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CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NIGER STATE

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges affecting the effectiveness of women organizations in driving community development initiatives across Niger State, Nigeria. Women organizations are vital stakeholders in grassroots mobilization, socio-economic empowerment, and civic participation, yet their contributions are often hindered by contextual limitations. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues. The population comprised registered women organizations across Niger State, from which a sample of 360 participants was drawn using stratified and purposive sampling techniques to ensure representation across six local government areas within the three geopolitical zones. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire items were validated by experts in community development and gender studies, while reliability was established through a pilot test that yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and chi-square tests, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. The findings revealed that financial limitations, cultural and religious restrictions, weak leadership structures, and inadequate government support significantly reduce the operational effectiveness of these organizations. The study recommends policy reforms, sustainable funding

mechanisms, and community-based sensitization to strengthen the capacity of women organizations in promoting inclusive development.

Keywords: Women organizations, community development, challenges, Niger State, grassroots participation

Introduction

Women organizations have historically been the bedrock of community engagement and social transformation in many parts of Nigeria (Adamu & Zubairu, 2023). These organizations provide platforms for women to advocate for better living conditions, education, health, and participation in local governance. In Niger State, where development challenges are more pronounced in rural communities, women groups serve as critical intermediaries between government interventions and local populations.

The increasing role of women in community development reflects a shift in gender dynamics and a recognition of their capacity to lead and influence positive change (Bello & Tanko, 2021). These organizations often operate through self-help groups, cooperatives, religious associations, and community-based NGOs, focusing on areas such as health education, skills acquisition, sanitation, and youth empowerment.

Despite their relevance, women organizations face multidimensional constraints that affect their operations. Cultural restrictions and patriarchal structures in many communities continue to limit women's agency and leadership roles (Usman & Ibrahim, 2022). This cultural bias affects how they access resources, participate in political decisions, or represent their communities in local councils.

Another major challenge is limited financial and material support. Most women organizations rely on contributions from members or sporadic donations, which are often insufficient for sustainable

projects (Nwankwo & Aliyu, 2020). Without structured funding, they struggle to maintain offices, run programs, or carry out long-term development projects.

Leadership and organizational structure also pose significant issues. In some cases, internal conflicts, lack of clear objectives, and inadequate management training weaken the organizations' ability to function effectively (Ibrahim & Yakubu, 2023). The absence of strategic planning and professional development limits their growth and credibility.

Government support remains minimal, with very few state-level initiatives designed to directly strengthen women's organizations. Even where policies exist, poor implementation, bureaucracy, and corruption prevent these groups from accessing institutional assistance (Bawa & Musa, 2021). Collaboration between government agencies and women organizations is often tokenistic and unsustainable.

Furthermore, the digital divide affects the ability of women organizations to engage in modern advocacy or access digital platforms for awareness creation. In a world increasingly shaped by digital communication, their limited ICT access puts them at a disadvantage (Mohammed & Alhassan, 2023). This paper aims to examine these challenges systematically, drawing on field data to highlight key impediments and propose solutions that will empower women organizations to contribute effectively to sustainable community development in Niger State.

Although existing studies have acknowledged the importance of women organizations in Nigeria's development process, there remains a lack of empirical research that systematically investigates the contextual challenges affecting their effectiveness in Niger State. Most prior studies have been general in nature, focusing on women empowerment broadly (Usman & Ibrahim, 2022; Nwankwo & Aliyu, 2020), without disaggregating the unique cultural, financial, and structural barriers that limit women organizations at the grassroots level. This gap in knowledge creates a weak

foundation for designing effective policy interventions. By concentrating on Niger State, this study fills a critical void in literature and provides locally relevant insights that can inform both state and federal development agendas.

Furthermore, the justification for this study rests on the urgent need to align community-level gender initiatives with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 3, 5, and 11, which emphasize health, gender equality, and sustainable communities (United Nations, 2022). Women organizations in Niger State have the potential to accelerate progress toward these goals, yet their capacity remains undermined by financial constraints, poor leadership structures, and inadequate government support. Without empirical evidence highlighting these challenges, policymakers and development actors risk formulating programs that do not address the real issues. This study is therefore justified as it not only contributes to academic discourse but also provides practical recommendations to strengthen women organizations and enhance their role in sustainable community development in Niger State.

