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ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF ABIA STATE AGENCY FOR COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN REDUCING POVERTY AND ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY

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Abstract

The study assessed the extent of the achievement of the objectives of the Abia State Agency for Community and Social Development Projects (CSDP) as it pertains to reducing poverty and gender equality. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey research design was employed. The population for the study was 310 stakeholders. No sampling was done. The instrument for data collection was developed by the researcher and titled Assessment of Abia State Agency for Community and Social Development Projects in Reducing Poverty and Achieving Gender Equality Questionnaire (AFCSPIRPAGEQ). It was validated by three experts from Adult and Continuing Education, Education foundations (measurement and evaluation unit). The reliability of the instrument was carried out using 20 stakeholders in Imo State. The coefficient alpha analysis yielded an internal consistency of 0.90 and 0.85 for clusters A and B, respectively. The instrument was distributed and collected by the researcher through the assistance of four briefed research assistants. Data were analyzed using mean and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Post hoc analysis was conducted using Bonferroni test for multiple comparisons. The findings of the study showed that Abia State Agency for CSDP has reduced poverty and achieved gender equality to a high extent in Abia State. Hence the study, among others recommended that Abia State Agency for CSDP should Provide learning opportunities for persons with disabilities, promote gender friendly

policies on women ownership of land and engage with different stakeholder groups accordingly, taking into consideration their various opinions on the agency's impact on poverty reduction, and gender equality by conducting regular stakeholders meetings and feedback sessions, developing targeted communication strategies to improve transparency and accountability, and collaborating with NGOs and private sectors to amplify impact in order to sustain and improve more on the CSDP existing milestone on poverty reduction and gender equality.

Keywords: Community and Social Development (CSD), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Poverty Reduction, Gender Inequality and Abia State Agency for Community and Social Development Project

Introduction

Community and social development (CSD) play a vital role in fostering sustainable growth and well-being among the citizens in any society. CSD aims to promote living standard and participatory democracy among citizens in any nation. According to Kenny and Connors (2017), CSD works towards addressing the needs of community members. CSD is a holistic approach which focuses on the principles of empowerment, human right, inclusion, social justice, and self-determination. Future Growth Initiative (2022) affirms that community development projects are essential for sustainable development, empowerment, inclusivity, and social justice of any society. According to Future Growth Initiative (FGI), these projects aim to address the needs of community members and uplift them by improving their living standards. This improves the overall quality of life of individuals by providing access to basic needs such as reduction of poverty and achieving gender equality for community development.

The National Association of Community Development Extension Practitioners (NACDEP, 2026) in Obidiegwu, Obiozor and Eme defined community development as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes sustainable development, human rights, equality, economic opportunity, and social justice through the organization, education and empowerment of people within their communities. Community Development (CD) is applied by civic leaders, activists, citizens and professionals to improve various aspects of communities, typically aiming to build stronger and more resilient local communities (Straza, 2023). CD is a planned effort which aimed at building assets to increase the capacity of residents and improve their quality of life (Green and Haines, 2015).

Similarly, CD is focused on the ideology that people can work together to shape their own destiny if given the opportunity and necessary empowerment in a safe and healthy environment while social development aims at the entire wellbeing of people, equity and social justice which include

social inclusion, sustainable livelihoods, gender equality, increased voice, participation and education so they can reach their full potentials (Obidiegwu, 2024).

The concepts of community development and social development are intricately related because both concepts emphasize community ownership, participation, equity, justice, inclusivity, sustainable development, empowerment, self-determination, participative democracy, and a holistic approach to community development. Both concepts work together to foster sustainable growth, well-being and social justice within societies. This implies that through CD, social development is achieved. According to Green (2016), social development refers to the process by which individuals or groups of people learn to enhance their social and emotional skills throughout their lifespan. Both concepts are intricately imbued in the socio-economic dimension of the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Community and social development are integral processes that play a crucial role in fostering sustainable development, inclusiveness and equitable societies. The importance of these concepts extends beyond economic growth and encompasses various dimensions that contribute to the overall well-being of individuals and communities. According to Straza (2023), community and social development create strong, diverse communities that are able to attract and keep talent, start and grow businesses, and overcome many challenges. Straza further opines that community and social development are essential for promotion of social justice, equity, and inclusivity. The concepts provide the foundation that a community builds upon to improve the quality of life of its citizens. Similarly, it is a process of social change, not merely a set of policies and programmes instituted for some specific results (Federal Government Initiative, 2022). Community and social development address social wellbeing, economic issues of citizens in all organizations, states and nations, no wonder, the two concepts are integral to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which focuses on eradicating poverty, transforming humanity and realizing a sustainable world. In addition, social development is part of community development.

