ECONOMIC HISTORY OF IGALA WOMEN IN KOGI STATE, 1900 – 2020

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the economic history of Igala women in Kogi State, Nigeria. It delves into the historical context of Igala society, examining the traditional roles and economic activities of women within the community. Through a comprehensive analysis of historical records, oral traditions, and scholarly research, this paper elucidates the significant contributions of Igala women to the economic development and sustenance of their families and communities. Furthermore, it discusses the challenges and transformations experienced by Igala women in the face of modernization and socio-economic changes. By shedding light on the economic endeavors of Igala women, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics and economic development in Nigerian society.

Introduction

The Igala people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, primarily inhabiting the eastern part of Kogi State, with significant populations in Anambra, Enugu, and Delta States. They have a rich cultural heritage that spans centuries, characterized by a unique blend of traditions, customs, and social structures. The Igala homeland is situated in the Niger-Benue confluence area, encompassing both riverine and upland regions. The landscape consists of fertile plains, river valleys, and hills, which provide favorable conditions for agriculture and trade. The origins of the Igala people are steeped in mythology and oral tradition and have remain largely unresolved. But one fact that is clear is that the Igala has been in their current location before the advent of civilization. Over time, the Igala developed a distinct cultural identity, influenced by interactions with neighboring ethnic groups such as the Idoma, Igbira, and Yoruba[1].

Traditional Igala society was organized into a hierarchical system with a monarch, known as the Atta, at the pinnacle of authority. The Atta was revered as both a political and spiritual leader, responsible for maintaining law and order, adjudicating disputes, and performing religious rites. Below the Atta were various titled chiefs and councilors who assisted in governance and administration. Igala society was stratified into different social classes, with nobility, commoners, and slaves occupying distinct positions. Social status was often determined by birthright, wealth, and lineage. Marriage customs, kinship ties, and age-grade associations played significant roles in social cohesion and identity formation[2].

[1]J.S. Boston, *Oral Tradition and the History of Igala*. JAH Vol. X, No. 1, Cambridge, 1969. 22-27
[2]A. E. Aliyu, *et,al*, Studies in the History of Nigeria Area. Kaduna, Valender Publisher, 2002 .33

Agriculture formed the backbone of the Igala economy, with yam, cassava, and millet being staple crops. Igala farmers practiced both subsistence and commercial agriculture, trading surplus produce with neighboring communities. Fishing, hunting, and palm wine tapping were also important economic activities, particularly in riverine areas. The Igala people have a rich cultural heritage, characterized by vibrant music, dance, and festivals. Traditional masquerades, such as the Omabe and Egwu Ocho, are integral to Igala cultural identity and are performed during important ceremonies and celebrations. Language-wise, the Igala language, part of the Volta-Niger branch of the Niger-Congo language family, serves as a unifying factor among the Igala people[3].

Traditional Igala religion was animistic, with beliefs centered around the worship of ancestral spirits, deities, and natural forces. Rituals and sacrifices were performed to appease the spirits and seek their favor for protection, fertility, and prosperity. With the advent of Christianity and Islam, there has been a gradual shift towards monotheistic religions among the Igala, although elements of traditional beliefs still persist. The Igala society, with its rich history, cultural diversity, and socio-economic complexities, provides a fascinating glimpse into the dynamics of Nigerian ethnic groups. Despite undergoing various socio-cultural changes over the centuries, the Igala people continue to preserve and celebrate their unique identity, contributing to the colorful tapestry of Nigeria's cultural landscape[4].

The Igala women are fundamental in the discourse of the history of the economic exploit of the Igala. Investigating the economic activities of Igala women sheds light on the gender roles and dynamics within Igala society. It provides insight into how women have traditionally contributed to the household economy and broader community development, offering a nuanced understanding of gender relations and power structures[5].Igala women have played significant roles in the economic life of their communities for generations. Studying their economic history helps preserve and document their contributions, ensuring that their invaluable knowledge, skills, and experiences are not lost to future generations. By examining the historical economic endeavors of Igala women, researchers can identify factors that have enabled or hindered their economic empowerment. This knowledge can inform strategies and interventions aimed at enhancing women's economic participation, autonomy, and well-being in contemporary Igala society[6].

