

Exploring Gender Inequality in Access to Education and Economic Empowerment of Women in Ndokwa West Local Government Area, Delta State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates gender disparity in education and economic opportunities, focusing on women in rural Ndokwa West local government area of Delta state, Nigeria. The research design used is descriptive survey research. The study population sample includes 1200 women in rural Ndokwa West Delta state, selected using a simple random sampling method. The data collection tool used is a close-ended questionnaire, and the tool's test-retest reliability was found to be .71. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The findings suggested that rural women were not entirely disadvantaged by gender inequity. They were, at various times, beneficiaries of economic empowerment and education by affluent children (sons and daughters) of Ndokwa West LGA, organisations based within the LGA, the Delta state government and non-governmental organizations. The gender inequity cases documented were a result of cultural and traditional practices. For instance, women cannot be traditional rulers in the communities, nor sit in the council of chiefs in Ndokwa West LGA of Delta state. The study concluded that in order to alleviate gender inequity, there should be increased economic empowerment of both men and women in the rural communities of the LGA

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INTRODUCTION

To combat societal imposed gender inequalities, gender equality, gender mainstreaming, gender considerations, among others are championed. (Cameron, 2023), explained that gender inequality, or gender disparity, effectively obstructs equal representation of both genders in Nigerian social structures. The most affected communities are the rural ones. Typically and customarily, the most of the gender inequality issues in rural areas are imposed. For instance, in no part of rural Africa can women be installed as traditional rulers (Mabasa et al., 2025). Considering the importance of gender equality to human and rural development, particularly for Africa's so-called giant, Nigeria and in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its forthcoming implementation, the girl-child and boy-child must receive equal opportunities to attain their fullest potential in all aspects of life as stated in the specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and associated targets. Gender inequality, particularly in Africa, has become a serious social problem for advocates of gender equality and inclusion. It is widely believed that gender inequality is the primary reason women have limited access to the most fundamental right of all education. The National Policy on

Education states that all children, be it a girl-child or a boy-child, must be able to obtain quality basic education (Beugelsdijk et al., 2025). Additionally, it is believed that there is a disproportionately high level of unemployment among young women, especially those living in rural areas, despite women having a high participation rate in tertiary education in Nigeria. This means that women's participation in education and their level of attainment have not been transformed into economic activities in the rural areas of Nigeria and communities.

Educationists and policy makers in Nigeria are beginning to focus on the poor performance of boys in lower basic education (primary 1-3), middle basic education (primary 4-6), upper basic education (JSS 1-3), and senior secondary school levels and how this impacts their chances of studying in higher education (universities, colleges of education, and polytechnics). Nigeria is in a race against the clock to deal with the situation of its human capital development with the rural areas facing the multiple and interrelated socio-economic and environmental challenges, and the 2020–2029 decade has been described as the “Decade of Action” for sustainable development (Shmelev & Gilardi, 2025). The role of education as a tool for socio-economic development of women is well documented (Bühler et al., 2024). The assertion, however, holds true only in theory as rural women, particularly in Nigeria, are subjected to numerous barriers to education. The barriers are extensive and are well documented in the literature on the intersection of women, education, and economic empowerment. The literature identifies a litany of barriers (cultural, economic, discriminatory, and socio-technical resource based) that limit women's access to education (Du Plessis, 2025). It is a well-documented fact that access to education and economic empowerment of rural women is fundamental and critical to individual and societal development.

