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Gender Discrimination and Women's Poverty Dynamics in Rural Nigeria: Evidence from Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State

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Abstract

Gender discrimination remains a significant obstacle to women's socio-economic advancement and continues to contribute to persistent poverty in many rural communities across developing countries. Despite numerous poverty alleviation interventions in Nigeria, poverty among women remains disproportionately high, particularly in areas where discriminatory cultural and institutional practices limit access to education, economic opportunities, and productive resources. This study examined the impact of gender discrimination on women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the effects of low school enrolment, lack of access to skills acquisition programmes, and limited access to inheritance rights on women's poverty. The study was anchored on the Deprivation Theory of Poverty (Capability Approach) propounded by Amartya Sen, which views poverty as a deprivation of capabilities and freedoms necessary for human development. A descriptive survey design was adopted. Data were collected from 350 women selected through a multi-stage sampling technique and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi-square (χ^2) analysis. The findings revealed that low school enrolment ($\chi^2 = 138.80$; $p < 0.05$), lack of access to skills acquisition programmes ($\chi^2 = 125.34$; $p < 0.05$), and limited access to inheritance rights ($\chi^2 = 148.88$; $p < 0.05$) significantly contribute to women's poverty incidence. The study concludes that gender discrimination remains a major driver of women's poverty. It recommends strengthening girl-child education, expanding gender-responsive skills acquisition programmes, and enforcing women's inheritance rights.

Keywords: Boki, Gender discrimination, Inheritance rights, School enrolment, Skills acquisition, Women's poverty

Introduction

Poverty remains one of the most pervasive and debilitating challenges confronting humanity in the twenty-first century. Although traditionally associated with income deprivation, contemporary scholarship increasingly conceptualizes poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing limited access to

education, healthcare, economic opportunities, political participation, and social protection (World Bank, 2020). While poverty affects both developed and developing societies, its manifestations are particularly severe in sub-Saharan Africa, where historical inequalities, weak institutional structures, and persistent

socio-economic vulnerabilities continue to reproduce deprivation across generations (Lee & Park, 2021). Within this context, women remain disproportionately affected, giving rise to what scholars and development practitioners describe as the feminization of poverty. Gender discrimination, expressed through unequal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes, has emerged as one of the most significant factors sustaining women's poverty in many developing societies (UN Women, 2020).

Across Africa, gender-based inequalities remain deeply embedded within social, cultural, economic, and political institutions. Despite notable progress in gender advocacy and legal reforms, women continue to face systemic barriers that restrict their access to productive resources, educational opportunities, land ownership, inheritance rights, financial services, and political representation (Ayamba *et al.*, 2024; Kabeer, 2018). These barriers not only undermine women's empowerment but also perpetuate cycles of poverty and economic dependence. According to the African Development Bank (2020), discriminatory norms and institutional practices continue to constrain women's economic participation across the continent, limiting their ability to accumulate assets and improve their livelihoods. Consequently, poverty and gender discrimination operate as mutually reinforcing phenomena, with each deepening the effects of the other. Women's restricted access to credit facilities, quality education, vocational training, and legal protections further compounds their vulnerability to economic shocks and social exclusion (Asmorowati & Schubert, 2018).

The Nigerian experience reflects many of these broader continental realities. Despite its vast natural and human resources, Nigeria continues to grapple with widespread poverty and inequality. Recent estimates indicate that approximately 63 percent of Nigerians, representing about 145 million people, experience multidimensional poverty, with women constituting a significant proportion of the most affected population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Although successive governments have introduced various poverty reduction programmes, including the N-Power Scheme, Conditional Cash Transfer Programme, and TraderMoni Initiative, poverty remains pervasive, particularly among women in rural communities (World Bank, 2024). Existing evidence suggests that gender discrimination continues to limit women's access to education, employment opportunities, leadership positions, and financial empowerment initiatives across the country (Odey & Sambe, 2019). Furthermore, discriminatory practices that confine women to low-paying, seasonal, informal, or unpaid labour reinforce economic dependency and increase their susceptibility to chronic poverty (Murtaza & Hui, 2025).

