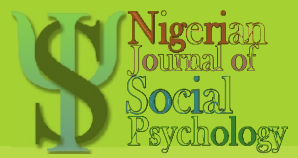


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# Sustaining Poverty Reduction through Gender Inclusive Decision-Making Process

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## ***Abstract***

*Women constitute close to 50% of the population of Nigeria. Women contribute to the economic, social and political development of their societies through playing major roles in the production, processing and marketing of goods which the majority of rural and urban population depend on. However, women have been subjected to more poverty and deprivation because of their inferior status to men in gender roles. Through adverse social, institutional and discriminatory cultural practices, women have been denied the adequate opportunities of participating actively in formulating economic, social and political policies. This paper focused on the relationship between inclusive decision making process at different levels of governance and socio-economic enhancement of women. The paper explored qualitative data through unstructured interview of 127 respondents and two Focused Group Discussions conducted in two Local Government Areas of Ebonyi State. The findings confirmed existing data from previous studies that societies with full involvement of women in governance at all levels enhanced their overall socio-economic development. We therefore conclude that gender inclusive decision making process will lead to a reduction in poverty, encourage social and gender equality, rejuvenate socio-economic activity and enhance national development.*

**Keywords:** *Sustenance, poverty reduction, gender, inclusiveness, decision making*

## **Introduction**

The concern for poverty has become palpable globally because poverty does not only afflict over 700 million (8.5%) of the global population, being those that live on less than \$2 a day (World Bank Group, 2024) but has implications on the social, economic, political and security of life of nation-states (UNDP, 2022). Sub-Saharan Africa with over 438.6 million people adjudged to be poor can be said to have a preponderance of the world poor because it harbours three-quarters of the global population in extreme poverty (Saifaddin, 2025). In Nigeria, records show that over 42% representing about 88.4 Nigerians are multi-dimensionally poor (Sasu, 2023; NBS, 2022). The measures for eradication of poverty reflect in the targets of both the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals.

Poverty is pervasive among men and women in both rural and urban areas of both developed and developing countries. It is however imperative to re-emphasize a well known fact that poverty impacts the women much more than the men. Women have indeed suffered grave indignities of social exclusion as a consequence of tradition, culture, socio-economic alienation and perception of women status by both men and women (Payne & Nasser, 2003). The extent of the increasing disproportionate representation of poverty against women popularised by Diana Pierce in 1978 as the “feminisation of poverty” reflects the burden of poverty women and their families carry, particularly in developing countries.

The subjugation of women despite their pivotal roles in the enhancement of the family and the community is a manifestation of power relation in the society. Power relations itself is a reflection of the individuals and groups relationship to the economic infrastructure. The loss of control of economic power invariably manifests in loss of political power which concomitantly will lead to lack of capacity for effective participation in the decision making process at different levels of society. The inevitable outcome of these deprivations is that poverty of women is a result of their marginalisation in the socio-political processes in the society. Put succinctly, women are poor because of their powerlessness (Tilley, 2008).

Our choice of gender relations as explanatory variables in the conceptualization of poverty among women is because it offers us the opportunity of situating the preponderance of poverty among the women as part of the general system of exploitative production relations. Women therefore being the most subjugated in a patriarchal society will naturally suffer more poverty and deprivation (Federice, 2004). Gender is not biologically determined structure but a system of statuses, roles and role relationships constructed by the dominant class in the society. The distinguishing factor in gender relations is that women are the only victims of gender oppression, whereas class exploitation affects both men and women (Agom, 2004).

In most Third World societies, evidences abound that women for reasons camouflaged as sacrosanct are despised in decisions on matters that are of major concern in their lives (Tadros, 2014). Denial of women opportunities in decision making process is more pronounced at the compound and community levels. This is because women are by custom not allowed to belong to cultural groups in the community that are central to the decision making in the communities. In Igbo land for instance, women are by custom not qualified to belong to *Umunna* meeting, elders group, masquerade cult, *Igwe* cabinet, council of chiefs and king makers that are central to the compound and community decision making process. The only organisations the women belong to, the *umuadas* whose powers though have some impact in some segments of the society are generally speaking limited in their influence in the society's fundamental decision in key areas of their lives (including the lives of women).