Understanding the economic roles and challenges faced by Igala women provides policymakers with valuable insights for designing targeted development programs and policies. Addressing gender disparities and promoting women's economic inclusion can contribute to more equitable and sustainable development outcomes in Igala communities. Studying the economic history of Igala women helps highlight issues of social justice and gender equality. It can spark discussions and advocacy efforts aimed at addressing systemic barriers and discrimination faced by women in accessing resources, markets, and opportunities for economic advancement.

Research on the economic history of Igala women adds to the body of knowledge on gender, economics, and African history. It enriches academic discourse and serves as a foundation for further scholarly inquiry into the diverse economic experiences of women across different cultures and contexts. In essence, studying the economic history of Igala women is not only an endeavor in understanding the past but also a means of empowering women, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting social justice and development in Igala society and beyond.

[3]M. S. Abdulkadir, *An Economic History of Igalaland, Central Nigeria: 1896 – 1939,* Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd, Zaria, Kaduna, Nigeria. 2014, 43.

[4]J.S. Boston, *Oral Tradition and the History of Igala*. JAH Vol. X, No. 1, Cambridge, 1969. 22-27

[5]E. Ocholi, Empowering Nigerian Women for the 21st Century:Education a Significant Tool. *Counselor,* 1999. 17(1): 270 –276.

[6]O.N. Okpe,An Assessment of the socio-religious of women in the Traditional Igala Society, *International Journal of Humanities*, Social Sciences and Education, 5(8), 2018.

Statement of Problem

Throughout history, women have played pivotal roles in the economic development of societies, yet their contributions have often been overlooked or marginalized in traditional narratives. Within the Igala community of Nigeria, women have been active participants in various economic activities, yet there is a dearth of scholarly research specifically focusing on their economic history. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the socioeconomic contributions and challenges faced by Igala women over time. Key questions include: What were the predominant economic activities undertaken by Igala women in different historical periods? How did these activities contribute to household and community economies? What were the social, cultural, and institutional factors that influenced the economic agency of Igala women? What were the major challenges and constraints faced by Igala women in pursuing economic endeavors? By exploring these questions, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the economic history of Igala women and shed light on their significance in shaping the region's economic landscape.

Conceptual Clarification

Economic History

Economic history is the study of past economic phenomena, including the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services, as well as the institutions, policies, and social dynamics that influence economic activities within a specific context and time period[7].

Gender Perspective

This study adopts a gender perspective, which acknowledges the social construction of gender roles and how they influence economic activities. It examines the roles, experiences, and agency of Igala women within the economic sphere, considering how gender norms, power dynamics, and societal expectations shape their economic behavior and opportunities[8].

Socioeconomic Contributions

This concept refers to the various ways in which Igala women have contributed to the economy, including through their participation in agricultural activities, trade, entrepreneurship, household management, and informal sector work. It encompasses both tangible economic contributions and the less quantifiable but equally important social and cultural roles played by women in sustaining livelihoods and community well-being[9].

Methodology

This study used qualitative method of data analysis. Secondary data from historical records, oral traditions, and scholarly research, was analysed using descriptive method with the view to revealing the significant contributions of Igala women to the economic development and sustenance of their families and communities. Random sample of two women leaders each was chosing from the three federal constituency that made up Igala land. The women gave oral evidence to support the documented sources consulted.

Theoretical Framework

This study is hinge on intersectionality theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of various social categories, such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity, and how they intersect to shape individuals' experiences and opportunities. The theory was originally proposed by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in the late 1980s to address the unique experiences of black women who are face with discrimination based on race and gender. In the context of Igala women's economic history, this

[7]M. S. Abdulkadir, *An Economic History of Igalaland, Central Nigeria: 1896 – 1939,* Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd, Zaria, Kaduna, Nigeria. 2014, 43.

