



Planning Strategies for Enhancing Inclusion and Empowerment in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

This study examined planning strategies for enhancing inclusion and empowerment in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State, Nigeria. The study utilized a quantitative research design, and data were collected from 320 respondents using a structured questionnaire. The results showed that 50% of the respondents were male and 50% were female, while the majority of respondents were between the ages of 25-40 (60%) and had tertiary education (45%). In terms of access to healthcare, 50% reported limited access, while 40% reported limited access to education. Furthermore, 60% reported being excluded from political participation, and 70% reported significant gender inequalities. The findings suggest that there are significant challenges to inclusion and empowerment in Obio/Akpor LGA. To address these challenges, the study recommends the implementation of planning strategies such as improvement of access to healthcare and education, addressing gender inequalities, promoting youth empowerment, and creating more employment opportunities. By implementing these strategies, it is possible to enhance inclusion and empowerment, and promote the well-being of individuals and communities in Obio/Akpor LGA.

Keywords: Inclusion, Empowerment, Planning, Strategies, Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State.

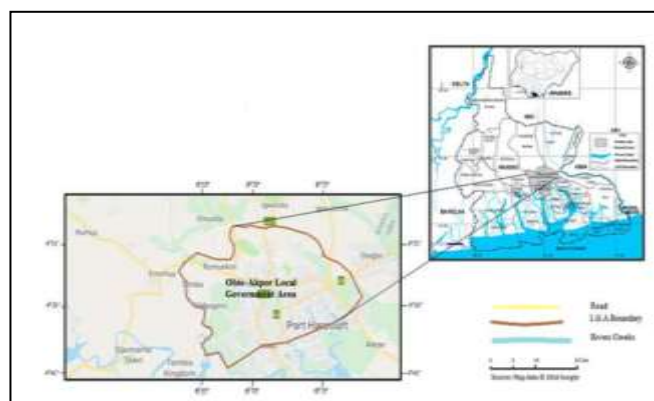
1. Introduction

Inclusion and empowerment are critical components of sustainable development. Inclusion refers to the process of ensuring that all individuals and communities have equal access to resources, services, and opportunities, regardless of their background or circumstances. Empowerment refers to the process of enabling individuals and communities to take control of their lives and make decisions that affect them. In Nigeria, like many other developing countries, there are significant disparities in terms of inclusion and empowerment, particularly in rural areas.

Obio/Akpor LGA is one of the largest Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria. Despite its size, the area faces significant challenges in terms of inclusion and empowerment. This study aims to provide an understanding of the current situation in Obio/Akpor LGA, identify barriers to inclusion and empowerment, and propose planning strategies to overcome these barriers. The objectives of this study are to provide an understanding of the current situation in Obio/Akpor LGA in terms of inclusion and empowerment, identify barriers to inclusion and empowerment in Obio/Akpor LGA and to propose planning strategies for enhancing inclusion and empowerment in Obio/Akpor LGA.

The Study Area

Obio/Akpor LGA (Local Government Area) is located in Rivers State, Nigeria. It is one of the 23 LGAs in the state and is situated in the southern part of Nigeria. The LGA shares boundaries with Port Harcourt LGA to the south, Ikwerre LGA to the west, Oyigbo LGA to the north, and Emohua LGA to the east. The study area in its geography encompasses eighty eight (88) communities (residential neighbourhoods) and covers an area of approximately 311 square kilometers. The total population when projected from the 1991 National Population Census data at 6.5 growth rate for 30 years (1991-2021) was One Million, Seven Hundred and Seventy Six Thousand, One Hundred and Forty Seven (1776147) people. The major ethnic groups in Obio/Akpor LGA are the Ikwerre, Ogoni, and Etche people. The LGA has a diverse economy, with activities such as trading, farming, and oil and gas exploration contributing significantly to its GDP.



Map of Nigeria, Rivers State showing Obio/ Akpor LGA

Source: Authors, 2023

2. Literature Reviews

2.1 Inclusion

Inclusion has been defined differently by various authors over time, but generally, it refers to the process of ensuring that all individuals or groups have access to the same opportunities, resources, and rights. Here are some definitions of inclusion from different authors and dates:

UNESCO (2009): 'Inclusive education is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education.'

Booth and Ainscow (2002): 'Inclusion is about the presence, participation, and achievement of all students.'

Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994): 'Inclusion is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education.'

Meyers and Silver (1999): 'Inclusion means the full and active participation of all individuals in all aspects of society.'

United Nations (2006): 'Inclusion refers to the process of empowering individuals to make choices and decisions that improve their lives, and it encompasses the removal of all forms of discrimination and ensuring equal access to opportunities and resources.'

These definitions highlight the importance of creating a more inclusive society that values diversity and provides equal access to opportunities, resources, and rights for all individuals, regardless of their background or characteristics.

