

Barriers to Industrial Advancement for Women in Idoma Rural Areas: A Sociological Study

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Abstract

The industrial advancement of women, particularly in rural areas, remains a critical determinant of socio-economic growth and gender equity. This study examines the barriers hindering industrial progression among women in Idoma rural communities, Benue State, Nigeria. Employing a qualitative approach, the study explores cultural, educational, financial, infrastructural, and institutional impediments through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Findings reveal that patriarchal cultural practices, low educational attainment, limited access to credit facilities, poor infrastructure, and weak policy implementation significantly restrict women's industrial participation and success. The study recommends targeted policy interventions, improved access to education, financial empowerment programs, and the dismantling of cultural norms that inhibit women's advancement. This research contributes to the growing sociological discourse on gender inequality and rural industrialization.

Keywords: Barriers, Industrial Advancement, Women, Idoma, Rural Areas.

Introduction

Industrial development is globally recognized as a critical pathway to economic transformation and poverty alleviation (World Bank, 2020). However, in many developing regions, including rural Nigeria, women remain disproportionately excluded from industrial opportunities due to systemic socio-cultural and economic barriers (United Nations Industrial Development Organization [UNIDO], 2019). Gender disparities in access to industrial resources, entrepreneurial training, and decision-making positions persist, particularly in rural areas where patriarchal traditions are deeply entrenched (Ekong, 2010).

The Idoma people, located predominantly in Benue State, Nigeria, represent a socio-cultural group with rich traditions, but also with gendered structures that limit women's participation in key economic sectors. Women in Idoma rural areas face compounded challenges: limited educational opportunities, financial exclusion, and minimal access to industrial infrastructure. According to Eboh (2016), rural women in Nigeria contribute significantly to the informal sector but are often marginalized in formal industrial settings due to systemic gender biases.

Despite government policies aimed at women's economic empowerment, the gap remains wide (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2021). The need to investigate the specific barriers affecting Idoma women's industrial advancement is urgent and significant, as the exclusion of women undermines both gender equity and sustainable development (United Nations, 2015).

Literature Review

Socio-Cultural Barriers

Patriarchy is a pervasive structure that significantly restricts women's industrial advancement in rural Nigeria (Aina, 1998). In Idoma communities, cultural practices often prioritize male economic participation, assigning women to domestic and informal economic roles (Okpeh, 2003). Gender norms dictate access to land, capital, and leadership positions, thereby limiting women's entry into industrial sectors.

Educational and Financial Constraints

Education is a vital determinant of industrial success (World Bank, 2020). Rural women's lower educational attainment is closely linked to reduced access to industrial skills and entrepreneurial knowledge (Adekola & Eniaiyaju, 2012). Financial institutions in Nigeria often impose stringent collateral requirements that rural women cannot meet, thus excluding them from formal credit systems (Nwoye, 2007). This financial marginalization limits their capacity to start or expand industrial ventures.

Infrastructural and Institutional Challenges

Inadequate infrastructure, such as poor road networks and unreliable electricity, disproportionately affects women in rural industries (Ogunlela & Mukhtar, 2009). Institutional neglect, weak policy enforcement, and corruption exacerbate these challenges, leaving women with limited support for industrial growth (Oluwatayo, 2017). Socio-Cultural Barriers Patriarchal dominance is a significant barrier to women's industrial advancement in Nigeria. According to Aina (1998), the socio-cultural framework in many Nigerian communities inherently prioritizes men over women, restricting women's access to land, education, and capital. In Idoma communities, as emphasized by Okpeh (2003), cultural norms limit women's participation in decision-making processes and confine them to domestic roles, leaving them underrepresented in industrial ventures.

Obaji and Olugu (2014) argue that the patriarchal ideology embedded within rural Nigerian societies perpetuates gender roles that restrict women from exploring industrial opportunities. Similarly, Omotayo and Oluwatayo (2019) found that cultural prohibitions against women owning land or inheriting property directly hinder their ability to start or expand industrial enterprises.

