

FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN NGOS SUCCESS WITH LOCAL WOMEN GROUPS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study attempted to examine beneficiary perceptions on factors influencing the various successes recorded by selected WNGOs in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A sample size of 120 respondents from 24 Local Women Groups (LWGs) that are affiliated to three successful WNGOs (as declared by the State Government) was utilized for the study. Data analysis was with the aid of descriptive and inferential statistics. Results revealed that WNGOs empowerment activities are not selective, but targeted at a broad-spectrum of rural women groupings. Three of the five likely factors affecting the successes recorded by WNGOs with LWGs, were revealed to exert significant influences. These are WNGOs ability to fulfill beneficiaries' expectation; high volume of credit provision and low income of beneficiaries. Recommendations are proffered to assist non-successful or emerging WNGOs, to record successes in their activities.

Key Words: NGOs, beneficiary perceptions, success factors, local women groups, socio-economic characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) refer to independent voluntary associations of people acting together on a continuous basis for some common purposes, other than achieving government office, making money or illegal activities (Willett 2006). NGOs have gained increasing recognition because they tend to be more sensitive to the needs and aspirations of poor communities, minorities and women. As a result, NGOs tend to command more legitimacy in the

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eyes of the poor than most governmental structures (Ofosu-Appiah, 2003). The international community and many governments are increasingly recognizing NGOs because of the belief that they help to share in the costs of providing development services and because of their perceived ability to reach the rural poor. Steinberg (2001) reports that NGOs as a group deliver more aid than the whole United Nations System and disburse more aid than the World Bank. Ofosu-Appiah (2003) reports that Africa based NGOs manage nearly 3.5 billion dollars in external aid, compared to fewer than 1 billion dollars in 1990.

Women form women NGOs (WNGOs) for the benefit of women. Ijere and Mbanasor (1998) refer to WNGOs as groups formed out of charity and meant to protect the interest of women and the girl-child in particular, and the society in general. In essence, WNGOs focus on women development programmes and help to mobilize the traditional strength of women in rural and poor urban areas in order to promote their participation in the development of human and natural resources for sustainable livelihood. WNGOs mobilize peasant women for the betterment of their means of livelihood through collective action, rather than concentrating on individualistic pursuits and looking up to the government for solution to their problems. WNGOs have of recent gained increasing importance and recognition. This is after issues of women rights assumed international dimensions, and gender equality moved from the margin to the center of the development agenda (UNIFEM, 2002)

The international recognition of women's rights occurred after more than 30 years of stringent advocacy to redress the unequal balance of decision making power and control, in the relations of men and women in the household, workplace, communities, government and in the international arena. The 1995 Beijing Declaration, the 2000 Millennium Declaration and the FAO Gender and Development Plan of Action (2002-2007) have all endorsed comprehensive plans of action to improve the conditions and rights of women and their communities. WNGOs act to ensure the realization of all these policies and plans by reaching out to rural women through existing local groups. WNGOs are motivated to work with and through rural groups in order to gain legitimacy and to help local groups to develop so that they can become self sustaining (Mukute, 2002) for enduring inputs into sustainable community development.

A lot of WNGOs exist in Akwa Ibom state of Nigeria. They are formally registered with the State Ministry of Women Affairs and are involved in a myriad of activities. These activities include: socio-economic empowerment, rights advocacy and eradication of socio-cultural vices like female genital mutilation, among others. The Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Women Affairs (AKMOWA, 2005) published a list containing categories of WNGOs, based on their reach, volume of credit facilities granted to women groups and level of involvement in community development activities. According to the list, category "A" WNGOs were found to have been more successful than category "B" WNGOs and were