[8]S. O Adofu. Challenges of Women Participation in Informal Financial Institutions among the Igala Women in Kogi State, Nigeria, 1991 – 2015. FULafia Journal of Entrepreneurial Development, 2022, 2 (1), 139 – 164

[9]S.O. Adofu. Historical Background of Igala Women Participation in Informal Financial Institutions from 1991 – 2015. FULafia Journal of Entrepreneurial Development, 2022 2 (1), 271 – 300.

framework acknowledges that women's experiences are not uniform and are shaped by multiple intersecting identities and social structures. It considers how factors such as socioeconomic status, marital status, and rural-urban location intersect with gender to influence women's economic roles and opportunities[10].

The Geographical Location of Igala

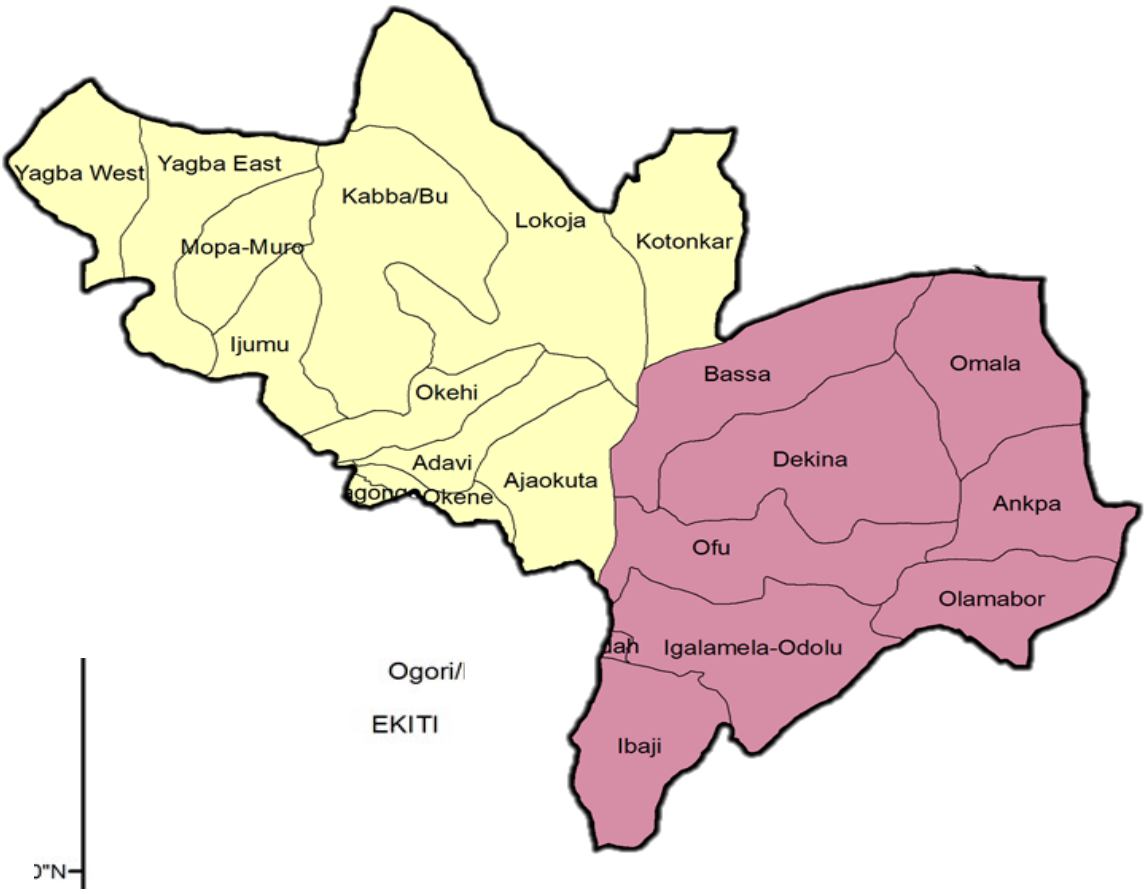
The study area for this research is the present-day geographical location known as Kogi East Senatorial District in the present-day Kogi State. The senatorial district is made up of three (3) federal constituencies (Ankpa, Olamaboro and Omala Federal Constituency, Idah, Ibaji, Igalamela and Ofu Federal Constituency and Dekina and Bassa Federal Constituency) and nine local government areas (Ankpa, Olamoboro, Omala, Idah, Ibaji, Igalamela, Ofu, Dekina and Bassa). Kogi East Senatorial District is bounded by River Niger to the north, Benue State to the east and Enugu and Anambra to the south.