Social development refers to the overall well-being (economic, social and cultural), growth and advancement of the society. It is also a process of individuals acquiring social skills, behaviors and attitude necessary for functioning effectively within a society. According to Psychology Dictionary (2024) social development is the process of attaining maturity within a social setting, emphasizing the acquisition of social skills and the ability to behave according to social expectations. This definition implies that improving the well-being of every individual in society can make them reach their full potentials.

In Nigeria, many communities and socio-economic enhancement programmes have been initiated by the Federal Government to achieve social and economic wellbeing. For example, in 2016, National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) was launched to reduce poverty and unemployment; promote education, health and empowerment through various initiatives. These initiatives include: N-power which provides young Nigerians with job training and helps them to acquire and develop skills for employment and entrepreneurship. Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) was also established by the Federal Government in the Year 2000 to offer financial support to the most vulnerable household. This encouraged them to engage in productive activities and access basic services, Government Enterprises and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) was initiated in 2016 to provide microloans to small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) to stimulate economic activity and promote financial inclusion,

Similarly, Macro-Economic Reforms and Social Protection was launched in 1990 to stabilize the economy and ensure that more resources are available for critical sectors. In addition, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was launched in 1997. It focused on empowering families for economic self-sufficiency through viable agro and non-agro based projects. It further aimed to establish cottage industries and micro-economic activities in rural areas to alleviate poverty and enhance economic empowerment (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Similarly, Action for Resilience and Economic Stimulus (CARES) programme was initiated in 2020 to support communities by enhancing resilience and providing economic stimulus. It aimed to improve infrastructure, create jobs, and support small businesses to bolster local economies and reduce poverty (World Bank, 2015). In addition, Women Empowerment Initiative was initiated to empower women and to scale up economic outcomes, Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), was implemented from 2017 to 2020, it focused on restoring growth, investing in people, and building globally competitive economy among others (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Some of these programmes were replicated at the same time in the thirty-six states of the Federation which included Abia State

In a bid for Abia State Government to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, the following ministries were established. The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development was established to promote women empowerment protection rights, provision of social services, implementing gender equality policies, capacity building for women support, economic empowerment and collaboration, to encourage women's participation in community development, with a focus on financial inclusion, capacity building, and governance role.

These efforts have created avenues for women to become economically self-sufficient and influential in their communities. Such efforts include financial and entrepreneurial support, leadership and governance, community projects and social services. The initiatives underscore a commitment equity and empowerment, creating a supportive environment where women can contribute meaningfully to community development which has enabled them to gain new skills and earn a livelihood (Abia State, 2020).

Additionally, Abia State Commission for Women and Girls was also established for the promotion of women's right, advocacy and sensitization efforts to promote women's empowerment and gender equality, implementation of policies aimed at promoting women's empowerment, supporting vulnerable women and girls, investigating and resolving complaints related to women's right and gender-based violence.

The Ministry of Women Affairs also conducts public awareness and education campaign to promote women's empowerment and gender equality, supports women's economic empowerment through initiatives such as microfinance entrepreneurship development and job creation. The overall women's participation in community development is essential in achieving sustainable development and promoting gender equality. It is crucial in addressing challenges that prevent women from participating in decision making processes and creating opportunities for women to participate and contribute to community development (Evans, 2014).

More so, despite all the socio-economic initiatives advanced in Nigeria, the multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) Survey in 2020 revealed that majority of Nigerian's lives in multi-dimensional poverty, with the National MPI at 48.5% and the Child MPI at 63.3% (NBS, 2022).