These challenges are equally evident in Cross River State, where women continue to experience significant socio-economic disadvantages. Reports by the National Bureau of Statistics (2020) and UNICEF (2019) indicate that women in the state face persistent poverty driven by limited educational opportunities, inadequate access to skills acquisition programmes, and socio-cultural practices that constrain their participation in economic and civic life. The situation is particularly severe in rural communities within the Central and Northern Senatorial Districts, where poverty rates among women have been estimated at between 70 and 75 percent (UNDP, 2020). In Boki Local Government Area, a predominantly agrarian and rural community located in Northern Cross River State, these structural disadvantages are compounded by geographical isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. Women often encounter barriers to

formal education, vocational development opportunities, and inheritance rights, thereby limiting their economic autonomy and reinforcing conditions of poverty.

The problem this study addresses is the persistent and mutually reinforcing relationship between gender discrimination and women's poverty in rural Nigeria. Despite the existence of numerous poverty alleviation initiatives, many women in Boki Local Government Area remain trapped in poverty due to discriminatory practices that restrict their access to educational opportunities, skills acquisition programmes, and inheritance rights. Existing interventions have largely focused on poverty reduction without adequately addressing the gender-specific barriers that perpetuate women's economic exclusion (World Bank, 2020; African Development Bank, 2020). Consequently, poverty alleviation efforts have often produced limited outcomes because they fail to confront the structural foundations of gender inequality. Although studies have examined gender and poverty in different parts of Nigeria, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding how specific forms of gender discrimination contribute to women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area. This represents an important empirical and policy gap that warrants investigation.

This study, thus, seeks to examine the impact of gender discrimination on women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigates the extent to which low school enrolment, lack of access to skills acquisition programmes, and limited access to inheritance contribute to women's poverty. To achieve these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. *To what extent does low school enrolment affect women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria?*
2. *To what extent does lack of access to skills acquisition programmes affect women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria?*
3. *How does limited access to inheritance influence women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria?*

In line with these questions, the following null hypotheses are formulated:

H₀₁: *There is no significant relationship between low school enrolment and women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.*

H₀₂: *There is no significant relationship between lack of access to skills acquisition programmes and women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.*

H₀₃: *There is no significant relationship between limited access to inheritance and women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.*

The contribution of this study is threefold. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on gender inequality and poverty by examining how specific discriminatory practices influence women's economic wellbeing within a rural African context. Empirically, it provides context-specific evidence from Boki Local Government Area, an area that has received limited scholarly attention despite exhibiting high levels of female poverty and socio-economic exclusion. At the policy level, the study offers practical insights for designing gender-responsive poverty

reduction strategies that address not only income deprivation but also the structural inequalities that sustain women's vulnerability.