It occupies a large land of about 14,916 km square and a projected population of 1,725,978 as at 2020, based on the 2006 population. The inhabitants of the area are majorly Igala; however, there are some other ethnic groups there such as Bassa Kwomo, Bassa Nge, Kakanda, and Igbirra Mozum. Igala land has an average maximum temperature of 37.2^0C and an average minimum temperature of 22.8^0C, with an average relative humidity of 6%. rainfall starts in earnest around March and gets to its peak in September, before decreasing towards December every year.[11]

[10]S. O Adofu. Challenges of Women Participation in Informal Financial Institutions among the Igala Women in Kogi State, Nigeria, 1991 – 2015. FULafia Journal of Entrepreneurial Development, 2022, 2 (1), 139 – 164

[11]I. Adofu, *et'al,* Informal Savings Mobilization in Nigeria: A Case Study of Rotating Savings and Credit Association (ROSCA) in Kogi State, Nigeria. *Continental Journal of Social Sciences*2010. 3. 7-17

Fig. 1. Map of Kogi State Showing Local Government Area of Igala Land



Source: M. E. Ukabiala, et, al, 2021

Traditional economic activities of Igala women

Igala women have historically been involved in agricultural activities, cultivating crops such as yams, cassava, maize, millet, and vegetables. They participate in land preparation, planting, weeding, harvesting, and processing of agricultural produce. Women often manage household farms and contribute significantly to food security and subsistence farming. Igala women are active participants in local markets and trading networks. They engage in buying and selling goods such as foodstuffs, textiles, pottery, and traditional crafts. Women often operate small-scale businesses, selling goods both within their communities and in neighboring markets, contributing to local economic exchange and commerce.

Igala women are skilled artisans, producing a variety of traditional crafts and household items. This includes pottery, basket weaving, cloth dyeing, beadwork, and mat making. These crafts are not only sources of income but also cultural expressions, with techniques and designs passed down through generations. Igala women are responsible for processing and preserving food, including drying, smoking, fermenting, and storing agricultural produce. Techniques such as palm oil extraction, fish smoking, and vegetable preservation are common practices carried out by women to

ensure food security and sustainability throughout the year.

Women play a central role in managing household finances, budgeting, and resource allocation. They oversee domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare, ensuring the smooth functioning of the household economy. Additionally, women often engage in income-generating activities from home, such as sewing, weaving, and catering services. Igala women are active participants in community development initiatives, including cooperatives, women's groups, and community-based organizations[12]. They collaborate with other women and community members to undertake projects such as building schools, health centers, water infrastructure, and communal farming initiatives. Overall, the traditional economic activities of Igala women are diverse, multifaceted, and essential for the well-being and resilience of Igala society. Women's contributions to agriculture, trade, craftsmanship, household management, and community development are integral components of the socio-economic fabric of Igala communities, reflecting their agency, skills, and resourcefulness[13].

