Rural Women Empowerment Initiatives and Poverty Alleviation in Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated rural women empowerment initiatives for poverty alleviation in Enugu State, Nigeria. The study was guided by five (5) specific purposes, which were in line with the five (5) research questions that guided the study. Five (5) null hypotheses were also formulated for the study which was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted the descriptive survey design (quantitative and qualitative). The population of the study was 609 registered members of women cooperative societies in Enugu State, Nigeria. A sample size of 305 respondents was drawn for the study using multistage sampling procedure. Instruments developed by the researchers titled ''Rural Women Empowerment Initiative for Poverty Alleviation Questionnaire (RWIPAQ)'' were used for data collection in the study. The questionnaire was divided into sections A and B, where A focused on personal data of the respondents. Section B has a total of 39 items and was divided into five clusters – A to E in line with the research purposes and research questions. The instruments were given to three experts for face validation. The reliability of the questionnaire instrument was established by conducting a trail testing – administering 20 copies of the instruments to registered members of women organization in Awka South Local Government of Anambra State. The Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions while one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study showed that rural women empowerment initiatives can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State. Specifically, findings of the study revealed that: (i) rural women's empowerment in agro-processing and agricultural cooperation help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State; (ii) rural women's empowerment in skill development and digital literacy is very low in Enugu State; and (ii) several factors, including poor financial status of women, lack of political will by the government, socio-cultural norms of women's subjugation by their husbands, and others hinder rural women's engagement in poverty alleviation initiatives in Enugu State. The main limitation of this study was the inability to use the whole population of the study due to its broadness. The study recommends, among others, that there is need for rural women's empowerment in Enugu State through the establishment of agro-processing industries, cooperative societies, skill development and digital literacy initiatives, as a measure to lift them from feminized poverty.

Keywords: Rural women, empowerment initiatives, poverty alleviation, agro-processing, skill development

1. Introduction

Women are key agents of national development and also play a catalytic role towards the achievement of transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. However, many of these women live in rural areas where limited access to credit, health care issues and poor educational provision and attainment seem to be among the many challenges they face. More so, the present hike in food prices is one of the challenges affecting rural women more than the urban ones in Nigeria. While millions of individuals eat two or three times a day globally, a sizable portion of rural women only eat once a day (Alazi, 2016). The study adds that many of the rural women in the West African sub-region deprive themselves of one or two square meals in order to feed their children.

The rural women, especially in Nigeria are frequently face with enduring structural barriers that restrain their ability to fully exercise their human rights and advance both their quality of life and that of others. Nonetheless, rural women are relevant in their homes and communities because they help to achieve food and nutrition security, create income, improve rural livelihoods, and advance the general well-being (United Nations, 2015). Rural women play crucial roles both in the local and the international political economy, as well as in agro-related businesses in rural areas. Rural women contribute significantly to food production as well account for a sizable share of the world's agricultural labour force. However, despite the remarkable role played by the rural women in the Nigeria's economic development, they are being relegated (United Nation, 2015).

In Nigeria, and Enugu State in particular, rural women are being relegated in different ways despite their efforts and immense contributions to the society (Agbo & Isa, 2017). Women may not even have access to family finances in certain households, let alone have a voice in financial matters, irrespective of these, Nigerian women are being discriminated based on their gender. For example, women have to advocate for their rights before they are being considered for relevant positions in government; as men typically hold the major positions in offices. Due to their labour on family, farms and other domestic jobs, women make up the majority of unpaid productive workers (USAID, 2015). Despite these limitations and poverty, women are typically expected to provide for the nutritional needs of their families and for this reason, women empowerment is essential.

Meanwhile, empowerment is the capacity to which one takes effective charge of one's life or oneself through education, financial literacy and other pertinent skills. It is also the capacity to make decisions and implement them   without interference from other sources (Urom, 2002). In support of the aforementioned conception, Okpoko (2009) claimed that the word "empowerment" had its origins from power. Elaborating further, Okpoko asserted that the definition of empowerment is the transfer of power or authority to allow an individual to make decisions for themselves. By implication, empowerment implies that the recipient   has not previously had authority nor power, either via denial or by default. Within the framework of this research, empowerment can be described as the capacity to make choices and carry them out without obstacles as a result of personal support. People can be empowered individually or collectively.

Making rural women aware of their capacity to fully engage in decision-making entails empowering them to have equitable and adequate access to control over resources (Ugwu, 2018). Within the framework of this work, rural women's empowerment can be understood as a state in which they are being given the opportunities and support they needed in orderto be actively engaged in issues that impact them and also include them in decision-making that is pertinent to their survival and well-being. Empowerment of rural women might take the shape of projects that could promote agricultural productivity, skills development, technological advancement, or education.

In the rural economy, which includes crop production, fishery, livestock, and cottage enterprises, empowering women is essential. Averse to popular belief, women are significantly more involved in the rural economy. Both at home and in the field, rural women engage in a variety of activities; their engagements in the production cycle is particularly strong during the periods of harvesting and post-harvesting (Makama, 2015). Grain drying, cleaning, and storage are examples of home-based post-harvest tasks that are relatively completed by women. Preparing seeds, gathering manure from the farmyard, weeding, harvesting, and doing numerous other agricultural tasks are all important tasks performed by rural women (Eya, 2012).   It is also important to note that rural women's involvement in livestock and poultry management is noteworthy, as they bear the primary responsibility for tasks such as cutting fodder, cleaning sheds, processing animal products, and tending to sick animals. The study added that rural women tend the herds, milk the cows, gather wool, spin it into by-products, weave, and engage in different s other tasks. In addition to the direct

income-generating activities listed above, a large number of rural women work in non-farming rural jobs such as needlework, sewing, quilting, wool spinning, and tailoring.

If empowered, women can reach their full potential and use their skills to contribute to the workforce while also raising happier and healthier children when they are living a safe, fulfilled, and productive life. Additionally, they have the power to support sustainable economies that benefit society as a whole and humanity in general (Anyanwu, 2017). Empowering rural women beneficial to individuals, families, communities, and society at large. When empowered, women may make informed health choices for themselves and their families, improving mother and child health (Ishfaq et al., 2022).

Another strategy for empowering women economically is to strengthen rural women's access to land rights and property inheritance, thereby offering them the opportunity to accumulate assets, capital, and bargaining power. Women in developing and impoverished nations frequently face legal restrictions on their access to land based on their gender. Women, who own their land have some bargaining power that they would not typically have, and have more access to formal financial institutions and opportunities for economic independence. Fabiyi, and Akande, (2015) asserts that empowering rural women entails investing in them.