Political participation is an area where the marginalisation of women has been obvious, because it impacts deleteriously on women decision making power and exacerbates their poverty situation. In Nigeria, the level of discrimination against women in politics is unprecedented. This is shown by the fact that the executive and legislative representation of women in Nigeria between 1999 and 2023 has been very poor and far from meeting the recommended UNO 35% affirmative action declaration for women participation in national governance. For instance, only 181 women won electoral positions in the 1999 elections. This is a paltry 1.62% of 1999 electoral positions. Also, women cabinet representation between 1999 and 2015 has been a paltry 15% (Quadri, 2016). Women representation between the 1st and 4th assemblies of the first and second republics ranged between 0-3% (Simbine, 2003). Also women representation in the 9th and 10<sup>th</sup> Federal legislative assemblies reduced to 7 (8.4%) in the Senate and 11 (3.1%) in House of Representatives making representation in the 9<sup>th</sup> National Assembly ridiculously 11.4 percent (Onyinyechi, 2022). In the 10<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, women representation in the Senate and House of Representatives are abysmally 3 (2.7%) of the 190 membership and 17 (4.7%) respectively: while only 8 (16.7%) women are in the enlarged 48 member Federal Executive Council (FEC) (Adelagun, 2024).

### **Women exclusiveness in decision making and poverty in Ebonyi State**

In Ebonyi state, 79.7% of the population are in abject poverty. This places Ebony State in the fourth position among the states with the highest poverty rate after Sokoto, Taraba and

Jigawa States (Statista, 2021; NBS, 2019). Ebonyi women both in the urban and rural areas are faced with the stark realities of poverty. Poverty of women in the state is in all dimensions ranging from squalid housing, malnutrition, unsafe water to poor sanitation, illiteracy and degraded health condition (Edeh, Udoikam, & Ugbala, 2019).

Women in Ebonyi State are denied access to family inheritance, community land, economic trees, state intervention grants, credits and other facilities that enhance productivity and better living (Oyeranti & Oyaiwole, 2020). A major reason for the poor state of Ebonyi women is that in a deeply patriarchal society, power relations have placed women in such a disadvantaged position that has implicitly denied them participation in the decision making process in the determination of economic, social and political issues in such a way that women degradation and discrimination is rationalised as normal (Klungman, 2004). Furthermore, the poverty of women in Ebonyi state is a function of their alienation from the political process. Ebonyi state has been particularly unfair to women in political participation. For instance, only 8 women out of 86 cabinet members have occupied commissionership positions between 1999 and 2015. There were also only three women in the 21 member cabinet of Governor David Umahi in 2019 (Aluma, 2019), and seven female members as well as a female deputy governor in the Governor Nwifuru enlarged 35 member cabinet in 2023 (Nnachi, 2023) respectively. In the same vein, the women involvement in the legislative arm of the government has been quite condescending. The table below shows the deplorable representation of women in the Ebonyi state executive and legislative arms of government in the last four administrations of the fourth republic.

**Table 1:** Women representation in Ebonyi State governments between 1999 and 2023

Office	Positions	1999	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019	2023	%
Governor	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Deputy Governor	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	14.2
Commissioners		2 (16)	3 (17)	1 (17)	0 (17)	2 (19)	3 (18)	7 (35)	13
Speaker (House of Assembly)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Membership of House of Assembly	26	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	8

**Source:** Compilation by the researchers (2024)

The table above shows that there were only 14 women House of Assembly members in a 182 legislator`s membership between 1999 and 2023 in Ebonyi State. Again, there has not been a female speaker in the Ebonyi House of Assembly in the fourth Republic of the last 25 years (1999-2024).

Similarly the situation in the two local government areas of the state paints a despicable picture of women dismal performance in political activities. Again the table below indicates the level of women representation in the governance structure of Abakiliki Local Government Area.

