

**ASSESSMENT OF THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION OF THE
GROWING ROLE OF WOMEN AS BREADWINNERS AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS FOR GENDER EMPOWERMENT IN IMO STATE**

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ABSTRACT: This study assessed the public's perception of the growing role of women as breadwinners in the family, identifies the perceived challenges constraining women empowerment, determined the prospects for women empowerment as a means for sustainable development in Owerri Imo State. Two theories- the theory of political economics and the sphere theory were used to provide explanation for the phenomenon of women breadwinners. Data for the study was generated using a specially designed instrument- structured questionnaire. The target population of the study was members of the public from the Owerri metropolis but limited to a sample size of 384. Data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools including sample percentage, frequency, and mean. The study shows that women are fast, assuming responsibility of heading households and becoming breadwinners. However, in spite of this, women are still constrained based on gender under consideration which prevents them from participating actively like their male counterparts in the workplaces, business and communities in leadership roles. The paper concludes that women empowerment is a key factor for sustainable development but however recommends that women be seen as economic actors in the family and by extension the community and be given opportunities to play roles that would enhance and sustain growth and development.

Keywords: Breadwinners, economic empowerment, gender inequality

INTRODUCTION

Women in the family play such roles as wife, collaborator, organizer, administrator, director, recreator, disburser, economist, mother, disciplinarian, instructor, health officer, artist and queen. Apart from this, women play a vital role in society's socio-economic growth. They are now interested in their families more than ever, not only as wives and mothers, but also as breadwinners and heads of families. In the midst of heavy rivalry from their male counterparts, there is an emerging new role that women are starting to play in society.

Fapohunda (2012) reported that about 31 percent of households in urban and rural areas are headed by women in Nigeria. Where unpaid labour contributes to household agricultural production and spends up to 50 hours a week on domestic labour and food production for subsistence use, the duties of wives or sons in the household are scarcely shared.

While women are considered the backbone of the development process, while fighting to earn and sustain themselves and their families, especially in rural areas, they still live a downtrodden

life. Women continue to face legally authorized and cultural obstacles to owning and inheriting land, engaging in politics, or obtaining education in many countries (UNDP, 2008: 161).

Women are frequently faced with seclusion and exclusion based on patriarchy's socio-cultural norms that eventually restricts their access to growth and empowerment (Isran & Isran, 2012). Being deprived of the fundamental legal rights of participation in economic activities, restricted work outside the home, a lack of education and skills, and domestic workloads make them dependent on their male counterparts, and they are neglected in the mainstream development process of the nation (Butt, Hassan, Khalid & Sher, 2010). As a result, the males get better focus in every domain of life for better opportunities that include schooling, ownership, decision making, and the control of the resources (Pudup, 1990).

An empowered woman has a sense of self-worth, according to UN Women Publications (2013). She can make her own choices and has access to possibilities and opportunities that offer her a range of choices she can follow. She has power over her own life, both inside and outside the home, and she has the opportunity to influence the course of social change, both nationally and globally, to create a more just social and economic order. The economic empowerment of women refers to women's ability to enjoy their right to influence and profit from wealth, properties, income and their own time, as well as their ability to handle risks and enhance their economic status and well-being. Empowerment for women suggests that women obtain more power and control over their own lives. This implies the principle of the continued disadvantage of women compared to men, which is evident in various economic, socio-cultural and political spheres. "Women's empowerment can therefore also be seen as an important process in achieving gender equality, which is understood to mean that 'individuals' rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female" (Crowley, Genova & Sansonetti, 2013).

Governments have increasingly removed discriminatory laws over the past two decades and have adopted legislation promoting gender equality and addressing violence against women. Significant gains are also noted in the enrolment of girls in primary and secondary education. In several regions, women's participation in the labour market has increased, while some regions have made progress in increasing access to birth control. Harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriages have started to decline in some contexts. Furthermore, some countries have made major gains in women's representation in national parliaments.

Global development has, however, been sluggish, inconsistent and limited. Despite increased normative commitments, a lack of enforcement, structural obstacles and oppressive social norms often undermine equality. Moreover, increased access to education, for example, has not been balanced by initiatives aimed at improving women's access to decent jobs, good terms of employment, advancement and equal pay.