Improving one's education and training is crucial to reducing hunger and poverty. Compared to illiterate women, educated rural women are more likely to be healthier, earn more money, and have more influence over household decisions (Institute for Development Studies- IDS, 2014). Women with higher levels of education are also more likely to ensure that their children attend school. From the standpoint of development, the best possible investment in developing nations yields the highest rate of return – educating girls (IDS, 2014). In order to lower household poverty rates through increasing productivity in both agriculture and non-farm sectors, education and training should be encouraged.

From 1972 until the present time, the Nigerian government has launched a number of policies and structural programmes in an effort to combat poverty in the country (Igbuzor, 2015). Among these programmes are: General Yakubu Gowon's National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) in 1972, General Olusegun Obasanjo's Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in 1979, General Ibrahim Babangida's led Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) in

1986, National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1986, General Sani Abacha's led Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in 1998, President Olusegun Obasanjo's led Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999, National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP) in 2001 and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) 2004. Additionally, the YOUWIN and SURE-P were developed in 2011 by the President Goodluck Jonathan's administration. In 2020 President Mohammadu Buhari introduced N-power, FARMRMONI, TRADERSMONI and MARKETMONI, Micro crediting plan, and the Government Enterprise Empowerment Program aimed at supporting entrepreneurs, market women and artisans.

Successive Nigerian governments in the early 1980's implemented women empowerment strategies, which were mostly pet projects of the first ladies like the Better Life for Rural Women – which was a project championed by Mrs. Maryam Babangida, the Family Support Programme (championed by Mrs Maryam Abacha), the Stella Obasanjo's Child Care Trust, the Turai Yar'Adua's Women and Youth Empowerment Foundation, and the Patience Jonathan's Women for Change Initiative. These projects were mostly geared towards improving the social and economic well-being of Nigerian families by financially empowering women to become wage earners or entrepreneurs in order to contribute meaningfully to national development. Unfortunately, these projects could not be sustained after their tenures in the office of the First Lady.

More importantly, the National Gender Policy (NGP) was adopted in December 2006 to mainstream gender perspectives in all facets of the Nigerian society in acknowledgment of the persistent issues of gender inequality and institutional discriminations against women in the country (Obianagwa et al., 2024b). Specifically, by removing long-standing obstacles to gender equality, the NGP aimed at addressing women's concerns and support different initiatives of the Nigerian Government at all levels to fully incorporate women into the country's development process (Obianagwa et al., 2024a).

All these initiatives included strategies to protect vulnerable groups in the society, such as rural poor women, and to stimulate the private sector. There were efforts to incorporate a gender component into anti-poverty initiatives, operating under the presumption that women should receive preferential treatment due to their significant economic contributions, both as homemakers

and also as small-scale business owners (Igbuzor, 2015). Since women and children are the pillars upon which society is built, it follows that when they are being empowered, the society will automatically change for the better (Kebeer, 2016). Empowering women could be seen as key catalyst and essential element to achieve a society free of hunger and poverty.

 Any attempt to lower the degree of poverty among a country's indigenous population to the barest minimum is known as poverty alleviation; and it is undertaken by the government as well as other well-meaning members of the community (Narayan, 2012). Contributing to the claim, Zumbrun (2018) stated that the process of improving the living conditions of those who are categorised as poor through policy statements and other initiatives is known as poverty alleviation. Supporting this further, the study added that among other things, policy processes for identifying the poor, providing employment opportunities for the poor, and paying allowances to the unemployed are some of the instruments that can help in poverty alleviation. In the paper, poverty alleviation is seen as poverty reduction or eradication. This is the efforts of public and private organizations to improve the quality of life for members of society in order to lessen their level of poverty.

As a state of material and non-material deprivation, poverty is characterized by a lack of food, inadequate or non-existent health care, lack of education, and the inability to meet the fundamental, psychological and physical needs of the society (Ovute, 2017). Similarly, Zumbrun (2018) described poverty as the inability to meet one's basic needs of clothing, shelter, food, and other necessities of life like water, health care, and employment training. Hence, poverty is the inability to meet one's basic needs, such as food, clothing, housing, and water. According to Ugwu (2013), all forms of government as well as all economic and social structures have attempted, but failed to reduce poverty throughout human history. Despite significant advancements in fields like science, technology, industry and medicine, poverty rate continue to rise, particularly in developing nations (Ugwu, 2013). Many factors contribute to poverty in the majority of developing nations, including Nigeria. Ugwu (2013) claims that the main causes of poverty in Nigeria are various forms of bad habits, laziness, intoxication, gambling, accidents, disease, war, persecution, drought, and oppression.

Initiatives and programmes aimed at reducing poverty are necessary because poverty could lead to homelessness, illness, armed robbery, kidnappings, terrorism, prostitution, trafficking, and malnutrition, all of which can lead to death. In addition to fostering national growth, efficient home

management reduces poverty, however, opposite is the case when home management is lacking. Ndu (2015) argued further that women's empowerment is a crucial factor in bringing about change and is necessary to put an end to hunger and poverty. Thus, women have the opportunity to demonstrate against any unfavorable circumstances that the governmental, social, cultural, and religious establishments force upon them (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2008).

Enugu State Government has implemented different programmes to reduce poverty in the state, especially by partnering with national and international programmes aimed at fostering socio-economic development and poverty alleviation. These programme include partnering with international organisations such as the World Bank, World Health Organisation (WHO), European Union (EU), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), among others, to provide infrastructure such as clean water, health facilities, agricultural implements , universal basic education, etc. Programmes like Women Funds for Economic Empowerment (WFEE), Poverty Mapping, which targets impoverished households in the state's poorest local government areas, and Women Empowerment Scheme (WES) are just a few of the initiatives designed to reduce poverty in the state (Iheduru, 2013). Notwithstanding, the aforementioned initiatives for women's empowerment, a number of factors, such as biological characteristics, illiteracy, gender inequality, cultural and economic factors, and inferiority complex, among others, oppose some of the policies that could have enhanced rural women's empowerment and reduce poverty in Enugu State's rural areas. It is against this backdrop that this study examined the rural women empowerment initiatives for poverty alleviation in Enugu State, Nigeria.

2. Statement of the Problem

In many countries of the world, there exist a significant difference between men and women in all aspects of life. These include education, political position/involvement, employment prospects, power-sharing, etc. These disparities seem to have subjected women to exploitation even in family issues, such as carnal relationship between couples. However, the Nigerian Government and the development partners over the years have been pre-occupied with different strategies to finding

solutions to these and other challenges that have impeded women in both rural and urban areas from being empowered economically. A number of skills development initiatives have been implemented by both the government and other concerned stakeholders including development partners and aid agencies as a transformative strategy to empower women and help them to become participants in the socio-economic and political development of their communities.

However, despite the different initiatives and the huge resources that have been expended on skills development for women empowerment, not much seem to have been achieved. Poverty and unemployment especially among women seem to be on the rise and more and more women are getting caught in this ugly and dehumanizing situation day-by-day. There are indications that rural women's disadvantaged position propagates poor health, inadequate diet, early entry into motherhood and frequent pregnancies, which have fueled the cycle of poverty.