2.2 Empowerment

The keyword 'empowerment' has been defined by various authors.

Kabeer (2007): 'Empowerment is the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.'

Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland (2008): 'Empowerment is a process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.'

Cornwall and Brock (2008): 'Empowerment is about creating the conditions in which individuals and communities can take control of their lives, and participate fully in the decisions that affect them.'

Zimmerman, Boonthum & Lerner (2016): 'Empowerment involves increasing the control that individuals or groups have over their own lives, as well as increasing their ability to affect change in their communities and larger social systems.'

Hirshfield and Tariq (2020): 'Empowerment is the process of building the skills, knowledge, and confidence of individuals and groups to take control of their own lives, make informed decisions, and take action to create positive change.'

These definitions emphasize the importance of creating conditions for people to take control of their own lives, make choices and take action towards desired outcomes. Empowerment involves building skills, knowledge, and confidence, and increasing individual and collective agency to create change. It is also seen as a process that is dynamic and ongoing, and can involve different forms of power, such as economic, political, social, and cultural power.

2.3 Relationship between Inclusion and Empowerment

There is a strong relationship between inclusion and empowerment, as both concepts are related to the goal of promoting equality and social justice. Here are some perspectives from authors on the relationship between inclusion and empowerment, along with their dates:

Kabeer (2005): 'Empowerment is a process of overcoming barriers to participation and access, and promoting inclusion and social justice.'

Sen (2005): 'Inclusion is a necessary condition for empowerment, as people who are excluded from society are unlikely to have the capabilities and opportunities to exercise agency and make meaningful choices.'

Cornwall and Brock (2008): 'Empowerment requires creating the conditions for inclusion, and inclusion requires empowering individuals and communities to participate in decision-making and shape their own lives.'

Zimmerman et al. (2016): 'Inclusion and empowerment are closely linked, as promoting inclusion involves increasing access to resources and opportunities, and empowering individuals and groups to use these resources and opportunities to create change.'

Hirshfield and Tariq (2020): 'Inclusion is the foundation for empowerment, as it involves creating the conditions for everyone to participate and have a voice, and empowering individuals and groups involves building the skills, knowledge, and confidence to exercise agency and make decisions that affect their lives.'

These perspectives suggest that inclusion and empowerment are interconnected and mutually reinforcing concepts. Inclusion provides the foundation for empowerment by creating the conditions for everyone to participate and have a voice, while empowerment involves building the skills, knowledge, and confidence to exercise agency and make meaningful choices.

3.0 Methodology

The study utilized a survey design to collect data on inclusion and empowerment in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State. A total of 320 participants were selected through a random sampling technique from the population of the LGA. The survey questionnaire consisted of questions related to demographics, access to healthcare and education, level of political participation, and gender inequalities.

Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentages, were used to analyze the data. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to conduct the statistical analysis. A chi-square test was conducted to examine the relationship between gender and feeling excluded from the political process in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State.

The null hypothesis (H₀) was formulated as follows: There is no association between gender and feeling excluded from the political process in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State. The alternative hypothesis (H_a) was that there is an association between gender and feeling excluded from the political process.

The study also identified challenges to inclusion and empowerment in the literature through a systematic review of relevant academic articles. The findings from this review were used to inform the planning strategies recommended in the study.

4.0 Findings and Discussions

Survey results for planning strategies for enhancing inclusion and empowerment in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State have been presented about the demographics, access to healthcare and education, political participation, and gender inequalities in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State. The survey was conducted among 320 respondents, and the results were presented in both percentage and frequency format.

4.1 The Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 4.1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the survey on planning strategies for enhancing inclusion and empowerment in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State. The sample consisted of 320 respondents, with an equal number of males and females.

In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents (60%) fell within the age range of 25-40 years, while 25% were between the ages of 41-55, and 15% were aged between 18-24 years.

Regarding education, the majority of respondents (45%) had tertiary education, while 35% had secondary education and 20% had primary education.

In terms of employment status, 30% were self-employed, 25% were employed in the private sector, and 20% were unemployed. 15% of the respondents were employed in the public sector, and 10% were students.

Table 4.1 Demographics

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	160	50%
Male	160	50%

Age		
18-24	48	15%
25-40	192	60%
41-55	80	25%
Education		
Primary	64	20%
Secondary	112	35%
Tertiary	144	45%
Employment Status		
Employed (Private)	80	25%
Employed (Public)	48	15%
Self-Employed	96	30%
Unemployed	64	20%
Student	32	10%

Source: Authors, 2022

4.2 Access to Health Care

Table 4.2 presents the respondents' access to healthcare in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State. The table shows that 50% of the respondents reported having limited access to healthcare services, while 30% reported having adequate access, and 20% reported having no access to healthcare services. These results suggest that there may be challenges with healthcare access in Obio/Akpor LGA, with a significant proportion of the population experiencing limited or no access to healthcare services. These challenges may be related to a lack of infrastructure, limited healthcare resources, and/or other socio-economic factors that may impact access to healthcare services.