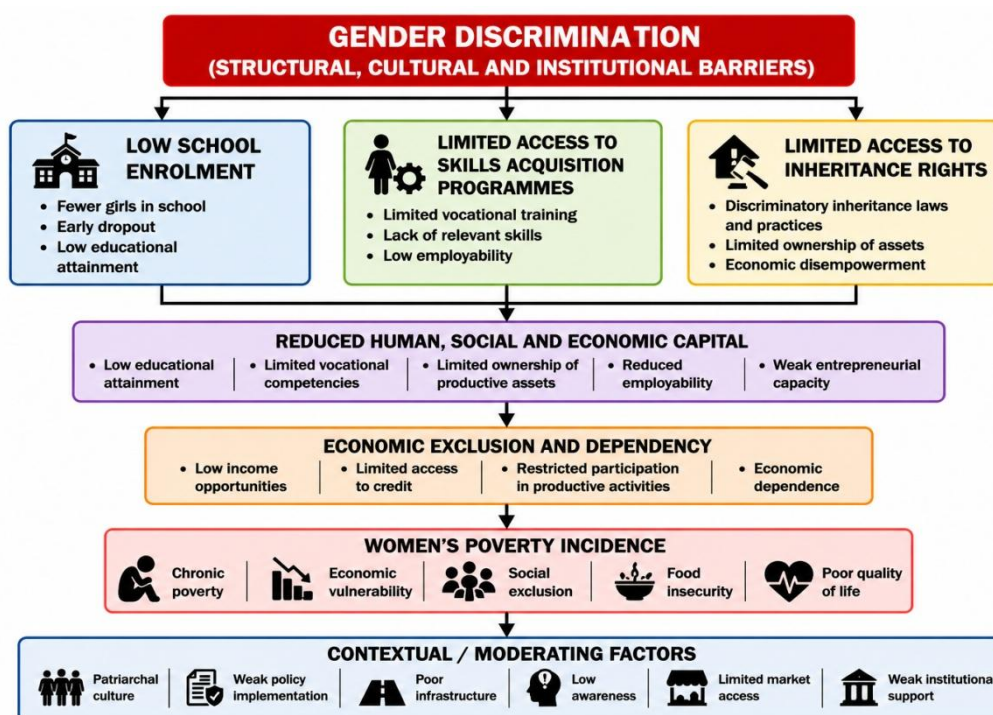
Boki Local Government Area was selected because it represents an important case for understanding the interaction between gender discrimination and poverty within rural Nigeria. The area is characterized by widespread dependence on subsistence agriculture, limited access to social infrastructure, and strong customary institutions that continue to shape gender relations. These conditions make Boki a suitable setting for examining how educational exclusion, inadequate access to skills development opportunities, and discriminatory inheritance practices contribute to women's poverty. Although the findings may not be generalized statistically to all parts of Nigeria, they provide valuable insights into the lived realities of women in rural communities where gender inequality remains deeply entrenched and poverty persistently high.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this study is anchored on the assumption that gender discrimination constitutes a fundamental structural factor that shapes women's socio-economic opportunities and, consequently, their vulnerability to poverty. The framework conceptualizes gender discrimination as a multidimensional phenomenon manifested through unequal access to education, skills acquisition opportunities, and inheritance rights. These discriminatory practices are deeply embedded within social, cultural, and institutional arrangements that systematically disadvantage women and restrict their ability to acquire the human, social, and economic capital necessary for sustainable livelihood improvement. Within rural communities characterized by patriarchal norms and limited development opportunities, such

forms of exclusion are expected to undermine women's economic empowerment and increase their susceptibility to persistent poverty. The framework further assumes that low school enrolment limits women's access to knowledge, literacy, and employment opportunities, thereby reducing their capacity to participate effectively in economic activities. Similarly, lack of access to skills acquisition programmes constrains women's ability to develop vocational competencies, entrepreneurial capabilities, and income-generating skills required for economic self-reliance. Limited access to inheritance rights further reinforces economic deprivation by denying women ownership and control of productive assets such as land, property, and other resources that could enhance their economic security and livelihood opportunities. Consequently, women subjected to these forms of discrimination are more likely to experience chronic poverty, economic dependence, social exclusion, and reduced quality of life. This conceptualization aligns with the assumptions of Gender and Development (GAD) Theory, which emphasizes that gender inequalities are socially constructed and institutionally reinforced through unequal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes. The theory argues that sustainable development cannot be achieved without addressing the structural barriers that perpetuate gender-based exclusion. In this regard, the framework explains the proposed relationship between educational exclusion, inadequate access to skills acquisition programmes, restricted inheritance rights, and women's poverty incidence within the context of Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Figure 1: Conceptual pathway linking gender discrimination and women's poverty incidence



Source: Author's configuration

Theoretical explication

This study is anchored on the Deprivation Theory of Poverty, also known as the Capability Approach, propounded by Amartya Sen in 1981 and further popularized by Nussbaum (1990). The theory holds that poverty is not merely a lack of income, but a deprivation of capabilities and freedoms essential for a dignified life including

access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and political participation. Three core assumptions underpin the theory: first, that human well-being depends on substantive freedoms rather than income alone; second, that structural barriers including gender, culture, and institutional discrimination deprive individuals

of these freedoms; and third, that awareness of inequality can mobilize collective action and advocacy for systemic change.

Applied to this study, the theory explains how women in Boki Local Government Area experience multiple, intersecting deprivations. Low school enrolment deprives women of knowledge and skills essential for economic empowerment; exclusion from skills acquisition programmes limits their productive capacity; and denial of land and inheritance rights removes the material foundation for economic independence. Cultural and religious norms in Boki LGA further constrain women's aspirations by prioritizing their roles as wives and mothers over personal development and civic participation. These deprivations, taken together, reproduce poverty across generations. The Deprivation Theory therefore best fits this study because it provides a robust framework for analyzing how gender discrimination rather than individual failure systematically deprives women of the capabilities needed to escape poverty, while also affirming women's potential for agency and collective action as drivers of change.