However, expanding opportunities for jobs and empowerment have also been cited as an explanation for the rise in female headed families. Rotten and Glick (1979) observed that a woman is in charge of one out of every six households. The economic and social condition of

kl,k./divorced mothers who lead their families is also noteworthy. Although welfare and child-support scholarships are a help for women-headed families, they are typically insufficient to sustain a family. As a consequence, she relies on jobs to provide for her family, whether the mother wishes to be employed or not. Nevertheless, many women who run their families earn such low salaries that they still qualify for financial empowerment.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria today, women are typically considered to be at the lowest rung of the poverty ladder, according to Adepelumi (2012), mainly because women's access to credit is usually hindered by practices that are justified as 'traditional Patriarchal customary laws concerning the right of women that hinder their rights to own land. This significantly diminished the possibility of women's empowerment. In addition, as limited resources go first to the males, the increasing households led by females as their breadwinner are affected. There is a need to balance the economic resources available between the two sexes, as women are gradually beginning to play a role in society as providers. This study aims to assess the public's perception of the emerging role of women as breadwinners and the need for their empowerment, with a special interest in Owerri, Imo State, on the basis of this assumption.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. Assessing public's perception of the growing role of women as breadwinners of the family in Owerri, Imo State.
- ii. Identifying public's perception of the challenges constraining women empowerment in Owerri, Imo State.
- iii. Determining the prospects of women empowerment as a means for sustainable development in Owerri, Imo State.

Research Questions

- i. How do the public see the growing role of women as breadwinners of the family in Owerri, Imo state?
- ii. What are the challenges that constraint women empowerment in Owerri, Imo state?
- iii. What are the prospects of women empowerment as a means for sustainable development in Owerri, Imo state?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's Economic Empowerment

Empowerment can be viewed as income of creating a social environment in which one be able to create decisions and build choices moreover independently or together for social alteration. Women empowerment enables independence and manages in excess of their life. The empowered women turn out to be agents of their own progress, capable to work out choices to set their own program and be strong sufficient to confront their subsidiary location in the society (Gujrati, 2016).

The empowerment of women consists of five elements, according to Adekanye (2014): a sense of self-worth, the availability of options, the right of women to access opportunities and resources, the right to have control over their own lives in and outside their homes, and the right to influence social change in terms of social and economic order. This means access to training skills, problem solving strategies, technology and information, and access to decision-making participation (CITE). Socio-economic empowerment means, according to the same concept, that a woman is financially independent through her participation in income-generating activities (CITE). These activities include access to productive facilities; control of the revenue generated, which may mean investing in personal property; personal savings; and active involvement in household decision-making that affects livelihoods (Adekanye, 2014).

Women are an essential part of every economy. All around development and melodious growth of a nation would be probable only when women are careful as equal partners in growth with men. Economic empowerment puts women in a stronger position and gives them the power to participate, together with men, in the shaping of society, to influence development at all levels of society, and to make decisions that promote their families and their own wellbeing. Economic empowerment of women is a matter of human rights and social justice.

The economic empowerment of women also lowers poverty and improves economic development and productivity (Sida, 2015). Interventions aimed at fostering women's economic empowerment would help ensure that woman's economic rights and, eventually, sustainable development are fully understood and realized. While economic growth has long been seen as an important route to reducing poverty, growth patterns are just as significant. Studies show that the greater the initial disparity in asset distribution, such as education, land or money, the less likely it is that poverty can be minimized by a specific growth pathway. Indeed, research has shown that countries with a high level of gender equality are more effective than those with a low level of gender equality in reducing poverty (World Bank, 2007).

Challenges to Women Empowerment

In recent decades, the evolving role of women has meant that women negotiate work-family roles; more Nigerian women pursue higher education and career advancement (Animasahun & Oladeni, 2012; Davison & Burke, 2011; Kahkha et al., 2014; National Statistics Bureau, 2011). From traditionally-assigned roles as wives and mothers to caregivers, the shifting roles of women

in Nigeria are observable (Bankole & Adeyeri, 2014). Working women in Nigeria do more than supplement family income; instead, these women serve as caregivers, requiring entry into the labor market and workplace development (Bankole & Adeyeri, 2014). The confrontation between career and family, however, persists (Kahkha et al., 2014). Nigerian women's career growth has been slowed by the pressures of focusing on the various tasks of caring for the family, pursuing career advancement, and attending to family duties (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2013).