therefore qualified for government grants assistance. WNGOs perform their activities through Local Women Groups (LWGs). It therefore became necessary to examine the perceptions of LWG affiliates of WNGOs, with regards to factors affecting the success of their focal WNGOs. On a specific basis, the study attempted to determine the socio-economic characteristics of WNGOs beneficiaries and also attempted to identify factors affecting WNGOs success. An attempt was also made to determine significant factors influencing the success of the WNGOs under focus.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was undertaken in Akwa Ibom state of Nigeria, which is located in the southeastern axis of Nigeria. The State occupies a landmass of 8,421sqkilometer and according to the Nigeria Population Commission, has a population of 2,359,736 (NPC.,2000). The State's population density of about 350 persons per square kilometer is one of the highest in the country. It has also been revealed that 80 percent of the population lives in the rural areas, more than half of which are women (NPC, 2000).

The sample frame for the study consisted of members of Local Women Groups (LWGs) that are affiliated to the 29 officially registered (with the Ministry of Women Affairs) WNGOs in the state. Three active WNGOs with statewide involvement in agricultural and rural development activities were utilized for the study. These were: the Women Health and Economic Development Association (WHEDA), the Women United for Economic Empowerment (WUEE) and Our Ladies Development Center (OLADEC). A multi-stage sampling procedure was thereafter utilized to select 120 respondents from 24 LWGs affiliated to the WNGOs (table1).

WNGO	Affiliated LWGs	Sampled Groups	No of Respondents	
WHEDA	36	8	40	
WUEE	28	8	40	
OLADEC	53	8	40	
TOTAL	117	24	120	

Table 1- Sampling Procedure

Data was generated with the aid of a pre-tested and validated structured questionnaire and from in-depth interview (IDI) sessions. Collated data were

analyzed with the aid of descriptive (frequencies, percentages, means, ranks) and inferential (multiple regression) statistical tools.

To determine factors affecting WNGOs success with local groups, 10 items were identified. Respondents were requested to indicate their attitudinal disposition to each item, with the aid of a 3-point Likert continuum of Disagree (1) undecided (2), and Agreed (3). Attitude scores were computed for each item, after which a mean score of 2.5 was utilized to differentiate between Likely ($x \geq 2.5$) and Non- Likely factors ($x < 2.5$).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-economic characteristics of WNGOs beneficiaries

Table 2 reveals that only 23 percent respondents were above 60 years of age, while 50 percent were married. About 67.5 percent respondents had a family size of between 1-6; only 25.83 percent had not acquired formal education while farming was the primary occupation of about 48.30 percent respondents. Table 2 also depicts that 45 percent respondents had affiliated with the WNGOs for a period of three years while 65 percent had benefited only once from WNGOs empowerment activities. It was also revealed that the proportion of respondents with income range of between #1000-#10,000 per month had dropped to 16.67 percent, from a pre-WNGOs affiliation level of 65.84 percent. In summary it may be deduced from the findings above, that beneficiaries of WNGOs empowerment activities are women from various strata of rural life, majority of whom have affiliated for a period of about three years and have benefited only once from WNGOs credit facilities. This has translated into increased earnings from their economic activities.

S/No	Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Age range (years)		
	Less than 21	12	10.00
	21-40	41	34.17
	41-60	39	32.50
	More than 60	28	23.33
2	Marital status		
	Married	60	50.0
	Single	24	20.0
	Divorced	6	5.0
	Widowed	30	25.0

3	Family size		
	1-3	37	30.83
	4-6	44	36.67
	7-10	29	24.17
	More than 10	10	8.33
4	Educational status		
	None	31	25.8
	Primary	45	37.5
	Secondary	32	26.7
	Tertiary	12	10.0
5	Major occupation		
	Farming	58	48.30
	Trading	30	25.00
	Civil service	12	10.00
	Food processing	20	10.70
6	Membership length (years)		
	1-3	54	45.00
	4-6	34	28.33
	7-9	20	16.67
	10 and above	12	10.00
7	Frequency of Benefits		
	Once	78	65.00
	Twice	32	26.67
	Thrice	7	5.83
	≥ 4 times	3	2.50
8	Monthly earning before WNGOs affiliation		
	5000	26	21.67
	5000-10000	53	44.17
	10000-15000	31	25.83
	15000-20000	10	8.33
	>20000	-	-
9	Monthly earning after WNGOs affiliation		

	5000	3	2.50
	5000-10000	17	14.17
	10000-15000	44	36.67
	15000-20000	34	28.33
	>20000	22	18.33

Table 2- Socio-economic characteristics of respondents (n=120).