**Table 2:** Women representation in the administrations of Abakiliki LGA between 2000 and 2024

Office	Position available	2000	2005	2008	2012	2015	2020	2024	%
Chairman of council	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vice chairman of council	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	28.5
Speaker of council	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	14.2
Councillors	14	3	2	2	4	1	2	3	17.3

**Source:** Compilation by the researchers, 2024

The above table indicate that women have had no chairmanship position in the last twenty-four years of democratic dispensation of the fourth republic. The women had two vice-chairmanship and one leader of council positions out of seven administrations representing 28.5 percent and 14.2 percent respectively; just as women constitute only 17 (17.3%) of the 98 councillorship membership in the last twenty-four years

**Table 3:** Women representation in the administrations of Ebony LGA (2000 to 2024)

Office	Position available	2000	2005	2008	2012	2015	2020	2024	%
Chairman of council	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	14.2
Vice chairman of council	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	14.2
Speaker of council	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	14.2
Councillors	13	4	2	3	3	2	4	3	21

**Source:** Compilation by the researchers, 2024

Again Ebonyi Local Government Area political representation of women has been very lacklustre as shown in the above table. Women only had one position each representing 14 percent of the seven positions in the chairmanship, vice-chairmanship and speaker of council in the last twenty-four years respectively. Also, out of 91 councillors in seven local government administration in the last twenty-four years, women only had 19 representing 21% of the council membership.

Thus, from the family to the local government through the state and to the federation, women have been wantonly disregarded in the political affairs that catalyze decision making process in the society. The implication is that women are denied access to the socio-economic and productive resources of the society. But more importantly, the women by being denied political access are also denied the participation in the design, formulation and the execution of poverty eradication projects and programmes. Unfortunately, these projects achieve little or no success because of the adoption of top-bottom approach rather than the bottom-up approach in their design and execution. When the target group for the projects lose touch of

the entire process because of their powerlessness, mistrust will set in; resources will be misapplied and sometimes misappropriated. The projects will be hijacked by the bourgeois class who arrogate to themselves the repository of knowledge of the needs and priorities of the people. The critical needs of the target group are misconceived. Development initiative that is conceived in this manner not only become bereft of anthropocentric purposes, but in the main become dialectically antithetical to the interest of the people. In the process, poverty that is supposed to be tackled by the programmes remain unchanged and in some cases exacerbated because the group that is to be the beneficiaries lose control of the decision making process that articulated the projects *ab-initio*.

In this study, we are going to explore how lack of inclusive decision making process have undermined the poverty alleviation projects and programmes in the Abakiliki and Ebonyi local government areas of Ebonyi state, particularly as they concern the gender question in the distribution of the development and underdevelopment of the Ebonyi state and by extension, the Nigerian federation. In line with the foregoing, we are going to interrogate the following research objectives:

- The level of poverty among women in Abakiliki and Ebonyi LGAs in Ebonyi state;
- The relationship between political participation and decision making power of women;
- The relationship between ownership and control of economic resources and participation in decision making;
- The extent to which level of education encourage the capacity for decision making;
- The level at which women organisation and interventions enhance women capacity for decision making process;

## **Materials and Methods**

**Research setting:** The research setting is two Local Government Areas of Ebonyi State, South-East Nigeria. Ebonyi state was created in 1996. The state has an area of 6, 488sqkm<sup>2</sup> and population density of 444km<sup>2</sup> (Ebonyi State ministry of Land and Housing (2023). The state has population of 2,880,400 as at 2022 with the females having a higher number of 1,112,791 and the males with a number of 1,064,156 (National Population Commission [NPC], 2022). The state has 13 local government areas two of which (Abakiliki and Ebonyi Local Government Areas) constitute our study area. Abakiliki Local Government Area has a population of 223,000 as at 2022 (NPC, 2022) with Nkaliki as the local government headquarters. The local government has thirteen communities that include: Abakpa, Amachi, Amagu, Amagu Unuhu, Azuiyi Udene, Azuiyiokwu Layout, Edda, Izzi Unuhu, Nduagu, Ekpoitumo Ndebor, Okpitumo Ndiegu and Timber Shed.

Abakiliki Local Government Area shares the capital city status with Ebonyi LGA. It is a trade centre and well known for its lead, zinc and limestone deposits. It hosts the university community and other government institutions. Ebonyi Local Government Area has a population of 189, 500 (NPC, 2022) with 12 communities and Onuebonyi Achara as the headquarters. The communities in the local government include: Amachi, Amagu, Edda, Ishieke, Izzi Unuhu, Nkaleke Achara, Nkaleke Echera among others. The local government is basically agricultural but has strong commercial and industrial presence that includes mechanic site, sprawling Ebonyi State rice mills, fertilizer plant and quarry sites among other economic and political centres that are both publicly owned and private sector driven.