Table 4.2 Access to Health Care

Access to Healthcare	Frequency	Percentage
Limited access	160	50%
Adequate access	96	30%
No access	64	20%

Source: Authors, 2022

4.3 Access to Education

Table 4.3 presents the respondents' access to education in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State. The table shows that 40% of the respondents reported having limited access to education, while 35% reported having adequate access, and 25% reported having no access to education.

These results suggest that there may be challenges with access to education in Obio/Akpor LGA, with a significant proportion of the population experiencing limited or no access to educational opportunities. These challenges may be related to a lack of infrastructure, limited educational resources, and/or other socio-economic factors that may impact access to education.

Improving access to education is critical to promoting the social and economic well-being of individuals and communities. Education is a fundamental human right and an essential tool for promoting economic development, reducing poverty, and fostering social cohesion.

Table 4.3 Access to Education

Access to Education	Frequency	Percentage
Limited access	128	40%
Adequate access	112	35%
No access	80	25%

Source: Authors, 2022

4.4 Level of Political Participation among Respondents

Table 4.4 presents the level of political participation among respondents in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State. The table shows that 60% of the respondents reported being excluded from political participation, while 20% reported being somewhat included and 20% reported being fully included in political participation.

These results suggest that there may be significant challenges with political participation in Obio/Akpor LGA, with a majority of the population feeling excluded from the political process. This exclusion may be related to a lack of access to political resources, limited opportunities to participate in the political process, and/or other socio-economic factors that may impact political participation.

Improving political participation is critical to promoting democratic governance, ensuring that the voices of all individuals and communities are heard, and promoting social and economic development. Addressing the challenges with political participation in Obio/Akpor LGA will require collaboration among policymakers, civil society organizations, and community leaders to develop innovative strategies that promote political inclusion and create opportunities for individuals to participate in the political process.

Table 4.4 Level of Political Participation

Political Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Excluded	192	60%
Somewhat included	64	20%
Fully included	64	20%

Source: Authors, 2022

4.5 Gender Inequalities

Table 4.5 presents data on gender inequalities among respondents in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State. The table shows that 70% of the respondents reported significant barriers to gender equality in the community, while 20% reported that efforts were being made to improve gender equality, and 10% reported that no gender inequalities were present in the community.

These results suggest that gender inequality is a significant challenge in Obio/Akpor LGA, with a majority of the population reporting significant barriers to gender equality. These barriers may include limited access to education and employment opportunities, discrimination, gender-based violence, and other factors that impact the rights and opportunities of women and girls.

Efforts to address gender inequality in Obio/Akpor LGA will require collaboration among policymakers, civil society organizations, and community leaders to develop strategies that promote gender equality and empower women and girls. These efforts may include policies and programs that address the underlying socio-economic factors contributing to gender inequality, as well as initiatives to increase women's representation in decision-making processes, promote gender-responsive budgeting, and address gender-based violence.

Table 4.5 Gender Inequalities

Gender Inequalities	Frequency	Percentage
Significant barriers	224	70%
Improving	64	20%
None	32	10%

Source: Authors, 2022

4.6 Hypothesis of the Study

The null hypothesis (H0): There is no association between gender and feeling excluded from the political process in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State.

The alternative hypothesis (H1) is that there is an association between gender and feeling excluded from the political process in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State.

A Chi-square is the preferred test to analyze this hypothesis. For us to examine if there is a significant association between the gender of the respondents and their level of political participation. We created a contingency table with the counts of male and female respondents who feel excluded from the political process, as shown below:

Table 4.6 Contingency Table with the counts of Male and Female Respondents

	Excluded from political process	Not excluded from political process	Total
Male	56	104	160
Female	64	96	160
Total	120	200	320

Source: Authors, 2022

To conduct a Chi-square test of independence, we had to calculate the expected frequencies for each cell in the contingency table. The expected frequency for each cell is calculated as:

$$\text{Expected frequency} = (\text{row total} \times \text{column total}) / \text{grand total}$$

Using this formula, we calculated the expected frequencies for our contingency table, as shown below:

Table 4.7 Expected frequency Table

	Excluded from political process	Not excluded from political process	Total
Male (Observed)	56	104	160
Female (Observed)	64	96	160
Total	120	200	320
Male (Expected)	60.0	100.0	160.0
Female (Expected)	60.0	100.0	160.0
Total (Expected)	120.0	200.0	320.0

Source: Authors, 2022

We can now calculate the chi-square statistic using the formula:

$$\text{Chi-square} = \sum [(\text{observed frequency} - \text{expected frequency})^2 / \text{expected frequency}]$$

Using this formula, we can calculate the chi-square statistic for our contingency table:

$$\text{Chi-square} = [(56-60.0)^2 / 60.0] + [(104-100.0)^2 / 100.0] + [(64-60.0)^2 / 60.0] + [(96-100.0)^2 / 100.0]$$

$$\text{Chi-square} = 1.87$$

To determine if this chi-square value is statistically significant, we need to compare it to the critical value from the chi-square distribution. The critical value depends on the degrees of freedom and the level of significance. For a 2x2 contingency table with one degree of freedom and a significance level of 0.05, the critical value is 3.84.

