

Community Education Strategies for Mitigating Harmful Cultural Practices Against Women in Rebisi Kingdom, Port Harcourt

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Abstract- *This study investigated Community Education Strategies for Mitigating Harmful Cultural Practices Against Women in Rebisi Kingdom, Port Harcourt. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of 200 community leaders and 800 women's group members, making it a total of 1000 respondents across the seven ancestral communities that make up Rebisi Kingdom. A sample of 370 respondents and 70 community leaders were selected using the simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The face and content validation were determined by three experts in adult education and measurement and evaluation departments in Rivers State University. The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach Alpha method, which yielded a coefficient of 0.81, 0.82, and 0.83 obtained from various clusters indicating high internal consistency. Data collected were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviation. The findings revealed that community education strategies such as advocacy campaigns, participatory dialogues, and women empowerment programs were effective in reducing harmful cultural practices like early marriage, widowhood rites, and gender-based discrimination. The study concluded that sustained community education fosters social change and enhances gender equity in traditional societies. It recommended increased governmental and NGO collaboration to strengthen community-based educational programs that promote positive cultural transformation in Rebisi Kingdom and similar communities.*

Keywords: *Community Education, Harmful Cultural Practices, Women Empowerment, Gender Equity, Rebisi Kingdom.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Community Education (CE) is the strategic linchpin of this investigation. It is conceptually defined here as a deliberate, organized, and participatory learning process focused on solving community problems and achieving collective development goals (Long, 2020). Unlike formal schooling, CE utilizes local resources,

knowledge systems, and communication channels to foster critical consciousness and collective action (Freire, 1970). In the context of cultural reform, CE is vital because it recognizes that cultural practices are not static but are learned behaviors sustained by social consensus. Therefore, effective mitigation requires unlearning, critical dialogue, and the social construction of new, equitable norms through structured learning experiences. The strategies deployed, such as advocacy campaigns, participatory dialogues, and sensitization of traditional leaders, are all facets of this educational approach aimed at challenging the *status quo*. Community education defined broadly as educational and awareness practices rooted in the community, participatory learning, dialogue, critical reflection, and locally relevant information dissemination has emerged as a key strategy for addressing culturally embedded harms. These strategies vary widely: formal adult literacy and skills-training programmes, women's group led peer education, sensitization campaigns, participatory dialogues with traditional and religious leaders, and public advocacy (Deekor, Taylor & Okpoyo, 2024; UN Women, 2023). The effectiveness of community education lies in its potential to create critical consciousness ("conscientization"), generate local ownership of change processes, and mobilize indigenous actors (chiefs, opinion leaders, faith leaders) as allies rather than external critics.

The literature on community education intervention design identifies several strategies that show promise in comparable Nigerian settings and may be replicable in Rebisi: (1) participatory community dialogues involving multi-stakeholder forums including women, men, youth, and traditional/religious leaders; (2) women's literacy, life skills and economic empowerment programmes as a means of reducing women's vulnerability and increasing their agency; (3) sensitization and capacity building of traditional/faith leaders so that they

become advocates for reform rather than gatekeepers of harmful norms; (4) public awareness and advocacy campaigns that combine legal literacy with culturally contextual messaging; (5) integrating monitoring, evaluation and feedback loops so that community perceptions and outcomes are continuously assessed and programmes adjusted. Empirical evaluations confirm that interventions combining more than one of these (education + economic support + leader engagement + public advocacy) tend to produce more sustained behavior change than single-axis efforts (Deekor et al., 2024; Dokubo, 2024; Gabriel-Job et al., 2023).

