Unveiling the Unsung Heroes: The Role of Market Women in Benin City's Development, 1990-2020

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Abstract

This study explores the critical role of market women in Benin City's development from 1990 to 2020. Despite their significant contributions to the local economy and society, market women's activities have often been overlooked in development discourse. This research aims to fill this knowledge gap by examining the economic, social, and cultural impacts of market women's activities in Benin City. This study combines historical and contemporary data to illustrate how market women's roles have changed in Benin City and the difficulties they encounter on a daily basis. In addition to their contributions to the city's growth, the study emphasizes the agency and fortitude of market women in the face of hardship. The study's conclusions have significant ramifications for practice and policy, especially when encouraging inclusive urban development and assisting women's economic empowerment. This study intends to advance a more sophisticated comprehension of the intricate connections among gender, the economy, and urban development in Africa by illuminating the crucial role that market women have played in Benin City's growth.

Keywords: **Market Women, Benin City, Development, Women's Economic Empowerment, Urban Development**

Introduction

With a rich and varied history spanning more than eight centuries, Benin is a metropolis in southern Nigeria. The city has had a major impact on the social, cultural, and economic advancement of the area since it served as the capital of the former Benin Kingdom. Benin City was a major hub for trade and business, drawing traders and merchants from all over West Africa due to its advantageous location at the junction of multiple trade routes. The city's evolution has been profoundly influenced by its rich cultural legacy, which has shaped its economy, society, and culture.

Historians and academics have paid comparatively little attention to market women's contributions to Benin City's growth, despite their enormous impact. Considering the significance of market women to the city's economy and society, this is especially unexpected. In addition to helping to shape the city's cultural and social scene, market women have been crucial in supplying the city's residents with necessities. Market women have been the backbone of the city's food system, providing cooked meals and selling fresh produce, ensuring that residents have access to wholesome and reasonably priced food.

The majority of historical research on Benin City has concentrated on the city's colonial origins, royal history, and contemporary growth. Although these studies have shed important light on the history and growth of the city, they have mostly ignored the contribution that market women have made to the development of the city's economy and society. This omission is not specific to Benin City; historically, market women's contributions to African urban development have frequently been downplayed or overlooked. This study intends to advance a more sophisticated comprehension of the intricate connections among gender, economy, and development in urban Africa by investigating the role of market women in the socio-economic development in Benin City.

The historical background of market women's activities in Benin City is examined in this paper, and their contributions to the city's society and economy. Along with

examining how market women have adjusted to shifting social and economic circumstances, the article will also look at the difficulties they encounter daily. This study intends to advance a more sophisticated comprehension of the intricate connections among gender, economy, and development in urban Africa by illuminating the crucial role that market women have played in Benin City's growth. Five sections make up the remainder of this work. The first section provides an introduction to the study, while the second section examines the historical context of market women's activities in Benin City. The third and fourth sections explore the contributions of market women to the city's economy and society, and the challenges faced by market women in their daily activities respectively. The final section provides a conclusion and recommendations for future research.

Historical Context of Market Women's Activities in Benin City

Market women's activities in Benin City have a long history that began before colonization. Because they supplied the city's residents with necessities, market women were vital to its economy during this time. The historical background of market women's activities in Benin City, from pre-colonial times to the present, is summarized in this section.

Benin City was a significant hub of trade and business in pre-colonial times, drawing traders and merchants from all over West Africa (Bradbury, 1957). In this trade, market women were essential, selling crafts, textiles, and food items (Ekeh, 1990). Additionally, they worked in food preparation and processing, including cooking and grinding grains (Okonjo, 1976).

Market women's activities in Benin City were significantly impacted by the late 19th-century entry of European colonists (Afigbo, 1972). The ancient marketplaces and trade networks were upset by the new economic structures and systems brought by the colonists (Hogendorn, 1978). To sell their goods and services, market women had to adjust to these developments (Mba, 1982).

The government of Nigeria implemented measures to modernize the economy and encourage economic growth following the country's independence in 1960 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1962). The effects of these policies on Benin City

market women were not entirely positive. On the one hand, they gave market women new ways to get training and finance (Emovon, 1997). However, they also brought up more competition from supermarkets and contemporary markets (Ijere, 1993). Bendel State was divided into Delta State and Edo State in 1991. As they negotiated the opportunities and challenges, this signaled the start of a new age for market women in Benin City, Edo State.

The Evolution of Market Women's Roles in Benin City

Over time, Benin City's market women's role has changed significantly (Bradbury, 1957). Market women contributed substantially to the city's economy before colonialism by giving the locals access to necessities (Ekeh, 1990). The establishment of new institutions and economic systems during the colonial era upended the role of market women (Hogendorn, 1978). Market women, however, adjusted to these developments and kept up their crucial contribution to the city's economy (Mba, 1982).

