GENDER RELATIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY OF OLAMABORO 1960 - 2020

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ABSTRACT
This study explores Gender Relations and Its Impact on the Economy of Olamaboro, examining how traditional gender roles and expectations influence economic participation and development within the community. Through qualitative method, the research analyzes the contributions of both men and women to local economic activities, highlighting disparities in access to resources, education, and employment opportunities. Findings reveal that gender relations significantly affect economic outcomes, with women facing systemic barriers that limit their participation in key economic sectors. The study recommends policies aimed at promoting gender equity and empowering women to enhance overall economic growth in Olamaboro. By addressing these gender imbalances, the community can harness the full potential of its population, leading to sustainable development and improved economic resilience. This work contributes to literature on gender and economic history by shedding light on community level experiences and advocating for inclusive policies that promote gender equity in the local economies.

Introduction

Gender relations are the ways in which a culture or society defines rights, responsibilities and the identities of men and women in relation to one another.[i] To Baumann, gender relations affect household security, family well-being, planning, production and many aspects of life.[ii] While these definitions might tend to over simplify the complex nature of gender relation, it assumes a level of cohesion within a culture but did not explicitly acknowledge the role of power and privileges. Therefore, gender relation can be referred to the complex interactions, power play and social structures that shapes the

experience, expectation and identities of men and women in relation to one another within a culture. It plays a significant role in shaping the socio-economic environment of communities, influencing individuals' roles, opportunities and experiences within local economies. Olamaboro local government area of Kogi State represents a microcosm of the inter play between gender relations and economic activities. This region like other regions in Nigeria is characterized by historical, cultural and social norms that have contributed to the differentiation of roles, responsibilities and power play between the men and the women in the various economic aspects. In the Igala traditional setting, men were seen as lords, women were made subordinate to the men. A woman is to be seen and not to be heard in Olamaboro culture, thus, they were forbidden from participating in trades like sale of land, sale of palm wine and forbidden from land ownership either through inheritance or purchase. These trades were seen as trades that commanded respect and prestige as such not to be ascribed to a woman. Women were excluded from this trade because of their nature of experiencing monthly flow which defiles them. In as much as modernity and globalization has in a way affected the area, women are still not allowed to participate in these trades. While some persons are of the opinion that women were subjected to various practices such as: women are to be seen and not heard, women's exclusion from certain trades and so on that promoted patriarchy and androcentrism, others hold the view that women were not a subject of marginalisation as they played vital roles in the economy of pre-colonial societies and the knowledge system in Olamaboro.

In "Introduction to Gender Analysis: Concepts and Steps",[iii] Juliet Hunt emphasizes the importance of critically examining gender roles, power dynamics, and societal expectations. It directly relates to gender relations by exploring gender subtleties and its impact on social dynamics. Which bring to fore how unequal power relations between genders can manifest in different social, economic and political spheres as seen in the Olamaboro economic engagements. She examines and challenges existing gender norms, barriers and inequalities, ultimately striving for more equitable and inclusive gender relations. While this work acknowledged the importance of intersection of gender with race, class and ethnicity, it is observed that an extensive discussion of how norms, barriers and inequalities impact gender relations must be done, therefore provides the enabling background to anchor this research. Similarly, Joshua and Omahas in their work titled "Socio-Economic Determinants of Women Participation in Agriculture in Olamaboro Local Government Area, Kogi State",[iv] states that unequal access to education exacerbates gender disparities in economic participation. They made an important observation that limited educational opportunities for girls restrict their ability to acquire skills and knowledge necessary for formal employment, thereby relegating many to low-paying jobs or informal sectors. In addition, they pointed out that this perpetuates a cycle of poverty and hampers overall economic growth by underutilizing human capital. Their study was relevant in aiding our knowledge of women's economic activities, therefore, this brought our focus on how gender relations impact the economy of Olamaboro. Yos Santasombat's "Gender Role and Gender Relations",[v] examines gender roles and relation, its impact on society, culture, and individual lives. It presents a well-researched and well-argued exploration of how gender roles are constructed, reinforced, and sometimes challenged within different social and cultural contexts. He explores the ways in which gender roles and expectations shape individuals' identities, opportunities, and interactions within society, highlighting the influence of cultural norms and power play in perpetuating gender inequalities. Through the use of case studies and real-life examples, he brings to light the lived experiences of individuals who grapple with societal expectations and the constraints placed upon them due to their assigned gender. The study observes that adequate attention has not been given to the impact of gender role and relations on the economy of Olamaboro, thus an attempt to fill this gap.