The social-cultural context of Igala women

Igala society is patriarchal, with distinct gender roles and expectations for men and women. Women are traditionally assigned domestic responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare, while men are expected to be providers and protectors[14]. Despite these gender norms, Igala women often juggle multiple roles, including those related to economic activities, community involvement, and family care. Igala society is organized around extended family structures and kinship ties. Women's roles are influenced by their familial relationships, including their positions within the lineage, clan, and household. Kinship networks provide social support, solidarity, and networks for resource sharing among Igala women, contributing to their resilience and social integration[15].

Marriage is an important institution in Igala society, and women's status and roles are often linked to their marital status. Polygyny is practiced among some segments of Igala society, with women navigating complex relationships within extended families[16]. Women play central roles in childbearing, upbringing, and household management, contributing to the continuity and cohesion of family units. Igala women participate in religious rituals, ceremonies, and traditional festivals that hold cultural and spiritual significance[17]. These ceremonies often involve gender-specific roles and activities, with women performing duties such as food preparation, dance, and ritualistic offerings. Religion and spirituality play a vital role in shaping Igala women's worldview, ethics, and sense of identity[18].

Historically, access to education and social mobility for Igala women has been limited compared to men. However, there have been efforts to promote girls' education and empower women through literacy programs, vocational training, and advocacy initiatives. Education can enhance women's economic opportunities, decision-making autonomy, and participation in public life, leading to positive social change and gender equality. Igala women engage in various cultural practices and expressions that reflect their identity and heritage. This includes traditional dances, music, storytelling, and art forms that are passed down through generations. Cultural traditions serve as sources of pride, community cohesion, and resilience among Igala women, preserving their cultural heritage in the face of social change[19].Understanding the social-cultural context of Igala women is essential for

[12]E. Ocholi, Empowering Nigerian Women for the 21st Century:Education a Significant Tool. *Counselor,* 1999. 17(1): 270 –276.

[13]Oral interview with Mrs Inikpi Echu, Member, Ejura Women Group Anyigba, C. 47, 2024

[14]J.S. Boston, *Oral Tradition and the History of Igala*. JAH Vol. X, No. 1, Cambridge, 1969. 22-27

[15] Oral interview with Mrs Ruth Akowe, President, Ateko Women Group Abocho, C. 58, 2024.

[16] Oral interview with Mrs Deborah Umoru, President, Udama Women Group Idah, C. 58, 2024.

[17]Oral interview with Mercy Musa, President, Omala Women Credit and Thrift group, Abejukolo C. 47, 2024.

[18] J.S. Boston, *Oral Tradition and the History of Igala*. JAH Vol. X, No. 1, Cambridge, 1969. 22-27

[19]Oral interview with Mrs Awo Jato, President, Ega Women Group Idah, C. 56, 2024.

recognizing their agency, challenges, and contributions within Igala society. It provides insights into the complexities of gender relations, family dynamics, and cultural practices that shape women's lives and experiences in Nigeria's diverse cultural landscape[20]

The historical perspective of Igala women economic contributions

Igala women played integral roles in pre-colonial Igala society, contributing to agricultural production, trade, craftsmanship, and household management. Women's economic activities were essential for household sustenance and community development, with women often responsible for farming, food processing, and small-scale trading. Socially, Igala women held respected positions within their families and communities, participating in decision-making processes and kinship networks. Traditional Igala religion and cultural practices influenced women's roles and status, with women actively involved in religious ceremonies and rituals[21].

The arrival of colonial powers, particularly the British, had profound impacts on Igala society and women's roles. Colonial policies, including land tenure systems and taxation, disrupted traditional economic activities and social structures, affecting women's access to land and resources. Gala women faced exploitation and marginalization under colonial rule, with the imposition of cash crops and labor demands exacerbating gender inequalities. Christian missionaries introduced Western education and social norms, which influenced changing perceptions of gender roles and family dynamics among Igala communities[22].