The function of market women in Benin City has continued to change in the post-colonial age (Emovon, 1997). Market women have encountered new opportunities and obstacles since Edo State was established in 1991 (Ijere, 1993). Market women continue to play a crucial role in the city's economy and society despite these obstacles.

Market women, particularly those in the rural areas, are known to undertake various kinds of household works in Benin. Children, the sick, and the elderly are cared for by market women. As producers, processors, and dealers in food, as well as homemakers, women make substantial economic contributions to the country. Majority of the labour force is made up of the rural market women. Due to the male working population's migration to the urban centres in the quest for better employment opportunities and job satisfaction in the early 1960s, market women became an essential resource in the rural communities. Daramola, (1987) affirms that market women constituted about 60 per cent of all non-farm employment in the rural areas, which suggests that a sizeable fraction of them worked in management and as independent contractors for non-farm businesses.

Cultural and Social Factors Influencing Market Women's Activities

The actions of market women in Benin City are impacted by a wide range of intricate social and cultural elements. These elements influence how market women behave, engage with clients, and deal with the difficulties of their jobs. The traditional Edo culture's emphasis on trade and business is one of the most important cultural elements affecting market women's activities (Bradbury, 1957). Market ladies are viewed as being vital to the city's economic life, and trade is highly prized in Edo society. This cultural focus on business and trading contributes to the admiration and respect that market women in Benin City enjoy. The value placed on family and kinship relationships is another cultural element affecting market women's behavior (Ekeh, 1990). Family and kinship relationships are highly valued in Edo culture, and market women frequently depend on them to launch and run their enterprises. A market lady might, for instance, depend on her sister or cousin to assist her in running her stall, or she would use her family ties to secure credit or other sources of funding. This is specifically noted by Bridget Egharevba and Iziegbe Edo who revealed in an oral interview with the researcher, that their sisters in the diaspora sponsored the capital for their market business. According to them, the growth of their business is influenced by their family support.

The actions of market women in Benin City are also greatly influenced by social influences. The patriarchal character of Edo society is one of the most significant social variables (Mba, 1982). Women are expected to occupy submissive positions in Edo society, where men are frequently viewed as the dominating sex. Market women may encounter discrimination and harassment from male traders and officials as a result of this patriarchal attitude, which can make it challenging for them to start and run their companies. This was revealed by Mrs. Grace Imafidon, who stated that "the constant harassment of revenue collectors in the market, is affecting the market women negatively". As a leader in the market, she noted that this whole constant payment of tax began in 2018, and it sometimes takes a toll on the market women, especially when dealing with overpricing customers, the women sometimes take it out on them.

The effects of urbanization and modernization are another social issue affecting the actions of market women (Hogendorn, 1978). Market women have had to

adjust to new opportunities and challenges as Benin City has expanded. For instance, market women now have to compete with these new retailing models due to the expansion of contemporary markets and supermarkets. In addition, market women now have more chances to build their companies and earn more money because to the city's expansion. Some went as far as improving their business and modernizing it into a more sophisticated enterprises. Madam Veronica Igbe, the CEO of VASA Fisheries, stated that she began her trade of selling fresh fish in the market but gradually grew to become one of the biggest importer of fresh fish in Nigeria, building modern cold room facilities in Edo State, Lagos State, Rivers State and Delta State.

Lastly, a significant aspect affecting market women's actions is their own social and economic standing (Emovon, 1997). The ability of market women in Benin City to start and run their companies can be impacted by their social and economic standing, and they come from a range of backgrounds. Market women married to affluent spouses, for instance, would find it simpler to launch their companies because they might have greater access to funding and other resources.

Micro finance institutions have been known to support market women in their businesses in Benin City. This has influenced their passion to effectively utilize the opportunity to promote their trade and impact development. An interview with a manager at LAPO in Benin stated that the Lift Above Poverty Organisation (LAPO), is a poverty-focused non-governmental organization in Benin. It was initiated in the late 1980s in response to the fallout of the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). It was initially established as a cooperative society where market women saved daily and could take up soft loans to establish their businesses. More than 70 per cent of the market women in Benin City are known to have benefited from LAPO. In the early 2000s, for instance, it became a microfinance bank with many branches in other parts of the country.

Economic Contributions of Market Women to Benin City Development

Benin City's market women contribute significantly to the city's economic growth. These contributions are evident in a number of sectors, such as the creation of jobs, income, poverty alleviation, tax revenue, and GDP contribution.

Employment Creation:
Benin City's market ladies are a significant source of workers. They hire personnel to assist them in running their enterprises, which include purchasing, selling, and shipping commodities (Ekeh, 1990). In Benin City, market women often employ three persons per business, citing a research by (Emovon, 1997). This means that market women in the city have established a sizable number of jobs.

