



# **Entrepreneurship Opportunities and Socio-Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study was conducted to examine Entrepreneurship opportunities and socio-economic empowerment of rural women in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State. The objectives of the study include to: identify entrepreneurship opportunities for rural women in Eleme Local Government Area, determine the levels of participation in entrepreneurship opportunities among the rural women; Determine the impact of entrepreneurship participation on the socio-economic empowerment of rural women; identify the challenges facing entrepreneurship opportunities and socio-economic empowerment among rural women in the study area. A total of sixty (60) women were randomly sampled and used to obtain primary data. Questionnaire was used to gather data that was analyzed using mean statistics. The findings showed that there are many entrepreneurship opportunities available for rural women in Eleme Local Government Area especially in fish farming, mat weaving, cassava flour processing, trading, plantain chip making among others. Also, the study found that making good use of the varied entrepreneurship opportunities impacted positively in the socio-economic well-being of rural women in the study area. The study therefore recommends that government should create more entrepreneurship for rural women to enhance wider participation. Also, improve rural infrastructures as well as dismantle all impediments constraining their participation in entrepreneurship activities.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, Opportunities, Socio-economic Empowerment, Rural Women

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gibson (2010) defined entrepreneurship as the process of using private initiative to transform a business concept into a new venture or to grow and diversify an existing venture or enterprise with great potential. In the same vein, Wiklund (2011) opines that to entrepreneurship is all about having the ability to find and evaluate business opportunities, gather the necessary resources, initiate appropriate actions to ensure success.

Generally, entrepreneurship is a term used mainly in connection with innovative and creative modern industrial and business leadership. According to Henry (2013) entrepreneurship is the engine driving the economy of a nation, creating new industries, breaching young entrepreneurs that will generate

employment and wealth. It plays a vital role in the growth and development of nations, just as the consistent rise in the level of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria has made entrepreneurship a rallying point to create employment for the unemployed (Ottih, 2000).

Entrepreneurship is what is needed in empowering and liberating women by opening opportunities through which they can advance their capabilities. These capabilities would enable them create their own future, exploit the opportunities inherent in economically turbulent world and thereby contribute better to economic development and social well being (Anyamamene, Anyachebely, Nwakolo and Izuchi, 2009). According to them, entrepreneurship plays a major role in the life of rural people in Nigeria as it relates to employability and income generation. In relation to women, Ubulom (2003) noted that entrepreneurial skills enable women function effectively even in hostile business environment as entrepreneurs. According to Ubulom, the essential skills needed in entrepreneurship is the ability to properly manage the business within the scope of human, material and financial resources for profit maximization.

Ottih (2000) opines that the participation of rural women entrepreneurship activities will help them diversify their income generation, whereby as well of reducing the burden of family well being on husbands. Rana (2011) noted that during the last two decades, Indian women have entered the field of entrepreneurship in increasing numbers, hence have contributed to the growth of Indian economy and society. Filani (2006) opined that opportunities for employment come as a result of participating in entrepreneurial activities. These opportunities include development of small scale businesses, which if properly managed will keep members of families gainfully employed and generate sufficient income to maintain their families and continually improve their standard of living. Most good business opportunities do not suddenly appear, but rather result from an entrepreneurs' alertness (Mike, 2011).

True entrepreneurs are resourceful, highly motivated and driven to succeed and improve their entrepreneurial skill (Mishra and Kiran, 2012). Mohanti (2004) asserted that there is great deal of emphasis on socio-economic empowerment of women in all part of society, as women are entering into business and industry in great number. Women empowerment may not necessarily mean more money to meet physical needs but women gain greater share of control over resources such as materials, human and intellectual. They are empowered when have the knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources and access to money and control over decision-making in the home, community, society and nation.

Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to power (Shakuntala 2007). The logic in empowerment implies been passive on the part of the person being empowered (Sinha, 2007). Panin and Mathombo (2007) described women empowerment as a process of empowering the powerless people who can change their status by gaining control over their lives. Activities related with socio-economic empowerment create opportunities for effective utilization of resources (Safaricom Foundation, 2011). To Ibararan and Shady (2009) women empowerment is the expansion of rights, resource and capacity of women to make decision and act independently in social, economic and political spheres. Prasad (1997) reported rural women profile as poor, ignorant, illiterate and superstitious being. He said they have low levels of skills and their way of accessing information and opportunities was low. Rural women is part of family foundation that leads to society and nation. Therefore development of women is necessary if the society and nation must develop.

Despite the efforts by some international organizations to bridge the gender gap in access to opportunities, gender inequalities are still widely prevalent and women are deprived of having equal rights with men (Sarfaraz & Faghieh, 2011). This means women have limited access to socio-economic rights and privileges. They enjoy lower social status and are encumbered by harmful traditional practices to exhibit their potentials. Ahirro and Sadavarte (2010) indicated that lack of identification of financial affair, incapability for providing insurance, lack of fixed capital, complexity of loan process and negative attitude of banks towards women and non repayment of loan as limiting factors to women entrepreneurship in India.

Eleme Local Government Area is a sub-urban society with agricultural activities being the major livelihood of the people especially, women. Eleme women need empowerment for better livelihood the empowerment could be possible if opportunities exist. The issue is, are the opportunities there for the

women? What could be the impact of their participation on their socio-economic well-being these are the crux of this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the entrepreneurship opportunities and socio-economic empowerment of rural women in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State, specifically, the study intended to:

- 1) Identify areas of entrepreneurship opportunities available for rural women in Eleme Local Government Area.
- 2) Determine the level of rural women participation in entrepreneurship opportunities in Eleme Local Government Area.
- 3) Determine the impact of entrepreneurship participation on the socio-economic empowerment of rural women in Eleme local government area.
- 4) Identify the challenges facing rural women entrepreneurship opportunities in Eleme Local Government Area.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the entrepreneurship opportunities available for rural women in Eleme Local Government Area?
2. What are the levels of rural women participation in the entrepreneurship opportunities in Eleme Local Government Area?
3. What are the impacts of entrepreneurship participation on the socio-economic empowerment of rural women in Eleme local government Area?
4. What are the challenges facing rural women in entrepreneurship opportunities in Eleme Local Government Area?

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study area is a suburb away from Port Harcourt metropolis, with many features of rural society especially, the primary occupation of women being agricultural in nature. The study design was a descriptive survey. A sample size of 60 micro and small scale businesses owned by women entrepreneurs were purposively selected from six communities of Ebubu, Ekpero, Eleo, Alesa, Aleto and Agbonchia (10 women from each community). The instrument used for data collection was structured questionnaire designed in the pattern of 4-point rating scale. The instrument was validated by experts and a reliability coefficient of 0.86 was established using Cronbach Alpha reliability test. The data collected were analyzed using Mean statistics and Standard Deviation, with a decision rule stipulating acceptance criterion mean value of 2.50 and above.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### ***Entrepreneurship opportunities for rural women in Eleme Local Government Area***

Data in table 1 showed the distribution of respondents based on available entrepreneurial skills. Eighteen variables were listed. The grand mean response on livestock farming was 3.33, fish farming 2.83, mat weaving 3.00, snail rearing 3.58, cassava floor making 2.91, local bead making 1.93, trading 3.05, poultry farming 3.11, plantain chips 3.41, mushroom farming 3.05, cassava chips 2.83, cosmetics making 3.00, plantain floor 3.16, processing of Ethanol from cassava 2.91, baking of confectionaries 2.83, fruit juice making 2.41, palm kernel cracking 3.25 and finally hair dressing and braiding 3.11. local bead making 1.93 and fruit juice making 2.41 among others an indication that the women in the area do not engage in such trades, however, the findings showed that there are a lot of entrepreneurial opportunities for women in Eleme L.G.A. The findings corroborated that of Filani [2006] who opined that opportunities for employment come as a result of participating in entrepreneurial activities. According to him, these opportunities includes development of small scale businesses, which if properly managed will keep

members of families gainfully employed and generate sufficient income to maintain their families and continuously improve their standard of living.