A gap between male and female entrepreneurs exists as differences in levels of education and experience, which can lead to differences in professional performance (Inmyxai & Takahasdhi, 2011). Also, according to the same researchers, participation in networks differs by men and women, and this is important because networks can be useful links for entrepreneurs for sales through personal contact, leading to improved performance. Women network differently, and these differences in communication styles according to gender may be why male networks often exclude women (Inmyxai & Takahasdhi, 2011).

Network styles may lead to variations in the performance of male and female managers, according to Inmyxai and Takahasdhi (2011). Patriarchal tendencies frequently hinder women in the formal business sector and, as a consequence, this leaves women outside favored social clubs where businessmen congregate (Spring, 2009). Still, amid advocacy, gender inequalities still exist, according to Spring (2009). The social environment and political structure does not sufficiently encourage or help women in the workplace as women negotiate roles between job and family and pursue higher education and career development, but instead positions women in conventional roles, questioning them (Inmyxai & Takahashi, 2011). McIntosh et al. (2012) observed that, after having kids, most mothers do not have a deep commitment to a career. This transition is most likely because the family was the role of gender that was established, implemented, and legitimized (McIntosh et al., 2012). Specifically, when the man is held up as the provider and head of household and the woman provided with the options of mother and nurturer, then a pervasive cultural model emerges that precludes a woman's participation and pursuance of her career (McIntosh et al., 2012). Furthermore, McIntosh et al. (2012) proposed that this cultural model could limit a woman's ambition and perceptions of the opportunities that are available to her, leading to a cultural stigma against women in the workplace, including lessened expectations and lessened promotion opportunities.

An issue also noted by Agezo and Hope (2011) was that at all times; society needed women to be quiet, positive, and respectful. In how she talked and treated herself, a woman in a teaching role was anticipated to be dignified and moderate. This is because society culturally expects that a woman should not publicly criticize men in this context, and wives should not behave in the same way as their husbands. Braun et al. (2012) reported that underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is important in current times and is still an issue.

Moreover, in Nigeria, the disparity in availability of resources decreases women's competitiveness and interferes with their well-being and that of their communities. It also, by productivity losses, imposes a high cost on the economy (Okonkwo, 2013). In the cultural phase of human development, gender attitudes are what turn economic development (Okonkwo, 2013). The glass-ceiling phenomenon in Nigeria is a way of restricting women's advancement in the

professional sphere, but it also helped to continue the cycle of poverty in developing nations, including Nigeria (Kolade & Kehinde, 2013; Okonkwo, 2013; Thomas, 2013).

Even in contexts where women in the workforce are more welcomed by society, contradictions remain about the dual roles required of women (McIntosh et al., 2012). McIntosh et al. (2012) studied the effects of motherhood on women's nursing careers; the combination of career and motherhood are important contributory factors to the relative poor performance of women. In terms of their career advancement, McIntosh et al. (2012) described this issue as a punishment of motherhood for women. In order to balance work and family duties, women often chose flexible hours or part-time jobs, but this choice was at the detriment of their long-term careers (McIntosh et al., 2012).

Nyewusira and Nweke (2014) observed that in many African cultures, patriarchy is still a norm, and that the concept of gender equality seems to be negated by domestic rules, official policies, and even the Nigerian constitution. Three key traditions were discussed, namely: widowhood rituals, girl-child genital mutilation, and sex trafficking, affirming that these traditions are typically supervised and enforced by women. They also demonstrated that by raising their daughter to comply with gender norms, mothers perpetuate gender discrimination. Supporting their analysis from relevant literature, the researchers found that women, under the disguise of culture and tradition, are more seriously the perpetrators and advocates of sexism against fellow women, as well as carrying out worse acts of gender inequality.

Growing Role of Women as Breadwinners in Nigeria

In a significant number of societies worldwide, the primary role of men is to serve as breadwinners in their households. However, in Nigeria, since the mid-1980s there has been a steady rise in the number of women breadwinners in many households; in spite of this, not enough research on this emerging phenomenon have been carried out. Mead (1988) and Eboiyehi (2013) also note that a man's central role was to serve as the main provider for his family, regardless of the status of his wife, in African societies. Africans believed that it was not normal for a wife to feed the husband. Thus, a woman who tries to combine men's role with her traditional role as caretaker of the home and nurturer of children is soon reminded that she is flouting the socially accepted norms. She finds herself in a seemingly no-win situation.