Education is a basic human right and an important instrument for the empowerment of women. Through education, women gain the requisite skills, knowledge and self-assurance to engage and become active. They are also able to assert their rights and uplift socio-economically their own status. They, however, still face numerous challenges in accessing education (Afonso et al., 2025). This paper examines the rural women in Ndokwa West local government area of Delta state and the disparity in the access to education and economic empowerment. Education is a basic human right for all Nigerians, as stated in the National Policy on Education (Reimers et al., 2026). Multiple investigations have documented the significant improvements in women's educational attainment over the decades. However, in the case of rural communities, access to and attainment of basic education of good quality remains a major challenge (Amoah & Le Roux, 2025). While education access is improving, significant disparities still exist in rural Nigerian communities, with boys being afforded greater access and educational opportunities compared to girls. A snapshot of the education of adolescents worldwide by age 6 to 17 and entrusted to UNESCO shows that over 130 million girls are still out of school. UNESCO also notes that a girl in this age group stands a higher chance to be out of school compared to a boy. Women in rural areas across Nigeria face many challenges that are barriers to obtaining quality education. Some of these challenges include lack of awareness and exposure, poverty, gender and cultural biases, ineffective political governance, and inadequate educational infrastructure and resources discrimination.

Having a means of sustaining oneself and one's family is a form of empowerment. Support to construct a framework for this purpose is also considered economic empowerment. (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). The support could be financial, material, or in the form of exposure to entrepreneurial opportunities. In rural areas, the need for access to education as a means of economic empowerment for women is enormous (Brändle et al., 2025). Benefits of education as a means of economic empowerment of rural women in communities include the following. First, education enhances women's ability to obtain higher-paying employment by equipping them with the requisite skills and knowledge (Nkomo et al., 2025). Women's education, employment, salaries, and work reliability are all improved, and this phenomenon is called economic empowerment. Moreover, education enhances the social standing of women and their community. Social empowerment of women fosters national growth and sustainability, international developmental cohesion, integration, and security. Also, education positively correlates with women and their children's health and nutrition status. Also,

education embraces women's health and their children's better health. Educating women, their children, and future generations helps tackle discrimination and stereotypes.

In addition to the aforementioned issues of women empowerment, education advocates for socio-economically diminished women to embrace their non-traditional roles. The development of women economically and socially has been noted by (Alayed & Alateeg, 2025). 2023 and 2020, respectively. The uncovered gaps include the absence of clearly articulated women empowerment criteria, particularly in Delta, and the inability to go beyond the widely accepted economic empowerment. These include community decision-making and empowerment integration beyond the patriarchal dominance of the community. The objectives of the study are to: Ascertain the extent to which awareness of the education and economic empowerment of women for the elimination of gender-equity injustices exist among rural women; Ascertain the channels through which rural women obtain information about the education and economic empowerment of women for the elimination of gender-equity injustices; Investigate the perceptions of rural women regarding the problems and challenges of gender inequities. iv. Examine the extent to which rural women are prepared to act as advocates for the education and economic empowerment of women.

METHODOLOGY

The method that was used to conduct this research is called the descriptive survey research method. The area of study was the rural areas of Ndokwa West local government area of Delta state. The sample consisted of 1,200 women from Ndokwa West local government area of Delta state, who were selected using simple random sampling method from the six (6) communities that comprise Ndokwa West local government area of Delta State (i.e, Utagba Uno, Utagba Ogbe, Ogume, Abbi, Onicha Ukwuani, and Emu autonomous communities), With 200 women representing the sample from each of the autonomous communities (Okwelum C. O., Okwelum Anthonia Onyenibe, 2025). Data collection for this study was done via a questionnaire titled: "Women in Rural Communities, Gender Inequality in Access to Education and Economic Empowerment Questionnaire" (WRCGIAEEEEQ). The Questionnaire had three sections. Section A was meant to collect the demographic data of the respondents.

Section B consisted of 20 items questions for which respondents were to indicate Yes or No and which sought to gather data in relation to gender Inequality, access to education, and economic empowerment (Hatim et al., 2024). While Section C had 8 items open-ended focuses to elicit information on the target population's sources of information and their willingness to become an information disseminator on economic empowerment (Cao, 2024). The instrument was validated through both face and content validity, by two Measurement and Evaluation experts, one Educational Management expert, and two Social Studies experts. Their comments and suggestions (where applicable) were incorporated into the final form of the instrument. Furthermore, the reliability of the research instrument was established by using the test re-test method to measure reliability. The sample was pre-tested on a sample of sixty persons outside the sample selected for the study. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation.