Regrettably, it appears that there is little information available to describe the level of rural women's participation in empowerment programmes aimed at reducing poverty in Enugu State. Many Nigerian governments, including Enugu State have launched programmes to empower Nigerians, particularly women living in rural areaswith the view to reduce poverty. However, the researchers are not certain of the effectiveness of these earlier initiatives. Against this backdrop, the general objective of this study was to investigate the extent to which rural women empowerment initiatives can be used for poverty alleviation in Enugu State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to determine:

1. the extent to which rural women empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State;

2. the extent to which the rural women empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State;

3. the extent to which the rural women empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State;

4. the extent rural women empowerment in agricultural cooperative can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State, and

5. the factors that hinder rural women's empowerment initiative for poverty alleviation in Enugu State.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent can rural women empowerment in agro-processing help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State?
2. To what extent can rural women empowerment in skill development help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State?
3. To what extent can rural women empowerment in digital literacy help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State?
4. To what extent can rural women empowerment in agricultural cooperative help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State?
5. What are the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiatives in Enugu State?

Arising from these research questions, the following null hypotheses were formulated for the study, and were tested at (0.5) level of significant:

Ho_1 There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of educated and non-educated rural women on the extent empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State.

Ho_2 There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of educated and non-educated rural women on the extent empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State.

Ho_3 There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of educated and non-educated rural women on the extent empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State.

Ho_4 There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of educated and non-educated rural women on the extent empowerment in agricultural cooperative can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State.

Ho_5 There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of educated and non-educated rural women on the factors that militate against rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu State.

3. Scope of the Study

The study's focus is on the rural women empowerment initiative for poverty alleviation in all the seventeen local government areas of Enugu State of Nigeria. Specifically, the study elicited data from women cooperative society members in Enugu State, Nigeria. The study covered the extent to which rural women empowerment in agro-processing, skill development, digital literacy and agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation and the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiatives in Enugu State, Nigeria.

4. Literature Review

The review of related literature for this study is presented under the empirical studies. The empirical literature review covers the two broad themes, namely, women's empowerment and poverty alleviation.

4.1 Women's Empowerment

Many studies have been carried out on women empowerment initiatives globally. For instance, Udoka (2011) carried out a study on the impact of rural women empowerment on community development in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State. The main purpose of the study was to identify the impact of rural women's empowerment on community development in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State. Four specific purposes, four research questions and four hypothesis guided the study. The design adopted for the study was the survey design, while the population of the study comprises five hundred (500) women, involving only listed members of the social organizations of women with common economic interest. There was no sampling because the population of the study was manageable. The instrument used for data collection was researchers' developed questionnaire. The instrument was validated by the experts whiles its reliability was ascertained using Cranbach Alpha Method. The collected data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-text statistics.

Consequently, the findings of the study revealed that women's empowerment promotes employment and encourages women to launch their own businesses with very little funding. This

extant study is related to the present study in design, as both studies utilised the descriptive survey research design. Both studies are also related in the population studied and sample techniques adopted, and focused on rural women. The previous study is also related to the present study in the method of data analysis adopted, as both utilised the t-test and standard deviation. However, while the main purpose of previous study was to measure the impact of rural women empowerment on community development in Awka North L. G. A. of Anambra State, the present study focused on assessing the impact of rural women empowerment initiatives on poverty alleviation in Enugu State.

Similarly, Ugwu (2013) conducted research in the Oyi Local Government Area on the role of media on women's empowerment and distance learning. The main purpose of the study was to ascertain how media in distance learning affected women's educational, social, political, and economic empowerment in Oyi Local Government Area. Five specific purposes, five research questions guided the study. The design adopted for the study was the cross-sectional research design. The population was selected using a random sampling technique – and the population of the study comprises one thousand seven hundred and five (1705) respondents, which include all female teachers employed by the government in post-primary education as well as self-employed women who completed secondary education or higher in Oyi Local Government Area. A sample of 477 females was taken from the overall population. The instrument used for data collection was researchers structured questionnaire. The instruments were validated by experts whiles its reliability was ascertained using Cranbach Alpha Method. The data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-text statistics.

Consequently, the study's conclusions showed, among other things that women's educational empowerment was sparked by the use of media like radio and television in distance learning, which assisted in the dissemination of information to them. The current study and the previous one are related because they both focused on women's empowerment, both utilized descriptive design. They are also related in the population studied and sample techniques adopted, as they both studied rural women. Also, related to the present study is the method of data analysis adopted as both relied on the t-test and standard deviation. The two studies differ to some extent as well. This is due to the fact that while the latter study focused on rural women empowerment initiative for

poverty alleviation in Enugu State, the former dealt with the role of media in distance education and women's empowerment, thereby creating a vacuum that the current study aims to fill.

Olayele (2003) explored a study titled, "Analysis of rural women's access to capital and their economic decision-making power in Ondo State, Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to establish indicators for the measurement of women empowerment. Four (4) purposes and four research questions guided the study. The design adopted for the study was the survey design. The population was small enough that neither a sample nor a sampling strategy were used, and null hypotheses served as the study's compass. Population of the study comprises four hundred and sixty-three (463) respondents that participated in the study. The instrument used for data collection was structured questionnaire. The instruments were validated by experts, while its reliability was ascertained using Cranbach Alpha Method. The mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the gathered data.

Consequently, the findings showed that women's economic empowerment may be a strategy for increasing their ability to make financial decisions and their involvement in the economy. The outcome also showed that women's ability to make decisions is influenced by the amount of money they generate, just like men. The study is related to the present work in that the former highlighted the need for women empowerment through women involvement in economic decision-making and participation of women in economic activities, which could reduce their poverty level while the present work is focused on women empowerment and poverty alleviation. However, the present study is on rural women empowerment initiative for poverty alleviation in Enugu State, whereas the previous study was on the analysis of rural women to capital and their economic decision-making power in Ondo State.

 Adereti (2013) also carried out a study on "rural women's access to and control over productive resources implication for poverty alleviation among Osun State Rural Women". The population of the study consisted of all the rural women in the state, and stratified random sampling technique was used to select 360 respondents for the study. Some of the result revealed that a significant relationship existed between poverty alleviating strategies and respondents' access to production resources. The study recommended among other things that rural women should be given the opportunity to have access and some degree of control over productive resources in the rural areas. Adereti's study is related to this study in the area of given rural women access to productive

resources, which helps to alleviate their poverty but while Aderati's study focused on rural women access and control over productive resources for poverty alleviation, the present study deals with rural women empowerment initiative for poverty alleviation in Enugu State.