Nigeria's independence in 1960 marked a period of political and social change for Igala women. Women's participation in formal education increased, providing opportunities for social mobility and economic empowerment. However, patriarchal structures persisted, limiting women's access to resources, political representation, and decision-making positions. Economic modernization and urbanization brought both opportunities and challenges for Igala women, as they navigated shifts in agricultural practices, labor markets, and social norms. Women's activism and advocacy efforts, alongside broader movements for gender equality, have led to incremental gains in women's rights, including legal reforms and increased representation in politics and leadership roles.[23]Throughout history, Igala women have demonstrated resilience, resourcefulness, and adaptability in the face of social, economic, and political changes. Understanding the historical perspective of Igala women illuminates the complexities of gender dynamics, power relations, and socio-cultural transformations within Igala society, providing valuable insights for addressing contemporary challenges and promoting gender equality and women's empowerment[24].

The challenges and transformations of Igala women

Igala women have faced challenges adapting to shifts in economic structures and livelihood strategies. The transition from subsistence agriculture to cash crop cultivation, along with the decline of traditional industries, has affected women's roles and income-generating activities. Economic modernization and globalization have brought both opportunities and challenges, with some women benefiting from access to new markets and technologies while others face competition and marginalization[25].While access to education has

[20] E. Ocholi, Empowering Nigerian Women for the 21st Century:Education a Significant Tool. *Counselor,* 1999. 17(1): 270 –276.

[21]O.N. Okpe,An Assessment of the socio-religious of women in the Traditional Igala Society, *of Humanities*, Social Sciences and Education, 5(8), 2018.

[22]J.S. Boston, *Oral Tradition and the History of Igala*. JAH Vol. X, No. 1, Cambridge, 1969. 22-27

[23]M. S. Abdulkadir, *An Economic History of Igalaland, Central Nigeria: 1896 – 1939,* Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd, Zaria, Kaduna, Nigeria. 2014, 43.

[24]O.N. Okpe,An Assessment of the socio-religious of women in the Traditional Igala Society, *of Humanities*, Social Sciences and Education, 5(8), 2018.

[25]S. O Adofu. Challenges of Women Participation in Informal Financial Institutions among the Igala Women in Kogi State, Nigeria, 1991 – 2015. FULafia

improved for Igala women over the years, disparities persist, particularly in rural areas. Limited educational opportunities can constrain women's economic prospects, decision-making autonomy, and participation in public life. Efforts to promote girls' education and women's empowerment have led to positive transformations, but further investments in education and skills development are needed to address persistent inequalities[26].

Igala women face various health challenges, including inadequate healthcare infrastructure, maternal mortality, and reproductive health issues. Limited access to healthcare services, cultural barriers, and socio-economic inequalities contribute to disparities in health outcomes. Efforts to improve maternal and child health, reproductive rights, and access to healthcare can lead to transformative improvements in women's well-being and quality of life. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and harmful traditional practices, remains a significant challenge for Igala women. Cultural norms, social stigma, and legal barriers often prevent women from seeking help and accessing justice. Transformative approaches to addressing gender-based violence involve raising awareness, strengthening legal protections, and providing support services for survivors[27].

Igala women continue to be underrepresented in political and decision-making processes at the local, regional, and national levels. Structural barriers such as discriminatory laws, patriarchal norms, and lack of support networks inhibit women's political participation and leadership. Transformative efforts to promote women's political empowerment involve implementing gender quotas, building women's leadership capacity, and fostering inclusive governance structures. Sociocultural changes, influenced by urbanization, globalization, and media influences, have both positive and negative impacts on Igala women's identities and roles. While cultural traditions provide a sense of belonging and continuity, they can also perpetuate gender stereotypes and inequalities. Transformative approaches to cultural change involve promoting gender-equitable norms, challenging harmful practices, and celebrating women's diverse contributions to Igala society. Addressing these challenges and fostering positive transformations requires multisectoral interventions that prioritize women's rights, gender equality, and social justice. Empowering Igala women economically, politically, and socially is essential for building inclusive and sustainable development outcomes in Igala communities and beyond[28].