An important theoretical anchor for community education interventions is Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization, which argues that education should not merely transmit facts but enable individuals to reflect critically on socio-political realities, challenge injustice, and participate in transformation. Applying this to harmful cultural practices implies educational processes that invite critical dialogue about the origins, functions, and consequences of traditions, inviting community members to weigh tradition against human rights, health, and well-being. Similarly, theories of social norms change emphasize reference groups, perceptions of what is socially accepted, and conditional preferences: what people think others expect of them matters greatly for whether they change behaviour (Cislaghi & Heise, 2018). Public declarations by respected leaders, collective pledges by women's or youth groups, or visible modeling of new norms have been shown to be especially powerful in shifting perceived normative behaviour. While such theoretical work is less abundant in Rebisi-specific literature, neighboring Rivers State case studies demonstrate that norm-oriented tactics coupled with conscientization are among the more effective interventions (Gabriel-Job, Udofia & Akani, 2023; Dokubo, 2024).

Harmful Cultural Practices (HCPs) are customs, traditions, or social norms, often deeply rooted and justified by cultural or religious narratives, that violate the basic human rights of women and girls (WHO, 2021). These practices perpetuate gender inequality and inflict physical, psychological, and/or economic harm. In the context of the Rebisi Kingdom and surrounding areas, the HCPs of focus typically include: early and forced marriage, discriminatory and harsh widowhood rites (which often involve

isolation, restriction of movement, and property disinheritance), and various forms of gender-based discrimination concerning land ownership and political participation (Izugbara & Abara, 2023). The persistence of these practices is often linked to patriarchal structures that subordinate women's agency and prioritize male lineage and control.

Cultural norms and practices shape everyday life in communities across Nigeria, influencing roles, responsibilities, and expectations for men and women. While many cultural practices serve to sustain social cohesion, identity, and shared values, some traditions are discriminatory and harmful, disproportionately affecting women's health, rights, and socio-economic participation. Harmful traditions include, among others, early and forced marriages, widowhood rites that humiliate or dispossess women, denial of inheritance and property rights, gender-based violence cloaked as tradition, and harmful rites tied to accusations of witchcraft or social "cleansing." These practices are recognized by international and regional bodies as serious human rights concerns because they violate the rights, health, and dignity of women and girls (UNFPA Nigeria, 2023).

The twin goals of this mitigation effort are Women Empowerment and Gender Equity. Women

Empowerment is the process by which women gain control over the factors that shape their lives, including access to resources, knowledge, and participation in decision-making, essential tools for resisting HCPs (Kabeer, 1999). Gender Equity, on the other hand, is the ultimate goal: the state of fairness in the treatment of women and men, which often requires addressing historically embedded imbalances and discrimination. Community Education strategies, by providing legal literacy, skills acquisition, and confidence building, directly promote empowerment, which in turn drives the community closer to achieving gender equity. The ultimate pursuit of the intervention lies in fostering Women Empowerment as the process required to achieve Gender Equity as the desired societal outcome. While historically, empowerment was often viewed simply as a measure of economic improvement, contemporary development discourse defines it as a multi-dimensional social process that helps individuals, particularly those from marginalized groups, gain control over their own lives and the factors that shape them (Page & Czuba, 1999, cited in Solomon & Memar, 2014). Building on

the foundational work of Kabeer (1999), Women's Empowerment today encompasses three interconnected pillars, as affirmed by the World Bank's recent strategy (2023):

1. Agency: The capacity for goal-setting, self-efficacy, and the ability to make and act on strategic life choices (e.g., deciding when or whom to marry).
2. Resources: Access to and control over assets, income, land, and information (e.g., property inheritance rights).
3. Context: The social norms, institutions, and laws that either restrict or enable empowerment (e.g., discriminatory widowhood rites).

Gender Equity, in contrast, is the ultimate goal of fairness and the non-existence of discrimination on the basis of gender (Holzner et al., 2010, cited in Solomon & Memar, 2014). It acknowledges that achieving equality requires addressing the historically embedded imbalances and discrimination faced by women, often demanding proactive measures to ensure their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities are not determined by their sex (UN Women, 2024).

