

Women Empowerment and Socio - Economic Development of Rural Women in Akwa Ibom State: A Case Study of Abak Local Government Area

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Abstract

Women in Nigeria constitutes a large number of the population. They are noted globally as main support for socio-economic development in Nigeria, but they have been continually marginalized from many spheres of life in terms of lack of education and financial empowerment, the objectives therefore are to identify women empowerment projects and programmes that influence socio- economic development of Abak Local Government Area. To examine the effect of gender inequality in women socio economic empowerment programmes of Abak Local Government Area. The sample size of 380 from the population of 68,764 based on 2006 census was used for this study. The sampling technique used for this study was random sampling technique. Two hypotheses for this study are: There is no significant relationship between women empowerment programmes and socio-economic development of Abak Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. There is no significant relationship between gender inequality and socio-economic development of Abak Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom state. The theory adopted for this study is the feminist theory, which is one of the arms within sociology. The term feminism was coined by a French socialist named Charles Fourier in 1837. The findings showed that not much empowerment has been done for Abak women. Also, that there is inequality between men and women in Abak Local Government Area. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made. Government should ensure the implementation of more projects and programmes that will build up women capacity for socio economic development of Abak Local Government Area. The idea of gender inequality should be abolished during empowerment programmes. In other word, women should not be overlooked during empowerment programmes. That women should be allowed to take part in the decision-making process of Society and not men alone.

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, Socio - Economic and Rural Development*

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Background to the Study

Empowerment is the process that creates power in individuals over their own lives, society and in their communities. People are empowered when they are able to access the opportunities available to them without limitations and restrictions such as in education, profession and lifestyle, feeling entitled to make their own decisions, create a sense of empowerment (Combodia, 2015). Women empowerment is the process of empowering women. It's also means accepting and allowing people (women) who are on the outside of the decision-making process into it (Lady Bun Rany, 2015). Empowerment includes the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy and training. Women's empowerment is all about equipping and allowing women to make life determining decisions through the different problems in the society (Michelle Obama, 2015).

In this research work, focus has been laid on empowerment in economy, education. Education is meant to provide and equip an individual (women) with the desired knowledge, skills and training that can help the beneficiary attain self-reliance in decision making and to perform effectively in every task (Lifelong learning, 2007). There is an African proverb that says "if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you have educated a whole nation, states and a whole family". The role of women in the development of any nation state or town cannot be overemphasized. This is in attempt to re-emphasize reawakens the mind of humanity on the importance of women education, political and economic empowerment as undisputable vehicle for sustainable development in the nation, Abak Local Government Area and Akwa Ibom State at large. It is commonly seen that women are the first teachers of the children at home. If a mother is educated, they play important role in shaping and moulding their sons and daughters' destiny (Hilda Tadria, 2001).

Women and girls cannot render their effective contribution in the society or work to support their families without education. They do not have the ability for upbringing of a family, they are primary vested with responsibilities such as nurturing of children, taking care of the household activities, presentation of meals and also working outside the home for women to be able to maintain a balance between house work and office work, they must acquire some levels of education (Rand, 2008). The United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said "when we empower women, we empower communities, nations and entire human family". The impact of political involvement of women has left a patch in path, therefore it can be asserted that women are not only loaded with valuable potentials, but also have legal right to contribute to the development of their societies. Any Government that wants to succeed should adequately provide for the position of women in its administration and make amendment policies that have placed women at the losing end (Rand, 2008).

Care International Organization of women (2016) defined women economic empowerment as the process by which women increase their right to economic resources and power to make decisions about economic resources and power to make decisions that benefit themselves, their families and the society. Empowering women economically sets a part for poverty reduction and for equality between men and women. Care works to ensure that poor women have access to a full range of suitable and affordable financial services critical to withstand

shocks and fulfill their economic and social potential. Care empowers women to build better livelihoods, earn more income and create businesses that provide jobs and boost local economics, which enable the women to afford healthcare treatment, to purchase uniforms for the children, and are more likely to play a leadership role in their society.