**Participants:** The study was conducted on 127 participants who were only females of minimum of twenty-five years that were selected through a multi-stage sampling technique that included cluster, purposive and random sampling from three communities (Nkaliki, Amagu and Abakpa communities) from Abakiliki and three communities; Onu-Ebonyi, Ishieke and Izzi Unuhu from Ebony Local Government Areas of Ebony State. The three communities from the LGAs were purposively selected on the basis of their contiguous positioning to each other which made it convenient for the researchers to cover within the research period. Random sampling method was used to select participants from the study population that have been clustered in the communities. For purposes of proportional representation, 70 participants were selected from Abakiliki LGA, while 57 respondents were selected from Ebonyi LGA. There were also 38 participants in the Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with 20 FGD participants from Abakiliki LGA and 18 FGD participants from Ebonyi LGA.

**Methods and sources of data collection:** The instrument of data collection was In-depth Interview (IDI) interview conducted on 127 respondents selected for the study. This method enabled the researchers to generate qualitative data. The questions were structured in such a way that enabled the participants to express their views seamlessly and freely without any encumbrances; having been assured of the confidentiality of their identities and answers. For easy interactions the researchers conducted the interviews with assistants of interpreters for easy elucidation of information from participants who could not communicate in English language or even central Igbo language. Data from the field work were recorded both manually and electronically. The essence of qualitative data is that they reflect a genuine way of life of a people; their experiences, attitudes and beliefs (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). This approach is therefore more auspicious in this type of study because the participants expressed their views intimately and sometimes with tinge of emotions, more so being in most cases the direct victims of the system under study (Bryna, 2016). Primary data were also elicited through the use of two Focused Group Discussion conducted from the two local government areas. The field work for the collection of data lasted between August to November, 2024. The study was also availed of secondary data sources through extensive use of published works and official information from government offices.

In carrying out the research, the ethical standards that guide the collection of data were strictly followed. The participants joined on their volition; more over the participants were availed of the reasons for the research and were assured of their confidentiality. The participants also had the option of withdrawing their participation at any time in the course of the field work.

**Data analysis:** The study was based on a descriptive research design. The recorded interviews were transcribed into conditions that enabled analysis and description. The data obtained from the respondents were presented in a descriptive and narrative format in a way that reflected our objectives. Frequency distribution and percentages were used to present the data where necessary.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

**Table 4.** Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Age bracket</b>		
25-34	25	20
35-44	30	24
45-54	36	28
55-65	21	18
65 & above	15	11
Total	127	100
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	34	27
Marred	66	52
Widowed	15	12
Divorce/separated	12	9
Total	127	100
<b>Educational qualification</b>		
primary	47	37
secondary	50	39
tertiary	30	24
Total	127	100
<b>Occupational/professional group</b>		
Public/civil service	31	25
Trading	27	21
Farming	33	26
Skill artisan	23	18
Others	13	10
Total	127	100
<b>Religious affiliation</b>		
Christianity	112	88
Islam	8	6
African religion	7	6
Total	127	100
<b>Membership of social/political organisation</b>		
Membership	35	28
Non-membership	92	72
Total	127	100
<b>Source:</b> Field work, 2024		

Majority of our participants are within the age bracket of 35 and 54 years as they represent 66 (52%). Participants in the age bracket of 25-34 years are 25 representing 20% while those that claim ages 55 and above 65 constitute 36 (29%) of the participants. The preponderance of our respondents 66 (52%) representation is married. The single and the widowed represent



34 (27%) and 15 (12%) respectively, while the separated and the divorced make up the remaining 12 (9%). Most of the participants constituting 50 (39%) stopped their education at secondary level, while 47 (37%) and 30 (24%) of the participants hold primary and tertiary educational certificates respectively. Public/civil service and farming with 31 (25%) and 33 (26%) respectively are major occupations of the participants, while trading and other occupations represent 27 (21%) 13 (10%) respectively; the participants engaged in other skills such as fashion designing, hair dressing, beauticians etc constitute 23 (18%) of the participants. . The participants that are Christians are 112 (88%) while Islam and African Traditional Religion representing 8 (6.7%) and 7 (5.3%) of the participants respectively. One major characteristic of our participants that is germane to our study is their membership of social and political organisations. Our findings as can be seen from the table indicated that only 35 (28%) of the participants belong to one form of social and political organisations, while 92 (72%) of them are not involved in any socio-political organisations. We categorise social and political organisations as feminist and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and political parties.