Literature review

Gender discrimination and women's poverty have received considerable scholarly and policy attention across the developing world. Existing literature consistently demonstrates that gender-based exclusion from education, productive resources, vocational opportunities, and property ownership contributes significantly to women's economic vulnerability and poverty incidence. The themes below review empirical studies on low school enrolment and women's poverty, access to skills acquisition programmes and women's poverty, and inheritance rights and women's poverty.

Low School Enrolment and Women's Poverty

Education is widely recognized as one of the most effective instruments for reducing poverty and promoting socio-economic empowerment. Scholars have consistently argued that educational attainment enhances individuals' access to employment opportunities, income generation, decision-making capabilities, and social mobility (UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Consequently, low school enrolment among women has been identified as a major factor contributing to persistent poverty in many developing societies.

Several empirical studies have established a strong relationship between educational exclusion and women's poverty. Oyekanmi and Moliki (2021), in their study of gender inequality and poverty in reduction in Ogun state, Nigeria, found that women with limited formal education were significantly more likely to experience chronic poverty than their educated counterparts. The study concluded that educational deprivation restricted women's access to formal employment and income-generating opportunities. Similarly, Odedina (2025) observed that low female school enrolment in rural communities contributed to intergenerational poverty by limiting women's human capital development and economic productivity.

Beyond Nigeria, international evidence supports the poverty-reducing effects of female education. Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2018) found that increased educational attainment among women significantly improved earnings and reduced household poverty across developing countries. Likewise, Onyeansi (2019) reported that girls' educational participation enhanced long-term economic independence and reduced vulnerability to poverty. These findings suggest that educational exclusion remains a critical pathway

through which gender discrimination contributes to women's poverty.

Within the Nigerian context, Ebohon (2023) found that socio-cultural barriers, early marriage, and household poverty contributed significantly to low female school enrolment in rural areas. Their study emphasized that educational inequalities continue to undermine women's capacity to participate effectively in economic and civic life. Collectively, these studies indicate that low school enrolment remains a significant predictor of women's poverty and socio-economic exclusion.

Access to Skills Acquisition Programmes and Women's Poverty

Skills acquisition programmes have increasingly emerged as important tools for enhancing employability, entrepreneurship, income generation, and poverty reduction. Through vocational training, technical education, and entrepreneurship development initiatives, individuals acquire practical competencies that improve their economic opportunities and livelihood outcomes (ILO, 2022).

Several studies have demonstrated that women's participation in skills acquisition programmes contributes significantly to poverty reduction. Nwosu and Orji (2017), in their study addressing poverty and gender inequality through access to formal credit and enhanced enterprises performance in Nigeria: an empirical investigation, found that women who participated in vocational training schemes recorded higher income levels and greater economic independence than those without such opportunities. Similarly, Ogosi *et al.* (2025) reported that entrepreneurship and economic empowerment of women in Delta State improved women's entrepreneurial capacity and reduced vulnerability to poverty in rural communities across Delta State, Nigeria.

Research conducted in other developing countries has yielded similar findings. Asmorowati and Schubert (2018) observed that access to vocational and livelihood training enhanced women's economic resilience and reduced dependency on male household members. Likewise, Kabeer (2005) argued that skills development constitutes an important mechanism for expanding women's agency and strengthening their ability to escape poverty.

Despite these benefits, access to skills acquisition programmes remains uneven. Ikpeme *et al.*, (2022), studying local women initiatives and socio-economic well-being of inhabitants of Akpabuyo Local Government Area, found that many rural women were excluded from government-sponsored skills programmes due to inadequate awareness, poor programme implementation, and limited institutional support. The study concluded that exclusion from skills acquisition opportunities significantly constrained women's economic empowerment and contributed to persistent poverty. These findings underscore the importance of vocational and entrepreneurial training as a pathway for reducing women's poverty.

Inheritance Rights and Women's Poverty

Access to property and inheritance rights has become an important area of inquiry within gender and development scholarship. Ownership of land, housing, and productive assets provides individuals with economic security, access to credit, investment opportunities, and protection against poverty (UN Women, 2020).