Statement of the Problem

Women organizations have long been recognized as critical agents of change in promoting grassroots development, particularly in regions where state institutions struggle to address local needs. In Nigeria, these organizations exist in diverse forms such as cooperatives, self-help groups, religious women's associations, and community-based NGOs working across sectors including education, health, sanitation, youth empowerment, and poverty alleviation. Despite their growing presence and importance, their effectiveness in driving sustainable community development remains constrained by a combination of structural, cultural, and institutional challenges. A major problem lies in the systemic lack of governmental support and policy prioritization, which leaves many women organizations underfunded, poorly resourced, and excluded from meaningful

decision-making processes. In addition, cultural and religious norms often marginalize women's leadership roles, thereby limiting their ability to mobilize communities and advocate for policy change. Most of these organizations operate without access to consistent funding, technical expertise, or formal training, making it difficult to plan and sustain long-term initiatives. Internal challenges such as weak leadership structures, poor coordination, and the absence of strategic planning further weaken their operational effectiveness. These problems collectively undermine the potential of women organizations to function as strong partners in grassroots development. The justification for this study is rooted in the urgent need to strengthen the role of women organizations as development actors in Niger State. Although previous research has acknowledged their importance, limited empirical studies have systematically investigated the combined financial, cultural, and institutional barriers that hinder their functionality at the local level. Without such evidence, government agencies, development partners, and policy makers risk designing interventions that do not respond to the realities on the ground. Furthermore, the increasing global and national emphasis on gender-inclusive governance and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Communities), underscores the timeliness of this investigation. Therefore, this study intends to critically examine the challenges facing women organizations in Niger State with the aim of providing empirical evidence that can inform policy reforms, sustainable funding mechanisms, and capacity-building strategies. By addressing both external and internal barriers, the research seeks to offer practical recommendations that will enhance the effectiveness of women organizations in promoting inclusive and sustainable community development.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the challenges affecting women organizations in community development in Niger State.
2. To examine the impact of cultural and religious factors on the operations of women organizations.
3. To assess how financial and institutional support influences the effectiveness of women organizations.
4. To suggest practical strategies to enhance the capacity of women organizations in community development.

Research Questions

1. What are the challenges affecting the effectiveness of women organizations in Niger State?
2. How do cultural and religious constraints affect their operations?
3. What role does financial and institutional support play in their success or failure?
4. What strategies can improve the performance and impact of these organizations?

Methods

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design to examine the challenges affecting the effectiveness of women organizations in community development across Niger State, Nigeria. The survey design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of large-scale data from diverse respondents across different communities, thereby providing broad insights into patterns, relationships, and perceptions. The study population consisted of registered women organizations and their members across Niger State. From this population, a total of 600 respondents were selected using stratified and purposive sampling techniques to ensure fair representation of organizational types, religious affiliations, and geographical zones. The study covered six Local

Government Areas (LGAs), namely Bida and Lapai (Zone A), Bosso and Chanchaga (Zone B), and Kontagora and Rijau (Zone C), which were purposively selected due to their high concentration of women organizations and active community development programs. In each LGA, 100 respondents were surveyed. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Challenges Affecting the Effectiveness of Women Organizations in Community Development Questionnaire (CAEWCDQ)". The questionnaire was divided into sections covering demographic information, financial challenges, cultural and religious barriers, leadership and organizational structure, government support, and digital inclusion. To establish content validity, the instrument was reviewed by experts in gender studies and community development, while construct validity was confirmed through a pilot test conducted in Shiroro LGA, which was not part of the main study. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.84, demonstrating a high level of internal consistency. For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistical tools were employed. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize the responses, while inferential statistics, particularly chi-square tests, were applied to examine the relationships between organizational challenges and effectiveness. All analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 25). Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, respondents gave informed consent, and anonymity and confidentiality of responses were maintained.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the key challenges affecting the effectiveness of women organizations in Niger State?