Factors Affecting WNGO Success with Local Groups

Likely factors that have assisted the WNGOs under focus to succeed with their female clientele, unlike other less successful WNGOs with similar programmes, are as revealed in Table 2. Respondents perceived five of the ten factors as likely to ensure the success of WNGOs in their operational areas.. The three most likely factors were perceived as; adequate funding / volume of credit provision (rank 1; $x = 2.83$); ability to fulfill beneficiaries' expectations (rank 2; $x = 2.70$); and timely loan refund by beneficiaries (rank 3; $x = 2.58$). Respondents perceived the three least (non) likely factors for WNGO success as: size of the organization (rank 10; $x = 1.24$); attendance at meeting (rank 9; $x = 1.45$) and literacy level of beneficiaries (rank 8; $x = 1.47$).

Dikito – Wachtmeister (2001) and Chen et al, (2005) asserted that women consistently seek to create and join groups that will provide them with critical economic and social benefits. Shingi and Bluhm (1987) also surmised that farmers will not just participate in any organized activity, but must be motivated, based on their needs and ability of NGOs, to meet their expectations. Shingi and Bluhm (1987) provide a list of seven reasons, which influence members' participation in organized group activities, including; degree of certainty of availability of output, and extent to which output will be available as a result of collective action. The fact that respondents perceived WNGOs as well funded enough to be able to meet their credit expectations, and the fact that credit facilities are given only to members engaged in a group activity, are salient reasons for the success of WNGOs under focus. In a similar vein, Bebbington et al (1993) have proffered that successful organizations are those engaged in activities that have a significant impact on members' family income. Bebbington (1994) and Thomas (1990) have also pointed out the attributes of successful NGOs to include: sustained donor and technical support from other institutions, strong and transparent leadership and honesty of group members, in terms of timely loan refunds.

The perceptions of respondents that membership size of LWGs, literacy level of LWG membership and membership attendance at LWG meetings may not affect the success or otherwise of WNGO activities, need to be closely examined.

There is a consensus in literature that the smaller the number of group members, the better the chances of group success. Hobley and Shah (1996) assert that group size may collapse after 30-40 members. They also admonish that a group becomes less effective if it falls below a minimum threshold level (of 15-20 members). It is important to note that none of the surveyed groups had more than 30 members and this may be a likely reason for the none-importance of group size in the study. With reference to education, Blum (1991) had revealed education as a facilitating factor towards achieving group participation and overall effectiveness of extension services. Only about 26 percent respondents did not possess any formal education and with the benefit of socialization garnered in the course of their various socio-economic interactions and pursuit, lack of education has ceased to be a constraining factor in their socio-economic activities. In the same vein Karl (1995) had opined that education empowers women by increasing their ability to earn an independent income, increases their status, provides them with a basic knowledge of their rights as individuals and ultimately enhances their input into family and community decision making. In essence, the women's moderate level of educational attainment is seen as a factor in making them cohabit and function as a group and may have much effect on the groups being chosen to participate in and derive benefits from WNGO activities. Hence, educational level attainment may not have a direct impact on WNGO activities but on group cohesion. With regards to attendance at meetings, although Osuntogun (1974) had observed society meetings as a major means of ensuring social participation in rural cooperatives, the World Bank (1996) had contended that kinds and frequency of meetings do not appear to affect group performance. This is in consonance with the research finding under reference.