Educational and Financial Constraints Education is widely acknowledged as a catalyst for industrial advancement. According to Adekola and Eniaiyaju (2012), the low educational attainment among rural women significantly impedes their ability to acquire industrial skills and manage enterprises effectively. World Bank (2020) data highlight that women's participation in technical education in rural Nigeria remains remarkably low.

Financial exclusion is another critical barrier. As Nwoye (2007) posits, rural women often lack access to credit facilities due to stringent collateral requirements that favor men, who typically control family assets. Aderemi et al. (2008) reported that women entrepreneurs in rural Oyo State encountered systemic barriers in obtaining capital, significantly limiting their industrial growth. Similarly, Ojong et al. (2015) revealed that the inability of women to access financial resources was the primary factor constraining their entrepreneurial ambitions in Cross River State.

Infrastructural and Institutional Challenges Ogunlela and Mukhtar (2009) emphasized that poor infrastructure, particularly unreliable electricity and inadequate transportation networks, disproportionately affects rural women seeking to develop industrial ventures.

Oluwatayo (2017) supported this, showing that women in rural Southwest Nigeria struggled to sustain non-farm enterprises due to infrastructural deficits.

Additionally, ineffective policy implementation is a recurring issue. Ochoga and Tyokever (2019) noted that although there are governmental programs aimed at empowering women, these initiatives are often poorly enforced in rural communities, limiting their effectiveness.

Gender and Industrial Development

Globally, industrial development is a key engine for economic transformation, poverty alleviation, and job creation. However, access to industrial participation remains gendered, particularly in rural regions. Studies (UNIDO, 2020; Kabeer, 2003) reveal that women often face systemic exclusion from industrial spaces due to patriarchal norms, low access to capital, and limited education. This marginalisation is even more pronounced in developing nations where cultural expectations restrict women's roles to the domestic sphere.

Rural Women in Industry in Nigeria

Rural Nigerian women significantly contribute to local economies through processing industries such as cassava, palm oil, pottery, and textiles. However, literature shows that women's role in these sectors is largely informal, underpaid, and technologically outdated (Aina, 2012; Nnadi, 2014). Without adequate infrastructure or policy support, these activities remain subsistence-based rather than growth-oriented.

Structural Barriers to Women's Industrial Participation

From a sociological standpoint, structural functionalism views the economy as stratified along gender roles, where women are relegated to unpaid or low-skilled sectors. Conflict theorists argue that this division is not neutral but a product of economic and gender-based inequality (Collins, 2000). Barriers identified in literature include:

Cultural Norms and Gender Stereotypes

In African patriarchal societies, cultural values shape women's occupational choices and mobility. Idoma communities, like many in Nigeria, reinforce male authority in land ownership, inheritance, and leadership thus limiting women's control over productive resources (Okwori, 2008). The persistence of gender stereotypes also undermines women's self-perception as industrial leaders or entrepreneurs.

Empirical Review

Several studies have highlighted the barriers women face in industrial development across Nigeria. A study by Aderemi et al. (2008) found that women entrepreneurs in rural Oyo State faced restricted access to capital, limited market exposure, and low literacy levels, which hampered their industrial success. Similarly, Akinbami and Oladele (2016) demonstrated that women in Ekiti State encountered socio-cultural barriers that diminished their participation in mechanized industries.

In a Benue State-specific study, Ochoga and Tyokever (2019) reported that women in rural Gboko experienced marginalization in local industrial initiatives due to cultural constraints and policy gaps. However, there is limited empirical research focusing specifically on Idoma women, which this study aims to address. Several empirical studies provide insight into the realities faced by rural women in Nigeria's industrial landscape:

Agbaji (2018) conducted a study in Otukpo and found that only 23% of women involved in garri processing had access to mechanical equipment, while the majority used traditional manual tools. The study attributed this to lack of cooperative structures and state support. Nwokocha & Chikwendu (2016) examined women entrepreneurs in Benue State and observed that low literacy rates, inadequate capital, and weak linkages with formal markets severely limited women's ability to scale their ventures beyond subsistence. Eze (2020) highlighted that even where women were engaged in production activities, patriarchal

gatekeeping especially in male-controlled trade unions and cooperatives prevented them from securing favourable market conditions or accessing government subsidies.