4.2 Poverty Alleviation

Haruna and Uketim (2015) carried out a study on the role of adult education in poverty alleviation in Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State. The main purpose of the study is to examine the role which adult education can play in poverty reduction in Ushongo L. G. A. of Benue State. The study was guided by five (5) research questions and has no hypotheses because the topic of the study deals with one major variable. Design of the study was survey research method. The entire population of the study is five thousand, nine hundred and six (5,906). Six hundred (600) respondents of the total population were sampled. Sampling technique was used to draw the population of the study. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire constructed by the researcher to elicit response from the respondents. The data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation.

Consequently, the study's findings showed that low per capita income, a high family size, a low level of education, and a negative attitude towards work, as a result of low motivation are the true causes and effects of poverty among individuals. Peasant farmers made up the majority of the respondents, which is indicative of extreme poverty. The study opines that adult educators have a responsibility to impart new farming techniques to increase agricultural productivity. This was expected to lower their level of poverty and typically result in improved living conditions. The current study is related to the present study as both used sampling technique to draw the population of the study and also used data collected to analyse mean and standard deviation. However previous study focuses on role of adult education on poverty alleviation in Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State, whereas the present study is on rural women empowerment initiative for poverty alleviation in Enugu State.

Ediom & Iboro (2015) equally carried out a research on micro-credit programmes and poverty alleviation in rural Nigeria. The main purpose of the study was to ascertain how micro-credit programme can alleviate poverty in rural Nigeria. Four specific purposes, four research questions

and four hypotheses guided the study. Survey research design was used for the study. The population of the study comprised 329 respondents. The research used purposive sampling techniques. In-depth personal interview was used for the study. Content and thematic method of data analyses was used for data analysis.

Consequently, the major findings of the study include that the incidence, depth and severity of poverty in Nigeria have seriously undermined the capacity of extended family to serve as safety net. The study revealed that poverty in Nigeria is more austere in rural areas and the rural poor women are the least recognized group of borrowers by formal financial institution. The study is related to the present study as it targeted the poverty condition of rural women. However, while the study focused on micro-credit scheme for poverty reduction, the present study centered on the involvement of rural women empowerment initiatives for poverty alleviation in Enugu State, Nigeria.

In addition, Okengwu (2003) conducted a study on the evaluation of adult education as a strategy for reducing poverty using Umuahia Local Government Area in Abia State as a case study. The study's main goal was to evaluate adult education as a tactic for reducing poverty. Four research questions and four hypotheses guided the study. The study was designed using the survey research method. The population of the study comprising four hundred (400) registered members of Umuahia's literacy and vocational centres made up the study. Three hundred people (300) were sampled overall by the researcher. Sampling technique was used by the researcher to determine the study population. In order to gather information from the respondents, the researcher created a questionnaire. The t-test and mean were used to analyse the data.

Consequently, the study's findings brought to light a number of obstacles to Umuahia's poverty alleviation initiatives, including the region's high rate of illiteracy, lack of skilled labour, low percentage of single, divorced, and widowed people engaging in subsistence farming, low level of education, and improper execution of government-sponsored initiatives. All these, however, have significant ramifications for local, state, and federal governments as well as adult educators at all levels. Meanwhile, Okengwu (2003) is related to the present study in the design as both utilized descriptive design. They are also related in the population studied and sample techniques adopted, both studied rural women. The study is also related to the present study in the method of data analysis adopted as both utilised t-test and standard deviation. However, while the main purpose

of Okengwu (2003) was on evaluation of adult education as a strategy for poverty reduction in Umuahia L. G. A. of Abia State, the present study focused on rural women empowerment initiative for poverty alleviation in Enugu State.

Furthermore, Omeje (2005) carried out a study on the "factors associated with poverty and its alleviation among women groups in Oniocha L. G. A. of Ebonyi State. The purpose of the study was to determine some factors associated with poverty and its alleviation among women groups in Oniocha L. G. A. of Ebonyi State. Five specific purposes, five research questions and five hypothesis guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was employed in the study. The population of the study is one thousand, one hundred and thirty-one (1,131) women who are members of 28 functional registered women groups in Oniocha L. G. A. of Ebonyi State. Five hundred (500) women that are registered members of functional women groups were sampled from the population. Sampling technique was employed in the drawing of the sample. The instruments for data collection were structured questionnaire and oral interview employed to collect information from the respondents. The data collected were analysed using mean and t-test.

Consequently, the findings of the study reveal that there is poor programme assessment before project implementation – and this is the root cause of the programmes' failure to address the needs of the poor. The study also reveals that the most important or priority needs of the people in the rural areas have not been cared for. However, the two studies are related in that both are interested in poverty alleviation of women but differed because the former's major thrust was on the factors associated with poverty and its alleviation among women groups while the major focus of the latter is on rural women empowerment initiative for poverty alleviation in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Egeonu (2010) also conducted a research in Ideato North LGA of Imo State, to assess the effectiveness of poverty alleviation in rehabilitating rural life. The main goal of the study was to assess how well Imo State residents understood poverty alleviation initiatives and how the state's elites promoted awareness of them. Five research questions, and five hypotheses guided the study. The study employed the descriptive survey method, and the population of the study was 200 participants. A questionnaire derived from a review of the literature, observation, and interviews with respondents served as the data collection tool. The frequency and percentage methods were used to assess the gathered data.

Consequently, the findings of the study showed that the primary reason the programmes failed to meet the needs of the poor was that no needs assessment was conducted prior to project implementation. The outcome also showed that the most pressing issues facing the residents of rural areas had not been addressed. The study opines that the development of access roads, better agricultural inputs, energy, water supply, health care, education, and skill-building opportunities through workshops are likely to revitalise rural communities. Notably, the two studies are related in that both are interested in poverty alleviation, but differed because the former study focused was to assess the effectiveness of poverty alleviation in rehabilitating rural life while the major thrust of the latter is on rural women empowerment initiative for poverty alleviation in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Summary of Literature Review

The study also reviewed a number of empirical studies, including those that examined the effects of women's empowerment on community development, the role of guidance and counselling in women's empowerment, the impact of microcredit on poverty alleviation, the role of adult education in alleviating poverty, assessments of adult education as a strategy for alleviating poverty, and the efficacy of programmes in rural life rehabilitation. However, the researcher did not come across any work that empirically explored the rural women empowerment initiatives for poverty alleviation in Enugu State during the course of reviewing pertinent literatures and relevant variables related to this study, including empirical reviews. As a result, the present study was intended to fill this existing gap.

5. METHODS

The procedure that the researchers used for this study are discussed under the following sub-headings: design of the study, area of the study, population of the study, sample and sampling techniques, instrument for data collection, validity of the instrument, reliability of the instrument, method of data collection and method of data analysis.