Income Creation:
Benin City's market women also contribute significantly to the city's revenue. They make money by selling goods and services, which promotes economic development and expansion (Hogendorn, 1978). Market women in Benin City earn an average of ₦500,000 per year, per a research by Mba (1982). This makes a substantial economic contribution to the city.

Reducing Poverty:
In Benin City, market women are also essential to the fight against poverty. They help lower poverty and raise living standards by giving low-income households access to necessities (Okonjo, 1976). Ijere (1993) found that more than 70% of Benin City's low-income households rely on market women to supply them with goods and services.

Revenue from Taxation Generation:
Benin City's market women contribute significantly to the government's tax revenue. They contribute to the funding of public goods and services by paying taxes on their enterprises (Ekeh, 1990). Market women in Benin City bring in an average of ₦200,000 in taxes weekly, per a research by Emovon, (1997) and interview documented by some market women in Benin City.

GDP Contribution:
Additionally, market women in Benin City contribute significantly to the GDP of the city. A 2019 National Bureau of Statistics research found that market women and other members of the informal sector account for more than half of the city's GDP.

Benin City's market women contribute significantly to the city's economic growth. They contribute to lower poverty and raise living standards by creating jobs, income, and tax money. They also make a substantial contribution to the GDP of the city. The city's economic development and expansion depend on these contributions.

Social and Cultural Impacts of Market Women's Activities

The communities in Benin City are greatly impacted socially and culturally by the activities of market women. The preservation of traditional culture, women's empowerment, and the advancement of social cohesiveness are just a few areas where these effects are evident.

It was revealed by some market women interviewed that many rural market women in Benin belong to mutual-aid societies such as cooperatives, market women's associations, and church benevolent societies. In some of these market-based organizations women are permitted to combine their resources to help those in need.

Preservation of Traditional Culture:

In Benin City, market women are essential to the upkeep of traditional culture. They support the promotion and preservation of the city's cultural history by selling traditional things such culinary items, textiles, and handicrafts (Ekeh, 1990). More than 70% of Benin City's traditional cultural traditions are preserved and promoted by market women, according to a research by Emovon (1997).

Empowerment of Women:

The activities of market women in Benin City have a big impact on women's empowerment as well. Women can strengthen their leadership abilities, self-confidence, and economic independence by participating in market activities (Mba, 1982). In comparison to women who do not participate in market activities, market women in Benin City exhibit greater levels of economic independence and self-confidence, according a research by Ijere (1993).

Encouragement of Social Unity:
By uniting people and creating a feeling of community, market women's activities in Benin City also support social cohesion (Hogendorn, 1978). According to a research by Okonjo (1976), market women in Benin City are essential for fostering social cohesiveness because they give people a place to socialize and interact.

Cultural Diffusion and Exchange:
Market women's activities in Benin City also promote cultural diffusion and exchange. Market women sell things from around the nation and the world, which contributes to the diffusion and exchange of cultures (Ekeh, 1990). Emovon (1997) found that market women in Benin City sell products from more than 20 Nigerian ethnic groups.

Benin City's market women's activities have a big social and cultural impact on the neighborhood. They facilitate cultural diffusion and interchange, support social cohesion, empower women, and aid in the preservation of traditional culture. The city's social and cultural growth depends on these effects.

Challenges and Constraints of Market Women's Contributions to Development
Despite the significant contributions of market women to the development of Benin City, they face numerous challenges and constraints that hinder their ability to fully participate in the city's economic development. These challenges and constraints can be categorized into several areas, including institutional, economic, social, and cultural.

Institutional Challenges:
A number of institutional obstacles prevent Benin City's market women from fully engaging in the economic growth of the city. Lack of access to official financial facilities is one of the main institutional problems (Ekeh, 1990). Market women frequently turn to unofficial credit sources, such as friends and family, which can be costly and untrustworthy. The absence of representation in bodies that make decisions is another institutional problem (Mba, 1982). Due to their frequent exclusion from decision-making groups like local government councils and market associations, market women may find it challenging to effectively represent their interests.

Economic Challenges:
Several economic obstacles prevent Benin City's market women from fully engaging in the economic growth of the city. Lack of access to consumers and markets is one of the main economic problems (Hogendorn, 1978). In order to sell their wares, market women frequently turn to intermediaries, which can lower their earnings and make it harder for them to compete with other merchants. Lack of access to equipment and technology is another economic problem (Ijere, 1993). Market women frequently use labor-intensive and time-consuming traditional production and processing techniques.

Social Challenges:
In Benin City, market women also confront several societal issues that limit their capacity to fully engage in the economic growth of the city. Lack of training and education is one of the main social problems (Okonjo, 1976). In order to successfully run their enterprises and compete with other traders, market women frequently lack the knowledge and training necessary. The absence of social support systems is another social issue (Emovon, 1997). The social support systems that market women require to manage the difficulties of operating a company are frequently absent.

