

# Sustainable Development: Challenges and Strategies to Reduce Female-Headed Households' Plights in Rivers-West Senatorial District of Rivers State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The study investigated challenges faced by female-headed households in respect of sustainable development tenets, and strategies to reduce the plight of the female householders in Rivers-West Senatorial District of Rivers State. Previously, a position paper for female-headed households in the Niger Delta Region in respect of sustainable development was discussed. However, the paper needed to be ascertained empirically of the issues raised, hence the need for this study. The population of the study was drawn from eight Local Government Areas of Rivers-West Senatorial District. Four hundred (400) female householders who are breadwinners were selected using convenient sampling technique, but 379 actually participated. The instrument used for data collection was researchers' prepared questionnaire titled: Sustainable Development of Female-Headed Households in Rivers-West Senatorial District of Rivers State Questionnaire (SDFHQ). The instrument had in Section A two items and in Section B twenty-three items. The data collected were statistically analyzed using mean for the two research questions and ANOVA for the hypotheses at  $P < 0.05$  level of significance. The findings revealed that female-headed households are having challenges (mean scores range of  $\bar{X}$  2.68 to  $\bar{X}$  2.80), and strategies to reduce the plights of the people (mean scores range of  $\bar{X}$  2.68 to  $\bar{X}$  2.76). There is lack of female inclusiveness, hence the challenges of female-headed households. Based on the findings it was recommended that pollution should be reduced, inclusive empowerment programs in the district should proportionally include women, security should be beefed-off among others.

**Keywords:** Female-headed, Development, Household, Hunger, Sustainable, Strategies.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

After six decades of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region, Rivers-West Senatorial District of Rivers State inclusive, the place is still plagued with hunger, suffering, marginalization and total neglect by government and oil exploring and prospecting companies. The current 13% derivation money ends with the governors which is mostly utilized for personal aggrandizement. Literary debate of sustainable development of female-headed households in the Niger Delta Region now called South-South of Nigeria needs

empirical dimension to ascertain the situation of the women who are pillars of economic productivity in the rural areas. According to Nwaji (2024) and China et al. (2017) sustainable development is the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future generation to be met. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals by United Nations in 2015 are concisely developmental needs of social, economic and environment targets for the wellbeing of humanity. The situation of female-headed households in Rivers-West Senatorial District of Rivers State is not

sustainable at all. Women are under-privileged due to cultural and socio-economic bottlenecks.

According to Ribadu (2024) Niger Delta region significantly contributed 75 per cent of the country's exchange earning, though there are socio-economic challenges related to security issues such as pipeline vandalism, oil theft, and harmful hardship faced by them. Therefore, the Federal Government is concern over the under-performance of federal agencies saddled with addressing the socio-economic issues, integration needs and stability of the region. This is despite the fact that artisanal refining activities, youth militancy and sea piracy are rampant in the district. The technical session of the Niger Delta Stakeholders Summit anchored by NTA (2024) also noted that there is discontent in the region because of devastation of the environment and unemployment of the youths.

It should be noted that since the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1956 in Bayelsa State of the South-South Region of present Nigeria, marginalization, environmental degradation, poverty and hunger have become the daily experience of the region. The natural blessing of crude and gas, remains blessing to the major ethnic groups of the nation, but invariably became a curse to the people of the region namely the Ijaws (Obichie, 2018; Oguzor et al, 2022). Activities of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region have resulted in environmental and economic devastation on the livelihood of the communities which include soil contamination, marine contamination, reduced crop production, decline in production of seafood, contamination of drinking water, increased incidence of malnourishment related diseases and general socio-economic effects (Egbe & Thompson, 2010) as cited by Oguzor et al (2022).

It is reported that in Sub-Saharan African, 31 percent of rural households are headed by women. The number of female-headed households is increasingly significant in rural areas of most countries in developing countries (Food and Agricultural Organization [FAO], 2024). According to Kwon and Kim (2020) factors contributing to increase in female-headed households are the rapid increase in single-women households, divorce rates, and relative long-life expectancy of women. Essentially, there is high rate of family break up. Saad (2022) reported that female-headed households involve those who live with children only, were alone without children, or live with men, women and children, but without a husband. According to Milazzo and Walle (2017) in Benjamin and Amalo (2020) Nigeria's share of 2020 households with female heads is 19% of the population but those households have just 13% of the population.