The contemporary economic status of Igala women

Igala women continue to be actively engaged in various economic activities, including agriculture, trade, entrepreneurship, and wage labor. While many women are involved in traditional sectors such as farming and small-scale trading, others have ventured into non-traditional sectors such as education, healthcare, and professional services. Entrepreneurship has emerged as a significant avenue for economic empowerment among Igala women. Many women have established their own businesses, ranging from small-scale enterprises such as tailoring, food processing, and retailing to larger ventures such as agribusiness, manufacturing, and services[29]. Entrepreneurial initiatives have enabled women to generate income, create employment opportunities, and contribute to local economic development. Despite progress, Igala women still face challenges in accessing resources such as land, finance, and technology. Land ownership remains predominantly male-dominated, limiting women's ability to engage

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[26]S.O. Adofu. Historical Background of Igala Women Participation in Informal Financial Institutions from 1991 – 2015. FULafia Journal of Entrepreneurial Development, 2022 2 (1), 271 – 300.

[27]M. S. Abdulkadir, *An Economic History of Igalaland, Central Nigeria: 1896 – 1939,* Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd, Zaria, Kaduna, Nigeria. 2014, 43.

[28]S. O Adofu. Challenges of Women Participation in Informal Financial Institutions among the Igala Women in Kogi State, Nigeria, 1991 – 2015. FULafia Journal of Entrepreneurial Development, 2022, 2 (1), 139 – 164

[29]S. O Adofu. Challenges of Women Participation in Informal Financial Institutions among the Igala Women in Kogi State, Nigeria, 1991 – 2015. FULafia Journal of Entrepreneurial Development, 2022, 2 (1), 139 – 164

in agriculture and property ownership. Access to credit and financial services is limited, with women often marginalized by formal banking institutions and relying on informal lending networks.

Education plays a crucial role in shaping Igala women's economic opportunities and outcomes. While strides have been made in improving girls' access to education, disparities persist, particularly in rural areas. Investing in girls' education and skills development is essential for enhancing women's economic capabilities, decision-making autonomy, and participation in higher-paying sectors of the economy[30].Igala women are employed in a wide range of occupations, including formal wage employment, informal sector activities, and self-employment. However, women are disproportionately represented in low-paying and precarious jobs, with limited opportunities for career advancement and social protection. Efforts to promote gender-sensitive labor policies, improve working conditions, and address occupational segregation are critical for advancing women's economic rights and well-being.

Socio-cultural factors continue to influence Igala women's economic status and opportunities. Traditional gender norms and expectations shape women's roles and responsibilities within the household and community[31]. Cultural practices such as bride price, inheritance customs, and marriage arrangements can impact women's economic security and decision-making autonomy. Promoting gender-equitable norms and challenging harmful practices are essential for advancing women's rights and economic empowerment[32]. The contemporary economic status of Igala women is characterized by a mix of progress and challenges, reflecting broader socio-economic dynamics and gender inequalities. Addressing barriers to women's economic participation, promoting inclusive development policies, and fostering gender-responsive interventions are crucial steps towards realizing women's rights and achieving sustainable economic growth in Igala society.

Multifaceted approach to the economic empowerment of Igala women

Implementing and enforcing laws that protect women's rights to land ownership, property inheritance, and access to resources is essential. Strengthening legal frameworks to address gender-based discrimination, violence, and harassment in the workplace can create an enabling environment for women's economic empowerment[33].Investing in girls' education and skills development is critical for enhancing women's economic capabilities and opportunities. Policies aimed at promoting girls' enrollment, retention, and completion of formal education, as well as providing vocational training and adult literacy programs, can empower women to participate more effectively in the labor market and entrepreneurial activities.