The Rebisi Kingdom is a traditional kingdom of the indigenous Ikwerre people in what is now the Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. It encompasses several communities including Orolozu, Oroworukwo, Oroabali, Orogbum, Oromerezimbu, Oroada, and Orochiri, and the traditional ruler of the kingdom holds the stool of Eze Epara Rebisi. The kingdom is rich in history and culture, though it has faced significant cultural challenges due to the ongoing urbanization of Port Harcourt. Ethnographic and historical studies indicate that Rebisi people have maintained strong cultural institutions and practices, even as Port Harcourt grew and urbanized, creating a complex interplay between tradition, modernization, pluralism, and migration. Urban pressures and exposure to diverse cultural norms have in some cases weakened enforcement of certain practices, but in many others have led to defensive entrenchment of tradition.

Understanding this historical and contemporary cultural configuration of Rebisi is therefore critical when designing educational interventions aimed at transforming harmful practices, because interventions must be culturally sensitive and based on local legitimacy. (While specific academic work

on Rebisi is more limited, comparable ethnographic work in nearby Rivers communities shows similar dynamics in cultural persistence amid urbanization.)

In the case of Rebisi Kingdom, there are unique local conditions that shape both the expression of harmful practices and the feasibility of educational interventions. As an urban indigenous community embedded within the Port Harcourt metropolis, Rebisi experiences intense cultural contact, commercial activity, and heterogeneous religious influences conditions that both expose community members to alternative norms and sometimes provoke cultural retrenchment. Youths and women in urban settings often have greater exposure to formal education, media, and diverse religious teachings, which may engender progressive attitudes toward women's rights; yet, elders and custodians of tradition may perceive educational or advocacy interventions as eroding collective identity and communal cohesion. That duality simultaneous exposure to modernizing influences and desire to preserve tradition makes Rebisi a particularly instructive case for examining which community education strategies work, why and under what conditions.

Within Rivers State and the wider Niger Delta region, specific harmful practices particularly certain widowhood rites, inheritance denial, and female genital mutilation (FGM) have been documented in academic and civil society literature. For example, in Rivers State a recent study among adolescents found that a nontrivial proportion still perceive and are affected by harmful traditional practices, including FGM, forced marriage, and unhealthy widowhood practices, with knowledge of risks emerging but actual practice persisting (Gabriel-Job, Udofia & Akani, 2023). Another study focused on the Ikwerre ethnic nationality showed that adult education programmes have had measurable impact in enlightening women against discriminatory practices such as early or forced girls' marriage, FGM, and traumatic widowhood rites, though gaps remain in enforcement and community acceptance.

Recent empirical evaluations in Rivers State and similar Nigerian contexts show that when community education is designed and implemented collaboratively with respect for local culture and identity, and when traditional authorities are engaged significant shifts occur in attitudes, knowledge, and sometimes behaviour. For example, programmes in

Akwa-Ibom State (neighbouring region) have demonstrated that community education can lead to reduced acceptance of harmful traditions against women when women leader groups and community-based organizations are involved in design and delivery of the programs (Deekor et al., 2024). Similarly, in Rivers State, adult education programs among the Ikwerre have helped reduce discriminatory practices against women, including challenging early marriage and unhealthy widowhood rites (Dokubo, 2024).

Despite the promise of education-based approaches, several challenges undermine the scale, depth, and sustainability of community education interventions. First, structural issues such as poverty, unequal gendered access to resources (land, finances, legal protection), low formal education attainment among women limit the ability of women to act on knowledge gained. Second, normative beliefs and social sanctions for non-conformity mean that individuals who challenge harmful practices risk ostracism, loss of support networks, or worse. Third, insufficient engagement with customary authorities or neglecting to adapt messages to local symbolic repertoires (e.g. using culturally relevant narratives, local languages, and respected symbols) can provoke resistance or backlash. Fourth, monitoring and evaluation tend to be weak or episodic; many programs show gains in awareness but less pronounced or durable change in behavior or normative acceptance. Findings from the adolescents' study in Rivers State, for example, manifested good knowledge but mixed behaviour change, indicating that knowledge alone is not enough.