S/ N	ITEMS	RESPONSE CATEGORIES			Mean	Rank	Remarks
		Disagreed	Un-decided	Agreed			
1	Level of Unity among LWG members	29 (24.1)*	42 (34.9)	29 (24.1)	2.16	7	NLF
2	Transparency of LWGs leaders	13 (10.8)	33 (27.5)	74 (61.7)	2.51	5	LF
3	Size of LWG	97 (80.8)	17 (14.2)	6 (5.0)	1.24	10	NLF
4	Literacy level of LWG members	80 (66.7)	26 (21.7)	14 (11.7)	1.47	8	NLF
5	Ability to fulfill	9	18 (15.0)	93 (77.5)	2.70	2	LF

	members expectations	(7.5)					
6	Timely loan refund	14 (11.7)	22 (18.3)	84 (70.0)	2.58	3	LF
7	Attendance at LWG meetings	78 (65.0)	30 (25.0)	12 (10.0)	1.45	9	NLF
8	Income level of beneficiaries	12 (10.0)	33 (27.7)	75 (62.5)	2.53	4	LF
9	Family size	24 (20.0)	28 (23.3)	68 (56.7)	2.37	6	NLF
10	High volume / regularity of credit provision	4 (3.3)	12 (10.0)	104 (86.7)	2.83	1	LF

* : Percentage NLF: Non likely factor LF: Likely Factor

Table 3- Factors Affecting WNGOs Success With Local Groups

Factors Affecting Success of WNGOs

An attempt was made to identify significant factors that affect the success of women WNGOs with LWGs. Multiple regression analysis Table 4 shows that three of the five “likely” factors are significant influences. These are: WNGOs ability to fulfill LWGs membership expectations ($b = 37.145$), Income ($b = 330.138$), and High volume / regularity of credit provision ($b = 651.394$). Arising from above, it may be inferred conclusively that low-income earners would patronize any WNGO that they perceive has enough funds to fulfill their expectations of credit advancements for improved income earning activities.

Variables	(B)	t-ratios	Sig.
Ability to fulfill expectations	37.145	2.971**	.000
Income	330.138	2.630**	.001
Credit provision	651.394	3.241**	.000
Transparency of leaders	646.140	-.922	.358
Timely loan refund	-563.464	-.684	.495

Table 4- Significant factors affecting WNGOs success with LWGs

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A lot of WNGOs operate in Akwa Ibom State, some of which attract more funding and patronage than others. This study focused on successful WNGOs and attempted to ascertain the perceptions of WNGOs beneficiaries with respect to reasons for the success of the WNGOs to which they are affiliated. It was revealed that WNGOs socio-economic improvement activities are not selective but are targeted at a broad spectrum of rural women groupings. The WNGOs are perceived as being well funded and are involved in activities that provide critical economic and social benefits to their rural clientele. WNGOs clientele also embark on timely loan refund activities. In essence, successful WNGOs are perceived by beneficiaries to act through rural women groups and possess enough funds to cater for the credit needs of its beneficiaries. These beneficiaries, in turn embark on timely loan repayment activities, so as to ensure a wider spread of credit facilities to needy group members. Hence, successful WNGOs have a mutually beneficial relationship with their clientele.

To ensure that the characteristics of WNGOs are publicized for the benefit of less successful and emerging WNGOs, the following recommendations seem pertinent: WNGOs,

- (1) should target socio-economic improvement activities at rural women groups, and not individuals;
- (2) should embark on broad-based linkage activities, so as to expose them to a variety of funding sources. This will ensure the fulfillment of clientele expectations;
- (3) leadership should be familiar with their operational environment and embark on socio-economic activities that will rank high in the value system of WNGOs clientele;
- (4) leadership should undergo capacity building activities on the management of group demands;
- (5) functionaries should ensure constant monitoring of the utilization level of disbursed credit advances. They should also consistently sensitize loan beneficiaries to the necessity to promptly repay credit facilities, in order to ensure a wider spread of credit facilities to deserving group members.

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