**Table 1: Respondents opinion on availability of entrepreneurship opportunities**

<b>Entrepreneurship opportunities</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>DA</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>REMARK</b>
Livestock farming	35	10	10	5	3.33	Accept
Fish farming	20	20	10	10	2.83	Accept
Mat weaving	25	15	15	5	3.00	Accept
Snail rearing	35	25			3.58	Accept
Cassava floor making	25	10	20	5	2.91	Accept
Local bead making	6	9	20	25	1.93	Reject
Trading	20	30	5	5	3.05	Accept
Poultry farming	22	28	5	5	3.11	Accept
Plantain chip	30	25	5		3.41	Accept
Mushroom farming	30	13	7	10	3.05	Accept
Cassava chips	20	15	20	5	2.83	Accept
Cosmetics making	30	10	10	10	3.00	Accept
Plantain floor	25	20	15		3.16	Accept
Processing of Ethanol from cassava	15	25	20		2.91	Accept
Baking of confectionaries	20	20	10	10	2.83	Accept
Fruit juice making	5	25	20	10	2.41	Reject
Palm kernel cracking	30	15	15		3.25	Accept
Hair dressing and braiding	22	28	5	5	3.11	Accept

Source: Field survey, 2017  
 ≥ 2.50 Accept; ≤ 2.50 Reject

**Level of rural women participation in the Entrepreneurship opportunities in Eleme Local Government Area**

**Table 2: Distribution of the respondents by level of participation**

<b>Level of participation</b>	<b>VH</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Remark</b>
Livestock farming	35	10	10	5	3.33	Accept
Fish farming	20	20	10	10	2.83	Accept
Mat weaving	25	15	15	5	3.00	Accept
Snail rearing	35	25			3.58	Accept
Cassava floor making	25	10	20	5	2.91	Accept
Local bead making	6	9	20	25	1.93	Reject
Trading	20	30	5	5	3.05	Accept
Poultry farming	22	28	5	5	3.11	Accept
Plantain chip	30	25	5		3.41	Accept
Mushroom farming	30	13	7	10	3.05	Accept
Cassava chips	20	15	20	5	2.83	Accept
Cosmetics making	30	10	10	10	3.00	Accept
Plantain floor	25	20	15		3.16	Accept
Processing of Ethanol from cassava	15	25	20		2.91	Accept
Baking of confectionaries	20	20	10	10	2.83	Accept
Fruit juice making	5	25	20	10	2.41	Reject
Palm kernel cracking	30	15	15		3.25	Accept
Hair dressing and braiding	22	28	5	5	3.11	Accept

Source: Field survey, 2017  
 ≥ 2.50 Accept; ≤ 2.50 Reject

Data in table 2 showed the distribution of respondents based on the level of rural women participation. Thus: livestock farming (3.33), fish farming (2.83), mat weaving (3.00), snail rearing (3.58), cassava floor making (2.91), and local bead making (1.93), Trading 3.05, poultry farming (3.11), plantain chips (3.41), mushroom farming (3.05), cassava chips (2.83), cosmetics making (3.00), plantain floor (3.16), processing of Ethanol from cassava (2.91), baking of confectionaries (2.83), fruit juice making (2.41), palm kernel cracking (3.25) and hair dressing and braiding (3.11). Among the opportunities listed women participation were good except for bead making and fruit juice making that recorded Mean values below 2.50. In view of that Mohanti [2004] asserted that women are entering in businesses and industries in great numbers. In the same vein, Khanka [2000] noted that rural women entrepreneurs are capable of achieving economic independence individually or in collaboration generate employment opportunities for other women through initiating, establishing and running an enterprise by keeping pace with their personal and social lives.