Numerous studies have linked discriminatory inheritance practices to women's poverty. Deere *et al.*, (2013) found that women who lacked inheritance rights experienced lower levels of asset

ownership, reduced economic independence, and greater susceptibility to poverty. Similarly, Doss *et al.* (2014) reported that unequal inheritance systems limited women's access to productive resources and reinforced gender-based economic inequalities across Africa.

Within Nigeria, inheritance discrimination remains a persistent challenge. Olomjobi (2016) observed that customary inheritance practices in many communities continue to deny women ownership of family land and property, thereby restricting their economic opportunities. Likewise, Odey and Sambe (2019) found that exclusion from inheritance rights contributed significantly to women's poverty in rural communities of Southern Nigeria by limiting access to agricultural land, housing, and other productive assets.

Empirical evidence from Cross River State further supports this relationship. Bassey (2026) found that customary norms in several rural communities discouraged female inheritance and reinforced economic dependency among women. The study concluded that denial of inheritance rights remains a major obstacle to women's economic empowerment and poverty reduction. These findings suggest that inheritance discrimination continues to function as a structural mechanism through which poverty is reproduced among women.

Identified Research Gap

Existing literature has extensively examined the relationship between gender inequality and poverty, particularly in relation to educational access, vocational skills development, and property ownership. Numerous studies have demonstrated that educational exclusion, inadequate access to skills acquisition programmes, and discriminatory inheritance practices contribute significantly to women's economic vulnerability and poverty. However, much of the existing evidence originates from broad national studies or investigations conducted in other regions of Nigeria and Africa.

Limited empirical attention has been devoted to understanding how these specific dimensions of gender discrimination interact to influence women's poverty incidence within rural communities of Cross River State, particularly in Boki Local Government Area. Furthermore, few studies have simultaneously examined low school enrolment, access to skills acquisition programmes, and inheritance rights as interconnected mechanisms through which gender discrimination perpetuates poverty among women. Accordingly, this study contributes to the literature by providing context-specific empirical evidence on the relationship between gender discrimination and women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The design involves collecting data from a sample of respondents to describe existing conditions and examine relationships among variables within a population. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain first-hand information from women regarding their experiences of gender discrimination and how such experiences contribute to poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

The study population comprised women, both married and single, within the productive age bracket of 18 to 65 years in Boki Local Government Area. According to the Cross River State Bureau of Statistics (2024), the estimated female population of Boki Local

Government Area is 169,750. Using Yamane's (1967) sample size determination formula, a sample size of 399 respondents was obtained. However, owing to time constraints, cost implications, and field accessibility challenges, the sample size was adjusted to 350 respondents, which was considered adequate for the study.

A multi-stage sampling technique involving stratified, purposive, and simple random sampling procedures was adopted. First, the study area was stratified according to political wards and communities. Thereafter, purposive sampling was used to select communities with significant female populations and accessibility. Finally, simple random sampling was employed to select individual respondents from the selected communities, ensuring equal chances of participation and minimizing sampling bias.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered directly to respondents with the assistance of trained research assistants. The instrument was designed to elicit information on low school enrolment, access to skills acquisition programmes, inheritance rights, and women's poverty incidence. To ensure face and content validity, the questionnaire items were aligned with the study objectives and research questions and were subjected to expert review in research methodology and gender studies. Reliability was assured through careful scrutiny, editing, and cross-checking of completed questionnaires to ensure consistency and accuracy of responses.

Data collected from the field were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and simple percentages, were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and responses. The hypotheses were tested using the Chi-square (χ^2) statistical technique at the 0.05 level of significance. The results were presented in tables and accompanied by appropriate interpretations.