However, it is important to note that women were not as docile as the above painted picture. In fact, Folola (2010) was of the view that in the traditional Nigerian economy, women were not as docile or powerless as contemporary literature tends to portray them and argues that ascribing the role of breadwinning to men alone may not be correct as the literature would want us to believe. Women have played complementary roles alongside their husbands in traditional Nigerian communities. Evidence from Nigerian women's anthropological and feminist writings has shown that women have played a significant role for centuries in social and economic activities, including local and long-distance trade (Leith Ross-Ross, 1982; House-Midamba, and Ekechi, 1995; Chuku; 1995; 2005; and Falola, 2010). Falola (2010) argues that among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, division of labour was along gender lines, and women controlled such occupations as food processing, mat weaving, pottery-making, and cooking.

Chuku (1995; 2005) also observes among the Igbo of South East Nigeria that Igbo women have played a very active role in agriculture that has been divided according to sex lines. While the women cultivate coco yams, the men grow yams. Feeding their families and visitors adequately has always been the Igbo women's ultimate goal. It was the emphasis of the colonial administration on the production of male-oriented cash crops in which men and European firms dominated the business of rubber, cocoa, groundnut, palm oil and which led women to shift to the production of subsistence crops (Chuku, 2005). However, over the years, the traditional Nigerian family as described above has undergone significant transformation due to the introduction of cash economy and paid employment which resulted in absence of men from home and their inability to remit money to family resulted in many women becoming breadwinners. These major changes in the family structure have altered the relationship that once existed between the man (the breadwinner) and the wife/wives and the children. In recent times, husband's meagre income, the economic recession and the associated retrenchment of many male workers also forced many women to seek employment outside the home (Bankole, 1996, Eboiyehi, 2013).

The implementation by the Babangida government of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in 1986 contributed to the liberalization, deregulation and devaluation of the Naira and contributed to the decline of domestic companies, resulting in the reduction of many male employees. Interestingly, in the field of professions, the late twentieth century even experienced competition between men and women. This has partly accounted for the rising percentage of women earning more than their husbands, from 17.8% in 1987 to 29.3% in 2013 (US Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2015). This, perhaps, made Mead (1988) envision that the role of man in the society as a breadwinner might be lost. However, it is doubtful whether this will be the case in Nigeria in the near future. Nigerian women have always been complementing the effort of the men in providing for the family. Importantly, there is a difference between these women's playing of complementary roles and their current complete breadwinning roles which has affected the women negatively and has constituted a social problem. Undoubtedly, women who play the role of breadwinners face many challenges. To worsen the situation, many of them do not have the skill or education that would help them to weather the storm. As they face the double burden of balancing their traditional role of mother (cooking, washing, nurturing, and caring for family members) with the role of men in providing for the family, there may be role conflicts.

Although the various integral functions performed by Nigerian women throughout history have been little acknowledged, some feminist and anthropological literature has shown that Nigerian women were not economically docile from pre-colonial times to the early 21st century (Chuku, 1995; 2005; 2015; Falola, 2010). Falola (2010) observes that women played a major role in social and economic activities in the pre-colonial period. Among the Yoruba, women were the major figures in long-distance trade, with enormous opportunities for accumulating wealth and acquiring titles (Falola, 2010). The most successful among them rose to the prestigious chieftaincy title of 'Iyalode', a position of great privilege and power. He laments that the most serious threat to the influence and privileges of women occurred during the 20th century, when patriarchy combined with colonial changes to alter gender relations.

Assessing the effects of colonialism on the roles and statuses of women in the economy of Igboland, Chuku (1995; 2005 and 2015) also demonstrates women's roles in the Igbo economy which range from very active participation in agricultural cultivation and food processing to manufacturing and marketing. It was not surprising that Leith-Ross (1982) asserted: Igbo women, because of their economic importance both as mothers, farm cultivators and traders have rather more power than is generally thought. According to Basden (1982), "Igbo women take their full share in farm work, assisting in the soil and moulding (mounding) up the yam beds. Thus, the gender division of labour in Igbo agriculture has been somewhat flexible in practice. According to Chuku (2005), the increased role of women in food production also continued in the post-colonial Igboland.