In order to fully understand gender relations, roles and impact in the economic activities in Nigeria societies, there is a need to study them at the micro level. Hence, this study intends to fill this gap by looking at the Gender Relations and Its impact in the Economy of Olamaboro Local Government area of Kogi State, Nigeria. Therefore, the study addresses the following questions:

i. What are gender roles in Olamaboro?

ii. What are the factors that shape gender roles in the economy of Olamaboro local government area?

iii. What are the impacts of gender relations in the economy of Olamaboro?

The Study Area and Methodology

Olamaboro Local Government is found in the South-Eastern part of Kogi State, Nigeria. Occupied by the Igala speaking ethnic group. It borders Enugu State in the South and Benue State in the North.[vi] Its headquarters is in Okpo. It has an area of 1132 km2 and a population of 160,152 at the 2006 census.[vii] It is made up of three districts: Imane, Okpo and Ogugu.[viii] Olamaboro lies between latitude 10 N and longitude 12 E.[ix] the Local government is blessed with varied physical features like River, mountains and dense vegetation. It generally experiences a tropical climate characterised by high temperature and distinct wet and dry season as a result of this, Olamaboro is known for their farming activities. Olamaboro derives its name from a River called *Maboro* and it is traced to Ofejiji in the Central Area of Ankpa Local Government.[x] The areas which later became Olamaboro Local Government Area consist of three major districts of Imane, Atabaka and Ogugu. These districts have been in existence since 1931 during the Igala Native Authority when they served as provincial quarters and in 1993 following the creation of Kogi State in 1991, Olamaboro Local Government Area was established along eight other local Government Areas curved out of Benue State.[xi]

This study adopts the historical approach in sourcing and analyzing the data for this work. The sources that are used in the work include information collected from Primary and Secondary sources. Primary source is used because it is the closest to the historical truth which the study seeks to establish. The oral data involves collection of oral information through oral interview with individuals and associations. The secondary sources are data that are collected from various libraries.

Gender Roles in Olamaboro

Olamaboro has always been rich in culture with strict traditions. Prominent tradition among the people is the belief in Ibegwu. This literally means belief in ancestral spirits. They believe the ancestral spirits serve as guardian angels to watch and protect the people against any immoral act and evil. This belief prevents the people from committing murder, adultery, other form of sexual immorality, abortion, witch craft and conspiracy.[xii] More so, in accordance with the culture of the people, the Ibegwu belief poses some restrictions on women because traditionally, women are seen as property of their husbands, they are meant in most cases to be seen and not to be heard. The Agarama cultural practice restricts women from doing anything for strangers, family members, parents without the permission of their husbands.[xiii] Women were not allowed to own land or inherit land from their fathers which to a large extent affected their participation in farming and other economic activities.

Gender roles are based on the different expectations that individuals, groups and societies have of individuals based on their sex and based on each society's values and beliefs about gender.[xiv] Francesco, Ulrike and Michael opine that traditional gender roles induce women and men to engage in different activities and to select into different environment in their daily lives. As a result, women and men have different experiences and are exposed to different signal about the economy.[xv] Olamaboro is patriarchal with well-defined gender role for women and men. Men were seen as lord while women were seen as mere properties.[xvi] Women were not allowed to make or take decision, neither were they allowed to inherit land or own land a situation that was strengthened by the Ibegwu culture.[xvii] Women tend to labour for men resulting in reduced economic productivity and increased poverty. They were traditionally assigned care giving and domestic responsibilities. Women bear disproportionate caregiving responsibilities, limiting their time and energy for economic activities while men are expected to be protectors and providers. Presence of discrimination against women led to feminization of crops as women were discriminated against planting or farming of some crops like yam, and cassava and men saw engagement in some farming activities and production as a taboo.[xviii] Despite these gender norms and role, women manage multiple roles especially economic activities which was evident in their complementary role in production and

major role in processing, community involvement and family care. These norms reduced women's economic power, however, through complementary and collaboration role, they were able to measure up in some aspect of the economy.

Economic Impact

In Olamaboro, men have been traditionally dominant in all sectors of the economy, including agriculture and trade. The fact that most households are headed by men, and men tend to make household decisions, have led to men engaging in male-focused activities that in turn contribute significantly to economic development. For example, men's participation in agricultural cooperatives have helped them to pool funds, acquire knowledge and access markets, and in collaboration with other men and community members, increase land productivity, increase incomes, and improve food security in the area.