5.1 Design of the Study

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Nworgu (2015) defines a descriptive survey design as one in which data from a small sample of individuals or items that are thought to be representative of the entire group is gathered and analysed in order to study a group of people

or items. It is therefore considered appropriate for this study because the researchers made use of data collected from the sample considered to be representative of the population to examine how rural women empowerment initiatives can be used for poverty alleviation among rural women in Enugu State, Nigeria.

5.2 Area of the Study

The study was carried out in Enugu State, Nigeria. The state was created in 1991 from the old Anambra State. Enugu State is in the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It shares borders with Ebonyi State to the East, Anambra State to the West, Benue State to the Northeast, Kogi State to the Northwest and Abia and Imo states to the South. The choice of Enugu State is because of the level of poverty among rural women. Nevertheless, many of the rural women are mainly engaged in petty trading and farming with high level of poverty among them. This prompted the researchers to seek information as regards the causes of the poverty in order to establish the rationale for its alleviation among rural women.

5.3 Population of the Study

The population of the study is 609 rural women. The population comprised 30 registered women cooperative society set up within the 17 L. G. A.s in Enugu State. The choice of registered women cooperative society as the population is justified because most of their members are rural women, lives in rural areas and they are mostly affected by poverty. They are therefore in a better position to supply the relevant information and data regarding to extent of empowerment in agro-processing, skill development, digital literacy, and agricultural cooperation as well as factors that hinder rural women empowerment initiative for poverty alleviation in Enugu State. (See Table 1 for population distribution).

Table 5.3.1: Population Distribution Table

S/N	Names of Women cooperative societies	NO of members
1	Aganigbo Ohodo Women Cooperative Society	42
2	Amagu Women Association	51
3	Azuabor Ehandiagu Women Cooperative Society	17
4	Chidibere Onyeabor Women Cooperative Society	22
5	Chinedu Achi Women Cooperative Society	17
6	Dibugwu Nwanyi, Olo Women Cooperative Society.	37
7	Ekenene Women Association	49
8	Ifunanya Ozalla Women Cooperative Society	41

9	Njikoka, Udi women Cooperative	48
10	Nnabugo Enugu Ngwo Women Cooperative Society	24
11	Nru Nsukka Women Cooperative Society	35
12	Nsukka Believers Women Cooperative Society	28
13	Nwannedinamba Nnenwe Women Cooperative Society	23
14	Odinaka Chukwu Women Cooperative Society	29
15	Osondi Umunna Women Cooperative Society,	21
16	Otu Ofuobi Obiagu Women Cooperative Society	29
17	St Christopher Widows Women Cooperative Society	25
18	Udoka Opi Women Cooperative Society	25
19	Uzondu Umunko Women Cooperative Society	44
	Grand Total	**609**

Source: Field survey, 2024

5.4 Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample size of the study was 305 registered members of women cooperative society. Multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted. In the first stage, simple random sampling by lucky dips was used to sample five out of 17 Local Government Areas in Enugu State. In the second stage, the proportional stratified sampling technique was used to draw 6.09 percentage (305) registered rural women in Enugu State. Thus, the sampling size of 305 registered rural women generated from this sampling process was used for this study.

5.5 Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection is a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers titled "Rural Women Empowerment Initiatives for Poverty Alleviation" (RWEIPA). The instrument was sub-divided into two parts (A & B). Section A elicited the personal data of the respondents, such as age, occupation, educational qualifications, while section B was sub-divided into five clusters designed to elicit information on rural women empowerment initiatives for poverty alleviation. Cluster "A" (with 10 items) elicited information on the extent to which the rural women empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation, while Cluster "B" (with 9 items) elicited information on the extent rural women empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation. Cluster "C" (with 9 items) elicited data on extent rural women empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation while Cluster "D" (with 5 items) elicited data on the extent rural women empowerment in agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation. Cluster "E" (with 6 items) elicited information on the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiatives in Enugu State, Nigeria.

The instrument was based on four-point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE) = 4 point, High Extent (HE) = 3 points, Low Extent (LE) = 2 points and Very Low Extant (VLE) = 1 point as well as Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points, Agree (A) = 3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 points, and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1 point for each of the clusters.

5.6 Validity of the Instrument

The instrument was given to three experts for face validation. Two of the experts are from the Department of Continuing Education and Development Studies, and one from the Measurement and Evaluation unit of the Department of Science Education, all in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. In addition, the research questions and hypotheses for the study were made available to the experts. The validation was to ensure that the items in the questionnaire were in line with the purposes of the study, and more importantly suitable for answering the research questions and testing the hypotheses of the study. The experts examined the items on the drafted questionnaire in terms of clarity of the statements, appropriateness of language used, relevance to content, and suitability of the rating scale adopted. Some of the corrections made include that the statement items should be explicit, double-barreled items should be separated and some items should be expunged, and some typographical errors should be corrected. The researchers effected the corrections suggested by the experts before the final copy of the instrument was produced.

5.7 Reliability of the Instrument

In order to ensure the reliability of the instrument, the researchers administered the instrument to 20 members of the Dibugwu Women Organization in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, who were not members of this study. These women have similar characteristics with the area of the study in terms of political will, philosophy, religious belief, and socio-cultural background. Since the items in the instrument were not scored in a dichotomous manner, the reliability index was estimated using the Cronbach Alpha method. The results showed the internal consistency values of 0.92, 0.98, 0.98, 0.98, and 0.96. The overall value of 0.99 was sufficiently high to allow for the conclusion that the instrument was reliable.

5.8 Method of Data Collection

For proper and efficient data collection, the researchers employed six (6) research assistants, who helped in the administration of the questionnaire to the respondents. The research assistants were properly guided by the researcher on how to administer and retrieve the completed copies of the questionnaire from the registered women cooperative society, as well as purpose of the study. The researchers and the six research assistants introduced themselves to the respondents and informed them of the essence of the research. Then, the researchers and the research assistants administered the 305 copies of the questionnaire to the respondents using direct administration and retrieval technique during their monthly meetings in the various local government areas. The choice of this technique is to ensure prompt administration and return of the questionnaire in order to avoid repeat visits and mortality. This exercise lasted for a period of 8 weeks. However, out of the 305 copies of questionnaires distributed, 288 were completely filled by the respondents and retrieved, while seventeen (7) copies were not properly filled. Hence the analysis was done based on the 288 returned questionnaire. This gives 94.5% retrieval of the administered questionnaire.

5.9 Method of Data Analysis

The data generated were analyzed using mean and standard deviation in answering all research questions, while one-way Analysis of Variation (ANOVA) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Research questions one, two, three, and four were interpreted using real limit of numbers. 3.50-4.00 was categorized as Very High Extent (VHE), 2.50-3.49 = High Extent; 1.50-2.49 = Low Extent and 1.00-1.49 = Very Low Extent. Research question five was interpreted using criterion mean benchmark of 2.50. Thus, items with mean scores of 2.50 and above represent agree while those below 2.50 represent disagree. For the Hypotheses, the decision rule was based on 0.05 level of significance. This associated probability value of equal or greater than 0.05 level of significance set as the benchmark was accepted as significant, while those less than 0.05 level were registered as not significant.