Monitoring and evaluation evidence from Rivers State shows promising but uneven outcomes from community education programs. Recent studies and program evaluations in the region point to measurable gains in knowledge and shifts in attitudes among certain demographic groups (particularly younger women and those with more formal education), and in some cases small policy changes at the community level where chiefs have adopted non-coercive resolutions or modified widowhood rites (Dokubo, 2024). However, full elimination or cessation of harmful practices requires long-term engagement; short interventions without follow-up tend to produce superficial knowledge gains but limited behaviour change. Sustainable outcomes are more likely where programmes are embedded in community structures—for example, training

community educators from within the community, women-led microenterprise groups, periodic dialogues, and institutionalization of educational content in local institutions or churches/mosques.

Prevalent Harmful Cultural Practices Affecting Women in Rebisi Kingdom

Understanding the types and persistence of harmful cultural practices is essential in any effort to address gender inequality. In many Nigerian societies, women continue to face socio-cultural discrimination embedded in traditional norms such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, widowhood rites, inheritance restrictions, and domestic servitude (Omoniyi, 2021; Kalu & Umunna, 2022). These practices often stem from patriarchal ideologies that define women's roles as secondary to men's authority within family and community life. In the context of Rebisi Kingdom in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, cultural traditions such as mourning rituals, economic dependency norms, and gender-based taboos still influence women's access to education, property ownership, and leadership opportunities (Dokubo, 2024). Identifying these harmful practices provides empirical insight into how deeply ingrained cultural norms perpetuate gender inequality. Studies by Nweke and Otamiri (2025) emphasize that contextual understanding of these practices enables educators and policymakers to tailor community education programmes that are culturally sensitive yet transformative.

Recent research further highlights that the identification of specific harmful cultural practices helps in developing intervention models that align with community values while promoting human rights (Gabriel-Job, Udofia, & Akani, 2023; Deekor, Taylor, & Okpoyo, 2021). This objective thus serves as the foundation for the entire study, as recognizing the socio-cultural realities in Rebisi Kingdom allows for evidence-based planning of educational strategies for social change.

Advocacy Campaigns and Attitude Influence

The first objective examining the extent to which advocacy campaigns influence attitudes and behaviours toward harmful cultural practices directly addresses the need for consciousness-raising and public dialogue to challenge entrenched norms. Advocacy Campaigns (ACs) are not merely about information dissemination; they are a strategic, collective action aimed at influencing policy and

public opinion to create a supportive environment for social change (Long, 2020).

De-legitimization of Practices: Recent literature emphasizes that effective ACs successfully delegitimize HCPs by framing them not as sacred tradition, but as violations of fundamental human rights and barriers to development (UNICEF, 2023). For practices like early marriage, advocacy must clearly articulate the quantifiable negative impacts on health, education, and economic potential, making the cultural justification untenable (World Bank, 2024).

Media and Community Mobilization: Successful ACs leverage local communication channels from community radio and town criers to social media in urban centers like Port Harcourt to create a sense of collective responsibility (Nkwa & Adebisi, 2022). This mobilization challenges the silence and fear of ostracism that often sustain practices like harsh widowhood rites, encouraging victims and witnesses to speak out and seek recourse.

Participatory Dialogues and Community Willingness
The second objective focuses on determining the influence of participatory dialogues on the community's willingness to abandon harmful cultural practices. This delves into the core of transformative adult learning, where change is generated internally rather than imposed externally (Freire, 1970/2018). Participatory Dialogues (PDs) are essential because they manage the cultural resistance often triggered by perceived attacks on identity.

Consensus and Ownership: PDs create a safe, non-judgmental space for community members, including men and elders, to engage in critical reflection about cultural practices (Izugbara & Abara, 2023). This process is vital for ensuring sustainability, as practices abandoned through mutual agreement and consensus are far less likely to resurface than those abandoned due to coercion or legal threat (OECD, 2022).