An organization known as Women Initiative for Economic Empowerment Inc. (WIEE) in Akwa Ibom State saw the potentials in women and believe that they are powerful catalyst for change. The organization saw that the women through education or acquisition of skills realize their potentials which will enable them to mobilize other women in their locality and address issues concerning them. The issues on education, political and economic empowerment, enable women to participate fully in the community decision making. Nevertheless, limited number of the women who married as adolescents returned to school and they achieved academic qualification which helped them to take up leadership position in the society and even ventured into politics, others acquired training and vocational skills that made them business entrepreneur thereby contributing to the development of a community (Akpan. 2013).

The rise of gender sensitivity is one of the distinguishing features of our times. It has taken hold of human imagination like never before. For all practical purposes, the concern of gender equity has graduated to the level of a policy objective (Sharma, 2000). Two perspectives have emerged in the contemporary discourse on the modalities of gender equity; women's development and women's empowerment. It is Ester Boserup's in Rahman (2013) pioneering work, Women's role in economic development that paved way to the rise of women's development perspective. According to Sharma (2000), the development strategy, however, has come under severe interrogation not only for its failure to deliver its promise but also for working against the interest of womankind. Women are the most important factor of every society. Even though everybody is aware of this fact, yet nobody is ready to accept this fact. As a result, the importance which used to be given to women is declining in today's society. As a significance of this growing tendency of underestimating women such as to make them occupy a secondary position in society and to deny them of their basic rights, the need for empowering women was felt (Akpan, 2013).

Essien (2017) stated it clearly that a community can see a greater development if the women are empowered either socially, politically, educationally or otherwise. He made a typical example of what is going on in Countries such as China, Korea and even mostly the northern part of Nigeria. Development is said can be introduced with excess money but it must have a well effective channel it will pass through, (Akpabio, 2013). The development of our Nation, state, local government areas and villages will require an effective establishment of an empowerment scheme that will further transform human most specifically, the women creativity and thinking faculty into meaningful exploitations of economic development. Therefore, this present research was designed to investigate how women empowerments relate to development of Abak Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

Women most often face discrimination and persistent gender inequalities, while some women are experiencing multiple discrimination and exclusion because of factors such as ethnicity or caste. Lack of adequate education (illiteracy) is another problem that women are facing this could be attributed to the fact that in most families, parents prefer to send their son to school, instead of their daughters whom they feel will eventually get married and get incorporated into another family. Thus, a larger percentage of the girls remain uneducated and unexposed. Lack of adequate finance is another crucial hindrance to effective women participation in socio economic development in Abak Local Government Area. Many women entrepreneurs in developing countries face disproportionate obstacles in accessing and competing in the markets. These include women's relative lack of mobility, capacity, assets and technical skills in comparable to men. Unequal opportunities between women and men continue to hamper women's ability to lift themselves from poverty, low developed area and gain more options to improve their living standards. The discriminatory practices and stereotypical attitudes prevent women in some parts of Nigeria from accessing financial support to build their businesses. In some country's women are unable to obtain business loans without their husbands or father's co-signature and support. Women perform the bulk of unpaid care work across all economies and cultures. In many societies, existing norms dictate that girls and women have the main responsibility for the care of children, the elderly and the sick, as well as for running the household, including the provision of water and energy supplies. These hinder women chances of being properly educated or being able to translate returns on their own productive work into increased and more secure incomes, better working conditions and increase standard of living. Communities or areas are poorly developed and the leaders of such communities or areas which mostly considered men during empowerment and socio-economic development process are still ignorance of other means to be adopted. This research work has been embarked on to access the relationship between women empowerment and socio-economic development of Abak Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify women empowerment projects and programmes that influence socio-economic development of Abak Local Government Area.
2. To examine the effect of gender inequality in women socio economic empowerment programmes of Abak Local Government Area.

Hypotheses:

The following hypotheses were used for this study

1. There is no significant relationship between women empowerment programmes and socio-economic development of Abak Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State
2. They no significant relationship between gender inequality and socio-economic development of Abak Local Government Area. Akwa Ibom state

Is Women Empowerment Important?

According to Team work (2019), the following are reasons why women empowerment is very important. Empowering women is important because women aren't getting what they deserve.