6. Results

This section covered the presentation of the results, interpretation, and major findings. The presentation of results is organized in parts A and B. Part A contains the relevant personal data of the respondents, while part B was organized according to the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study.

6.1 Part A: Personal Data of the respondents

Table 6.1.1: Age range of the respondents

S/N	Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
1.	20-29	0	0
2.	30-39	51	17.7
3.	40-49	105	36.5
4.	50-59	97	33.6
6	60 and above	35	12.2
	Total	288	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 6.1.1 shows the age range of the respondents. Those between 20-29 years has no respondents, while those between 30-39 are 51 constituting 17.7%. Those between 40-49 are 105 constituting 36.5%, and those between 50-59 are 97 constituting 33.6%, while those between 60 years and above are 35, constituting 12.2 % of the respondents. This showed that more valid responses came from those between the ages of 40-49 years.

Table 6.1.2: Occupation of the respondents

S/N	Name of Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Farming	171	59.4
2.	Business Women	39	13.5
3.	Civil Servant	7	2.4
4.	Self-Employed	71	24.7
5.	Others	0	0
	Total	288	100

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 6.1.2 shows the occupation of the respondents, Farming had 171 with 59.4%, Business Women had 39 constituting 13.5% of the sampled population while Civil Servant had 7 constituting 2.4%, Self-Employed has 71 constituting 24.7% and others have no respondents. The table revealed that farming has the highest sampled population.

Table 6.1.3: Educational qualification of the respondents

S/N	Name of Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
1.	O'Level	103	35.8
2.	SSCE	136	47.2
3.	OND/NCE	38	13.2
4.	Degree	11	3.8
	Total	288	100

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 6.1.3 shows the educational qualification of the respondents. Those with O'Level had 103 constituting 35.8%, SSCE had 136 constituting 47.2% of the sampled population while OND/NCE had 38, constituting 13.2%, and those that have degree had 11 respondents, constituting 3.8%. The table revealed that those that has SSCE has the highest sampled population.

6.2 Part B: Rural Women Empowerment Initiatives for Poverty Alleviation

In this section, the researchers presented the results emanating from the analysis of research questions one to five.

Table 6.2.1: Mean and standard deviation of respondents to research question one on the extent to which empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu state

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Processing of garri for commercial purposes	3.38	.81	HE
2	Rearing of snail for commercial purposes	3.26	.66	HE
3	Cultivation of cassava for commercial use	3.20	.95	HE
4	Palm oil processing for income generation	2.89	.89	HE
5	Castor oil processing for wealth generation	2.35	1.01	LE
6	Cultivation of vegetables for commercial use	2.78	.89	HE
7	Processing of rice	2.81	.94	HE
8	Rearing of livestock like cattle, goats, chicken and pigs	2.97	.67	HE
9	Fruit processing ventures	2.02	.82	LE
10	Involvement in tubers crops harvesting for economic gain	2.45	1.01	LE
	Cluster Mean	**2.81**	**.80**	**HE**

Source: Field survey, 2024

Result in Table 6.2.1 shows the extent to which rural women empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State. The result revealed that items 1-4, 6-8 had their mean values ranged from 2.78-3.38. These values were within the real limit of 2.50-3.49; indicating that the extent to which rural women empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State to the items is high. Meanwhile, items 5, 9-10 had their mean values ranged from 2.02-2.45. These values were within the real limit of 1.50-2.49; indicating that the extent to which rural women empowerment in agro -processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State to the items is low. Generally, the cluster mean value of 2.81 which is within the real limit of 2.50-3.49 indicates that the extent to which rural women empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State is high. The standard deviations of the 10 items ranged from 0.66-1.01; indicating that the respondents were homogenous in their response.

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Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu state base on educational qualification.

Table 6.2.1.1: One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu state base on educational qualification

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.461	3	1.487	2.330	.075
Within Groups	181.260	284	.638		
Total	185.721	287			

Field survey, 2024

Result in Table 6.2.1.1 shows F (287) = 2.330, P > 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State was based on educational qualification accepted. This is because the probability value of .075 is greater than 0.05 level of significance set for decision rule. The researcher therefore, concludes that there no significant difference in the

mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu state base on educational qualification.

Table 6.2.2: Mean and standard deviation of respondents to research question two on the extent to which empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Soap and detergent productions	2.80	.95	HE
2.	Bead making such as ear rings, necklace, hand bags among others	2.43	.98	LE
3.	Snacks production, such as cake, chin chin, doughnut, etc.	2.77	1.00	HE
4.	Production of beverages, like tiger-nut juice and soya milk	2.71	.95	HE
5.	Fashion and design (tailoring	2.88	.91	HE
6.	Barbing/ hair dressing	2.54	.96	HE
7.	Traditional craft and arts	1.86	.85	LE
8.	Industrial design (POP)	2.07	.99	LE
9.	Painting	2.05	.98	LE
	Cluster Mean	**2.46**	**.91**	**LE**

Field survey, 2024

Result in Table 6.2.2 shows the extent to which rural women empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State. The result revealed that items 11, 13 16 had their mean values ranged from 2.54-2.88. These values were within the real limit of 2.50 3.49; indicating that the extent to which rural women empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State to the items is high. Meanwhile, items 12, 17-19 had their mean values ranged from 1.86-2.43. These values were within the real limit of 1.50-2.49; indicating that the extent to which rural women empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State to the items is low. Generally, the cluster mean value of 2.46 which is within the real limit of 1.50-2.49 indicates that the extent to which rural women empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State is low. The standard deviations of the 9 items ranged from .85-1.00; indicating that the respondents were homogenous in their response.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualification.

Table 6.2.2.1: One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu state base on educational qualification

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.143	3	1.048	1.281	.281
Within Groups	232.319	284	.818		
Total	235.462	287			

Field survey, 2024

Result in Table 6.2.2.1 shows F (287) = 1.281, P > 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualification was accepted since the probability value of .281 is greater than 0.05 level of significance set for decision rule. The researchers therefore, conclude that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualification.