For example, young and adult males were forced to devote their resources to war activities during the war period (1967-1970), leaving the women and children to take care of food production. The number of crops planted by women has risen. Farmlands were more open as well. Their working hours a day rose from 10-12 to 14-16 to meet the challenge of eating. The bush was cleared, mounds made, seeds and seedlings planted, staked, weeded, and harvested. Chuku (1995, 2005 and 2015) also states that women took over the lead from men during the Nigeria-Biafra War. They engaged in the period's ahia-ataki (smuggling) trade, bringing in goods such as stockfish, salt and corn flour. The active role of Igbo women in commerce as well as agriculture was paramount in maintaining the Igbo population during the war, according to Chukku, 2015. Gender expectation has, thus, undergone fairly dramatic change from traditional to more egalitarian forms, the change which the women, the young, the well-educated, and the upper-middle-class dual-career couples were at the vanguard (Potuchek, 1997; Paterson, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The theory of political economics and the theory of the field also provide explanations for the phenomenon of women breadwinners. The political economic theory argues that within that context, the economic situation and government policies of any country affect people's lives; their education, livelihoods, and even life chances. In applying this theory to our work, it can be argued that as the Nigerian economy entered into recession in the 1980s, which led to structural adjustment programmes that resulted in cut in government expenditures, folding up of companies and businesses, retrenchment of workers, among others, many men lost their jobs and their wives became bread winners. As Marx and Engels (1976) also posited, capitalist political economy entails the exploitation of many by a few and it breeds tensions and strains. Indeed, the nature of political economy of Nigeria created the situation in which few Nigerians pocketed the large chunk of the resources of the nation while the majority of them live in abject poverty. This political/economic scenario has generated very unfavourable economic conditions for the Nigerian people and has been a push factor in generating the phenomenon of women breadwinners in the country. In the same vein, sphere theory is part of the feminist orientation; unearth cultural, socioeconomic and political barriers against women capacity development, empowerment and involvement in different aspects of societal life (Bassey, Ojua, Archibong & Bassey, 2012). The sphere theory posits that the society divided its activities into the public and private sphere and assigned women to the private sphere and men to the public sphere (Cornelly et. al., 2000; Susen, 2011).

In this research, the sphere theory is used to explain the difficulty which women breadwinners experience by going into the public space of earning money to provide for the family. It also describes the experiences of these women as they find themselves in their husbands' shoes of caring for their household; the physical fatigue of their jobs, the emotional trauma of having to cope with their husbands' erratic behaviour. It also explains the position of women facing conflict as they have to come home after doing their breadwinning work to face house work. Women must also contend with the fact that they are women and that, regardless of how much they care for their families, society views them as inferior. From the political economic and feminist theoretical orientations, we argue that increase in proportion of women breadwinners in Nigeria is a function of economic recession while the experience of women breadwinners is a consequence of the patriarchal gender roles and gender relations which are embedded into the structure of the Nigerian society.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed descriptive survey research design in which primary data was collected and used to generate information for attaining the study's objectives. The target population for the study comprised members of the public in Owerri metropolis, Imo State in Nigeria. The data for the study was collected using a specially designed instrument (structure questionnaire). The population of the study was obtained from the population of Owerri town. According to the 2006 census, the population of Owerri metropolis is about 1,127,213 (NPC, 2006). The sample size of the study was obtained with the help of research advisors (2006) and Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination tables. According to both tables, a sample size of 384 is suitable for the target population (1,127,213). Respondents for the survey were selected using simple random sampling technique. The carefully designed questionnaire was administered on the randomly selected respondents. Data obtained from the survey was analysed using descriptive statistical tools (simple percentage, frequency, mean and standard deviation).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A total of 384 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to respondents and 370 copies were retrieved valid for analysis, while 14 copies were either wrongly filled or missing. The collected data was analysed and the results presented in tables. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in tables below. This corresponds to 96.4% response rate which is reasonable and acceptable for analysis. According to Baruch and Holtom (2008), any response rate from 52.7 and above is 'acceptable'.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 4.1: Age of Respondents

Age Category	Frequency	Percentage
Below 20 years	0	0
21-30 year	140	38
31-40 years	130	35

41-50 years	60	16
51 years and above	40	11
Total	370	100

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The above table shows that, majority of the respondents fall within the age range of 21-30 which represents 140 (38%) of the respondents, followed by those within the age bracket of 31-40 which represents 130 (35%) of the respondents, the category of respondents within the age bracket of 41-50 is represented by 60 (16%), while respondents within the ages of 51 and above represents 40 (11%). Thus, most of the respondents of this study fall within the ages of 21-30 years. There were no respondent in the category of below 20 years.

Table 4.2: Educational Qualification of Respondents.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Primary	110	30
Secondary	190	51
Tertiary	30	8
Uneducated	40	11
Total	370	100%

Source: Field Survey, November 2020.