In Abia State, most of the aforestated socio-economic efforts have been made by successive governments to end poverty in all its forms, reduce gender inequality and achieve gender equality. The extent to which such efforts have yielded results has not been empirically determined. Furthermore, the Child Multi poverty index is at 10.1% Which implies that more efforts need to be made to further reduce poverty level (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

In addition, a study on the effects of micro- credit on poverty levels of farmers indicated a high level of poverty among farmers in Abia state (Orikara, 2021). Gender inequality in Abia State is a major challenge that perpetuates poverty among women and girls. However, the Abia State government introduced community development programmes from 2009 till January 2026 and

still counting in the rural areas to ensure even spread of socio-economic growth (Okeke,2023). In line with this initiative and in order to promote the wellbeing of the citizens of Abia State for achieving social and community development, the Abia State Agency for CSDP was established by Law No. 2 of 2009 and passed by the Abia State House of Assembly. The CSDP was established in Abia State in order to improve the wellbeing of the citizens, end poverty in all its forms, achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, among others. The CSDP is a World Bank Country portfolio which adopts Community-Driven Development (CDD) and aims to improve the social and community resources of Abia State. The Agency for CSDP in Abia State was established as a state parastatal with an administrative organ that is autonomous and mandated to achieve the following three objectives; to improve the socio-economic condition of the populace at the grassroot level by promoting prompt delivery of services geared towards poverty reduction in the state, to encourage and increase the capacities of communities to participate in community development projects. and to ensure the sustainability of community participation in development projects, even after their completion (Abia State, 2021)

The CSDP was established to enable communities, particularly at the grassroots, feel a sense of belonging, wellbeing and be integrated into the mainstream of the national existence. The CSDP aims to improve access to services for human development, empower communities to plan, part-finance, implement and monitor their own programmes. It further aims to promote sustainable and socially inclusive multi-sectoral micro-projects, and build the capacities of local governments to take on the roles of community development (Abia State, 2021). As stated earlier, Abia State Agency for CSDP was set up more than a decade ago; there is therefore a dire need to determine the extent the agency has succeeded in implementing its policies for subsequent improvement towards joining committee of states and nations to achieving in full SDGs. This cannot be done without due focus on the socio-economic dimensions of the SDGs which were born at the UNs conference in 2012 for global attention and development (United Nations, 2012).

The targets and indicators of the SDGs can be referred to as goals and metrics for tracking socio-economic and environmental progress in member countries in order to transform humanity. These goals are expected to be achieved in member countries before the expiration year of 2030, therefore, continuous assessment of these targets and indicators is needed for necessary improvement. For this reason, in this study, socio-economic condition of the populace at the grassroot level as seen in the first objective of the CSDP in Abia State was assessed using the socio-economic targets and indicators of the SDGs.

The Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) in Abia State was established to promote a sense of belonging, well-being, and integration for grassroots communities. The CSDP's objectives include improving access to services for human development, empowering communities to plan and implement their programmes, reducing poverty and achieving gender equality, inclusive micro-projects, and enhancing local governments' capacities for community development (Abia State, 2021). These services for sustainable human development include reducing poverty and achieving gender equality. Specifically, this study will focus only on the socio-economic targets and indicators of poverty and gender equality

The Agency for Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) in Abia State was established 14 years ago and is overdue for progressive assessment in the area of SDGs which include provision and promotion of food, empowerment and gender equality in the communities. Assessment is crucial for identifying gaps in the agency's efforts, in formulating need statements, and selecting appropriate solutions (Skidmore, 2019). Assessment involves systematically collecting and analyzing information to understand community needs, resources, and conditions in helping them plan, implement, and evaluate programmes effectively (Nelson and Dawson, 2015). Assessment can be formative or summative, with formative assessment providing continuous feedback during programme implementation and summative assessment evaluating a project's overall impact (Stufflebean, 2001; Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, 2004). This study is a formative evaluation of the Abia State Agency for CSDP in the area of providing industrialization and modern energy. It is set up to assess the agency□s progress and addressing challenges for improvement and development. The agency collaborates with various ministries, NGOs, and CBOs to achieve community-related SDGs.