Results

This section presents the analysis of data collected for the study on the impact of gender discrimination on women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. A total of 350 copies of the questionnaire were administered and fully retrieved, giving a 100% response rate which is adequate for robust statistical analysis.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Married	210	60.0
Single	105	30.0
Divorced	35	10.0
Total	350	100

Source: Survey field work, (2026)

Interpretation

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents (60.0%) were married, 30.0% were single, and 10.0% were divorced. This indicates that most women in the study area are in marital relationships, which has implications for property rights and inheritance.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
16 – 20	63	18.0
21 – 45	217	62.0
46 and above	70	20.0
Total	350	100

Source: Survey field work, (2026)

Interpretation

Table 2 reveals that 62.0% of respondents were within the 21–45 age bracket, 20.0% were 46 years and above, and 18.0% were between 16 and 20 years. The dominance of the 21–45 group indicates a working-age population directly affected by poverty and discrimination.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Educational Qualification

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
PSLC – SS3	196	56.0
Diploma – HND	98	28.0
B.Sc and above	56	16.0
Total	350	100

Source: Survey field work, (2026)

Table 3 indicates that 56.0% of respondents had educational qualifications between PSLC and SS3, 28.0% held Diploma to HND certificates, and 16.0% had B.Sc and above. The low formal education profile of the majority underscores the link between gender-based educational exclusion and poverty.

Analysis of research questions

Table 4: Mean Scores on Low School Enrollment and Women's Poverty Incidence

S/N	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	Remark
1	Low school enrollment of women reflects a high poverty rate in Boki LGA.	182	91	28	31	18	3.88	Agreed
2	Parents do not sponsor their daughters to go to school Boki LGA.	175	98	22	35	20	3.81	Agreed
3	Parents prefer to educate the male child over the female child Boki LGA.	190	85	25	30	20	3.87	Agreed
4	Girls are given out in early marriage instead of going to school Boki LGA.	168	102	30	28	22	3.79	Agreed
5	Culture does not support the education of the girl child Boki LGA.	185	88	27	33	17	3.86	Agreed
Grand Mean							3.84	Agreed

Source: Survey field work, (2026)

Interpretation

Table 4 shows a grand mean of 3.84, indicating that respondents agreed that low school enrollment significantly impacts women's poverty incidence. All five items exceeded the 3.50 benchmark, confirming a consistent pattern of educational exclusion linked to poverty among women in the study area.

Table 5: Mean Scores on Skills Acquisition Programmes and Women's Poverty Incidence

S/N	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	Remark
6	Women do not have equal access to skills acquisition as men Boki LGA.	178	95	25	30	22	3.82	Agreed
7	Men are given more preference in skills acquisition than women Boki LGA.	183	90	22	35	20	3.80	Agreed
8	Skills acquisition programmes are designed mainly for male needs Boki LGA.	170	97	30	33	20	3.75	Agreed
9	There are no skills acquisition programmes specifically for women Boki LGA.	165	100	28	37	20	3.72	Agreed
10	Culture prevents women from participating in skills acquisition in community.	180	92	25	33	20	3.79	Agreed
Grand Mean							3.78	Agreed

Source: Survey field work, (2026)

Interpretation

Table 5 reveals a grand mean of 3.78. Respondents agreed that women's exclusion from skills acquisition programmes contributes substantially to their poverty. The cultural dimension (item 10) and gender-biased programme design (item 8) were particularly highlighted as constraining factors.

Table 6: Mean Scores on Limited Access to Inheritance and Women's Poverty Incidence

S/N	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	Remark
11	Women are denied the right to inherit land and property in your community.	190	88	22	30	20	3.91	Agreed
12	Only male children are given inheritance rights Boki LGA.	195	82	23	30	20	3.92	Agreed
13	Widows are driven away from their husband's property by in-laws Boki LGA.	185	90	25	28	22	3.87	Agreed
14	Women cannot use land as collateral because they do not own any Boki LGA.	178	95	27	30	20	3.83	Agreed
15	Denial of inheritance rights is a major reason women remain poor Boki LGA.	192	85	23	30	20	3.90	Agreed
Grand Mean							3.89	Agreed

Source: Survey field work, (2026)

Interpretation

Table 6 shows a grand mean of 3.89, the highest across the three dimensions. Respondents strongly agreed that denial of inheritance rights including land, property, and collateral access significantly perpetuates women's poverty. The data confirms that patriarchal inheritance customs remain a dominant structural barrier to women's economic empowerment in the study area.

Test of hypotheses

Three null hypotheses were tested using the Chi-square (χ^2) statistical tool at 0.05 level of significance with 2 degrees of freedom. The critical value is 5.991.