It was discovered from the table above that, 110 respondents representing 30% obtained primary certificate, while 190 respondents representing 51% of those sampled obtained secondary school qualification or equivalent, 30 which represents 8% of the respondents have tertiary certificate, 40 which represents 11% of the respondents were uneducated. This indicates that majority of the respondents in this study obtained primary certificate. It is also a good indication that respondents in the study had at least one form of formal education or the other.

Table 4.3: Gender Distribution of Respondents.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	240	65
Male	130	35
Total	370	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020.

In the table above out of three hundred and eighty respondents, 240 representing 65% of the respondents were female while 130 representing 35% of the respondents were male. This indicates that majority of the respondents were female.

Table 4.4: Gender Breadwinner in Respondents' Household

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Solely Female (Mother, Sister, Aunty, wife)	88	23.8
Solely male (father, brother, uncle, Husband)	190	51.4
Both	92	24.8
Total	370	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020.

Respondents were requested to state the gender of the breadwinner of their household and the result was presented in the table above. According to the result, 88 of the respondent, representing 23.8% indicated that a female is the sole breadwinner of their household, while 190 respondents representing 51.4% indicated that a male is the sole breadwinner of their household and the remaining 92 representing 24.8% of the respondents indicated that both a male and female contribute as breadwinners for their household. From the above result, it can be seen that more women are also bearing the burden of providing for their family as their male counterparts, thus it would be unfair to continue to relegate them from the helm of economic affairs. There is therefore a need to target economic empowerment of women to give them the required opportunities.

Table 4.5: Respondents' Marital Status.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	157	42.4
Married	200	54.1
Divorced	10	2.7
Widow	3	0.8
Total	370	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020.

The table above shows the marital status of the respondents, 157 which represent 42.4% of the respondents are single, 200 which represent 54.1% of the respondents are married, and 10 representing 2.7% of the respondents are divorced. The remaining 3 representing 0.8% of the respondents are widow. This shows that respondents were of different marital status.

Public's Perception of the Growing Role of Women as Breadwinners of the Family

Respondents were asked questions to show their perception of the growing role of women as bread winners of the family.

Table 4.5: Examining the Growing Role of Women as Breadwinners of the Family

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Women are increasingly beginning to take the role of breadwinners in the family	SA	233	62.9
	A	124	33.5
	DS	-	-
	D	5	1.4
	U	8	2.2
	TOTAL	370	100%
More women are modifying their traditional family roles to include providing for the family and supporting the need of their family	SA	288	77.8
	A	64	17.3
	SD	6	1.6
	D	12	3.3
	U	-	-
	TOTAL	370	100%
More family are beginning to rely more on women.	SA	212	57.3
	A	118	31.9
	SD	9	2.4
	D	26	7
	TOTAL	370	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The result presented above in table 4.5, shows the response and perception of the respondents to the growing role of women as bread winners of the family in Owerri, Imo State. The result shows that 357 respondents representing 96.4% indicated agreement to the statement: ‘Women are increasingly beginning to take the role of breadwinners in the family’. This high agreement indicates that there is high public perception as to the growing role of women as breadwinners in the family. High agreement was also recorded for the statement: ‘More women are modifying their traditional family roles to include providing for the family and supporting the need of their family’. About 352 respondents representing 95.1% were in agreement to the statement, also implying a high public perception to the growing role of women as breadwinners in the family. The result further showed that a high response rate of agreement (N:330; 89.2%) was recorded for the statement ‘More family are beginning to rely more on the capacity of the women to provide and contribute towards the upkeep of the household’. The above results buttress the argument that there is a growing pattern in the society where women are shifting from their traditional assigned role as mothers, wife and home manager to becoming the bread winner and head of the family.

Public's Perception of the Challenges Constraining Women Empowerment in Owerri, Imo State

Table 4.6: Identifying the Challenges Constraining Women Empowerment in Owerri, Imo State

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Inadequate access to good education	336	90.8
Gender norms and discriminatory social norms	370	100
Conflict between career and family	342	92.4
The glass-ceiling phenomenon	320	86.5
Gender disparity	340	91.9

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The above results show the identified challenges constraining women empowerment in Owerri metropolis, Imo State. According to the result showing respondents responses, 336 representing 90.8% of the respondents indicated that inadequate access to good education constrains women empowerment in Owerri, Imo State. Also, all of the respondents making 100% indicated that gender norms and discriminatory social norms constrains women empowerment, while 342 representing 92.4% indicated that conflict between career and family is a challenge constraining women empowerment in Owerri metropolis. About 320 respondents representing 86.5% indicated that 'glass-ceiling phenomenon' also constrains women empowerment and 340 representing 91.9% admit that gender disparity was a challenge to women empowerment in Owerri metropolis.