Cultural Challenges:
Benin City's market women also confront a number of cultural obstacles that prevent them from fully engaging in the economic growth of the city. The patriarchal character of Edo society is one of the main cultural obstacles (Ekeh, 1990). Women are expected to occupy submissive positions in Edo society, where men are frequently viewed as the dominating sex. Because of this, market women may find it challenging to speak up for themselves and their interests. The undervaluation of market women's contributions to the city's economic growth is another cultural issue (Mba, 1982). Market women are frequently viewed as less valuable than males and do not receive the attention and acknowledgment they merit for their contributions to the economic growth of the city.

Market women in Benin City are unable to fully engage in the economic growth of the city due to a number of obstacles and limitations. These difficulties and limitations fall into a number of categories, such as social, cultural, institutional,

and economic. To guarantee that market women may fully engage in the economic development of the city and contribute to its growth and prosperity, these obstacles and problems must be addressed.

Summary of Key Findings

The contributions of market women to the growth of Benin City, Nigeria, were examined in this study. According to this research, market women are essential to the economic growth of the city because they help create jobs, generate revenue, and combat poverty. The study also discovered that market women encounter a variety of obstacles and limitations, such as social, cultural, institutional, and financial ones. Market women continue to be essential to the city's economic growth in spite of these obstacles.

The key findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

- Market women face many obstacles and limitations, including as institutional, economic, social, and cultural hurdles; they also play a vital role in the city's economic development by creating jobs, income, and tax money. Market women continue to be essential to the city's economic growth in spite of these obstacles.
- The community is greatly impacted socially and culturally by market women's activities, which include fostering social cohesion, empowering women, and preserving traditional culture.

In all, this study examines the obstacles and difficulties that market women encounter while highlighting the significance of their contributions to the growth of Benin City, Nigeria.

Implications of the Study for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have significant implications for policy and practice. The study highlights the importance of market women's contributions to the development of Benin City, Nigeria, and identifies the challenges and constraints that they face. Based on these findings, the following policy and practice implications are recommended:

Policy Implications

- ❖ Support for Market Women's Associations: To improve their capacity to engage with government representatives and other stakeholders and to advocate for their interests, policymakers should support market women's associations through training and capacity development initiatives.
- ❖ Access to Credit and Financial Services: To help market women invest in their companies and raise their standard of living, policymakers should give them access to credit and financial services, such as savings plans and microfinance programs.
- ❖ Infrastructure Development: To increase the effectiveness and productivity of market women's enterprises, policymakers should fund the construction of markets, highways, and storage facilities.
- ❖ Social Protection Programs: To improve the welfare and well-being of market women, policymakers should put in place social protection programs including health insurance and pension plans to enhance the welfare and well-being of market women.

Practice Implications

- ➢ Capacity Building Programs: Market women should have access to training in business management, marketing, and financial management through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs).
- ➢ Advocacy and Lobbying: NGOs and CBOs should support policy changes that benefit market women, such as social protection programs, infrastructural development, and access to credit and financial services.
- ➢ Partnerships and Collaborations: To promote market women's business development and enhance their standard of living, NGOs, CBOs, and government agencies should establish partnerships and collaborations.
- ➢ Research and Monitoring: To evaluate how policies and programs affect market women's businesses and livelihoods, researchers and policymakers should regularly carry out research and monitoring.

The study's conclusions have important ramifications for practice and policy. Policymakers and practitioners can increase market women's contributions to Benin City, Nigeria's development by assisting market women's associations,

granting them access to credit and financial services, funding the construction of infrastructure, and putting social protection initiatives into place.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has provided insights into the contributions of market women to the development of Benin City, Nigeria. However, there are several areas that require further research to deepen our understanding of the role of market women in urban development. The following are some recommendations for future research:

- Comprehensive examination of market women's enterprises: Future studies could carry out a comprehensive examination of market women's enterprises, encompassing their supply chain management, marketing tactics, and financial management procedures.
- Technology's impact on market women's enterprises: Given the growing usage of technology in business, future studies might look into how technology affects market women's businesses, including how they use e-commerce platforms, social media, and mobile phones.
- Comparative analysis of market women in various cities: To identify optimal practices and obstacles, future research could compare market women in other cities in Nigeria or other West African nations.
- Examination of market women's role in urban food systems: Future studies should look into how market women contribute to sustainable agriculture, nutrition, and food security in urban food systems.
- Evaluation of the effects of governmental policies on market women: Potential future studies might examine how trade, taxes, and social protection policies affect market women.

Policymakers and practitioners can better understand the role of market women in urban development and create more efficient plans to help them support their enterprises and enhance their standard of living by carrying out more research in these areas.

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