The problems faced by female-headed household are mainly caused by poor income generating skills because of lack of education, restricted mobility to search for job at various workplace, discrimination at work place as a result of preferences of male counterparts, inability to take better job in the labour market due to gender inequality among others (Population Association, 2012; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2019). Saad (2022) noted that there is high vulnerability in female-headed households and poverty is

multidimensional though subjectively interpreted. This is so because the people remained in abject poverty and underdevelopment due to environmental pollution and socio-economic marginalization; and the government and oil corporation programs of intervention were not inclusive to women, especially female-headed households. Furthermore, Dienye (2024) noted that insecurity is getting complex in Nigeria as it affects the social, political, economic among other issues in the country. The challenges of insecurity in the country has led to general fear in the minds of travelers and business people as all the sectors of socio-economic domains are affected due to threats of kidnappers, sea pirates, bandits, arm robbers, burglars and so on. This need to be addressed by the government of Nigeria and stakeholders in security issues of the country.

Oil spill is one of the hazardous situations in the Rivers-West Senatorial District of Rivers State. According to Oguzor et al. (2022) when oil spills occur farming and fishing activities, which are the main sources of occupation and employment for the inhabitants are disrupted. Losing means of livelihood, threat of environment pollution, and food insecurity stare the faces of the people with challenges such as hunger, starvation and malnutrition. Moreover, oil spills have serious impact on the natural resources upon which many poor Niger Delta communities depend. Drinking water, farmland and the rivers are significantly impacted, and the ecosystems are seriously degraded. Daily Trust (2024: December 23) reported that the entire Niger Delta's environment (air people breath, water people drink, and land for farming) is polluted. Women in Niger Delta States staged a protest recently at Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) press center in Yenagoa because of toxic environmental pollution. They claimed that husbands in the region could no longer impregnate their wives due to pollution. Instead of Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC) to mitigate solution to the ecosystem, the company decided to sell all onshore assets to investors. However, Sanusi (2024) noted that Nigeria crude oil is a blessing not a curse, as applicable in the areas where oil is explored. It is important that human capacity should be built through deliberate vision of government to enshrine good governance and the people to engage in innovative exploits, conscientious development of intellectual property through vibrant education and ensuring strong public institutions. These situations affect the food security, environmental security and health of rural people, especially women living near oil facilities. Female-headed households are worse off in these situations, hence this study on sustainable development of female-headed households in Rivers-West Senatorial District of Rivers State.

#### ➤ *Research Questions*

The study was guided by two research questions as follows:

- What are the challenges faced by female-headed households in Rivers-West Senatorial District?
- What are the strategies to reduce the plight of the female householders of Rivers-West Senatorial District?

#### ➤ *Hypotheses*

The study formulated two hypotheses as follows:

- Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference on the mean responses of female breadwinners on the challenges faced across the LGAs of the Rivers-West Senatorial District of Rivers State.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference on the mean responses of female breadwinners on the strategies across the LGAs of the Rivers-West Senatorial District of Rivers State.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### ➤ Design of the Study:

The study adopted survey research design. According to Uzoagulu (2011) survey research is descriptive research that allow a researcher to collect, organize, analyze and describe as they exist without interfering with them.

### ➤ Area of the Study:

The study area is Rivers-West Senatorial District of Rivers State. The district consists of Local Government Areas with distinct ethnicities and they are Akuku-Toru, Asari-Toru, Degema (Kalabari ethnicity), Abua-Odual (Abua and Odual ethnicities), Ahoada-East (Ekpeye ethnicity), Ahoada-West (Engenni ethnicity), Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni (Ogba, Egbema and Ndoni ethnicities), and Bonny (Ibani ethnicity).

### ➤ Population of the Study:

The accessible population consisted of female-headed householders domiciled in all the LGAs of Rivers-West Senatorial District (RWSD) of Rivers State. The entire population (male and females) is 2,366,158 (Brinkhoff, 2022) and female heads of the RWSD population is between 13% - 19% (Benjamin and Amalo, 2020), therefore the female head householders' population for this study is taken to be 15% which is 354,924.

### ➤ Sample of the Study:

The study applied Yaro Yamane formula and arrived at 399.6 therefore the sample size was 400. Cluster sampling technique was employed in the selection of the respondents. The LGAs headquarters and the next big towns were sampled and each LGA had 50 female-headed respondents in the

proportion of 35 for the headquarter and 15 for the next sampled town.

### ➤ Instrument for Data Collection:

Researchers-structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was made up of 5 items in Section A and 51 items in Section B. Section B is four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree with values of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

The instrument was validated by three experts (two Home Economists and one in measurement and evaluation from Federal College of Education (technical), Omoku.

Four hundred copies of the questionnaire were administered but 379 copies were retrieved. This presented retrieval rate of 94.8%.

### ➤ Method of Data Collection:

The communities were Abonnema and Kula, Degema and Tombia, Buguma and Obuama, Abua and Emagho, Ahoada and Ogbo, Akinima and Mbiama, Omoku and Obrikom, Bonny and Finima, and in the towns selected the first women that are single female householders constitute the respondents.