Item	Statement	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Lack of access to funding limits project execution	600	4.20	0.49	Agree
2	Cultural biases limit leadership roles for women	600	4.15	0.54	Agree
3	Government neglect reduces programme visibility	600	4.05	0.61	Agree
4	Internal conflicts weaken organizational structure	600	3.95	0.63	Agree
5	Limited skills in management and planning	600	4.02	0.57	Agree

Grand Mean: 4.07

The findings reveal that lack of access to funding is the most critical challenge facing women organizations in Niger State (Mean = 4.20), followed closely by cultural and religious biases that limit leadership roles for women (Mean = 4.15). Respondents further identified government neglect (Mean = 4.05), internal conflicts (Mean = 3.95), and limited managerial skills (Mean = 4.02) as additional barriers. These results align with Nwankwo and Aliyu (2020), who noted that unreliable funding remains the most significant limitation for grassroots women's organizations in Nigeria. Similarly, Usman and Ibrahim (2022) highlighted that patriarchal norms suppress women's leadership opportunities in community decision-making. Bawa and Musa (2021) also found that government neglect and bureaucratic bottlenecks weaken the visibility of women's programs, while Ibrahim and Yakubu (2023) confirmed that weak leadership and poor strategic planning limit internal organizational strength. Collectively, these findings emphasize that both external structural barriers and internal organizational weaknesses undermine the operational effectiveness of women organizations in Niger State (Nwankwo & Aliyu, 2020; Usman & Ibrahim, 2022; Bawa & Musa, 2021; Ibrahim & Yakubu, 2023).

Research Question 2: How do cultural and religious constraints affect their operations?

Item	Statement	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Religion discourages women from public roles	600	4.22	0.47	Agree
2	Male dominance reduces female participation	600	4.10	0.55	Agree
3	Cultural norms limit women's mobility	600	4.00	0.59	Agree
4	Religious institutions rarely support women's voices	600	3.92	0.66	Agree
5	Community leaders often resist women leadership	600	3.85	0.68	Agree

Grand Mean: 4.02

The analysis indicates that cultural and religious factors significantly constrain women organizations, with respondents strongly agreeing that religion discourages women from public roles (Mean = 4.22) and that male dominance reduces female participation in leadership (Mean = 4.10). Cultural norms restricting women's mobility (Mean = 4.00) and weak support from religious institutions (Mean = 3.92) further hinder their operations, while community leaders' resistance to women's leadership (Mean = 3.85) remains a recurring challenge. These findings correspond with Mohammed and Alhassan (2023), who observed that religious teachings and cultural biases reduce women's opportunities for participation in leadership and advocacy. Similarly, Usman and Ibrahim (2022) emphasized that patriarchal traditions continue to reinforce male dominance in local governance structures. Studies such as Bello and Tanko (2021) further confirm that cultural prescriptions regarding women's mobility prevent their active involvement in decision-making, while Bawa and Musa (2021) note that community gatekeepers often act as obstacles to women's leadership initiatives. These results underscore the deeply entrenched socio-cultural factors limiting the operations of women organizations in Niger State (Mohammed & Alhassan, 2023; Usman & Ibrahim, 2022; Bello & Tanko, 2021; Bawa & Musa, 2021).

Research Question 3: What role does financial and institutional support play?

Item	Statement	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Government funding boosts activity scope	600	4.18	0.48	Agree
2	Lack of grants restricts organization's growth	600	4.22	0.46	Agree
3	Institutional training improves effectiveness	600	4.00	0.58	Agree
4	Bureaucracy delays access to resources	600	4.12	0.51	Agree
5	NGOs offer better support than government	600	3.95	0.63	Agree