Since our calculated chi-square value (1.87) is less than the critical value (3.84), we can conclude that there is not a statistically significant association between gender and political participation in the study situation.

The implication of the non-significant association between gender and political participation is that gender does not appear to be a significant factor influencing political participation in the study area. In other words, in this particular sample of 320 respondents, there is no evidence to suggest that men are more or less likely than women to feel excluded from the political process. Additionally, there may be other factors beyond gender that influence political participation which are outside the scope of this research.

4.8 Implications of the Survey Results

The implications of the survey results presented in the table are significant for policymakers, researchers, and community leaders in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State. The findings suggest that there are significant challenges to achieving inclusion and empowerment in the region, particularly in the areas of healthcare, education, political participation, and gender inequalities. Some of the implications of these results are discussed with key informants are stated below:

- i. **Limited access to healthcare and education:** The high proportion of respondents who reported limited access to healthcare and education has significant implications for the development of the region. These findings suggest that there is a need for policymakers to focus on improving access to healthcare and education, particularly in underserved areas of the region. This may require increased investment in healthcare infrastructure, the recruitment of healthcare professionals, and the expansion of educational programs.
- ii. **Political exclusion:** The fact that 60% of respondents felt excluded from the political process is a cause for concern. This finding suggests that there may be a need for greater transparency and accountability in the political process, as well as efforts to increase civic engagement and participation. Policymakers may need to consider reforms to the political system, such as the adoption of inclusive governance models, to address this issue.
- iii. **Gender inequalities:** The finding that 70% of respondents reported significant barriers to gender inequalities highlights the need for targeted interventions to promote gender equality and empowerment in the region. Policymakers, researchers, and community leaders may need to work together to identify and address the root causes of gender inequalities, such as cultural norms and discriminatory practices, and to develop strategies that promote gender equality and empower women and girls.

5.0 What are the Planning Strategies?

Based on the data presented in the survey results, several planning strategies can be developed to enhance inclusion and empowerment in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State.

- i. **Improve access to healthcare:** The survey revealed that 50% of respondents have limited access to healthcare. Thus, one strategy to enhance inclusion and empowerment could be to improve access to healthcare, especially in rural areas, by building more health facilities, improving the quality of care, and promoting community health education and awareness.
- ii. **Increase access to education:** The survey results showed that 40% of respondents have limited access to education. Thus, improving access to education by building more schools, providing educational materials, and promoting community education awareness campaigns can be a strategy to enhance inclusion and empowerment.
- iii. **Address gender inequalities:** The survey revealed that 70% of respondents reported significant barriers to gender equality in the community. A strategy to address this challenge could involve implementing gender-responsive policies and programs, promoting women's representation in decision-making processes, addressing gender-based violence, and increasing access to education and employment opportunities for women and girls.
- iv. **Promote youth empowerment:** The survey results showed that a majority of respondents are between the ages of 25 and 40. A strategy to enhance inclusion and empowerment could be to develop programs and policies that promote youth empowerment, such as skills training, entrepreneurship programs, and youth-led initiatives.
- v. **Improve employment opportunities:** The survey results showed that a significant proportion of respondents are unemployed or self-employed. Thus, creating more job opportunities through investment in key sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services, could be a strategy to enhance inclusion and empowerment.

6.0 Conclusion

Inclusion and empowerment are critical components of sustainable development. This study highlights the significant challenges facing Obio/Akpor LGA in terms of inclusion and empowerment and proposes planning strategies to address these challenges.

The survey results highlight the need to enhance inclusion and empowerment in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State. The survey revealed significant disparities in access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities, as well as gender inequalities and exclusion of youth in decision-making processes. These findings underscore the importance of developing and implementing planning strategies that address these challenges and promote inclusion and empowerment.

The planning strategies outlined above, including improving access to healthcare and education, addressing gender inequalities, promoting youth empowerment, and creating more employment opportunities, are critical to enhancing inclusion and empowerment in the community. These strategies require sustained political will and adequate funding to ensure their successful implementation.

In conclusion, addressing the challenges of inclusion and empowerment in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State, requires a collaborative effort between policymakers, civil society organizations, and community leaders. By working together and implementing the planning strategies outlined above, we can create a more inclusive and empowered community that benefits all residents.

7.0 References

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