A reliability co-efficient of 0.76 was determined. This was regarded as sufficiently high for establishing the instrument's reliability for the study (Obilor & Miwari, 2025). Before administering the questionnaire to the students, the traditional leaders and president generals of 24 selected schools were consulted. 1200 (one thousand two hundred) questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and the respondents were briefed to aid their understanding of what was required of them. The respondents were sufficiently guided, and 1185 questionnaires were filled and submitted immediately. The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) by way of inferential and descriptive statistics (Karanu & Omollo, 2023).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: What is the level of awareness of women in rural communities of access to education and economic empowerment so as to eliminate gender inequality?

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Women in Rural Communities Level of Awareness of Access to Education and Economic Empowerment for the Eradication of Gender Inequality

N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
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Awareness	1185	7.00	20.00	12.38	2.07	.305	.310
Valid N	1185						

Table 1 displays the statistics for the mean responses of rural women regarding their awareness of education and economic empowerment opportunities and the contributions to the alleviation of gender inequity. For the respondents mean women's awareness is 12.39, and the standard deviation is approximately 2.08. In result-based frameworks centered on awareness, the respondents from rural communities exhibit a moderate level of awareness with a mean of 12.39. In a spread of 20 being the highest, 7 being the lowest, and 10.5 the midpoint, awareness was classified as follows, low (7.0 -11.5); moderate (11.6 – 15.5) and high (15.6 – 20). Research Question Two: What is their channels of communication in relation to education and economic empowerment?

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Women in Rural Communities' Source of Information about Access to Education and Economic Empowerment

Sources of Information about Climate Change	Frequency (%)
Television	285 (17.60)
Radio	279 (17.30)
Newspaper	101 (06.20)
Internet	99 (06.10)
Market place	584 (36.10)
Flyers	17 (01.10)
Political Sensitization	131 (8.10)
Friends	80 (04.90)
Others	41 (02.50)

As per table 2 above, 584 (36.10%) respondents cited market place as their source of information regarding access to education and economic empowerment, followed by television with 285 (17.60%), radio with 279 (17.30%), and political sensitization 131 (8.10%). Conversely, flyers received the least responses with 17 (1.10%), followed by friends 80 (4.90%), and internet 99 (6.10%). 41 (2.50%) respondents had their information source other than those mentioned above.

Research Question Three: What is their perception about the issues associated with gender inequity

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics on the Perception of Women in Rural Communities about Issues Associated with Gender Inequity

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Issues Associated with GI	1185	2.00	6	2.98	.717	.102	-.743
Valid N	1185						

The data provided for Table 3 represents average responses of women in rural communities regarding their perception on issues related to gender inequality. Based on the table the statistical mean response of the rural women communities on the issues related to gender inequality is 2.99 (where 6.0 is the maximum score and 2.0 is the minimum score) and the standard deviation is 0.72. This suggests that most of the respondents identified the gender inequality issues as factors.

Table 4. Percentage Distribution of Women in Rural Communities Responses on the Issues Associated with Gender Inequality

Statement	YES Freq. (%)	NO Freq. (%)
Do you know the likely issues associated with gender inequality?	368 (31)	817 (69)
Do you believe that culture and traditions are causes of gender inequality?	387 (33)	798 (67)
Can human activities cause gender inequality?	885 (75)	300 (25)

As seen from table 4, approximately twice as many women from the rural areas (69%) stated that they do not know gender issues pertaining to inequality, compared to those (31%) who stated that they are aware of them. Also, a good number of them (67%) do not consider culture and traditions as an element of gender inequality, meaning they do not believe that there is a link between culture, traditions, and gender inequality. On the contrary, a good number (75%) of those surveyed identified that gender inequality stems from the activities of people. In addition, a good number of those

surveyed (73%) identified that the activities of the government engender inequality among women. Research Question Four: Are the women in rural communities willing to be agents of change?