## Results and Discussions

### The level of poverty among women in Abakiliki and Ebonyi LGAs of Ebonyi State.

More than 90% of the participants agree that the level of poverty among women is unprecedented. Responses to the question on manifestations of poverty showed that majority of the participants agree that the indicators of poverty include: deprivations of basic necessities of life (87%); recourse to menial jobs (73%); the nature of income generating activities (69%); housing conditions (81%); accessibility to health and other infrastructures (68%); the nature of nutrition (82%); lack of control over resources (58%); and denial of participation in the decision-making process of the society (54%). Our FGD concur on the severity of poverty among women.

Indeed, one the participants argued that,

*If poverty has to do with the inability to meet with the basic necessities of life then I don't know how many of us in this community that are not poor. My brother (referring to one of the research assistants) meeting the need of ordinary basic food like rice, yam, cassava and even potato that used to be taken for granted has become increasingly difficult such that many people go to sleep hungry. We are not talking of clothing beverages or meet; we are talking about basic food (carbohydrate)*

While agreeing with above participant on the unprecedented poverty in the communities, an FGD participant observed that “many women in the community have resorted to menial jobs, most of the jobs being humiliating and even dehumanising to redress the deteriorating pangs of poverty. The construction sites in the communities are filled with women doing *labouring jobs*; some women, particularly the younger ones have become involved in prostitution with all the associated vagaries”

The statistics from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022) AND Statistica (2022) among other studies affirm the above findings that the poverty rate among Ebonyi citizens is unprecedented and particularly the women in the state share disproportionately over 78% of the state`s poverty rate. Also Edeh, Udoikah and Ugbala (2019) in their study of poverty

programmes in Ebonyi State discovered that women constitute the significant majority of the Ebonyi State 65 percent poverty rate and that village women and aged farmers lack access to road, health, electricity and even basic nutrients. In the Abakiliki and Ikwo LGAs, the poverty rate among women is enormous and constitutes over 75% of the poor in the area (Valera, 2020). In a study of poverty among the women of Northern Nigeria, Ajayi (2014) showed that the scourge of poverty is more pronounced on the female gender than on the male gender because of cultural norms and values, gendered division of assets and power dynamics between men and women.

### **The relationship between political participation and inclusive decision making among women.**

Majority of the participants (72%) are of the opinion that it is desirable for women to be fully involved in politics. For the 25% of the participants, the nature of the Nigerian politics and the attitude of women in politics make participation of women in politics of no effect in the life of women. However, for the participants that responded positively to the participation of women in politics, noted that it will enhance their involvement in the decision making process. This is because both elective and appointive positions in governments are in most cases guaranteed through the membership of political parties. Women however, face inhibiting challenges in their efforts in political involvement. Some of the inhibiting factors include: financial constraints; time stress; government policies; cultural and social inhibitions; false perception from both men and women; and the nature of Nigerian politics that is based on manipulations and thuggery.

Participation of women in politics is a *sine-qua-non* in the quest for freedom and economic well being; it helps to reinvigorate full and equitable democracy and sustainable development (Lynnede, 2009). In their study on women and the dialectics of gender inclusive governance structure in Nigeria, Eyisi and Njemanze (2022) showed that the marginalisation and exclusion of women in family, community, state and federal decision making and political processes does not only encumber women's capacity and potentials in extirpating poverty but also circumvent the community, state and national efforts in poverty alleviation and eradication processes. Eteng (2011) also averred that the exclusion of women in the politics of Ebonyi State and Nigeria has truncated the achievement of realising full balanced sustainable development in the state. However, women according to Ajayi (2004) lack economic power to enable them pursue political power; hence the need for government deliberate affirmative action in favour of involvement in politics as this will enhance development.