**Table 3: Impact of entrepreneurship participation in socio- economic empowerment**

<b>Impact entrepreneurship</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>DA</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b><math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>Remark</b>
More income	25	10	5	20	2.66	Accept
Ability to meet financial obligations	30	15	5	10	3.08	Accept
Better attention to financial needs of the family	15	35	5	5	3.00	Accept
Improved self esteem	35	15	5	5	3.33	Accept
Easy admission into social organizations	5	10	30	5	2.08	Reject
Make friends easily	5	15	25	15	2.16	Reject
Improved interactions and relationships	20	20	10	10	2.83	Accept

Source: Field survey, 2017

≥ 2.50 Accept; ≤ 2.50 Reject

Table 3 showed the distribution of respondents based on the impact of entrepreneurship participation on socio- economic empowerment. The findings showed that more income had 2.66, ability to meet financial obligations 3.08, better attention to financial needs of the family 3.00, improved self-esteem 3.33, easy admission into social organizations 2.08, make friends easily 2.16 and improved interaction and relationship among peers 2.83. Ottih [2000], noted how rural women participation in entrepreneurship activity will help in income diversification as well as women not been a burden on their husbands.

***Challenges facing entrepreneurship skills development among rural women in Eleme Local Government Area***

Table 4 showed the distribution of respondents based on the challenging factors to entrepreneurship skills development. The findings showed that low education 2.75, weak infrastructure 3.75, lack of motivation 3.41, high cost of production 3.00, poor market outlet 2.91, difficulty in securing loan 3.41 limited mobility 2.83, multiple responsibility 3.25, and finally constraining cultural impediments 3.05. Ahirro and Sadavarte (2010) indicated that lack of identification of financial affair, incapability for providing insurance, lack of fixed capital, complexity of loan process and negative attitude of banks towards women and not repayment of loan including limiting factors for women entrepreneurship in India.

**Table 4: Distribution of respondents by challenges facing Women Participation in Entrepreneurship Opportunities**

Challenges	SA	A	DA	SD	X	Remark
Low level education	15	25	10	10	2.75	Accept
Weak rural infrastructure	20	30	5	5	3.75	Accept
Lack of motivation	35	15	10		3.41	Accept
High cost of production	25	15	15	5	3.00	Accept
Poor market outlet	25	10	20	5	2.91	Accept
Difficulty in securing loans	30	25	5		3.41	Accept
Limited mobility	20	20	10	10	2.83	Accept
Multiple responsibility	30	15	15		3.25	Accept
Constraining cultural impediments	30	13	7	10	3.05	Accept

**Source: Field survey**

≥ 2.50 Accept; ≤ 2.50 Reject

### CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following were deduced;

There are many Entrepreneurship opportunities for rural women in Eleme Local Government Area, especially in the area such as snail rearing, cassava flour, plantain chip etc.

Rural women in Eleme local government area are actively participating in varied entrepreneurial activities to a high level; especially in agricultural related opportunities.

It was also concluded that participation in entrepreneurship activities positively impacted the women in the study area economically and socially.

That the relative successes recorded through women participation in entrepreneurship opportunities were constrained by many factors ranging from financial, personal to cultural among the rural women in the study area.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following were recommended.

1. Governments [Federal, State and Local] should encourage the development of more entrepreneurship opportunities in the rural areas. This will enhance wider range of choice and participation among women at all levels.
2. Governments at all levels, in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations should ensure effective and higher level of participation of rural women in entrepreneurship activities through effective incentive provisions and training.
3. More women should be encouraged to participate in entrepreneurship activities as it enhances their income generation and the capacity to meet their needs.
4. Every obstacle constraining women participation in entrepreneurship activities should be dismantled through the improvement in infrastructural facilities, provision of market and credits and improvement on the educational status of rural women using adult education programmes.

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