The SDGs are a set of 17 goals (with 169 targets and 247 indicators) adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call for action to end poverty, protect the planet, ensure peace and prosperity for all among others (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs incorporates three dimensions which include economic, social, and environmental elements. As shown in the first objective of the CSDP as provided in the Abia State Act, the socio-economic condition of the people of Abia State are the thrust of this study. They are the critical attributes of the CSDP. Similarly, the economic and social dimensions are part of the major considerations of the UN in setting up the 17 SDGs for global attention and well-being (UN, 2015). The socio-economic SDGs which will be integrated in this study are Goals 1, 5, They are: Ending poverty in all its forms, achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. This study strictly focused on evaluating the extent to which the agency is achieving its mandate. Specifically, the study assessed the extent

the Agency for CSDP has reduced poverty in all its forms in Abia State and achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State.

Statement of the Problem

Community and social development are precursors to the general economic development of any state or nation. and any progressive state life expectancy, achieving poverty eradication, and gender equality, should progress at a steady rate toward providing citizens with a better quality of life and standard of living.

However, in Nigeria, and in Abia State in particular, despite the implementation of various poverty alleviation and economic enhancement programmes, as outlined in the background to this study, socio-economic indicators appear to be unstable. For instance, life expectancy in Abia State remains low at 57.3 %.

The poverty rate increased from 30.7% in 2019 to 33.9% in 2022, while the inflation rate rose from 28.92% in December 2023 to 29.90% in January 2024, among other concerning statistics (NBS, 2024). The Community and Social Development Project (CSDP), established in 2009 to promote socio-economic development in Abia State, appears to be falling short of fully achieving its mandate.

Therefore, this study sought to conduct a formative assessment of the Abia State Agency for Community and Social Development in reducing poverty and achieving gender equality, with the aim of supporting evidence-based planning, decision-making, policy-making, implementation, and overall development in the state.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the perceived extent of implementation of Abia State agency for community and social development project by exploring the perspectives of key stakeholders in the state. Specifically, the study assessed:

1. The extent Agency for CSDP has reduced poverty in all its forms in Abia State
2. The extent Agency for CSDP has achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. To what extent has Abia -CSDP reduced poverty in all its forms in Abia State?

2. To what extent has Abia-CSDP achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State

Hypotheses

The following null (Ho) hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

$H0_1$: Staff of the Ministry of Women Affairs, Science and Technology, Connak Foundation and President Generals (PGs) do not differ significantly in their mean rating on the extent to which Abia State Agency for CSDP has reduced poverty in Abia State.

$H0_2$: Staff of the Ministry of Women Affairs, Science and Technology, Connak foundation and President Generals (PGs) do not differ significantly in their mean rating on the extent to which Abia State Agency of CSDP has achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to gather information from the staff of the Ministry of Science and Technology, staff of the Ministry of Women Affairs, staff of Connak Foundation and President Generals to determine the extent to which Abia State CSDP is achieving community and social development in Abia State. The area of the study is Abia State. This study is necessary in order to determine what has been done so far in the focus areas in this study so that more efforts will be put in place towards attaining the overall objectives. The population for the study consisted of 310 stakeholders consisting of (91 staff of the Ministry of Women Affairs, 135 staff of the Ministry of Science and Technology, 14 staff of Connak Foundation and 70 President Generals. These groups are the major stakeholders in community and social development activities in Abia State. No sampling was done.

The instrument for data collection was a researcher made questionnaire titled Assessment of Abia State Agency for Community and Social Development Project in Reducing Poverty and Achieving Gender Equality Questionnaire (AACSDPIRPAGE). The instrument was divided into two parts, A and B. Part A focused on the personal data of the respondents while part B focused on items addressing the research questions. Each of the items has 4-point response categories as follows: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) and they were assigned values of 4,3,2,1. The instrument was validated by three experts from the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, and the Department of Educational Foundations (Measurement and Evaluation Unit). Their suggestions were used to produce the final copy of the

instrument. The reliability index of the instrument was established using 20 stakeholders in the Ministry of Women Affairs, Science and Technology, Association of Town Unions and NGOs in Imo State. The state was used because they share the same characteristics with the area of study Abia State. Data collected from the pilot test were analyzed and the internal consistency of the instruments was determined using Cronbach□s alpha. The coefficient alpha analysis yielded an internal consistency of 0.90 and 0.85 respectively.