The cooperatives have proved very effective in facilitating better economic opportunities for women and men in Olamaboro. For example, some of the cooperatives specialise in cash crop farming, and they have helped men pool resources to do large-scale production and marketing.[xix] Through the associations, they were able to bargain for better prices, access credits for agricultural inputs and increase their production beyond the small farming they have traditionally done. Similarly, increasing women's participation in agricultural cooperatives has also encouraged them to work not just as individual but also collectively on processing and marketing activities. For instance, participation for women in palm oil processing cooperatives have enabled them to collectively procure palm fruits from local farmers, process the oil through improved technologies, and market the end products to local and regional markets. The income of these women did not only increase, but they have also developed the skills for business management and marketing, and improved their financial literacy. Emphasizing the advantages of gender relations, Ikani Onoja revealed that:

> *Our cooperative includes both men and women, and this mix has been very beneficial. Women often bring different perspectives and skills, which compliment that of men. For example, while the men might focus on large-scale production, the women are often excellent at managing resources and organising marketing efforts. By working together, we were able to combine our strengths. Women in our cooperative are very good at negotiating prices and managing finances, which has helped us to get better deals and increase our profits. This collaboration has also aided mutual respect and better communication among us, leading to a more organised and effective group.*[xx]

Furthermore, men's participation in the commercial and local industrial sector exposes them to economic collaborations with local and provincial markets. In the use of mutual-aid associations, Olamaboro men reached favourable trading terms, organise supply chains, and promote economic growth through sales. These collaborations have helped men to work not only for their own individual gain but also to stabilise and develop the general local economy.

Economic relations have helped women become more financially and socially empowered.[xxi] Women in Olamaboro have formed cooperatives and self-help groups to engage in collective action for economic empowerment. Through such groups, where women join forces and collaborate with other women and other community stakeholders, they have had greater access to training, inputs and markets for their produce. For example, female processing cooperatives have supported women to add value to local produce by bringing together women to process cassava, palm oil, locust bean (*Okpehe)* and other goods for market and to create income and jobs for women in their communities.[xxii]

In addition, women's involvement in microfinance group or savings association has also expanded economic partnerships such as entrepreneurship and micro business ownership. Being able to pool savings and acquire credit has enabled these women to enhance their businesses, expand, and improve their quality of life. Enemah Ajuma pointed out that:

> *One major benefit of gender relations is the sharing of knowledge and skills. Although men often have access to more resources because of cultural restraint on women, the complimentary role of women in the agricultural activities with men, help us improve our farming and business strategies. This has in a way increased our production and income, and we've also learned to appreciate everyone's efforts and contributions.*[xxiii]

Economic progress has come in part because women and men complement each other in commercial endeavours and trading. Many men in Olamaboro belong to local trade associations and have formed cooperative associations with women entrepreneurs to provide women with access to market opportunities and to promote local products.[xxiv] For example, trade networks have helped to provide the people with access to varied and distant markets, thereby increasing sales and incomes for their handicrafts and agricultural commodities. During an interview with Waziri Ojone, she noted that:

> *In ensuring goods gets to the market, women work closely with men which have been very effective. Men typically handle logistics and market connections, production while women often focus on processing and sales. This complimentary relationship has been key to our success. By working together, we've been able to open up new markets for local products. Men's networks help in reaching distant markets, while women ensure the products meet high standards. This collaboration has increased sales and incomes for everyone involved. It's also enhanced a sense of community and shared purpose, as we all work towards common goals, respecting and valuing each other's contributions.*[xxv]

Government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) support is not encouraging in Olamaboro in many ways; however, we cannot deny the little effort.[xxvi] Economic complimentary roles that promote gender relations, supportive cooperative enterprises and the provision of basic infrastructure, goods and services are the bedrock on which economic collaboration between men and women have flourished in Olamaboro. Although, government schemes of providing training and technical assistance to agricultural cooperatives have not been effective in this area, the capacity to pursue strategies of collaboration in farming, new technologies and boost productivity has been the aim of the local farmers and businesses.

Socio-Cultural Impact

In all Igala communities, men in Olamaboro communities traditionally control culturally constructed notions of gender, rank, age and power that inform and direct family and community life.[xxvii] In many instances, this societal positioning of men as family and community leaders has resulted in men's socio-cultural associations (for community development, social cohesion and adherence to traditional culture). This includes men's leadership of cultural and religious processes of production of cultural values, norms and meanings – from the moment of conception to the moment of transition and after. Men's work in community associations and in traditional councils have also allowed them to come together to create social initiatives that address occurring challenges, as well as promote education and improve health services in Olamaboro. As guardians and protectors, gatekeepers of tradition and culture, men have nurtured community norms, reduced violence and built harmony among the people.