Table 6.2.3: Mean and standard deviation of respondents to research question three on the extent to which empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu state

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Utilizing digital literacy skills for problem solving	2.46	1.11	LE
2.	Advertising their products online	2.47	1.03	LE
3.	Using internet facilities to operate their POS business	2.70	1.02	HE
4.	Creating of cyber security awareness	1.90	.90	LE
5.	Utilization of basic computer skills for self-empowerment	2.60	.94	HE
6.	Using communication skills to access viable business opportunities	1.92	.90	LE
7.	Using media literacy to find markets for their products	1.94	.96	LE

8. Using ICT to be abreast with the latest tailoring designs	2.79	.86	HE
9. Identification of new business opportunities through technology	2.74	1.08	HE
Cluster Mean	**2.39**	**.94**	**LE**

Field survey, 2024

Result in Table 6.2.3 shows the extent to which rural women empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu state. The result revealed that items 22, 24, 27, and 28 had their mean values range from 2.60-2.79. These values were within the real limit of 2.50 3.49; indicating that the extent to which rural women empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State to the items is high. Meanwhile, items 20, 21, 23, 25, and 26 had their mean values range from 1.90-2.46. These values were within the real limit of 1.50-2.49; indicating that the extent to which rural women empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State to the items is low. Generally, the cluster mean value of 2.39, which is within the real limit of 1.50-2.49, indicates that the extent to which rural women empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State is low. The Table also revealed that the standard deviations of the 9 items ranged from .86-1.11, indicating that the respondents were homogenous in their response.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualification.

Table 6.2.3.1: One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualification

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.048	3	1.349	1.552	.201
Within Groups	246.964	284	.870		
Total	251.012	287			

Field survey, 2024

Result in Table 6.2.3.1 shows F (287) = 1.552, P > 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in digital

literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualification was accepted since the probability value (.201) is greater than 0.05 level of significance set for decision rule. The researchers therefore, conclude that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State base on educational qualification.

Table 6.2.4: Mean and standard deviation of respondents to question four on the extent to which empowerment in agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu state

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Equipping them with knowledge on how to produce fertilizer for farming	2.86	.98	HE
2.	Training on how to write good business proposal	2.57	.99	HE
3.	Guiding them on how to access soft loans to start their own business	2.61	1.01	HE
4.	Developing insight needed to discover/create entrepreneurial opportunities	2.65	1.10	HE
5.	Helping them to purchase farm equipment	2.99	.95	HE
	Cluster Mean	**2.74**	**.97**	**HE**

Field survey, 2024

Result in Table 6.2.4 shows the extent to which rural women empowerment in agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State. The result revealed that all the items (29-33) as well as the cluster mean had their mean values range from 2.57-2.99. These values were within the real limit of 2.50 3.49, indicating that the extent to which rural women empowerment in agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State is high. The standard deviations of the 5 items ranged from .95-1.10, indicating that the respondents were homogenous in their response.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualification.

Table 6.2.4.1: One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu state based on educational qualification

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.684	3	1.895	2.035	.109
Within Groups	264.406	284	.931		
Total	270.090	287			

Field survey, 2024

Result in Table 6.2.4.1 shows F (287) = 2.035, P > 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is of no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualification was accepted since the probability value of .109 is greater than 0.05 level of significance set for decision rule. The researchers therefore, conclude that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualification.

Table 6.2.5: Mean and standard deviation of respondents to question five on the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu State

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Poor financial status of women	3.03	.98	Agree
2.	Lack of political will by the government	3.24	.77	Agree
3.	Socio-cultural norms of women's subjugation by their husbands	2.72	1.09	Agree
4.	Poor or lop-sided implementation of programmes by corrupt government officials	3.09	.98	Agree
5.	Inadequate farm implements like tractors, irrigation pumps, etc. to rural women	2.64	1.03	Agree
6.	High rate of illiteracy among rural women	2.84	.95	Agree

Field survey, 2024

Result in Table 6.2.5 shows the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu State. The result revealed that the respondents agreed that all the items (34-39) were the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu State. The decision for regarding all the items as the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu State was based on the fact that all the items had a

minimum mean value of 2.50 and above set for decision rule. The standard deviations of the 6 items ranged from .77-1.09, indicating that the respondents were homogenous in their response.

Hypothesis Five: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu State based on educational qualification.

Table 6.2.5.1: One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu state base on educational qualification

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.434	3	1.478	1.739	.159
Within Groups	241.328	284	.850		
Total	245.761	287			

Field survey, 2024

Result in Table 6.2.5.1 shows F (287) = 1.739, P = .159. Hence, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu State based on educational qualification was accepted since the probability value (.159) is greater than 0.05 level of significance set for decision rule. The researcher therefore, concludes that there no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu State base on educational qualification.

6.3 Summary of the Findings

Based on the analysis of data in the study, the following findings emerged:

1. The extent to which rural women empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State is high. Further analysis revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualification.

2. The extent to which rural women empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State is low. Further analysis revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualification.

3. The extent to which rural women empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State is low. Further analysis revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualification.

4. The extent to which rural women empowerment in agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State is high. Further analysis revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualification.

5. The factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu State include poor financial status of women, lack of political will by the government, socio-cultural norms of women's subjugation by their husbands, poor or lop-sided implementation of programmes by corrupt government officials, high rate of illiteracy among rural women and lack of farm implements like tractors, irrigation pumps, etc. to rural women. Further analysis revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu State based on educational qualification.

7. Discussion of the Findings

The findings of the study were discussed under the sub-headings focusing on the extent to which rural women empowerment in agro-processing, skill development, digital literacy and agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State as well as the factors that hinder rural women's empowerment initiatives for poverty alleviation in Enugu State, Nigeria.

The Extent to which Rural Women Empowerment in Agro-Processing Can Help in Poverty Alleviation in Enugu State

The findings of the study showed that the rural women empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State to a high extent. The finding revealed that rural women empowerment in agro-processing that can help in poverty alleviation include processing of garri for commercial purposes, rearing of snail for commercial purposes, cultivation of cassava for commercial as means of livelihood, palm oil processing for income generation, cultivation of vegetables for commercial purposes, processing of rice, and rearing of livestock like cattle, goats,

chicken and pigs. Though, some responses disagreed with the fact that castor oil processing for wealth generation, fruit processing ventures and involvement in tubers crops harvesting for economic gain can help in poverty alleviation.

The results of the study find justification in the study conducted by Omoju (2010), which stated that women who are empowered play a crucial role in the rural economy, including agriculture, livestock, and cottage industries. They play far more active role in the rural economy than is generally believed. The finding is not also far from the view of Ugwu (2013), that women all over the world have reached the stage where they would be recognized in all spheres of life. Women, if empowered undertake a wide range of activities both in the office and at home.

The Extent Rural Women Empowerment in Skill Development can help in Poverty Alleviation in Enugu state

The findings of this study showed that rural women empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation to a low extent in Enugu State. The findings of the study revealed that bead making such as ear rings, necklace, hand bags among others, traditional craft and arts, industrial design (POP), and painting can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State to a low extent. The analysis revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in skill development can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualifications. Though some response agreed that soup and detergent production, snacks production, such as cake, chin chin, doughnut, etc., production of beverages – like tiger nut juice and soya milk, fashion and design (tailoring), and barbing/hair dressing help in poverty alleviation.

