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Feminist Interpretation of Paul (1 Corinthians 14:34-35) in the Sustainable Development Goals for the Urhobo Women

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Abstract

The paper reinterprets Paul instruction for women in 1 Corinthians 14:33–35 to remain silent in church within a feminist context, aligning it with the goals of gender equality outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5). For the Urhobo woman, whose identity is shaped by both Christian doctrine and cultural traditions, this passage has often reinforced exclusion from leadership roles. A contextual feminist reading, however, suggests that Paul's directive was specific to a historical setting and not a universal mandate. By challenging patriarchal interpretations, this study advocates for the empowerment of Urhobo women to participate fully in religious and public life. Such a re-evaluation supports broader global efforts to ensure inclusive development and equal representation. It encourages a dialogue between faith and social progress, affirming the value, voice, and leadership capacity of Urhobo women in building sustainable communities.

Keywords: Feminists interpretation, Gender parity, SDGs, Pauline corpus, women emancipation

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Introduction

The history of the Urhobo people is preserved mainly through oral traditions, which often emphasize migration from Aka in Edo/Benin. Today, Urhoboland consists of 24 kingdoms, each with distinct migration accounts but united by a common language with slight dialectal variations (Otite 2003). From their origins, the Urhobo maintained cordial relations with neighboring groups such as Ndokwa, Isoko, Bini, Itsekiri, and Ijaw, many of whom are believed to share ancestral ties (Otite 2003). Written records of Urhobo history are scarce, as early Europeans focused on coastal trade, though Pereira in 1505 noted the presence of the Subou or Sobo people inland, later corrected to Urhobo in 1938 (Otite2003).

Traditions trace Urhobo beginnings to Edo territory near Udo and Benin City. Following the collapse of the Ogiso dynasty, Urhobo and Edo groups dispersed in search of peace and fertile lands (Otite2003). Under different leaders, some emigrants founded Urhobo settlements while others moved elsewhere, though originally Edo-speaking. Colonial officers later classified the 22 socio-political units as "clans" (Egharevba, 1960). Oral traditions also assert that Urhobo were original dwellers of their land, though these claims lack archaeological evidence (Otite 2003). Bradbury (1957), citing Hubbard , suggests Urhobo and Isoko cultures reflect layers of Ijaw, Igbo, and Edo influences imposed on earlier Edo-type dialect communities (1948, 129).

In the absence of archaeological proof, linguistic evidence provides crucial support for Urhobo origins. Talbot argues that language validates oral traditions and highlights historical ties between Urhobo and Edo-speaking peoples, as well as broader socio-linguistic connections extending to regions in Sudan and Egypt (Talbot, 1926). The structure of Urhobo culture, language, and institutions thus reflects both indigenous development and the absorption of immigrant influences, shaping their identity as a distinct yet interconnected people.

Statement of the Problem

Pauline instruction on women and the issue of silence in I Corinthians 14:34–35 has received more criticisms in recent times. Apostle Paul enjoined women silence or only to be heard in the background as faceless, implying that women should be seen but not heard like their male counterparts. This paradoxical situation has created confusion and disaffection among feminist and pro-feminist exegetes. Scholars and the church question whether Paul's theology on women's silence should be taken literally, re-interpreted, or ignored.

The pursuit of fairness in women's discourse remains recurring in his epistles. Must women become paupers and beggars in all human endeavors, voiceless beside their husbands? What about single women who are not married—does this imply total subordination and dehumanization? From his theological thought pattern, Paul risks being regarded as a male chauvinist. Can the society of Paul's day be compared to contemporary times? Will women's empowerment enhance family living standards? These questions continue to puzzle modern scholarship and the church.

General Objective

To critically examine feminist interpretations of Paul's injunction on women's silence in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and assess its implications for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among Urhobo women.

Specific Objectives: The specific objectives of the study are to:

i.To analyze how feminist exegetes reinterpret Paul's directive on women's silence in relation to gender equality and empowerment within Urhobo communities.

ii. evaluate the socio-economic and cultural impact of Pauline theology on women's participation in education, leadership, and family life, as aligned with SDG targets.

iii. explore how contextual feminist readings can contribute to bridging theological traditions with contemporary efforts toward sustainable development for Urhobo women.

Research Questions: The following research questions are raised to guide the paper

i. How do feminist interpretations of Paul's injunction on women's silence in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 contribute to understanding gender equality within the Urhobo context, especially in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals?
ii. In what ways has Pauline theology on women's silence influenced the socio-economic participation of Urhobo women in education, leadership, and family life, and how does this align with specific SDG targets?
iii. iii.How can contextual feminist readings of Paul's writings be applied to bridge theological traditions with contemporary efforts toward sustainable development and empowerment of Urhobo women?