1. **Underemployed and Unemployed:** Women population constitutes around 50% of the world population. A large number of women around the world are unemployed. The world economy suffers a lot because of the unequal opportunity for women at workplaces.
2. **Inspiration for others:** There are a lot of women in India who have done exceptionally well in various fields of life. Women like PT Usha, Hima Das, PV Sindhu, Sania Mirza, Saina Nehwal, etc, have won various trophies and medals in their respective fields and showed the girl power to Indian people. After looking at them, a lot of girls came out of their houses and showed what actual talent they carry inside them.
3. **Talented:** Women are as talented as men. Previously, women were not allowed higher education like men and hence their talents were wasted. But nowadays, they are also allowed to go for higher studies and it encourages women to show their talents which will not only benefit her individually but to the whole world at large today, many women are occupying the top position of multinational companies.
4. **Overall development of society:** The main advantage of Women Empowerment is that there will be an overall development of the society. The money that women earn does not only help them and or their family, but it also helps develop the society.
5. **Economic benefits:** Women Empowerment also leads to more economic benefits not to the individuals but to the society as well. Women empowerment leads to more financial independence of women and girls. They are taught on how they can use their skills to get income that they can use to support their families. Women empowerment helps women to stand on their own legs, become independent and also to earn for their family which grows country's economy
6. **Reduction in domestic violence:** Empowering girls also leads to reduced levels of domestic violence. Educated women and girls are able to stand for themselves and escape from incidences of domestic violence.
7. **Reduce poverty:** Women Empowerment also reduces poverty. This also **contributes significantly to the family welfare.** This is because their children are more likely to acquire good education and they are also able to save and invest for the benefit of their families.
8. **National development:** Women are increasingly participating in the national development process. They are making the nation proud by their outstanding performances almost every sphere including medical science, social service, engineering, etc. **This led to more developed economies.** This is because the women are able to work and acquire income which translates to higher levels of a country's GDP. By empowering women, we enable the nation.
9. **Availability of quality workforce:** Large organizations need a large of high quality workforce. Empowerment of women would help in increasing the total workforce of quality people.

10. **Self-esteem:** Women should be treated equally with men in all spheres of life. This would help her develop a good emotional health.
11. **Improved health:** Another importance of empowering women is that **leads to healthier societies**. This is because women by nature are the care takers of their homes and when empowered, they are better able to take care of their homes and families.
12. **Human rights:** Every Woman deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. Not allowing them to get educated or not providing them with a safe working environment is against basic human rights, Empowering women would help in dealing with human right issues.
13. **Cleanliness and hygiene:** Empowering women also include providing them education related to cleanliness and hygiene. When they understand the benefits of maintaining a clean and hygiene environment, they would obviously make effort towards it.
14. **Educated society:** Women empowerment leads to **increased levels of literacy** in the world. This is the case when these girls gain education that can help them better their lives. Many people do want their daughters to study and thus a lot of women remain illiterate. But, girls should be allowed to study till the time she feels it is good for her. This is not only good for her but also from the country's perspective as well.
15. **Gender equality:** Empowerment of women is also important in **accomplishing the world goal of gender equality**. By empowering girls, this goal is achieved as they are better able to compete with their male counterparts in places such as government, learning institutions and even leadership positions.
16. **Women empowerment helps realize the potential and the dreams** that are manifested in the female population hence giving them momentum to propagate themselves. Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) argued for women's empowerment through the attainment of full employment and self-reliance of poor and rural exploited women. It holds that. "When there is a woman's income, there is security of work, she has assets in her name, she feels economically strong, independent and autonomous" (The Kurukshetra. 2005). Kurukshetra (2004) through the article 'Micro Finance for Women s Empowerment' also argued that."Micro Finance is emerging as a powerful instrument for poverty alleviation in the new economy. She envisages that. "Empowerment is a process of change by which individuals or groups gain power and ability to take control over their lives." In economic development, the empowerment approach focuses on mobilizing the self-help efforts of the poor, rather than providing them with social welfare. "Economic empowerment is also the empowering of previously disadvantaged sections of the population . (Retrieved) from <http://en.wikipedia.Org/wiki/Empowerment>).

Women Educational Empowerment

According to the Malala Fund (2018), there are over 130 million girls worldwide who are not in school. Without an education, these girls will often marry and have children at their early ages, work in unpaid or low paying positions, and rely on their husbands or families for economic support. Without an education, their futures and their families' future are limited.