The researcher administered 310 copies of the questionnaires to the respondents with the help of four briefed research assistant, (a staff of the Ministry of Science and Technology, a staff of the Ministry of Women Affairs, President Generals, and Connak Foundation) who are stakeholders in community development in Abia State. Mean and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used for data analysis. Mean was used to analyze the data on the research question and the decision for answering the research questions was based on the boundary (true) limit of the four-point response which state that Mean of 2.50 and above will be adjudged High Extent of performing roles and activities by the Abia State Agency for CSDP while Mean of 2.49 below will be deemed low extent. ANOVA was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One: To what extent has Abia State Agency for CSDP reduced poverty in all its forms in Abia State**.**

Table 1: Mean Ratings of the respondents on the extent Abia State Agency for CSDP has reduced poverty in all its forms in Abia State.

SN	N = 300	PG N = 67 $\bar{X}$ (SD)	MWA N = 89 $\bar{X}$ (SD)	MST N= 130 $\bar{X}$ (SD)	SCF N = 14 $\bar{X}$ (SD)	Average $\bar{X}$ (SD)	Remarks
1	Ensuring food security by supplying improved seedling to farmers	2.90 (.60)	2.98 (.69)	2.82 (.62)	3.43 (.51)	3.03 (.65)	HE
2	Ensuring food security by introducing mechanized farming in communities	2.91 (.56)	2.93 (.50)	2.63 (.48)	3.36 (.50)	2.96 (.54)	HE
3	Providing non-formal education for all through learning centres	3.01 (.56)	3.01 (.77)	2.81 (.71)	3.43 (.64)	3.07 (.70)	HE
4	Providing free delivery services for pregnant Women	2.81 (.76)	2.71 (.69)	2.42 (.50)	3.14 (.77)	2.77 (.67)	HE
5	Providing portable water for the communities	3.03 (.74)	2.92 (.64)	2.63 (.59)	3.21 (.60)	2.95 (.66)	HE
6	Providing health insurance scheme for citizens	2.78 (.87)	2.72 (.81)	2.65 (.58)	3.29 (.61)	2.86 (.73)	HE
7	Providing free basic education for all citizens	2.73 (.80)	2.83 (.64)	2.95 (.81)	3.14 (.54)	2.91 (.76)	HE
8	Providing food for children at the basic education level	2.34 (.86)	2.40 (.49)	2.72 (.57)	3.00 (.68)	2.62 (.66)	HE

9	Providing learning opportunities for all persons with disabilities	2.28 (.95)	2.75 (.68)	2.88 (.68)	2.64 (1.0)	2.64 (.80)	HE
10	Providing food for all internally displaced persons	2.09 (.85)	2.66 (.71)	2.71 (.66)	2.64 (1.0)	2.53 (.78)	HE
	Cluster Mean Scores	**2.69**	**2.80**	**2.73**	**3.13**	**2.83**	**HE**

PG = President Generals; MWA = Ministry of Women Affairs; MST = Ministry of Science and Technology; SCF = Staff of Connak Foundation

Table 1 shows all the items have mean ratings ranging from 2.53 to 3.07. This implies that all the respondents agreed that the extent of reduction of poverty by the Agency for CSDP is high in Abia State. This is also in consonant with the cluster mean point of 2.83 which indicates high extent of reduction of poverty.