Expanding women's access to financial services, including savings accounts, credit facilities, and insurance products, is essential for enhancing their economic resilience and entrepreneurial ventures. Implementing gender-sensitive financial policies and initiatives, such as microfinance programs targeted at women entrepreneurs, can facilitate greater financial inclusion and economic empowerment[34].Providing targeted support and resources to women-owned businesses and entrepreneurs is crucial for fostering entrepreneurship and economic growth. Initiatives such as business development services, mentorship programs, and access to markets and networks can enhance women's entrepreneurial skills, improve business performance, and facilitate market linkages.

[30]O.N. Okpe,An Assessment of the socio-religious of women in the Traditional Igala Society, *of Humanities*, Social Sciences and Education, 5(8), 2018.

[31]Oral interview with Mrs Aishatu Dauda, President, Ejilogwu Women Group Ankpa, C. 56, 2024.

[32]S.O. Adofu. Historical Background of Igala Women Participation in Informal Financial Institutions from 1991 – 2015. FULafia Journal of Entrepreneurial Development, 2022 2 (1), 271 – 300.

[33]M. S. Abdulkadir, *An Economic History of Igalaland, Central Nigeria: 1896 – 1939,* Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd, Zaria, Kaduna, Nigeria. 2014, 43.

[34]S.O. Adofu. Historical Background of Igala Women Participation in Informal Financial Institutions from 1991 – 2015. FULafia Journal of Entrepreneurial Development, 2022 2 (1), 271 – 300.

Promoting gender-responsive labor policies and practices is essential for advancing women's rights and addressing gender disparities in employment. Measures such as equal pay for equal work, maternity leave benefits, flexible working arrangements, and childcare support can create a more conducive and inclusive work environment for women. Strengthening social protection mechanisms, including social insurance, pensions, and safety nets, is important for safeguarding women's economic security and well-being. Policies that provide maternity benefits, healthcare coverage, and support for vulnerable groups can mitigate the risks of poverty and economic vulnerability faced by women[35].

Integrating gender considerations into all aspects of policy planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation is essential for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Adopting a gender mainstreaming approach ensures that policies and programs address the specific needs, priorities, and realities of Igala women, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes. Engaging communities, traditional leaders, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders in promoting women's economic empowerment is crucial for driving social change and building grassroots support. Mobilizing community resources, raising awareness about women's rights, and fostering dialogue and collaboration can strengthen efforts to address gender inequalities and promote women's economic inclusion. By adopting these policy implications and implementing gender-responsive strategies, Igala society can create an enabling environment for women's economic empowerment, leading to more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes for all.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, the economic history, contemporary status, challenges, and transformations experienced by Igala women reflect a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and policy dynamics. Despite historical and persistent challenges such as limited access to education, economic resources, and gender-based discrimination, Igala women have demonstrated resilience, resourcefulness, and determination in pursuing economic empowerment and social progress. Through their involvement in agriculture, trade, entrepreneurship, and community development initiatives, Igala women have made significant contributions to their families, communities, and the broader society. Their entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, and leadership have driven economic growth, innovation, and social change, underscoring the importance of women's agency and participation in shaping Igala society's economic landscape.

However, realizing the full potential of Igala women's economic empowerment requires concerted efforts from multiple stakeholders, including government institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, and the community at large. Policy interventions aimed at addressing gender disparities, promoting women's rights, and enhancing access to education, finance, and entrepreneurship support are essential for creating an enabling environment for women's economic inclusion and advancement. Moreover, fostering cultural change, challenging traditional gender norms, and promoting gender equality and social justice are integral to ensuring that Igala women can fully participate in and benefit from economic development opportunities. By prioritizing women's rights, empowering women economically, and promoting gender-responsive policies and practices, Igala society can harness the immense potential of its women to achieve inclusive and sustainable development goals.

In essence, Igala women are not only agents of change but also catalysts for progress, resilience, and transformation in their communities. By investing in women's economic empowerment and fostering an environment of equality and opportunity, Igala society can build a more prosperous, equitable, and inclusive future for all its members.

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