Education is the key to women's empowerment. Through it, women have better access and opportunities in the workforce, leading to increased income and less isolation at home or exclusion from financial decisions. With an education, women are able to live their dreams by pursuing their own goals and values. Studies have found that if every girl completed 12 years of education, child marriage would drop by 64% and health complications from early pregnancy, like early births and child deaths, would drop by 59% and 49%, respectively. Educating women and girls also boosts countries' economies, lowers risk of war and extremism, and has been called the best investment against climate change by the Brookings Institution. However, there are still many barriers preventing girls and women to pursue and complete their education, limiting women empowerment. These can include the cost of school or college, difficulty getting to school due to distance or lack of transportation, being forced to work and provide for their families and being forced to marry and have children, or conflict in their hometown or country. The United Nations (2018) found that as girls reach secondary school, their enrollment rates decline significantly. Only 39% of countries have equal proportions of boys and girls enrolled in secondary education. In developing countries, 35% to 85% of girls are forced to stay home from school to take care of their younger siblings and the house while their brothers are able to achieve an education. To level the playing field and expand their professional opportunities, women need the same experiences and skills making post-secondary education a critical part of women's empowerment. "Without proper education to all children including girls, gender empowerment is not possible. This maxim if one male child is literate personally, he alone becomes educated but if one girl child is educated the whole family becomes benefited has been realized by the national political leaders, policy makers, administrators and bureaucrats. In this regard PH Sethumadhava Rao (2001) considers that "the most important thing is that they (the women) need to be given free and compulsory education so as to make them aware of the rights and duties and possible free legal aid so that they can fight their cases without spending money. An educated mother is a one-thousand-fold superior to a mere lecturer. Education creates self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-sufficiency to a person. It brings light of hope; increases social, political, intellectual, cultural and religious consciousness, broadens the length of mind; removes all kinds of bigotry, narrowness, superstition and enhances fellow-feeling, tolerance etc.

Selected Empowerment Scheme for Women of Abak Local Government Area

Provision of educational welfare scheme to women of Abak Local Government area through Market women empowerment project in collaboration with Excellence Community Education Welfare Scheme (ECEWS). During the visit of (ECEWS) to Abak, the executive director Mr. Andy Eyo made it known to the women, the organization's commitment to empower the ultra-poor market women of Abak Local Government area that the empowerment scheme is to help in the reduction of the poverty level in Abak Local Government Area.

This exercise took place in January 7 2015, the executive director of (ECEWS) emphasized that empowering women means empowering the family which in turn will reduce hunger, hawking, child labour, poverty. The market women empowerment project is an initiative of the Akwa Ibom Women resident in the USA (NKA UforoIban) in collaboration with

(ECEWS) is aimed at poverty reduction amongst ultra-poor market women through issuance of grants to boost their businesses and also enhance their educational standard.

1. The provision of free and compulsory education from primary to secondary school levels by Akwa Ibom State government has also serve as an empowerment programme to women of Abak Local Government Area.
2. Empowerment of women through Micro-credit facilities to co-operative societies within Abak Local Government Area.
3. Provision of residential quarters to some widows in three (3) wards in Middim Clan.
4. Abak Usung Women farmers link to Global cashless Network In a bid to encourage a cashless society. Abak Usung Women farmers embraced financial infusion through digitization of business transaction.
5. Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare in collaboration with Nestle Nigeria marked the 2020 rural women empowerment Project on Monday 7th December, 2020 at Cross River Basin Authority. Abak Local Government Area as Women farmers were presented with Airtel and activated e-wallets to empower the economic growth of the rural women in Abak
6. Inauguration of Shelter of Hope for widow with seven children at Ata-Ediene Ediene Clan in Abak Local Government Area by Akwa Ibom State First Lady Dr. Martha Udom Emmanuel on 9th March, 2020 and Mrs. Ekaette Unoma Akpabio also established Family Life Enhancement Programme (FLE) for women of Akwa Thom State
7. Provision of grant to 25 indigene women in Abak through tECEWS)
8. Society for women and vulnerable groups empowerment (SWOVUGE)

Provides the following empowerment scheme for women of Abak Local Government Area in 2012 The Organization build women Capital in leadership. Governance, sustainable agriculture natural resources management Micro economic enterprises and good health practice through the under listed programmes within Abak Local Government Area

- i. Ankara Accessories Framing
- ii. Snacks production
- iii. Menstrual hygiene management Campaign
- iv. Poultry farming
- v. Snailery
- vi. Fish farming
- vii. Organic fertilizer Production
- viii. Cultivation of cash crops
- ix. ICT training for women in all the eleven (11) Wards in Abak.