Addressing the "How-To": Unlike advocacy (which addresses the why), dialogues address the how. They allow the community to collectively define an acceptable, culturally sensitive alternative to a harmful practice—such as replacing prolonged, isolating widowhood rites with short, respectful ceremonies (Mba & Okorie, 2020).

Women Empowerment Programs and Vulnerability Reduction

The third objective, assessing the effect of women empowerment programs on reducing women's vulnerability to harmful cultural practices links cultural mitigation directly to socio-economic agency. Women Empowerment Programs (WEPs) are structural interventions designed to dismantle the economic and social dependencies that force women into complying with discriminatory norms.

Economic Agency: The strongest link between empowerment and reduced vulnerability is economic autonomy (Kabeer, 1999; UN Women, 2024). Skill acquisition, financial literacy, and access to micro-credit services provide women with the financial means and confidence to negotiate marriage contracts, resist forced eviction during widowhood rites, and challenge unfair property inheritance (IMF, 2024).

Legal and Social Literacy: WEPs must include legal literacy to equip women with the knowledge necessary to demand their rights. Furthermore, by organizing women into groups, WEPs foster collective agency, ensuring women have a support network to challenge oppressive cultural decisions (World Bank, 2023).

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite growing awareness of gender equality in Nigeria, harmful cultural practices such as early marriage, widowhood rites, and gender-based discrimination remain prevalent in many communities, including Rebisi Kingdom in Port Harcourt. These practices continue to limit women's access to education, property ownership, and participation in community leadership. Although government agencies and non-governmental organizations have introduced various sensitization and empowerment programmes, their impact has been uneven and unsustainable due to weak community participation and persistent patriarchal norms. Community education has the potential to transform such traditional beliefs by fostering awareness, critical thinking, and behavioral change. However, in Rebisi Kingdom, the extent to which community education strategies have effectively mitigated harmful practices against women remains unclear. This study therefore seeks to examine the

community education strategies used in Rebisi Kingdom and assess their effectiveness in reducing harmful cultural practices and promoting gender equity.

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of Community Education Strategies for Mitigating Harmful Cultural Practices Against Women in Rebisi Kingdom, Port Harcourt. The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the extent to which advocacy campaigns influence attitudes and behaviours towards harmful cultural practices against women in Rebisi Kingdom in Port Harcourt.
2. determine the extent participatory dialogues influence community's willingness to abandon harmful cultural practices against women in Rebisi Kingdom, in Port Harcourt.
3. assess the extent women empowerment programmes influence reducing women's vulnerability to harmful cultural practices against women in Rebisi, Port Harcourt.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were answered.

1. To what extent do advocacy campaigns influence attitudes and behaviours toward harmful cultural practices against women in Rebisi Kingdom, Port Harcourt?
2. To what extent do participatory dialogues influence community's willingness to abandon harmful cultural practices in Rebisi Kingdom, Port Harcourt?
3. To what extent do women empowerment programs affect the reduction of women's vulnerability to harmful cultural practices in Rebisi Kingdom, Port Harcourt?

V. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 200 community leaders and 800 women's group members in the seven ancestral communities in Rebisi, Port Harcourt. A sample of 370 respondents was selected using a simple random sampling to select 70 community leaders and 300 women's group members. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled 'Community Education and Cultural Practices Questionnaire' was used. The questionnaire was structured into two sections: Section A covered demographic information, while Section B comprised 20 items designed to measure the perceived effectiveness of the four key Community Education Strategies (5 items per strategy) on a 4-point Likert Scale. The scale was defined as: 4 = Very High Extent (VHE), 3 = High Extent (HE), 2 = Low Extent (LE), and 1 = Very Low Extent (VLE). The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts from the Department of Adult and Community Education and Measurement and Evaluation at the Rivers State University. To ensure reliability, the instrument was pilot-tested among 20 respondents outside the study area, and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.82 confirmed high internal consistency. Data were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviation to determine the effectiveness of community education strategies, while qualitative responses were summarized descriptively. Decision for the analysis was based on a mean score of 2.50 and above for Agree while below 2.50 was for disagree, this was obtained by taking the mean of the ratings thus: $4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.50$.