From education, participating in socio-cultural activities to leading the charge in promoting social justice, women in Olamaboro are increasingly challenging dominant norms. Social approach of women in Olamaboro through participation in community-based organisations, women's groups and cultural festivals have led to increased awareness and opportunities for them to express their opinions, participate in decision-making activities and mobilise in advocating for policies promoting social justice, such as gender equality and security.[xxviii]

Gender complementarity enabled men and women in Olamaboro to work together to maintain, preserve cultural practices and traditions. For example, the cultural festival comprising men, women and children's dancers during the Ogugu Cultural festival held annually

in December, recreates the traditional ancient arts and cultural performances. It is a unique cultural event involving leaders, men, women and children's dancers and performers from the various unit that make up the community. During the performance, they danced together, sang and played the locally made drums and flute, while educating the people through songs to show the history and traditions of Ogugu people.[xxix] These performances illustrated one of the aspects of life during precolonial era, helping the younger generation to understand its history and strengthen social bonding among communities. The festival features tale-telling performances, where men and women relate the important socio-cultural ideas and norms contributing to better knowledge of the cultural history of the community. These cultural and traditional arts have been preserved over generations and are passed down to the younger generation. These events, such as the one held annually in December, shows the significance of men-women working together to honour the history and traditions of the community through song, dance and performance. Preserving, celebrating and promoting intangible cultural heritage through men-women relations creates avenue for social bonding within communities. During an interview with Friday Ameh, he stated that:

> *I participated in the cultural Festival 2012. It was an amazing experience. We recreated traditional arts and cultural performances. It was wonderful to see men and women working together to preserve our heritage. The effort made the event unique and more vibrant. Men played drums and flute, while women danced alongside. This showed the younger generation the importance of our cultural heritage and strengthened the bonds within our community.*[xxx]

In corroborating the above position, ThankGod Akor noted that:

> *in our community, even though men assume dominance, women compliment them in several ways preserving our culture. For instance, during the then Otegwu cultural festival, the first and second sacrifices were made by the Ochogwu and the eldest man in the village… Men usually handle the musical instruments, while women focus on dancing in the Emonobule dance. This blend brings our cultural practices to life and keeps them relevant for future generations. It benefits the community by creating a richer cultural experience. When men and women work together, it makes our cultural events more engaging. It also leads to mutual respect and understanding, as we all contribute to preserving and promoting our heritage together.*[xxxi]

Another informant, Emmanuel Onoji, revealed that:

> *working together in cultural events is very important. By seeing men and women work together to recreate traditional performances, they learn about our history and the importance of maintaining these practices. It also encourages them to participate in cultural activities, ensuring that our traditions continue to survive.*[xxxii]

Emphasizing the impact of gender relations, Onojah Gabriel stated that:

> *gender relations have had a huge impact on the community, from the cultural perspective, it is seen as an unequal relationship, however, it is believed that it is for peaceful coexistence that men have to assume superior role. Men and women bring different strengths and ideas. Their distinct role helps to build a stronger sense of community, as respect and value for all becomes a natural habit.*[xxxiii]

Education and increasing awareness have empowered women to challenge harmful stereotypes about gender roles, norms and to foster gender equity. In Olamaboro, for example, women's groups engage in planning and organising meetings and community dialogue sessions on such sensitive topics such as reproductive rights, sexuality, family planning and women's empowerment. Despite this effort, it is deeply believed that family planning negates the culture of the people.

Political Impact

Men secure leadership positions in local governance structures, traditional councils and community associations, which gives them collective social influence for political activities that enhance public policy, resource allocation and priority setting.[xxxiv] Taking one example from men's formal roles in local government councils and traditional councils and the Ogugu Development Union have facilitated political collaboration for infrastructure development, social welfare and economic initiatives at the community level.

Men's involvement in political parties and in elections means that they can take up mandates to pursue legislative reforms, agricultural investment and policy, or push for accord within their communities. Men can exploit these political contacts and positions to shape political agendas, mobilise support for the development projects and practices, and pursue political stability in Olamaboro.