Literature Review

Paul's Theology on Women in the Context of 1 Cor. 14:34-35

Religio-Cultural Setting of Corinth

Corinth, originally two settlements, was destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. and left desolate until Julius Caesar rebuilt it in 44 B.C., creating the city known in Paul's era (Attaway 2005). Strategically located near Athens on the Isthmus connecting mainland Greece to the Peloponnesus, Corinth became a vital hub of commerce and defense (Padfield 2005). By the 1st century A.D., its golden age had passed, but the city remained prominent, hosting the Isthmian games in honor of Poseidon. Paul likely witnessed these contests, referencing the "corruptible crown" in 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, a prize made of wilted celery (Padfield 2005). Myths of Sisyphus, condemned to push a rock uphill endlessly, symbolized futility and resonated with Corinthians' sense of spiritual emptiness, which Murphy-O'Connor (1983) suggests made them receptive to Paul's preaching.

The city's social life was shaped by diverse cults and temples, including Aphrodite's shrine on the Acrocorinth. Though less influential in Paul's time, prostitution was widespread, typical of harbor towns with constant influxes of sailors and traders (Attaway 2005). Padfield (2005) notes remnants of cult prostitutes and wine shops, while Corinth's reputation for

immorality was so entrenched that "to Corinthianize" meant sexual promiscuity. The city also housed temples to Apollo, Hermes, Poseidon, Demeter, and others, reflecting its religious diversity. Mystery religions such as Mithraism offered emotional rituals, while sacrifices provided meat for markets and households. Corinth's libertine atmosphere, described even in classical sources, may have been one of the challenges Paul confronted in his ministry (Padfield 2005).

Economically, PAdfield (2005) notes that Corinth flourished with a population of about 75,000, including elites, freed slaves, and veterans who gained status through trade or military service. Its two harbors made it a crossroads of the Roman Empire, linking Asia, Rome, and the Aegean. Plutarch identified it as one of Greece's three economic centers, thriving in commerce, agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism, with the Isthmian games drawing crowds. Under Roman rule, Corinth became Achaia's capital, with restored public buildings, a 14,000-seat amphitheater, and a marketplace larger than any in the province. New Testament figures such as Aquila, Priscilla, and Erastus reflect the city's diverse population, which included hundreds of thousands of freedmen and slaves contributing to its prosperity (Padfield 2005).

History of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Background of First Corinthians as contained in Paul's letter to the Corinthians must be read against the backdrop of the city's history and culture. Once destroyed by Rome in 146 BC, Corinth was rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BC and became a thriving hub of commerce and defense due to its location on the Isthmus near Athens (Mare 1976). By 27 BC it was the capital of Achaia, where wealth rather than aristocracy defined social status, shaping the independence and pride of its people (Hafemann 1993). These dynamics influenced the Corinthian church (Polhill 2011), which Faced issues such as intellectual pride (1 Cor. 1–2), divisions at the Lord's table (1 Cor. 11), disputes over spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12–14), and controversies surrounding women's head coverings. Keener (1993) notes Roman women veiled while Greek women did not, creating cultural tension, while Kroeger (1993) adds that uncovered heads offended Jewish observers near the synagogue (Acts 18:7–8). Some scholars, like Showerman (1931), suggest the covering referred to hair, a symbol of sexuality in Mediterranean culture.

Cultural and Religious Tensions

Keener (1993) argues wealthy women resisted veiling as a sign of superiority, while Paul urged humility (1 Cor. 11:11–12). Boer (1979) and Pomeroy (1975) link veiling to older Greek traditions confining women to domestic roles, while Roman moralists demanded silence and modesty (Harrell, 1967; Plutarch, p.62). Jewish thinkers like Philo also promoted seclusion (Goodman 1983; Verner 1983). Longnecker (1976) and Gardner (1986) note unveiled heads were associated with prostitutes, reinforcing Paul's concern for propriety. Bruce (1980) adds that Paul may have been thinking of "uncovered and dishevelled heads" resembling pagan prophetesses. Practices varied: Greek men worshipped bareheaded (Grant, 1953), Roman women veiled during sacrifices (Oster 1988), and Roman men covered their heads with the toga (Thompson 1980). Corinth's blend of Roman and Greek traditions (Keener 2003) created tensions in house churches, prompting Paul's directives to maintain order (Alano2006; Thrall 1965).