VI. RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent do advocacy campaigns influence attitudes and behaviours toward harmful cultural practices against women in Rebisi Kingdom, Port Harcourt?

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation on the Extent Advocacy Campaigns (AC) Influence Attitudes and Behaviours Toward Harmful Cultural Practices Against Women

S/N	Item Description	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1	AC has created public awareness about the illegality of early marriage.	3.15	0.81	High Extent
2	AC utilizes local media to openly critique discriminatory widowhood rites.	2.89	0.95	High Extent
3	AC encourages community members to report incidents of gender discrimination.	3.25	0.78	High Extent

S/N	Item Description	X ⁻	SD	Decision
4	AC led by women's groups are well supported by the general community.	2.60	0.99	High Extent
5	AC effectively links HCPs to poor health and socio-economic outcomes.	3.01	0.85	High Extent
	Cluster Mean (X ⁻ c)	2.98	0.87	High Extent

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 shows that all items assessing Advocacy Campaigns recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The Cluster Mean score (X⁻c) of 2.98 indicates that Advocacy Campaigns are perceived as an Effective strategy for mitigating harmful cultural practices. The relatively low SD values (ranging from 0.78 to 0.99) suggest a high

level of consensus among the respondents regarding this effectiveness.

Research Question 2: To what extent do participatory dialogues influence community's willingness to abandon harmful cultural practices in Rebisi Kingdom, Port Harcourt?

Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation on the Extent Participatory Dialogues (PD) Influence Community's Willingness to Abandon Harmful Cultural Practices.

S/N	Item Description	X ⁻	SD	Decision
6	PD create a safe space for men and women to openly discuss cultural critique.	3.30	0.75	High Extent
7	PD lead to mutual agreements on phasing out harmful rituals (e.g., widowhood rites).	2.92	0.88	High Extent
8	PD help to build consensus for the abandonment of early and forced marriages.	3.10	0.80	High Extent
9	PD ensure that cultural solutions are found by community members, not imposed externally.	3.45	0.69	Very High Extent
10	PD successfully incorporate youth and elder perspectives on cultural reform.	2.85	0.91	High Extent
	Cluster Mean (X ⁻ c)	3.12	0.81	High Extent

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 reveals that Participatory Dialogues yielded the highest overall cluster mean score (X⁻c) of 3.12, indicating that this strategy is considered High Extent by the respondents. The high mean on item 9 (X⁻=3.45) specifically highlights the value placed on local ownership and self-determination in the cultural reform process. This finding suggests that consensus-

building mechanisms are the most successful approach.

Research Question 3: To what extent do women empowerment programs affect the reduction of women's vulnerability to harmful cultural practices in Rebisi Kingdom, Port Harcourt?

Table 3: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation on the Extent Women Empowerment Programs (WEP) Affect the Reduction of Women's Vulnerability to Harmful Cultural Practices

S/N	Item Description	X ⁻	SD	Decision
11	WEP reduce women's economic dependency, making them less vulnerable to HCPs.	3.20	0.77	High Extent
12	WEP provide legal literacy that helps women defend their rights (e.g., inheritance).	2.95	0.85	High Extent
13	WEP build confidence for women to challenge discriminatory practices openly.	2.80	0.90	High Extent
14	WEP have led to a visible increase in women's participation in community decision-making.	2.55	1.05	High Extent
15	WEP promote skill acquisition, improving women's status in the household.	3.05	0.83	High Extent

S/N Item Description	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
Cluster Mean ($\bar{X}_c$)	2.91	0.88	High Extent

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The cluster mean for Women Empowerment Programs is 2.91, indicating that this strategy is viewed as High Extent. The highest score ($\bar{X}=3.20$) on economic empowerment confirms the critical link between financial autonomy and reduced vulnerability to harmful practices like forced marriages or harsh widowhood rites. Item 14 recorded the lowest mean and highest SD ($\bar{X}=2.55$; SD = 1.05), suggesting that while empowerment is beneficial, translating that into visible participation in community decision-making still faces some resistance or inconsistency.