### ➤ Analysis of Data:

The demographic data collected were analyzed with percentage. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to analyzed the research questions and the decision point for agreement is 2.50 and above while ANOVA was used to analyze the hypotheses at  $P < 0.05$  significance level.

## III. RESULTS

Demographic data of the respondents showed that 86% are not living alone while 14% are living alone. Also, 30% were living with children and men who are not husbands, while 70% were not living with children and men.

Research question one: What are the challenges faced by female-headed households in Rivers-West Senatorial District?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on Challenges of Female-headed Households

S/N	Challenges of Female-Headed Households	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1	Agitation of resource control has bred militancy in the areas.	2.71	0.43	Agreed
2	General insecurity is a major problem in the creeks/farms.	2.68	0.45	Agreed
3	Kidnapping and rape of women are common trends.	2.73	0.58	Agreed
4	There is high level of promiscuity.	2.76	0.69	Agreed
5	Lifestyle issues result in STDs and unintended pregnancies.	2.72	0.62	Agreed
6	Pollution of the sea and land through crude oil activities has deprived women of their livelihood.	2.78	0.60	Agreed
7	Poverty of female-headed households is among the worse of the world.	2.73	0.71	Agreed
8	There is lack of political and socio-economic inclusion of women.	2.80	0.55	Agreed
9	High school drop-out is rampant among adolescent girls.	2.72	0.57	Agreed
10	Male denial of female pregnancies is rampant.	2.69	0.54	Agreed
11	There is lack of employment opportunities.	2.76	0.50	Agreed

Criterion Mean = 2.50; SD = Standard Deviation

Table 1 above shows that the challenges of female-headed households' items had mean scores of 2.71, 2.68, 2.73, 2.76, 2.72, 2.78, 2.73, 2.80, 2.72, 2.69 and 2.76 which are all above the criterion mean of 2.50. Therefore, the respondents agreed to all the items of challenges of female-

headed households. The standard deviation on challenges ranged from 0.42 to 0.71.

What are the strategies to reduce the plights of the female householders of Rivers-West Senatorial District?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on Strategies to Reduce Plights of Female-headed Households

S/N	Strategies to Reduce Plights	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1	Reduction of green gas emulsion.	2.74	0.49	Agreed
2	Chiefs and youth leaders in Rivers-West Senatorial District should be trained on skills on human resource management.	2.73	0.67	Agreed
3	Youths and especially women should be empowered educationally in the district.	2.74	0.54	Agreed
4	Inclusive arrangement for entrepreneurship skill training should be compulsory with follow-up programs.	2.72	0.52	Agreed
5	Amnesty program should be all-inclusive because environmental degradation is felt by all in the district.	2.75	0.57	Agreed
6	There should be holistic sustainable program to alleviate the issues of poverty and hunger, pollution and infrastructure.	2.68	0.50	Agreed
7	Social welfare should be put in place for poorest of poor especially the female bread winners without reasonable income.	2.70	0.51	Agreed
8	Derivation principles should be fairly distributed from Federal to the LGAs and host communities.	2.75	0.59	Agreed
9	Politicians should stop stealing our collective wealth for their personal gain to the detriment of people.	2.73	0.52	Agreed
10	There should be more military presence and infrastructures to forestall the increasing rate of kidnapping, piracy and stealing.	2.76	0.53	Agreed
11	Soft-loans should be given to the very vulnerable women in the district by government.	2.76	0.51	Agreed
12	Functional Government sponsored co-operatives should be encouraged in the district.	2.69	0.49	Agreed

Criterion Mean = 2.50; SD = Standard Deviation

Table 2 showed that strategies to reduce the plight of female-headed households had agreement mean responses of 2.74, 2.73, 2.74, 2.72, 2.75, 2.68, 2.70, 2.75, 2.73, 2.76, 2.76, and 2.69. the standard deviation ranged from 0.49 to 0.67. The respondents agreed to all the items because the mean scores were above the criterion mean of 2.50.

Table 3: ANOVA Result on the Challenges of Female-headed households

Source of Variance	SS	Df	MS	f-cal	f-Critical	Remarks
B/W Group variance	62.89	7	8.98			
W/Group variance	3.18	371	0.03			
Total	66.07	378		225.87	2.13	Sig.

Source: Field study; Sig. = Significant at  $P < 0.05\%$

Table 3 showed that there is significant difference on the mean responses of respondents on the challenges of female-headed householders across the LGAs of the Rivers-West Senatorial District of Rivers State due to the f-calculated of 225.87 being far greater than the f-critical of 2.13. Therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected.