Table 2: ANOVA table on significant difference in the mean ratings of the respondents on the extent to which Abia State Agency for CSDP has reduced poverty in Abia State

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.522	3	.841	4.628	.004
Within Groups	53.763	296	.182		
Total	56.285	299			

In order to test hypothesis 1 (H_{O1}), ANOVA analysis was used. The result in Table 2 shows that an F-ratio of 4.628 with associated exact probability value of 0.004. This probability value of 0.004 was compared with 0.05 set as level of significant for testing the hypothesis, and it was found to be significant because 0.004 is less than 0.05. The null hypothesis, which stated that the Staff of Ministry of Women Affairs, Science and Technology, Connak Foundation and President Generals (PGs) do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent to which Abia State Agency for CSDP has reduced poverty in Abia State, is therefore rejected. Inference drawn was that, the Ministry of Women Affairs, Science and Technology, Connak Foundation and President Generals (PGs) differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent to which Abia State Agency for CSDP has reduced poverty in Abia State. A post hoc test was performed in Table 3 to show which specific groups differ significantly in their mean ratings.

Table 3: Post Hoc Test on the extent to which Abia State Agency for CSDP has reduced poverty in Abia State.

(I) Categories of the respondents	(J) Categories of the respondents	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
PG	MWA	-.10408	.06893	.793	-.2872	.0790
	MST	-.03348	.06409	1.000	-.2037	.1368
	SCF	-.44051*	.12524	.003	-.7732	-.1079
MWA	PG	.10408	.06893	.793	-.0790	.2872

	MST	.07060	.05863	1.000	-.0851	.2263
	SCF	-.33644*	.12253	.038	-.6619	-.0110
MST	PG	.03348	.06409	1.000	-.1368	.2037
	MWA	-.07060	.05863	1.000	-.2263	.0851
	SCF	-.40703*	.11988	.005	-.7254	-.0886
SCF	PG	.44051*	.12524	.003	.1079	.7732
	MWA	.33644*	.12253	.038	.0110	.6619
	MST	.40703*	.11988	.005	.0886	.7254

Table 3 shows the post-hoc test conducted to identify specific group differences in mean ratings on the extent to which Abia State Agency for CSDP has reduced poverty in Abia State. The results reveal significant differences, between SCF and the other groups. Specifically, SCF had significantly higher mean ratings compared to PG (mean difference = 0.44051, p = 0.003), MWA (mean difference = 0.33644, p = 0.038), and MST (mean difference = 0.40703, p = 0.005). These findings indicate that the Connak Foundation has the opinion that Abia State Agency for CSDP as having a greater impact on reducing poverty in Abia State. In contrast, the other groups (PG, MWA, and MST) have relatively lower opinion of the agency's impact, suggesting varying levels of satisfaction or assessment among stakeholders.

Research Question Two: To what extent has Abia State Agency for CSDP achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State?

Data gathered in respect to this research question are presented in Table 4

Table 4: Mean scores and Standard Deviation of the respondents on the extent Abia State Agency for CSDP has achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls

	N = 300	PG N = 67 $\bar{X}$ (SD)	MWA N = 89 $\bar{X}$ (SD)	MST N= 130 $\bar{X}$ (SD)	SCF N = 14 $\bar{X}$ (SD)	Ave. $\bar{X}$ SD	Rem.
1	Addressing gender gap in education by enforcing enrollment of the girl child.	3.13 (.65)	3.35 (.64)	3.11 (.57)	3.64 (.45)	3.31 (.62)	HE
2	Advocating for payment of women on maternity leave	2.43 (.80)	2.83 (.48)	2.82 (.52)	3.14 (.66)	2.81 (.62)	HE
3	Ensure implementation of 35% affirmative action for women representative in politics	2.40 (.85)	2.76 (.66)	2.88 (.58)	2.64 (.84)	2.67 (.71)	HE
4	Promoting gender friendly policies on women ownership of land	2.52 (.89)	2.75 (.74)	2.77 (.64)	3.29 (.61)	2.83 (.75)	HE
5	Implementing policies that protects women' s rights against gender-based violence	2.52 (.91)	3.22 (.42)	2.93 (.42)	3.36 (.63)	3.01 (.63)	HE
6	Increasing access to maternal care services	2.60 (.80)	2.98 (.69)	2.82 (.62)	3.36 (.63)	2.94 (.70)	HE
7	Providing entrepreneurial opportunities for women	2.57 (.86)	2.74 (.81)	2.95 (.71)	3.21 (.70)	2.87 (.79)	HE