Table 5. Percentage Distribution of the Responses of the women in rural communities to be Agents of Change about access to education and economic empowerment

Statement	Yes Frequency (%)	No Frequency (%)
As a woman from a rural community, can you be an agent for the dissemination of information on access to education and economic empowerment?	972 (82)	213 (18)
Have you ever been involved in any discussion that borders on access to education and economic empowerment with anybody?	58 (04.90)	1127 (95.10)
If you come across information about access to education and economic empowerment would you tend to look at it?	984 (83)	201 (17)
Can you spend your money to make awareness about access to education and economic empowerment?	893 (75.40)	292 (24.60)

From Table 4a, it can be observed that the women in rural communities are willing to act as information facilitators about the accessibility of education and economic empowerment. The result showed that a good percentage (82%) of women in the rural community wants to be information disseminator about education and economic empowerment. This shows that they are willing and ready to be advocates of a community that is well organized and managed to improve and increase the accessibility of education and economic empowerment. Additionally, 83% of the respondents stated that they would be interested in information regarding education and economic empowerment, and in the same 75.40% of the respondents stated that they would invest their money to promote awareness of education and economic empowerment, however, 95.10% of the respondents stated that they have never participated in conversations regarding education and economic empowerment.

Table 5. shows the Percentage Distribution of the Responses of the women in rural communities on who should be agent of Information Dissemination about Access to Education and Economic Empowerment for sustainable community development

Agencies	Frequency (%)
International Organisations	125 (11.70)
Federal Government	247 (23.20)
State Government	239 (22.40)
Local Government	244 (22.90)
Business and Industries	96 (9)
Environmental Organisations	64 (6)
Individual	36 (3.40)
Others	16 (1.50)

Table 6 shows that federal (23.20%), state (22.40%), and local (22.90%) government agencies rank highest in advocacy for responsibility regarding access to education and economic empowerment. Then come International Agencies (11.7%), and Business and Industry (9%) Advocacy is Least by Individual (3.40%) as an agency that should advocate for access to education and economic empowerment so that individuals can optimally utilize education and economic empowerment. individual advocacy is least to reduce the impact of gender Inequality. Research Hypothesis One: There is a lack of difference in the awareness of women in rural society regarding the access to education and economic empowerment and the eradication of gender inequality.

	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	Df	Sig level P=0.05
Level of Awareness	Older	614	12.29	2.24	.09059	-1.53	1183	0.12
	Younger	571	12.48	1.88	.07875			

CONCLUSION

There are numerous problems regarding gender inequality, poverty, lack of access to education and absence of economic empowerment in rural communities. The issues of gender inequality are a global concern that cannot be pushed to the background. The Women's level of awareness about the issues at hand has been determined to be average which means the Government, benefactors, traditional and religious leaders, and NGOs, and the community be called to run campaigns to sensitize the rural women and their communities to the basics of education and economic empowerment. It is imperative to target rural women with information on the causes of gender inequalities so that a shift towards economic empowerment and education becomes predominant. Most rural women have committed to being information change agents. They have pledged to educate the masses on the level of education and economic empowerment. Such a platform would be crucial in advocacy on gender issues. Fighting gender inequities is a collective obligation, and no one has the luxury of being an outsider. Everyone has to modify their approach towards the issues at hand, and advocating for gender, social justice, and economic empowerment at the grassroots is a place to establish interfacing with local and community leaders to facilitate practical changes that can be scaled up to community, national and international levels. As for businesses and industries, they can help construct and advocate for sustainable technologies that alter stereotyping, prejudices, ethnic discrimination, and formulate positive new gender mainstreaming approaches. An awareness campaign on educational and economic empowerment accessibility should be targeted, especially among rural women in the West local government area of Delta state, and by extension, Nigeria. The following recommendations are positive for this research: An increased effort in creating awareness of the accessibility of education, economic empowerment and the existence of gender inequality among rural women should be a priority; Different methods and approaches are encouraged in creating awareness among rural women of the value of primary education, especially for the girls.

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