Hypothesis one

Ho1: *There is no significant relationship between low school enrolment and women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.*

Table 7: Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis One

Category	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O-E) ² /E
Agree (SA+A)	273	117	41.22
Undecided	28	117	62.37
Disagree (D+SD)	49	117	35.21
Total	350	351	138.80

Source: Survey field work, (2026)

Interpretation

The calculated χ^2 value of 138.80 exceeds the critical value of 5.991 at df = 2 and p < 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that low school enrollment has a significant impact on women's poverty incidence.

Hypothesis Two

Ho2: *There is no significant relationship between lack of access to skills acquisition programmes and women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.*

Table 8: Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis Two

Category	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O-E) ² /E
Agree (SA+A)	261	117	36.50
Undecided	26	117	65.19
Disagree (D+SD)	63	117	23.65
Total	350	351	125.34

Source: Survey field work, (2026)

Interpretation

The calculated χ^2 value of 125.34 exceeds the critical value of 5.991 at df = 2 and p < 0.05. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This means that lack of access to skills acquisition programmes has a significant effect on women's poverty incidence.

Hypothesis Three

Ho3: *There is no significant relationship between limited access to inheritance and women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.*

Table 9: Chi-square test for hypothesis three

Category	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O-E) ² /E
Agree (SA+A)	278	117	44.62
Undecided	24	117	68.07
Disagree (D+SD)	48	117	36.19
Total	350	351	148.88

Source: Survey field work, (2026)

Interpretation

The calculated χ^2 value of 148.88 exceeds the critical value of 5.991 at $df = 2$ and $p < 0.05$. The null hypothesis is rejected. This means that limited access to inheritance significantly influences women's poverty incidence.

Table 10: Summary of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	χ^2 Cal	df	χ^2 Crit ($p=0.05$)	Decision
Ho1: There is no significant relationship between low school enrolment and women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.	138.80	2	5.991	Reject Ho
Ho2: There is no significant relationship between lack of access to skills acquisition programmes and women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.	125.34	2	5.991	Reject Ho
Ho3: There is no significant relationship between limited access to inheritance and women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.	125.34	2	5.991	Reject Ho

Source: Survey field work, (2026)

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that gender discrimination remains a significant determinant of women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State. Specifically, the results show that low school enrolment, lack of access to skills acquisition programmes, and limited access to inheritance rights all exert statistically significant influences on women's poverty. The overall implication is that poverty among women in the study area is not merely a consequence of low income but is largely rooted in structural inequalities that systematically restrict women's access to educational, economic, and productive opportunities.

The study found a significant relationship between low school enrolment and women's poverty incidence ($\chi^2 = 138.80$; $p < 0.05$). The findings indicate that many families continue to prioritize the education of male children over female children, while cultural

practices such as early marriage further limit girls' access to formal education. As a result, many women enter adulthood with limited educational qualifications, reducing their employability, earning potential, and capacity for economic self-sufficiency. This finding supports the argument that education remains one of the most effective instruments for breaking the cycle of poverty. The result is consistent with the findings of Njoku and Ayamba (2026) who established that gender disparities in school enrolment significantly contribute to female economic marginalization and poverty in Southern Nigeria. Similarly, Ayuba (2020) found that communities characterized by low female educational participation recorded higher levels of women's poverty. The finding also resonates with Nussbaum's (2011) Capability Approach, which emphasizes that denial of educational opportunities deprives individuals of the capabilities necessary to achieve meaningful social and economic wellbeing.

Furthermore, the study established that lack of access to skills acquisition programmes significantly influences women's poverty incidence ($\chi^2 = 125.34$; $p < 0.05$). Respondents largely agreed that many vocational and empowerment programmes remain inaccessible to women due to socio-cultural barriers, inadequate awareness, and gender-biased programme structures. The inability to acquire vocational and entrepreneurial skills limits women's participation in productive economic activities and constrains their capacity to generate sustainable income. This finding corroborates Ntor-Ue (2021), who reported that unequal access to vocational training significantly reduces women's productive capacity in rural communities in Nigeria. Likewise, Okechukwu *et al.* (2024) observed that women excluded from government-sponsored skills acquisition initiatives were substantially more vulnerable to poverty than those who had access to such programmes. From a theoretical perspective, the finding aligns with Sen's (1999) Development as Freedom framework, which views the expansion of human capabilities and productive opportunities as fundamental to poverty reduction and human development.