Table 4: ANOVA Result on the Strategies to Reduce the Plight of the People of Rivers-West Senatorial District

Source of Variance	SS	Df	MS	f-cal	f-Critical	Remarks
B/W Group variance						
	57.29	7	8.18			
W/Group variance	1.27	371	0.02			
Total	58.56	378		465.19	2.14	Sig

Source: Field study; Sig=Significant at  $P < 0.05\%$

Table 4 showed that the sources of variance of the between group and within group which shows the f-calculated of 465.19 and f-critical of 2.14. This implies that there is no significant difference on the mean responses of female-headed householders on the strategies to reduce the

plight of the people across the LGAs of the Rivers-West Senatorial District of Rivers State, therefore the hypothesis is rejected because there is significant difference across the eight LGAs responses of the female-headed householders.



#### IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Given the information in the analysis in Table 1, all the female-headed respondents agreed to the challenges of female-headed households' items which had mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The items are agitation for resource control has bred militancy in the area; general insecurity is a major problem in the creeks/farms; kidnapping and rape of women are common trends; there is high level of promiscuity; lifestyle issues result in STDs and unintended pregnancies; pollution of the sea and land through crude oil activities has deprived women of their livelihood; poverty of female-headed households is among the worse of the world; there is lack of political and socio-economic inclusion of women; high school drop-out is rampant among adolescent girls; male denial of female pregnancies is rampant, and there is lack of employment opportunities. These findings are in agreement with Daily Trust (2024: December 23) assertion that the entire Niger Delta's environment (air people breathe, water people drink, and land for farming) is polluted. Accordingly, Oguzor et al. (2022) noted that when oil spills occur farming and fishing activities, which are the main sources of occupation and employment for the inhabitants are disrupted. Therefore, losing means of livelihood, threat of environment pollution, and food insecurity stare the faces of the people with challenges such as hunger, starvation and malnutrition. Further, they opined that activities of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region have resulted in environmental and economic devastation on the livelihood of the communities which include soil contamination, marine contamination, reduced crop production, decline in production of seafood, contamination of drinking water, increased incidence of malnourishment related diseases and general socio-economic effects.

The result in Table 2 showed that strategies to reduce the plights of female-headed households had agreement mean responses above the criterion mean of 2.50. The householders' strategic response items are reduction of green gas emission, gas flaring and crude oil pollution; chiefs and youth leaders in Rivers-West Senatorial District should be trained on skills of human resource management; youths and especially women should be empowered educationally in the district; inclusive arrangement for entrepreneurship skill training should be compulsory with follow-up programmes; amnesty programme should be all-inclusive because environmental degradation is felt by all; there should be holistic sustainable programme to alleviate the issues of poverty, pollution and infrastructure; social welfare should be put in place for the poorest of the poor, especially the female bread winners; at least 10% of derivation money should reach the host communities; politicians should stop stealing our collective wealth to detriment of the people; more military presence and infrastructure to forestall increasing rate of criminality; soft loans should be given to vulnerable women in the district by government; and functional government sponsored co-operatives should be encouraged in the district. The findings conform with Sanusi (2024) assertion that it is important that human capacity should be built through deliberate vision of government to enshrine good governance and the people to engage in innovative exploits, conscientious

development of intellectual property through vibrant education and ensuring strong public institutions. Also, in agreement Dienne (2024) noted that insecurity is getting complex in Nigeria as it affects the social, political, economic among other issues in the country. The challenges of insecurity in the country has led to general fear in the minds of travelers and business people as all the sectors of socio-economic domains are affected due to threats of kidnappers, sea pirates, bandits, arm robbers, burglars and so on. This need to be addressed by the government of Nigeria and stakeholders in security issues of the country. Benjamin and Amalo (2020) further confirmed that female-headed households suffer poverty at just two-thirds the rate of male-headed households in Nigeria.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The mitigation of plights of female-headed householders in the Rivers-West Senatorial district need collaboration between the Federal Government and NDDC; as well as ameliorate discontent in the district through robust implementation of their programs for the wellbeing of the people, especially the women that have been neglected over the years. Promoting improvement in the wellbeing of the people for sustainable livelihood. Also, degradation of the environment because of oil spillages should be tackled effectively by matching policy with action by the Federal Government and oil companies including NDDC to minimize incessant pollution.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations are pertinent.

- From the findings profound reforms need to be made by the oil companies and the Nigerian government to benefit the host communities. For instance, communities living close to their flow-stations should be given electricity and medical attention for a sense of belonging as oil producing people.
- Multinational companies' operations in the area should be forced to practice sustainable practices or face sanction. Global gas flaring laws should be upheld in Niger Delta region to minimize air pollution related diseases in the area. They have corporate social responsibility to the people.
- Scholarship should be awarded to all pupils and students in school from primary to tertiary in the district.

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