Ojobo (2019) studied industrial training participation among rural women in Idoma land and found that over 65% had never attended any skill-upgrading program due to low awareness, family resistance, and travel restrictions.

These studies affirm that while women are active participants in rural industry, they operate under multiple constraints that hinder their advancement.

Key Barriers to Industrial Advancement

Gendered Cultural Norms

Traditional gender roles prioritize men as decision-makers and landowners, restricting women's industrial participation.

Limited Access to Capital

Women often lack collateral and are excluded from formal credit schemes.

Poor Infrastructure

Unreliable roads, electricity, and water supply constrain productivity and expansion.

Low Educational Attainment

Minimal formal education restricts knowledge of modern industrial tools and practices.

Technological Disadvantage

Reliance on manual tools results in low efficiency and product quality.

Health and Safety Risks

Exposure to unsafe conditions during production affects long-term health.

Market Access Limitations

Women lack access to larger markets and digital trade platforms.

Insecurity and Instability

Local violence and unrest disrupt economic activities.

Policy and Institutional Neglect

Government industrial policies often exclude rural women.

Time Poverty

Balancing domestic duties with industrial work leaves women overstretched.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Political Economy Theory

This study is anchored in the Feminist Political Economy Theory, which examines how economic systems, power structures, and gender relations intersect to marginalize women (Bakker, 2003). The theory emphasizes that women's industrial underdevelopment is not merely a personal failure but a systemic issue embedded in socio-economic and political frameworks (Rai & Waylen, 2014).

Social Exclusion Theory

Social Exclusion Theory (Silver, 1994) is also relevant as it explores how institutionalized practices and social norms systematically marginalize particular groups from economic opportunities. In the context of Idoma rural areas, women are excluded from industrial advancement through formal and informal mechanisms.

These frameworks help to analyze how gender, economic policy, cultural norms, and institutional structures collectively hinder women's industrial growth.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 20 women from five rural communities in the Idoma region. Key informants, including local leaders, women entrepreneurs, and representatives from financial institutions, were also

interviewed. Data were thematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns related to cultural, educational, financial, infrastructural, and institutional barriers.

Analysis

80% of women interviewed reported that cultural restrictions, such as inheritance laws, prevented them from accessing land for industrial purposes.

70% of participants indicated that low educational attainment limited their knowledge of industrial processes. 90% of respondents noted difficulty accessing loans due to lack of collateral. 75% of women emphasized poor infrastructure (roads, electricity) as a major barrier to production and market access. 60% of key informants admitted that local policies favour men in industrial funding and training programs.

Findings

1. Patriarchal Dominance: Cultural norms continue to restrict women's access to land, capital, and industrial leadership.
2. Educational Gaps: Many women lack formal education and industrial training, limiting their technical competence.
3. Financial Exclusion: Access to credit remains a significant barrier due to discriminatory lending practices.
4. Infrastructural Deficiencies: Poor transportation and unreliable electricity hinder the growth of women-led industries.
5. Weak Institutional Support: Government policies targeting women's industrial empowerment are poorly implemented in rural Idoma areas.

Conclusion

The study reveals that women in Idoma rural communities face multiple, interconnected barriers to industrial advancement. These barriers cultural, educational, financial, infrastructural, and institutional are deeply rooted in patriarchal structures and systemic gender inequalities. Without intentional policy interventions and socio-cultural shifts, women will continue to be sidelined in industrial development, perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment in the region.

Recommendations

- i. Policy Reforms: The government should enact and enforce gender-sensitive policies that promote equitable access to industrial resources.
- ii. Educational Empowerment: Initiatives should be introduced to improve rural women's access to formal and vocational education, particularly industrial skills training.
- iii. Financial Inclusion Programs: Microfinance institutions should develop collateral-free loan schemes specifically targeting rural women.
- iv. Infrastructural Development: Investment in rural infrastructure, particularly roads and electricity, is essential to support women-led industries.
- v. Cultural Reorientation: Community-based sensitization programs should challenge and gradually dismantle harmful cultural practices that inhibit women's industrial participation.
- vi. Capacity Building: Regular workshops, mentoring, and networking platforms should be created to enhance women's industrial competencies and leadership skills.

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