The findings further reveal that limited access to inheritance rights exerts the strongest influence on women's poverty incidence among the variables examined ($\chi^2 = 148.88$; $p < 0.05$). This variable also recorded the highest grand mean score, indicating widespread agreement among respondents that discriminatory inheritance practices remain prevalent within the study area. The denial of women's rights to inherit land, property, and other productive assets significantly weakens their economic security and restricts access to credit, investment opportunities, and livelihood resources. In many rural communities, land ownership serves as an important source of wealth creation and economic empowerment; consequently, exclusion from inheritance rights perpetuates economic dependency and vulnerability among women. This finding supports the work of Obioha (2007), who found that inheritance discrimination contributes significantly to women's economic deprivation in rural communities. It also agrees with Ajala (2017), who demonstrated that women denied inheritance rights in patrilineal societies face greater obstacles in escaping poverty. Similarly, Doss and Meinzen-Dick (2020) identified restrictions on women's access to land and property as one of the strongest predictors of female poverty across sub-Saharan Africa.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that women's poverty in Boki Local Government Area is largely driven by interconnected forms of gender discrimination that restrict access to education, skills development opportunities, and productive

assets. The results suggest that meaningful poverty reduction among women cannot be achieved solely through conventional poverty alleviation programmes. Rather, sustainable solutions require deliberate efforts to address the structural and socio-cultural barriers that perpetuate gender inequality and limit women's access to the resources necessary for economic empowerment and social advancement.

Conclusion, Implications, Recommendations and Future Research Directions

This study examined the impact of gender discrimination on women's poverty incidence in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that low school enrolment, lack of access to skills acquisition programmes, and limited access to inheritance rights significantly contribute to women's poverty. The rejection of all three null hypotheses demonstrates that gender discrimination remains a critical structural factor shaping women's socio-economic outcomes within the study area. The study therefore concludes that women's poverty in Boki is not merely an outcome of economic hardship but a manifestation of deeply embedded social, cultural, and institutional inequalities that systematically restrict women's access to opportunities and productive resources.

The findings have important theoretical and policy implications. Theoretically, the study validates the assumptions of the Capability Approach, which argues that poverty results from deprivation of the capabilities and freedoms necessary for individuals to lead meaningful and productive lives. The educational, vocational, and property-related barriers identified in this study constitute significant capability deprivations that limit women's ability to improve their socio-economic conditions. From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that conventional poverty alleviation programmes are unlikely to produce sustainable outcomes unless they directly address the structural dimensions of gender inequality. Efforts aimed solely at increasing household income without confronting discriminatory social practices may achieve only limited success.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the Federal Government, Cross River State Government, and relevant development partners intensify interventions aimed at improving girls' access to education. This should include the expansion of conditional cash transfer schemes, scholarship programmes, community sensitization campaigns, and the strict enforcement of compulsory basic education policies. Particular attention should be given to rural communities where cultural practices and economic constraints continue to limit female educational participation.

Furthermore, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and development institutions should establish gender-responsive skills acquisition and entrepreneurship programmes tailored to the realities of rural women. Such programmes should be accessible, affordable, and linked to sustainable livelihood opportunities. Establishing women-focused vocational centres, improving awareness of existing empowerment initiatives, and providing start-up support for beneficiaries would significantly enhance women's productive capacity and reduce their vulnerability to poverty.

The study also recommends stronger enforcement of legal and policy frameworks protecting women's inheritance and property rights. Traditional institutions, religious organizations, civil society groups, and community leaders should be actively engaged in

advocacy and public enlightenment campaigns aimed at challenging discriminatory inheritance practices. In addition, accessible legal aid mechanisms should be provided to assist women whose inheritance rights are violated, while government authorities should ensure compliance with constitutional and statutory provisions guaranteeing gender equality.

Future research should extend this investigation to other local government areas within Cross River State and beyond in order to generate broader empirical evidence on the relationship between gender discrimination and poverty. Comparative studies involving rural and urban communities would provide deeper insights into the varying dimensions of gender-based exclusion across different socio-economic contexts. Future scholars may also examine additional dimensions of gender discrimination, such as access to credit facilities, political participation, employment opportunities, and decision-making power, to enrich understanding of the complex pathways through which gender inequality contributes to poverty among women.

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