8	Changing societal attitude and norms that perpetuate discrimination against women	2.24 (.68)	2.92 (.51)	3.05 (.42)	2.57 (.65)	2.70 (.61)	HE
9	Promoting positive representation of women in media	2.40 (.70)	2.73 (.45)	2.95 (.65)	2.57 (.76)	2.66 (.65)	HE
10	Encouraging women participation in community development	2.42 (.76)	2.90 (.78)	3.12 (.75)	2.57 (.76)	2.75 (.81)	HE
	Cluster Mean Scores	**2.52 (.79)**	**2.92 (.62)**	**2.94 (.59**	**3.04 (.67)**	**2.86 (.69)**	**HE**

PG = President Generals; MWA = Ministry of Women Affairs; MST = Ministry of Science and Technology; SCF = Staff of Connak Foundation

Table 4 shows all the items has mean ratings ranging from 2.66 to 3.31. This implies that all the respondents agreed that the extent of achieving the objectives on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls in Abia State by the Agency for CSDP is high. This is also in consonant with the cluster mean point of 2.86 which indicates high extent of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

Hypothesis Two: The Ministry of Women Affairs, Science and Technology, Connak Foundation and President Generals (PGs) do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent to which Abia State Agency of CSDP has achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State.

Table 5: ANOVA table on significant difference in the mean ratings of the respondents on the extent to which Abia State Agency of CSDP has achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9.137	3	3.046	16.798	.000
Within Groups	53.669	296	.181		
Total	62.806	299			

In order to test hypothesis 2 (H_{O2}), ANOVA analysis was used. The result in Table 5 shows that an F-ratio of 16.798 with associated exact probability value of 0.000 was obtained. This probability value of 0.000 was compared with 0.05 set as level of significant for testing the hypothesis and it was found to be significant because 0.000 is less than 0.05. The null hypothesis, which stated that; the Ministry of Women Affairs, Science and Technology, Connak foundation and President Generals (PGs) do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent to which Abia State Agency of CSDP has achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State, is therefore rejected. Inference drawn was that the Ministry of Women Affairs, Science and Technology, Connak Foundation and President Generals (PGs) differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent to which Abia State Agency of CSDP has achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State. A post hoc test will be performed in Table 6 to show which specific groups differ significantly in their mean ratings.

Table 6: Post Hoc Test on the extent to which Abia State Agency for CSDP has achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State.

(I) Categories of the respondents	(J) Categories of the respondents	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
PG	MWA	-.39522*	.06887	.000	-.5782	-.2123
	MST	-.41843*	.06404	.000	-.5885	-.2483
	SCF	-.51183*	.12513	.000	-.8442	-.1795
MWA	PG	.39522*	.06887	.000	.2123	.5782
	MST	-.02321	.05858	1.000	-.1788	.1324
	SCF	-.11661	.12243	1.000	-.4418	.2086
MST	PG	.41843*	.06404	.000	.2483	.5885
	MWA	.02321	.05858	1.000	-.1324	.1788
	SCF	-.09341	.11977	1.000	-.4115	.2247
SCF	PG	.51183*	.12513	.000	.1795	.8442
	MWA	.11661	.12243	1.000	-.2086	.4418
	MST	.09341	.11977	1.000	-.2247	.4115

Table 6 shows the post-hoc test conducted to identify specific group differences in mean ratings. The results indicate significant differences between certain groups. Specifically, PG had significantly lower mean ratings compared to MWA (mean difference = -0.39522, p = 0.000), MST (mean difference = -0.41843, p = 0.000), and SCF (mean difference = -0.51183, p = 0.000). This shows that PGs opinion on the extent to which Abia State Agency of CSDP has achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State is lower as compared to the other groups. Additionally, the mean ratings of MWA, MST, and CF did not differ significantly from each other, suggesting similar opinion among these groups. The findings imply that PGs have lower opinion compared to the other groups, while MWA, MST, and CF share similar views.