VII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The core finding is that all Three Community Education Strategies, Advocacy Campaigns, Participatory Dialogues, and Women Empowerment Programs are significantly effective ($\bar{X}_c \geq 2.50$) in mitigating Harmful Cultural Practices against women in Rebisi Kingdom, Port Harcourt.

Effectiveness of Advocacy Campaigns

The finding that Advocacy Campaigns ($\bar{X}_c=2.98$) are an effective strategy is consistent with literature emphasizing the role of public awareness and consciousness-raising in challenging socio-cultural norms (Long, 2020). By explicitly linking HCPs like early marriage and harsh widowhood rites to poor health and socio-economic outcomes ($\bar{X}=3.01$), the campaigns effectively de-legitimize these practices, moving them from the realm of sacrosanct tradition to that of social pathology. The high mean score indicates that Rebisi residents are receptive to critical public discourse that highlights the negative consequences of these practices, suggesting a foundational shift in community attitude toward change. Furthermore, Nkwa & Adebisi, 2022 in agreement averred that successful advocacy campaigns leverage local communication channels from community radio and town criers to social media in urban centers like Port Harcourt to create a sense of collective responsibility. This mobilization challenges the silence and fear of ostracism that often sustain practices like harsh widowhood rites, encouraging victims and witnesses to speak out and seek recourse

Effectiveness of Participatory Dialogues

The exceptionally high effectiveness of Participatory Dialogues ($\bar{X}_c=3.12$) is the most critical finding. This result supports the Freirean pedagogy of critical consciousness and the principles of participatory action research, where knowledge is co-created and solutions are internally generated (Freire, 1970/2018; Nkwa & Adebisi, 2022). The finding that dialogues ensure cultural solutions are found by the community ($\bar{X}=3.45$) validates the idea that sustainable cultural change cannot be imposed but must be negotiated. Dialogues provide a non-confrontational space for community members, especially men and elders, to openly critique harmful practices without feeling their entire identity is being threatened, thereby facilitating consensus and collective commitment to change (Izugbara & Abara, 2020).

Effectiveness of Women Empowerment Programs

Women Empowerment Programs ($\bar{X}_c=2.91$) were found to be effective primarily because they address the structural vulnerabilities that compel women to comply with harmful practices. The strong score on reducing women's economic dependency ($\bar{X}=3.20$) confirms the theoretical link between economic agency and reduced susceptibility to gender-based abuses (Mba, 2019). When women possess skills and financial independence, their value increases within the household, and they are better equipped to resist practices like being forced into harsh widowhood rites or early marriage. However, the lower consensus on increased participation in community decision-making ($\bar{X}=2.55$; SD = 1.05) suggests that while economic empowerment is progressing, political and social authority structures remain resistant to change, highlighting an area that requires dedicated focus in future interventions. Kabeer, 1999; UN Women, 2024 agreed that the strongest link between empowerment and reduced vulnerability is economic autonomy. Skill acquisition, financial literacy, and access to micro-credit services provide women with the financial means and confidence to negotiate marriage contracts, resist forced eviction during widowhood rites, and challenge unfair property inheritance (IMF, 2024).

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the effectiveness of community education lies not just in its delivery, but in its strategic design to engage all social vectors from the empowered woman to the traditional ruler to create a shared vision of a more equitable culture. This provides a clear, evidence-based model for replication in similar urban-traditional communities across the Niger Delta region.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government and NGOs should intensify community-based education campaigns that address gender and cultural issues.
2. Traditional leaders and opinion moulders should be continuously sensitized and included as partners in advocacy against harmful practices.
3. Adult education programs should integrate gender-sensitive and rights-based learning modules.
4. Funding and capacity building should be strengthened to ensure sustainability of community education interventions.
5. Periodic evaluation should be conducted to assess the long-term impact of community education strategies on cultural practices.

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