The pictures below show the different empowerment programs for Abak women



Figure 1: Organic Fertilizer Production



Figure 2: ICT Training



Figure 3: Ankara Accessories Training



Figure 4: Menstrual Hygiene Campaign

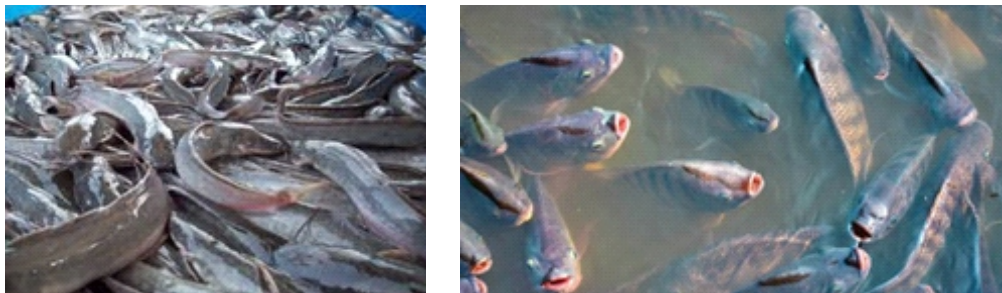


Figure 5: Fish Farming



Figure 6: Sewing



Figure 7: Snailery

Contribution of Women Empowerment Programmes and Socio-economic Development of Abak Local Government Area

At the end of the training or programme, the trainee was given some equipments like sewing machines, computer, fertilizer to farmers that enable them to generate income that will improve their living standard. Such as provision of food for their families, payment of children school fees and health care. The programme helps to build women capacity in economic activities that can increase their business standard and also:

- i. To build women capacity in leadership and participation in socio-economic activities.
- ii. To increase the level of literacy among women in the community.
- iii. To build the capacity of the rural dwellers in Agro income generating enterprises such as fish farming, poultry snailery etc.
- iv. To promote participation of women and rural communities in politics and resource management.
- v. To promote good health practices among women and rural communities E.g. water sanitation, hygiene, nutrition etc.

Theoretical Framework: Feminist Theory

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Feminist theory. The term feminism was coined by a French socialist named Charles Fourier in 1837, and was first used in 1872 in France and in the United State in 1910. Offen (1988). This theory includes a wide range of political, economic, cultural and social. But its central message remains the equality among the sexes, equal opportunities for women and the dissolution of the oppressive practices associated with patriarchy, while also seeking increased access to education, better health care and improved life choices for women. Feminist theory is a major branch within sociology that shifts its assumptions, analytic lens, and topical focus away from the male viewpoint and experience toward that of women. In doing so, feminist theory shines a light on social problems, trends, and issues that are otherwise overlooked or misidentified by the historically dominant male perspective within social theory.

Key areas of focus within feminist theory include: Discrimination and exclusion on the basis of sex and gender, objectification, Structural, economic inequality, power, oppression, Gender roles and stereotypes. Many people incorrectly believe that feminist theory focuses exclusively on girls and women and that it has an inherent goal of promoting the superiority of women over men. In reality, feminist theory has always been about viewing the social world in a way that illuminates the forces that create and support inequality, oppression, and injustice, and in doing so, promotes the pursuit of equality and justice. That said, since the experiences and perspectives of women and girls were historically excluded for years from social theory and social science, much feminist theory has focused on their interactions and experiences within society to ensure that half the world's population is not left out of how we see and understand social forces, relations, and problems. While most feminist theorists throughout history have been women, people of all genders can be found working in the discipline today. By shifting the focus of social theory away from the perspectives and experiences of men, feminist theorists have created social theories that are more inclusive and creative than those that assume the social actor to always be a man. Part of what makes feminist theory creative and inclusive is that it often considers how systems of power and oppression interact, which is to say it does not just focus on gendered power and oppression, but on how this might intersect with systemic racism, a hierarchical class system, sexuality, nationality, and (dis)ability, among other things.