### **Ownership and control of economic resources; and inclusiveness in decision-making process.**

For the majority (74%) of the participants, the inaccessibility of women to the resources of the society is a major factor in the exclusion of women from the decision making process of the society. For the 25% of the participants, the relationship between control of resources and inclusiveness in decision making is not clear because what is important is the character, integrity and competence rather than wealth. However, some participants argue that inclusiveness in decision making for women is contingent on the control of societal resources; women's voice are only heard within the families where they have access to the land and economic trees through their husbands. The inhibiting factors that deny women access to the community resources also exclude them from partaking in framing policies and programmes for the society. Most of our interviewees affirmed strongly that alienation from

economic resources hinder their productive capacity which limit their income. For instance, one of the participants succinctly averred “

*The major factor sustaining poverty among us in this community is that we lack the leverage to expand our productive capacity. Take the issue of land for farming; on our own we can only farm small patch of land allowed us by our husbands which means that our engagement in large scale farming must be for the entire family or for my husband who owns all the lands. By extension, he controls all the resources and products of the family; he distributes resources to family members including his wives as he wills. This situation makes the women perpetually dependent on their husband both economically and other wise.*

The debate on the relationship between the economic control and political control has been an ongoing one. Those who control the resources of the society have greater say in what happens in the society; which is exactly why the men control the society. The legitimization of the degradation of women through the process of exploitation according to Federice (2004) brings into focus, the part played by systems of production in the genesis and reproduction and sustenance of feminization of poverty. For women to be part of decision making therefore, they must according to Klungman (2004) have economic capital, in the form of ownership of and control over resources, income and assets; particularly when this capital is combined with cultural and social capital such as education.

### **The extent to which level of education enhance the participation of women in decision making.**

Up to 90% of our participants concur that acquiring education is a major fillip in the reduction of poverty among the vulnerable groups in the society including women. Education enables the woman to meet the requirements for positions in the bureaucracy, executive and the legislature at different levels of government where decisions are taken. When women are represented in decision making structures they help to enunciate policies that will improve the conditions of women in the society. Education for women is also a leveller; it creates the conditions for social and gender equality and sustainable development. Through women education, institutionalised discriminatory practices that embellish the patriarchal stranglehold on the society will be tackled, thereby creating a society where the emancipation of women and other vulnerable groups would mean equal opportunities for all in accessing societal resources. In dissecting the relationship between education and poverty in the study area, one of the participants during the interview explained thus:

*What we lack in acquiring education is the opportunity we insist our daughters must gain and that is why all my daughters are in school; the same with most members of the community. Our lack of education limited our opportunities for work in government and industries other than as cleaners and office assistants. Lack of education also inhibited our capacity to contend with social and cultural problems women face and which combined with our illiteracy has perpetuated the excruciating poverty we suffer as women in this community. We do hope our daughters will not suffer the same fate.*

However, the girl-child has been short changed when it comes to acquiring education in Nigerian society. When there is plummeting resources in the family the girls education always becomes the first casualty so that the limited resources will be used for the boys` education (Campbel, 2016). The Nigerian poverty situation disproportionately affects the Nigerian women and girls. Girls are less likely than the boys to be literate. In the poorest parts of the country 75% of girls are out of school and in some regions, the share of un-enrolled girls is close to twice that of the boys (Abara, 2012). According to World Bank (2015 report), only 50% of Nigerian women participate in the labour force, compared to almost 60% of men. Also fewer women apply for entry to university as a result of their being fewer girls completing secondary school education and this has roots in primary school. Again, women`s increased education is positively associated with autonomy in their own health care decision making.