Women in Olamaboro have participated in political activities for instance, Honourable Rebecca Itodo was actively involved in the local politics and served as women leader, counsellor and People's Democratic Party Chair person.[xxxv] However, women's participation in politics in Olamaboro has remained at the local level as no Olamaboro woman has risen to top political cadre and this is a result of male domination and cultural barriers imposed on them by culture. Perhaps with more exposure and continuous participation, women will be enabled to successfully challenge and question some of the most ingrained patriarchal norms and structures. The call for more inclusive forms of governance by some fraction of women indicates how they are using politics as an avenue to achieve empowerment. They utilise institutional structures afforded to them in decentralised local government area, community development association and awareness groups to demand for, and also contribute and ensure their public participation in local governance and service delivery processes. For instance, women leaders in Olamaboro engaged in projects aimed at increasing the number of women in political leadership roles; policies and practices that improved access to education among girls; and healthcare services that focused on the welfare of women and children.[xxxvi] Women have used the women's groups, as well as supportive community-based groups, to amplify their voices in politics and to use gender-sensitive principles for the social-justice good of their constituents. Regardless of these efforts, women's ability to transcend to higher positions has remained sickled due to male domination and cultural barriers.

According to Paul and Edino, collaborative initiatives improved the interface between political actors and citizens.[xxxvii] The involvement of men and women leaders in a collaborative governance programme has, for example, led to the development of new participatory approaches to accountability and transparency in local government areas and community associations. Dialogue, consultation and involvement of citizens in decision-making processes have helped to build bridges of trust between the leaders and the community, and have strengthened service delivery, while promoting good government practices.

Religious Impact

According to Achoba, in Igalaland where Olamaboro is an integral part of, men often occupy leadership positions in religious institutions, and are predominate leaders in religious ceremonies and rituals, especially those conducted in public spaces where families gather.[xxxviii] As earlier stated, major sacrifices and other religious activities were done by the Ochogwu, the eldest man in the village and men within each family. These positions of religious leadership provide opportunities for men to enter into collaborative relationships within religious spheres, around issues such as spiritual healing, moral teaching and community service for the betterment of the community.

Participation in religious activities such as prayer groups, community outreach and 'charity' also enable men to mobilise resources, advocate for social causes and respond to community needs.[xxxix] Through their incorporation of religious networks and leadership roles, men's contribution to 'the good', as people described it, has been reflected in the enhancement of ethical values, social cohesion and well-being of their communities. Just as men learnt how to tend to their crops or engage with new social networks, women also learnt how to adjust to the changing times in order to enhance the

benefits they received from their relationships with men as husbands, relations and providers of resources. Elder John Agada particularly stated that:

> *Men often take on leadership roles in our traditional religious institution. They lead prayers, ceremonies, and rituals, especially those that happen in public where families and communities gather. This gives us a chance to work together on spiritual matters, teach moral values, and serve our community. For instance, as part of the religious council, I have worked with other men to offer spiritual guidance and organize community service activities. Our involvement in prayer and programmes help us to promote certain values and togetherness.*[xl]

Women's contributions to religious activities and religious forums, though minor, have empowered them to express and administer their piety and interpret religious teachings. Also, with the advent of Christianity, the people were introduced to a religion that teaches equality before God irrespective of gender. Although, the acceptance of Christianity was gradual, eventually, Christianity eroded some cultural practices, however, till date men seat separately from women in churches.

Efforts aimed at providing religious education have produced women and men who are grounded both spiritually and morally. Akoh observes that collaborations between men and women have increased access to religious education, scriptural courses and programmes of theological studies in which the participants receive the skills necessary to develop their capacity to contribute to their communities and fill religious leadership roles.[xli]

Conclusion

From the study, gender relations have some profound impact on the economic, socio-cultural, political, and religious dimensions of life in Olamaboro. Traditional gender roles and norms influence labor market participation, income disparities, access to resources, and entrepreneurial activities. Socio-cultural practices shape family relationships, education, and social interactions, reinforcing gender inequalities. Political participation and representation are constrained by structural, cultural barriers and discriminatory practices, limiting women's influence in governance and policy-making. Religious beliefs and practices often reinforce traditional gender norms, affecting women's participation in religious activities. Addressing these impacts require comprehensive and collective efforts to promote gender equity and women's empowerment. This study recommends that adequate and effective policy interventions, community engagement and education should be set in place and focus should be place on gender equity rather than equality in the area. These are essential for challenging discriminatory practices and enhancing all round development in Olamaboro.

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