Determining the Prospects of Women Empowerment as a Means for Sustainable Development in Owerri, Imo State

Table 4.7: Prospects of Women Empowerment as a Means for Sustainable Development in Owerri, Imo State

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Women empowerment will influence development at all levels of the society	SA	185	50
	A	145	39.1
	SD	12	3.2
	D	28	7.6
	U	-	-
	Total	370	100%
Development can only be sustained when women are given equal rights as men	SA	250	67.6
	SA	60	16.2
	A	20	5.4
	SD	20	5.4
	D	10	2.7
	U	10	2.7

	Total	370	100%
economic empowerment of women will lead to poverty reduction and better standard of living	SA	350	94.5
	A	8	2.2
	SD	7	1.9
	D	5	1.4
	U	-	-
	Total	370	100%
Women's economic empowerment will help achieving full recognition and realization of women's economic rights and ultimately, sustainable development	SA	240	78.4
	SA	120	18.9
	A	5	1.4
	SD	5	1.4
	D	-	-
	U	-	-
	Total	370	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The results presented above all point to the fact that there is prospect in women's economic empowerment. For instance, the item 'Women empowerment will influence development at all levels of the society' had 330 'agree' responses representing 89.1%. The item 'Development can only be sustained when women are given equal rights as men' also had a high agreement responses (frequency of 310 representing 83.8%). The item 'Economic empowerment of women will lead to poverty reduction and better standard of living' had a high agreement response from respondents (frequency of 358 representing 96.7%) and the item 'Women's economic empowerment will help in achieving full recognition and realization of women's economic rights and, ultimately, sustainable development' had 360 agreement response representing 97.3%.

Discussion

The study examined the public's perception of the growing role of women as breadwinners of the family; it also identified the challenges constraining women empowerment and determined the prospects of women empowerment as a means for sustainable development in Owerri, Imo State. The study showed that women are fast taking responsibility of heading their family and becoming breadwinners. However the study found out that in the midst of the growing role of women taking charge as breadwinners in the family, they are still constrained by gender disparities which makes it difficult for them to act favourably as their male counterparts in the workplace, business environment and leadership positions. This study therefore makes a case for the women to be empowered in order to strategically position them in the society.

The study specifically found out that more women are becoming the breadwinners of their family either as contributors or solely. It was also found out that there is a growing pattern in the society where women are increasingly shifting or combining their traditional role in the family as wife and mother to include supporting the need of their family or becoming the sole breadwinner of

their family. This therefore inspires the need for women to be empowered and given the necessary support and considerations enjoyed by their male counterparts in the society. This study therefore identified the challenges constraining women empowerment to include: inadequate access to good education, gender norms and discriminatory social norms, conflict between career and family, the glass-ceiling phenomenon and gender disparity.

Women economic empowerment is a key to sustainable development at the household level, the community and state levels in general. Women economic empowerment is advocated because it is essential to eliminate structural gender inequalities in the labour market, business places and reduce women's unpaid work. The study found that women empowerment among other benefits will influence development at all levels of the society. Economic empowerment of women was also found to be capable of leading to poverty reduction and better standard of living. Women's economic empowerment was also found to be capable of helping in achieving full recognition and realization of women's economic rights and, ultimately, sustainable development.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study has made a case for women's economic empowerment. It has particularly revealed the growing role of women in the society and at the household level. A strong patriarchal society with deep-rooted socio-cultural values continues to affect the progress of women's empowerment in the country. The need of the hour is an egalitarian society, where there should be no place for gender superiority. It is argued that women have to be perceived as economic actors in the developing world, and processes to facilitate their empowerment in the entrepreneurship, labour market inclusion and productive work in the state and the nation at large. Improving women capabilities and skills is important to facilitate women's entry into the labour market and enhancing their entrepreneurship development; facilitating access to land and productive inputs and credit is also fundamental. Women's economic empowerment boosts productivity, increases economic div women's and girls' educational attainment contributes to women's economic empowerment and more inclusive economic growth. The study also found that globally, women are paid less than men, even in the face of the rising role they have to play in the family (as breadwinner and home keepers).

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