Testing of Hypotheses and Interpretation

Hypothesis one

Hypothesis (Ho): There is no significant relationship between women empowerment programmes and socio-economic Development of Abak Local Government Area. Akwa Ibom State. Pearson Product Moment Correlation is used to determine the relationship between women economic empowerment and development. (Where n=380)

Formular:

$$t = \frac{\sum d}{\frac{\sqrt{N(\sum d^2) - (\sum d)^2}}{N-1}}$$

Where: Σ = Summation
 d = Difference
 N = Sample Size
 I = Constant

Table 1:

| Options | Frequency X^1 | Expected freq. X^2 | D | D² |
|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Very high extent(VHE) | 150 | 39.47 | 110.53 | 12216.88 |
| High extent (HE) | 90 | 23.68 | 66.32 | 4398.34 |
| Low extent (LE) | 82 | 21.57 | 60.43 | 3651.78 |
| Very low extent (VLE) | 58 | 25.26 | 32.74 | 1071.90 |
| Total | 380 | 100 | $\Sigma d=270.02$ | $\Sigma d^2=21338.91$ |

Source: Field survey, 2021.

Calculation:

$$t = \frac{\Sigma d}{\frac{\sqrt{N(\Sigma d^2) - (\Sigma d)^2}}{N-1}}$$

$$t = \frac{270.02}{\frac{\sqrt{380(21338.91) - (270.02)^2}}{380 - 1}}$$

$$t = \frac{270.2}{\frac{\sqrt{8,215,480.35 - 7290.80}}{380 - 1}}$$

$$t = \frac{270.2}{\frac{\sqrt{8208189.55}}{379}}$$

$$t = \frac{270.02}{\frac{2,864.99}{379}}$$

$$t = \frac{270.02}{7.55} \\ = 35.72$$

To calculate the degree of freedom (df) for related t-test:

$$(c - 1) (r - 1)$$

$$2 \times 1 (4 - 1)$$

$$1 \times 3$$

$$Df = 3$$

The level of significant is 0.5 or 0.05.

The calculated t-test value = 35.72.

The critical table value = 9.142.

Decision: Since the calculated t-test value of 35.72 is greater than the critical table value of 9.143. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternate hypothesis (H_1) is accepted.

Therefore, there is a significant relationship between women empowerment programmes and socio-economic development of Abak local government Area. Akwa Ibom State

Hypothesis two;

Ho: There is no significant relationship between gender inequality and socio-economic development of Abak local government Area Akwa Ibom State

Table 2.

| Options | Frequency X | Expected freq. X^2 | D | D^2 |
|------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Very high extent (VHE) | 170 | 44.73 | 125.27 | 15692.57 |
| High extent (HE) | 143 | 37.66 | 105.34 | 11096.51 |
| Low extent (LE) | 47 | 12.37 | 34.63 | 1199.24 |
| Very low extent (VLE) | 20 | 5.2 | 14.74 | 217.26 |
| Total | 380 | 100 | $\Sigma d = 279.98$ | $\Sigma d^2 = 28205.59$ |

Source: Field survey, 2021.

To calculate for t test value.

$$t = \frac{\sum d}{\frac{\sqrt{(N \sum d^2) - (\sum d)^2}}{N - 1}}$$

$$t = \frac{279.98}{\frac{\sqrt{380 (28,205.59) - (279.98)^2}}{380 - 1}}$$

$$t = \frac{279.98}{\frac{\sqrt{10,718,124.2 - 788.8}}{380 - 1}}$$

$$t = \frac{279.98}{\frac{\sqrt{10,639,735.4}}{379} = 28073.18}$$

$$t = \frac{279.98}{\frac{28073.18}{379}}$$

$$t = \frac{279.98}{\frac{\sqrt{28073.18}}{279.98^2}} = 167.55$$

$$X = 1.67$$

$$(c - 1)(r - 1)$$

$$2 - 1 \times 5 - 1$$

$$1 \times 4$$

$$2 \log 4 = 0.60$$

The level of significant is 0.5

The calculated t test value is 1.67

The critical table value is 0.60

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made.

1. Government should ensure the implementation of more projects and programmes that will build up women capacity for socio economic development of Abak Local Government Area.
2. The idea of gender inequality should be abolished during empowerment programmes. In other word, women should not be overlooked during empowerment programmes.
3. That women should be allowed to take part in the decision-making process of Society and not men alone.

4. Women should not be seen as inferior as such not allowing them to go to school as their male counterpart or stop them from social activities, but rather they should be encouraged to enhance effective socio-economic development of the state and Abak local government area.

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