpabuyo and Bakassi. It has a population of 1,590, 200 (NPC, 2016 Population Projection). The population of the study comprised all the women inhabitants of the seven (7) local government areas that constitute the southern senatorial district of Cross River

State, a total population of 1,590,200 (NPC, 2016 Population Projection). The sample for the study was made up of 654 respondents selected from six (6) local government areas (Calabar Municipality was excluded due to its urban status) and eighteen (18) villages. The study comprised rural women ranging from literate to non-literate farmers, traders, business women, women engaged in fishing, community workers and the unemployed who reside in this study area irrespective of their status in their communities.

Sample and sampling procedure

In determining the sample size, the simplified procedure recommended by Taro Yamene (1967) was used. The multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for the study. Firstly, all the seven (7) local government areas that make up the Southern Senatorial district were purposively studied except one (1); Calabar Municipality was excluded because it is characteristically an urban environment. Thus, six (6) local government areas out of the seven (7) participated in the study. These six (6) local government areas constituted the six strata of the study. From each stratum, three communities (villages) were selected. To draw the actual respondents of the study, a systematic sampling technique was adopted. The total of 654 respondents (rural women) including 48 women participated in the Focus Group Discussion (drawn from the 6 sub-stratum) and 6 women participated in the Key Informant Interview (drawn from each strata).

Method of data analysis

Data analysis was done, hypothesis by hypothesis, testing each one at 0.05 level of significance. Both descriptive and inferential statistical tests were conducted. The specific inferential statistics adopted were Chi-square test, Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis, and content analysis of qualitative data.

Data analysis

Hypothesis 1.

Women involvement in food production has no significant relationship with household wellbeing.

Table 2: Pearson product-moment correlation analysis of the relationship between women involvement in food production and household wellbeing (N=600)

Variables	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal
Rural women initiative in food security				
a. Cultivation of food crops (X ₁)	1050	1950	1775	0.878
b. Poultry/livestock production (X ₂)	1055	1970	1750	0.614
c. Improve storage facilities (X ₃)	1040	1945	1780	0.925
d. Adequate nutrition (X ₄)	1046	1952	1774	0.860
Household wellbeing (y)	950	1650		

Significant at 0.05, critical- r= 0.195, df= 598

Source: Field Data (2024).

Results of analysis in Table 2 show that the calculated r-values of 0.878, 0.614, 0.925, 0.860 are greater than the critical r-value of 0.195 at 0.05 level of significance, with 598 degrees of freedom. By these results, the null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis upheld. This means that women involvement in food production in terms of cultivation of food crops, poultry/livestock production, improved storage facilities and adequate nutrition have significant relationship with household food security.

Hypothesis Two

Women entrepreneurship engagement has no significant association with household income. Entrepreneurship was classified into vocational skills, handicrafts, small retail shops, running of restaurant, snacks bars and catering services while household income was classified into high and low household income. Chi-square (χ^2) analysis was used to test this hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 3

Table 3: Chi-square (χ^2) contingency analysis of the association between women entrepreneurship and household income (N =600)

Variables	Household income		Total
	High	Low	
Women in entrepreneurship			
Vocational skills	55	25	80
Handicrafts	50	45	95
Small retail shops	120	30	150
Running of restaurant	60	40	100
Snacks bar	32	53	85
Catering services	48	42	90
Total	365	235	600

Source: Field Data (2024)

Table 4: Contingency table showing the association between women entrepreneurship engagement and household income

Cell	O	E	O - E	(O - E) ²	(O - E) ² /E
1	55	48.67	6.33	40.0689	0.82
2	25	31.33	-6.33	40.0689	1.28
3	50	57.79	-7.79	60.6841	1.05
4	45	37.21	7.79	60.6841	1.63
5	120	91.25	28.75	826.5625	9.06
6	30	58.75	-28.75	826.5625	14.07
7	60	60.83	-0.83	0.6889	0.01
8	40	39.17	0.83	0.6889	0.02
9	32	51.71	-19.71	388.4841	7.51
10	53	33.29	19.71	388.4841	11.67
11	48	54.75	16.75	45.5625	0.83
12	42	35.25	6.75	45.5625	1.29
Total	600				49.24

Source: Field Data (2024).

Calculated (χ^2) value = 49.24

Critical (χ^2) value = 11.1

Level of significance = 0.05

Degree of freedom = 5

Result of analysis in Table 3 show that the calculated (χ^2) value of 49.24 is greater than the critical (χ^2) of 11.1 at 0.05 level of significance, with 5 degrees of freedom. This means that women entrepreneurship engagement has a significant association with household income.