Discussion of findings

Extent to which Abia State Agency for CSDP has Reduced Poverty in Abia State

Findings from the study shows that Abia State Agency for CSDP has been effective in reducing poverty in Abia State to a high extent. This finding is consistent with the study by Aigbokhan (2019) on poverty reduction strategies in Nigeria, which highlighted the importance of community participation, entrepreneurship, and skill acquisition in poverty reduction efforts. The study found that community-based initiatives and social protection programmes can be effective in reducing poverty and improving living standards in rural communities. Similarly, a study by Joshua and Abulude (2020) on the impact of microfinance programmes on poverty reduction in Nigeria found that microfinance programs can be an effective tool for reducing poverty and improving the well-being of low-income households.

The finding shows that there are notable achievements in areas such as ensuring food security through supplying improved seedlings to farmers and introducing mechanized farming in

communities. The agency's initiatives in providing non-formal education for all through learning centers, health insurance schemes, and free basic education for all citizens have also been commendable. Additionally, the agency's efforts in providing portable water for the communities and free delivery services for pregnant women have contributed to its poverty reduction efforts. The agency's efforts in providing food for internally displaced persons and learning opportunities for persons with disabilities are however of a lower opinion. Furthermore, providing food for children in basic education is another area that requires more attention from the agency.

The result of Hypothesis one shows that the Ministry of Women Affairs, Science and Technology, Connak foundation and President Generals (PGs) differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent to which Abia State Agency for CSDP has reduced poverty in Abia State. Additionally, post hoc analysis of the study reveals a statistically opinion that CSDP has reduced poverty in Abia State compared to other groups. This suggests different degree of opinion among the stakeholders

Extent to which Abia State Agency of CSDP has achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State.

The study found that the Abia State Agency for CSDP has achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State to a high extent. This finding is consistent with the study by Ibrahim and Alkali (2019) on the impact of gender equality initiatives on women's empowerment in Nigeria, which found that initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment can have a positive impact on women's lives and communities. Similarly, a study by Adubi, Okolie, and Nwosu (2020) on the effectiveness of policies aimed at promoting women's empowerment in Nigeria found that policies that promote women's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities can be effective in promoting women's empowerment and reducing gender inequality.

The finding also reveals that the agency's initiatives in addressing gender-based violence, increasing access to maternal care services, and providing entrepreneurial opportunities for women have been effective. The agency's efforts in enforcing enrollment of the girl-child in education and encouraging women participation in community development are also commendable. The agency's efforts in ensuring implementation of 35% affirmative action for women representative in politics and advocating for payment of women on maternity leave are perceived as relatively less effective. Additionally, changing societal attitudes and norms that perpetuate discrimination against women, as well as promoting positive representation of women in media, remain areas that require more attention. The initiatives of the agency in promoting

gender-friendly policies on women ownership of land and implementing policies that protect women's rights against gender-based violence are also notable.

However, the Ministry of Women Affairs, Science and Technology, Connak Foundation and President Generals (PGs) however differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent to which Abia State Agency of CSDP has achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State. The Post Hoc Test reveals that the PG has statistically significant opinion that CSDP has achieved gender equality and empowered all women and girls in Abia State. compared to other groups. This suggests different degree of opinion among the stakeholders

Conclusion

This study provides an assessment of the Abia State Agency for CSDP's impact on various development outcomes in Abia State, Nigeria. The findings indicate that the agency has made significant progress in reducing poverty and achieving gender equality in Abia State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made

1. The Abia State Agency for CSDP should engage with different stakeholder groups to understand their opinion on poverty reduction in the state and address them accordingly by conducting regular stakeholder meetings and feedback sessions, identifying and addressing concerns of specific stakeholder groups, and developing targeted communication strategies to sustain reduction of hunger and penury in the state.
2. The Abia State Agency for CSDP should build their effort in promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls by conducting needs assessments to identify areas where women and girls require more support, developing targeted programmes to address their specific needs, and providing training and capacity-building opportunities for stakeholders to promote gender equality.

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