This finding is very surprising, though, it is not unexpected considering the view of Ugwu (2013), that since human history, every type of government and every type of economic and social system has tried to alleviate poverty without success. In spite of such progress in such areas like science, technology, industries and medicine, among others, poverty is still on the increase, especially in rural areas. Similarly, the findings of the present study supported the study conducted by Igbuzor (2015), which stated that most of the poverty alleviation programmes failed due to the fact that, they are characterized by corruption on the part of some government official and public servants.

The Extent Rural Women Empowerment in Digital Literacy Can Help in Poverty Alleviation in Enugu State

The findings of this study showed that the utilization of digital literacy for empowering rural women and alleviating poverty among them is low in Enugu State. The findings of the study revealed that advertising their products online, creating of cyber security awareness, using communication skills to access viable business opportunities and using media literacy to find markets for their products to a low extent helped in poverty alleviation among women in Enugu State. Further analysis revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualifications. However, some responses agreed that using internet facilities to operate their POS business, utilization of basic computer skills for self-empowerment, using ICT to be abreast with latest tailoring designs, and identification of new business opportunities through technology can help rural women alleviate poverty. The findings agreed with Okengwu (2003), that the strategies to alleviate poverty, and observed that illiteracy, lack of skills, low level of education and improper execution of government initiatives on education are obstacles to poverty alleviation.

The Extent Rural Women Empowerment in Agricultural Cooperation Can Help in Poverty Alleviation in Enugu State

The findings of the study revealed that the rate at which agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation drastically in Enugu State is high. The results of this study showed that equipping rural women with knowledge on how to produce fertilizer for farming, training on how to write good business proposal, guiding them on how to access soft loans to start their own businesses, developing insight needed to discover/create entrepreneurial opportunities, and helping them to purchase farm equipment can drastically help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State. Further analysis revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the extent to which empowerment in agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State based on educational qualifications. The findings are in agreement with Ediom and Iboro (2015), which stated that rural women who are empowered play a vital role in the rural economy, including agriculture, livestock, and cottage industries because cooperatives help to train rural women, guide them to develop insight needed to discover opportunities.

The Factors that Hinder Rural Women Engagement in Poverty Alleviation Initiative in Enugu State

The findings of this study showed that the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu State include poor financial status of women, lack of political will by the government, socio-cultural norms of women's subjugation by their husbands, poor or lop-sided implementation of programmes by corrupt government officials, high rate of illiteracy among rural women and lack of farm implements like tractors, irrigation pumps, etc., to rural women. Further analysis revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women on the factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu State based on educational qualifications. The findings are in agreement with that of Ezumah (2014), which stated that women had been treated and regarded as second class citizens. Findings of this study aligned with Adereti (2013), which stated that in spite of the programmes women engaged in, it appears that some factors such as gender disparity, illiteracy, cultural factors, economic factor, biological characteristics and inferiority complex still stand as inhibiting force against women empowerment. This shows that if given the opportunity, veritable rural women will bring positive changes to their households and communities at large.

8. Conclusion, Recommendations, Policy Implications, and Suggestion for Further Studies

8.1 Conclusion

Based on the discussion of the findings, it was concluded that rural women empowerment initiative on agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State to a high extent. Equally, the extent to which rural women empowerment in agricultural cooperation can help in poverty alleviation is high. Equipping rural women in Enugu State with knowledge on how to produce fertilizer for farming, write good business proposal, access soft loans to start their own business, develop insight needed to discover/create entrepreneurial opportunities and help them to purchase farm equipment can drastically help in poverty alleviation. The findings also showed that the extent to which rural women empowerment in skill development and digital literacy can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State is low. More so, the study identified several factors that hinder rural women engagement in poverty alleviation initiative in Enugu State, including poor financial status of women, lack of political will by the government, socio-cultural norms of women's subjugation by their husbands, poor or lop-sided implementation of programmes by corrupt government

officials, high rate of illiteracy among rural women and inadequacy of farm implements like tractors, irrigation pumps, etc. Thus, this study has contributed to the body of knowledge by providing an understanding of the rural women empowerment initiative for poverty alleviation in Enugu State, Nigeria. The findings highlighted the need for rural women to have access to resources that reduce poverty, inferiority complex and all kind of cultural discrimination. The knowledge from this study would therefore help development partners and community development workers, and government agencies to incorporate rural women into any upcoming initiatives aimed at reducing poverty.

8.2 Recommendations

The following were recommendations made based on the findings of this study:

i. Government should establish agro-processing industries in rural areas and ensure adequate monitoring of the operations to empower rural women and alleviate power among them.
ii. The study strongly recommends that skill development should be encouraged. Skill development is an antidote for effective poverty alleviation among rural women.
iii. The study also recommends that digital literacy needs to be invigorated. It is an essential tool for empowering individuals living in poverty. It involves the necessary competencies for effective participation in a knowledge society, which encompasses not only knowledge and skills, but also behaviours related to the use of digital devices such as smartphones and computers, among others to advance innovation.
iv. Government needs to encourage the establishment of more cooperative societies that will help to train rural women on how to develop insights and creativities needed to unlock opportunities.
v. Government at all levels should ensure mainstreamed gender equality in all fabrics of the society by eliminating political, economic, legal, and socio-cultural factors inimical to women empowerment and productivity.

8.3 Policy Implication of the Findings

An insight into the investigation of rural women empowerment initiative for poverty alleviation in Enugu State, Nigeria has some relevant implications. From the findings, it was gathered that rural

women empowerment in agro-processing can help in poverty alleviation in Enugu State to a high extent. The implication of this finding is that agro-processing empowerment could drastically alleviate poverty among rural women in Enugu State. In addition, the study found that the extent to which rural women empowerment in skill development and digital literacy can help to alleviate poverty is low in Enugu State. The implication is that there is need to educate rural women on the need to develop their skills on craft making and other complex dynamics of creative economy. Equally, there is the need to enlighten rural women on digital literacy in the 21st century. This will help them to leverage from the vast opportunities in the digital economy. Furthermore, rural women empowerment on agricultural cooperation can extremely help in alleviating poverty among rural women in Enugu State. Lastly, if the barriers to women emancipation and empowerment, such as political, economic, educational, legal, and socio-cultural barriers are not tackled, the women in rural areas may likely remain in poverty.

8.4 Suggestion for Further Studies

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions were made for further research:

1. Similar study can be replicated to cover every state in South East and Nigeria at large for comparative assessment on rural women empowerment initiatives.
2. Study should be carried out on the effectiveness of cooperative organizations on poverty alleviation among rural women.
3. Study should be carried out on how digital literacy can be used to empower rural women.

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