



ABIA STATE SNAPSHOT: SOCIAL NORMS & WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



The Abia State brief is a part of a larger review of social norms, women's economic empowerment, and policy across six states – Abia, Borno, Edo, Kaduna, Lagos, and Niger – from varied geo-political zones in Nigeria. These states were chosen to reflect diverse contexts among Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) priority states. The full report consisted of a desk review, 36 in-depth interviews (IDIs), and two focus group discussions (FGD) with key stakeholders across the selected states and at the national level.

Throughout Nigeria, women are exposed to patriarchal social norms relating to decision-making, employment, land ownership, and access to school. Across states, this leads to negative outcomes for women's economic empowerment resulting in women often having limited access to public services, finances, legal and social protection, health services, education, and opportunities to participate in the economy. Women also make most of Nigeria's poor.

Abia State has the highest cumulative rates of economic empowerment for women ages 15 to 49. It has the highest percentages of women's educational attainment (97.9%), participation in decision making (82.2%), ownership of land and house assets (7%), and ownership of a bank account (35.8%) and the second highest percentage of women's employment (73.9%). It also has high rates of gender-based violence (GBV) (33.7%) (2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey).

In Abia State, patriarchal land practices play an important role in limiting women's economic empowerment. In traditional Igbo families, fathers do not will land to their daughters out of fear that the land will leave the family (Opata and Asogwu, 2017). In addition to not being able to inherit land, women need a male next of kin to buy their own

land (Ugweje, 2014). Women face further difficulty purchasing property because doing so is seen as competing with men, and many landowners refuse to deal with women. Land is seen as an inheritance from ancestors and is considered a source of wealth, social status, power, and social security (Umeh, 2003). Gendered land practices therefore exclude women from a key source of security and empowerment. Despite these dynamics, Igbo women engage in trade and are influential in politics.



It is very difficult for a woman to own land in Igbo land, I guess it's a part of their culture that they can't be competing with the men when it comes to land which makes it difficult for their women to own lands unlike in other places.

*In-Depth Interview,
Government Official*

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COMMON GENDER NORMS RELATED TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



Families consider sons more deserving of care and investment.



Husband controls wife and provides permission for her to access health care, engage in income-generating activities, access financial services, and move outside the home.



Men should be the key decision-makers in their families and communities.



Women are not expected to control their own assets or property.



Women are expected to take care of most domestic and nurturing chores within the household.



In some circumstances it is appropriate for men to use violence to discipline their wives.¹

¹ Unlike the other norms, the issue of appropriateness to use violence to discipline wives did not arise from the interviews, it comes from the literature (2018 NDHS).

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GENERAL GENDER EQUALITY-FOCUSED LAWS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMMES

- Abolition of Widowhood Practices Bill (2017)
- VAPP Act (2020)
- Child's Rights Act (2009)
- Equality Bill (2017)
- Abia State Disability Bill (2017)
- Ban on female genital mutilation (FGM) in accordance with the National Policy and Plan of Action for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation in Nigeria 2013-2017.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT-FOCUSED LAWS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMMES

- No policy/programs exist or information could not be located.

OBSERVATIONS ON POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The Abolition of Widowhood Practices Bill has been at the State House of Assembly but is yet to be passed since 2017. The ban on FGM in accordance with the National Policy and Plan of Action for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation in Nigeria is being implemented in the State, but FGM still remains prevalent.