Hypothesis Three

Women involvement in cooperative organization has no significant association with household consumption of goods and services. Cooperative organization involvement was classified into financial support of members and financial self-sufficiency while household consumption of goods and services was classified into increased household consumption and decreased household consumption of goods and services. Chi-square (X^2) analysis was used to test the hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 5

Table 5: Chi-square (X^2) contingency analysis of the association between women involvement in cooperative organization and consumption of goods and services (N= 600)

Variables	Household consumption		Total
	Increased	Decreased	
Women in cooperative organization			
Financial support of members	220	100	320
Financial self- sufficiency	125	155	280
Total	345	255	600

Source: Field Data (2024).

Table 6: Contingency table showing the association between women involvement in cooperative organization and household consumption of goods and services

Cell	O	E	O - E	(O - E) ²	(O - E) ² /E
1	220	184	36	1296	7.04
2	100	136	-36	1296	9.53
3	125	161	-36	1296	8.05
4	155	119	36	1296	10.89
Total	600				35.51

Source: Field Data (2024).

Calculated (X^2) value = 35.51; Critical (X^2) value = 3.84; level of significance =0.05

Degree of freedom = 1

Results of analysis in table 5 show that the calculated (X^2) value of 35.51 is greater than the critical (X^2) value of 3.84, at 0.05 level of significance with 1 degree of freedom. This means that there is a significant association between women involvement in cooperative organization and household consumption of goods and services. The result further showed that rural women involvement in cooperative organization promote financial support for members.

Discussion of findings

Women involvement in food production and poverty reduction through household food security

The statistical analysis of hypothesis one of this study revealed the fact that women involvement in food production has a significant relationship with poverty reduction in terms of household wellbeing. This implied that women involvement in food production in dimensions of cultivation of food crops especially for household consumption, poultry and livestock production, improved storage facilities and ensuring adequate nutrition have helped to reduce rural poverty and improve people's wellbeing. Findings support UNFAO (2001) emphasized that agriculture is a vital engine of growth and socio-economic development in countries where it serves as the major occupation of the poor.

Women represent a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy itself by reason of their roles as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs. The findings of this study are consistent with Roy and Mondal (2015) that women have culturally been involved as household labourer in preparing fish catching instrument. Women in Thailand contribute immensely to the production of fruits and vegetables in the homestead and small area of farm, tree plantain and processing. These help to increase the total family income.

The findings here validate Tambi *et al.*, (2017) that women constitute a crucial asset to humanity due to their triple indispensable role in the society. These roles are in the areas of productivity (food security), population growth (constituting the principal source of child bearing and domestic care-cooking, washing, serving, fetching and grooming. In these functions, women working in subsistence agriculture give in more than other occupation. Prakash (2006) earlier concluded from his study on women in Cameroon that about 90 percent of the food needed for subsistence by the rural population are supplied by women. The present study in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State has validated this conclusion.

In the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) carried out in some communities in the sub-stratum of the study, it was reported that women comprised a higher proportion of small holder farmers. The women work in agriculture, produce food, process basic food and also undertake rural marketing. In response to research question one, women have acted as very strong catalyst in rural poverty reduction. In the FGD at Esighi, in Bakassi Local Government Area, Anonymous (Pers. Comm.) (2024, Feb 10) reported that: *Our major work here is farming. Garri and fufu is our main source of diet and from there we get our family income. So we earn cash from cassava production. Some of us are able to make large quantity of starch from cassava. Some people from Calabar use the cassava product as raw material for their livestock there. Our men help us sometimes in clearing the land and ploughing (FGD, 2024).*

In the Key Informant Interview held in Anantigha in Calabar South local government area, member of the Community Women group, a small holder farmer aged 40 years Godwin, M (Pers. Comm.) (Feb 2024) responded to research question by stating that: *Although we do not have much money, our women are so committed to food production. Our land here is not good but through what we are able to plant our children are surviving. We are also involved in poultry, fishing and some of our people operate piggery. But I think, we have made our men proud by keeping our family intact in terms of food supply (KII, 2024).*

Women engagement in entrepreneurship and rural poverty reduction through improve income

The result of statistical analysis of hypothesis two revealed that an association exists between women engagement in entrepreneurship and rural poverty reduction through improve income. These findings support Tende (2013) that women entrepreneurs create and innovate to build and grow something of recognized value that is interlinked with socio-economic perspectives. These values are noticeable in terms of socio-economic benefits at individual, household and community levels. The existence of this association, according to Naude (2010), is because rural women entrepreneurship initiative is about their ability to create and build something of value from practically nothing; they create or seize an opportunity and pursue it regardless of the resources currently controlled by them. These women entrepreneurs, as confirmed by this study, exhibit innovative behaviours and employ strategic management practices in their businesses. These women are able to produce a combination of ideas, skills, money, equipment and market to make an enterprise successful (Naude, 2010).