### **The level at which women`s involvement in social and political organisations enhance participation in decision making process and access to intervention programmes**

Most of our participants (83%) are of the opinion that women involvement in social and political organisations like feminine groups, cooperative societies as well as political parties and other pressure groups increase their opportunities of being part of societal inclusive decision making process. For instance, government economic and financial packages and grants are majorly accessed through groups. Also, recruitment into political offices is done through membership of political parties. None involvement in social and political organisations, also means deprivation of access to social and political resources of the society. Again, most of the participants (56%) contended that poverty intervention programmes and pet projects available to the Local Governments are mostly not accessible to them. Most of the participants argue that the resources from the poverty reduction programmes and pet projects are easily hijacked by women political desperados who claim that they represent them. Our FGD participants argue that full involvement of women in social and political organisations will not only act as a bulwark against the deprivation of their rights and privileges, but will put the women in a strong position to be part of the initiators, formulators and implementers of the programmes and policies of government. According to Hitun & Weldon (2011), women`s political power also depends on their collective capabilities. Women organising with other women is critical to their questioning of men`s dominance and to the solidarity needed to challenge it.

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that majority of women and girls in Nigeria and particularly in Ebonyi State still face serious feminization of poverty with attendant privations of basic sustenance amenities, scourge of diseases, violence and vulnerability to right abuses. These inanities against the women are camouflaged as reflections of cultural, traditional and religious norms. Government has made tepid efforts towards mitigating these problems. Countless conferences have been made by national and international organisations with the targets of curbing these issues. In these paper however, we have identified the basic problems of women as a consequence of denial of opportunity of involvement in the decision-making process of the society; particularly on those issues that pattern to the poverty alleviation and other issues that are specific to the women and other vulnerable groups.

We also identified the factors that have attenuated the capacity of women to be part of an inclusive decision making process. Some of the factors include: lack of control of community economic resources; limited education for the girl-child; non involvement in the national

political process; and lack of socio-political organisation among women and other vulnerable groups. Some of these factors are reflections of the society's entrenched cultural religious and traditional inhibitions. Most of the factors are also manifestations of the country's colonial past which have been unfavourable to the female sex. These unfortunate dispositions have persisted in many parts of the country.

The Nigerian state has unfortunately exacerbated the situation through its laws and its incapacity to control untoward machinations that characterise some of the institutional processes. It is the contention of this paper that efforts should be made towards engendering gender equality through inclusive decision making process. Gender inclusive governance process will lead to a reduction in poverty, encourage social and gender equity, rejuvenate socio-economic activity and enhance national development.

### **Recommendations (Policy Implications)**

In view of the above situation, we make the following recommendations. Our recommendation is holistic because it involves cultural, legal, economic, social and political dynamics that have surreptitiously deprived majority of women their right for inclusive decision making thereby perpetuating their subjugation and poverty.

1. Government should be in the vanguard of efforts geared towards the extirpation of obnoxious discriminatory and customary practices that are camouflaged as sacrosanct and divine; and which tend to inhibit women from expressing their God given capacity to the fullest. These discriminatory practices have denied women access to communal resources and inheritance.
2. The state should work towards reviewing laws that tend to deny women their right of full participation in the socio-economic activities of the society. Such laws as indigeneship, Land Use Act, Sharia (Islamic law) etc have been exploited by certain segments of the society to deny women employment, political and economic positions in their communities and states.
3. It is now time for the Nigerian state to make conscious efforts to meet 35% affirmative action for women involvement in governance. There is now urgent need for constitutional reforms that will guarantee the application of quotas for women as a basis for political representation. It has also become imperative that deliberate efforts be made to review the system of politics to eschew undue monetization, *god fatherism*, *thuggery* and violence that undermine women political participation.
4. The girl-child education, particularly in certain parts of the country and in Ebonyi state should be given desired attention to enable the women determine their life chances. Education will also equip them with the right attitude to challenge entrenched reprehensible practices that they have been unfortunately been socialised into, but which have unwittingly subjugated them in our patriarchal society.
5. Women should be empowered economically through loan facilities, grants and other business and economic packages to enable them become financially and economically independent. Economic independence will guarantee self determination in taking personal decisions. There is need to formulate and execute the poverty alleviation programmes and policies with a sense of responsibility, integrity and probity by the state so that the expected impact will be achieved.
6. There is need for a co-ordinated and articulate enlightenment and raising of consciousness of women on their rights through education and socio-political advocacy. The women need to mobilise themselves through the promotion of socio-political organisations and grass root movements. These movements will not only

promote advocacy for addressing women marginalisation, but develop comprehensive political strategy for securing more positions of power for themselves through elections and appointments.

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