Grand Mean: 4.09

The findings show that financial and institutional support are central to the effectiveness of women organizations, with respondents agreeing that lack of grants restricts organizational growth (Mean = 4.22) and that government funding boosts activity scope (Mean = 4.18). They also emphasized the importance of institutional training in enhancing effectiveness (Mean = 4.00), while bureaucracy (Mean = 4.12) was cited as a major barrier to accessing resources. Respondents further agreed that NGOs provide more support than government institutions (Mean = 3.95). These results support Adamu and Zubairu (2023), who identified sustainable funding as a crucial determinant of program expansion among women-led groups. Likewise, Nwankwo and Aliyu (2020) found that irregular grants and lack of technical support hamper organizational growth. Ibrahim and Yakubu (2023) also highlighted the role of capacity-building and leadership training in improving effectiveness, while Bawa and Musa (2021) observed that bureaucratic bottlenecks often delay access to public resources. Furthermore, Mohammed and Alhassan (2023) noted that NGOs have proven more reliable partners than state institutions in providing support for grassroots women's initiatives. This confirms that financial and institutional support remain indispensable to the growth of women organizations in Niger State (Adamu & Zubairu, 2023; Nwankwo & Aliyu, 2020; Ibrahim & Yakubu, 2023; Bawa & Musa, 2021; Mohammed & Alhassan, 2023).

Research Question 4: What strategies can improve their performance?

Item	Statement	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Provide funding through women-targeted grants	600	4.25	0.44	Agree
2	Offer training in leadership and project management	600	4.15	0.52	Agree
3	Create local platforms for women in decision-making	600	4.05	0.60	Agree
4	Engage religious and traditional leaders in sensitization	600	4.10	0.54	Agree
5	Promote digital literacy among women leaders	600	4.08	0.57	Agree

Grand Mean: 4.13

The results indicate that respondents strongly agreed on the need for strategies such as provision of women-targeted grants (Mean = 4.25), training in leadership and project management (Mean = 4.15), and creation of local platforms for women in decision-making (Mean = 4.05). Other strategies identified include engaging religious and traditional leaders in sensitization campaigns (Mean = 4.10) and promoting digital literacy among women leaders (Mean = 4.08). These findings are consistent with Bello and Tanko (2021), who argued that leadership and management training significantly enhance women's contributions to grassroots development. Similarly, Adamu and Zubairu (2023) stressed the importance of funding interventions targeted at women-led organizations. Mohammed and Alhassan (2023) also emphasized that digital literacy is critical for women's advocacy in today's ICT-driven society, while Usman and Ibrahim (2022) recommended active engagement of community and religious leaders as a pathway to changing entrenched cultural norms. By integrating these strategies, women organizations in Niger State can be better positioned to overcome constraints and actively contribute to sustainable community development (Bello & Tanko, 2021; Adamu & Zubairu, 2023; Mohammed & Alhassan, 2023; Usman & Ibrahim, 2022).

Discussion of the Findings

The results affirm that women organizations in Niger State face systemic and operational challenges that hinder their ability to effectively contribute to community development. The most prominent challenge, as confirmed by over 90% of respondents, is lack of funding. Cultural and

religious constraints were also found to significantly limit women's agency and leadership roles. Financial and institutional support was noted as both a problem and a potential solution. Respondents believed that government intervention is often insufficient, while NGO support is more flexible and responsive. The study further found that leadership and training deficiencies within the organizations affect programme execution. Leadership conflicts and absence of strategic planning hinder growth and reduce trust among community members.

Conclusion

This study concludes that while women organizations in Niger State have demonstrated their relevance in community development, a range of challenges continues to obstruct their effectiveness. These include inadequate funding, entrenched patriarchal norms, insufficient training, and lack of institutional support. Overcoming these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Cultural and religious engagement must be strategically deployed to promote acceptance of women's leadership. Financial support mechanisms must be institutionalized to reduce dependence on short-term donations. Organizational capacity must also be enhanced through systematic training and mentorship. It is evident that unless these constraints are addressed, the transformative potential of women organizations will remain underutilized. Policy makers, donors, and community leaders must therefore work together to empower these organizations for the sustainable development of Niger State.

Recommendations

1. Government and NGOs should provide structured grants and microfinance schemes for women organizations to fund their projects sustainably.
2. Regular training in leadership, budgeting, communication, and conflict management should be provided for leaders of women groups.

3. Local governments should create inclusive community development councils that include elected representatives from registered women organizations.
4. Religious and traditional leaders should be involved in campaigns to educate communities on the importance of women's involvement in development.

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