The findings validate opinion that the expansion of the business venture leads to additional investment with the expected return on financial capital and other forms of capital. The involvement of rural women in entrepreneurship has led to the improvement in rural life. This finding support Adofi (2013) that the growth of rural women small scale enterprises in the rural environment is associated with socio-economic wellbeing in terms of job creation, opening of employment opportunity, reduction of unemployment rate and contributing towards poverty reduction.

In the Focus Group discussion carried out in Esighi in Bakassi local government area, in response to research question one, it was responded that:

Our poor women are involved in very many small businesses to earn income to take care of their homes. In the process of doing these businesses, they have been able to enhance their personal capabilities, they have a voice, they cannot be easily silenced by the men, so they also make inputs during village meetings. As we are able to make money, we tend to rely less on the men, who, of course, are not even helping us financially. In fact, we are equal to them or we are even better than some of them because our contribution to our family and community is greater (FGD, 2024).

In the Key Informant Interview, the women leader of the Women Organization, aged 51 years emphasized that:

Our women have high respect and better social image. Most of us have established savings group to enable us make savings and be more self-reliant. Importantly, self-reliance means self-employment. Self-employment means that you can take care of the basic necessities of your family to a certain extent. We are our employers. Government is not giving jobs (KII, 2024).

Women involvement in cooperative organization and poverty reduction through household consumption of good and services

The result of the statistical analysis of hypothesis showed that women involvement in cooperative organization significantly rural poverty reduction. This significant impact was confirmed through chi-square analysis of association between rural women initiative in cooperative organization and socio-economic wellbeing in terms of household consumption of goods and services. The findings support (Mayoux, 2001; Bunk, 2005) that the cooperative form of enterprises affords the women the opportunity to contribute to socio-economic wellbeing like men. Women cooperative enterprises can assume a variety of forms: they can be set up by a group of enterprises or by individual women entrepreneurs wishing to derive benefits from shared services, cheaper goods and easier access to markets to give their products a better advantage.

The findings of the study validate Carree and Thanik (2002) that women cooperative organization is an initiative whose members are able to create economies of scale and increase their influence and bargaining power. In sub-Saharan African societies, rural women invest individual efforts in the informal economic sector, operating at a minimal level and reaping meagre benefits in terms of income. Thus, working individually affects the growth and development of the local economy. Carree and Thanik (2002) commented that for the achievement of a better socio-economic wellbeing the rural women combine forces in small scale enterprises. This has been

affirmed by this study. The involvement in cooperative organization provides them a significant social and economic leverage to contribute towards the improvement of the quality of rural life.

The discussants in the FGD answering to question two expressed their views concerning their involvement in Cooperative Organization thus:

Cooperative organization are not many here. But for those of us who are members, we have seen the benefits. In fact, we are encouraging our women to try to belong. We contribute financially and we are able to solve problems in our homes (FGD, 2024). The women stressed that: We are able to sell our goods through this organization. Benefits are many and are shared among the women that is the members. We are able to borrow cash from it to do our small businesses. Members are encouraged to save and those who need money are given. Our condition of living has improved because of this. Members try to do their best to help fellow women (FGD, 2024).

Conclusion/recommendations

Social inclusion of women in development are significant predictors of rural poverty reduction. It was specifically established that based on the statistical analyses of the study that women involvement in food production, engagement in entrepreneurship and involvement in cooperative organization have collectively impacted on rural poverty reduction. Findings revealed that through involvement in food production, rural communities have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food; engagement in entrepreneurship has helped to change the living conditions of community by diversifying the rural economy and enhancing quality of rural life in the process; involvement in cooperative organization has helped to improve the income of rural communities. Food production ensures food security and it is a means of guaranteeing rural families secure livelihoods and overall wellbeing. Since rural women have made immense contribution in food security at subsistence level, more resources should be invested by government in its rural development programme to supplement the efforts of these women in food production.

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