Textual Debates on Women's Silence

Scholars continue to debate Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. Barrett (1971) suggests the verses were later marginal notes, while Wallace (2004) shows manuscript evidence of varied placement but universal inclusion. Douglas (2000) offers possible explanations, noting textual principles support authenticity despite awkwardness. Oduyoye (2009) interprets the command for silence as applying broadly, while Toryough (2009) situates it within Greco-Roman and Jewish norms. Abogurin (1988) argues both chapters 11 and 14 reflect public worship, Carson (1991) sees chapter 11 as concessionary, and Fiorenza (1991) attributes restrictions to Paul's personal bias. Payne (1995, 2009) contends the verses are interpolations, but Wallace (2004) rejects this, emphasizing their presence in all manuscripts. Despite apparent contradictions with 1 Corinthians 11:5, defenders argue Paul's concern was order in worship, consistent with his broader teachings (Douglas, 2000).

However, these were consistent and visible in his writings: "To be silent", (14:28.), "To permit," (1 Corinthians 14:34.)and "To learn," (1 Timothy 2:11), all as other epistles like Galatians, Timothy and Titus in verb form. Furthermore, we see in Paul's letter terms that appear once in all his letters (**ἅπαξ λεγόμενον**) meaning "(something) said (only) once" in the entire written document or New Testament. It becomes difficult to classify anything as "unpauline" when weighed against the available evidence. The presence of similar terms and expressions within Paul's writings, the inclusion of *ἅπαξ λεγόμενον* in his letters, and the weakness of manuscripts that omit verses 34–35 all suggest that arguments based on supposed "un-Pauline" language or unusual usage carry little weight and should be dismissed as insignificant.

Donald (2000) notes the difficulty in explaining Paul's appeal to the "Law" in 1 Corinthians 14:34, since explicit commands for women's silence are not found in the Pentateuch. Scholars propose different interpretations: some argue Paul referred to a local law of his time, though his use of "law" never implied secular statutes; others suggest he was recalling his earlier directives in verses 27–33, addressing disorderly worship; and a third view sees "law" as Jewish tradition, either invoked by Paul to enforce silence or summarized as practices the Corinthians had wrongly adopted to promote female submission. Paul's sharp response in verse 36"Did the Word of God originate with you men only?"- hows his reference was not to Jewish tradition but to the misuse of such customs (Donald 2000).

Urhobo Social History

The historiography of the Urhobo rests mainly on oral traditions, with varying accounts but a shared belief in migration from Aka (Edo/Benin). Urhoboland has 24 kingdoms, each with distinct migration narratives yet united by a common language with slight variations (Otite, 2003). From origin, the Urhobo cultivated cordial relations with neighbours—Ndokwa, Isoko, Bini, Itsekiri, and Ijaw—many of whom share similar traditions (Otite, 2003). European documentation is limited; Pereira in 1505 noted the Subou or Sobo beyond the Forcados River, later corrected to Urhobo in 1938 (Otite, 2003).

Urhobo groups trace beginnings to Edo territory near Udo and Benin City. Following the Ogiso dynasty's collapse, many migrated in search of peace and fertile lands (Otite, 2003). Under varied leadership, some emigrants became Urhobo founders, while others dispersed elsewhere, though originally Edo-speaking. Colonial officers classified the 22 socio-political units as "clans" (Egharevba, 1960). Otite affirmed Urhobo as original

dwellers, though evidence remains oral (Otite, 2003). Bradbury (1957) notes Hubbard's view that Urhobo and Isoko traits reflect layered immigration. With no archaeology, linguistic evidence validates Urhobo origins (Talbot, 1926). Ekeh (2004) later recorded 22 kingdoms, expanded to 24 (Isiorhovoja, 2018).

Women in Urhobo Tradition

Among the Urhobo, women traditionally face restrictions in family and society, often regarded as second-class citizens who lose identity after marriage. Polygyny is common, with men's status tied to the number of wives, while women serve mainly as helpers, bearing children and supporting household labor (Ugono Felix, interview 2016). Though excluded from decision-making, they participate in ceremonial roles through the Eghweya council, and their conduct is regulated by taboos such as prohibitions against adultery (Otite, 2006). Inheritance rights are denied, as married women are considered Ogbe re ohwo ofa, belonging to another family (Akpoigbe, interview 2016).

Despite these limitations, women manage affairs within the Eghweya council and are consulted in certain matters. They reverence in-laws, earning family support in times of need. The eldest woman is often consulted for major decisions as matriarch (Arerierian, interview 2016). Women provide informal education, grooming daughters for family responsibilities, while mothers play vital roles in child development (Haralambos, 2006). Their presence in churches and society reflects global changes, with feminist perceptions gaining acceptance though equality remains incomplete (Aluko, 2007).

Feminist Importance of 1Corinthians 14:34-35 in the SDGs for the Urhobo Woman

Feminists have viewed the text of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 as anti-women, development and society. Male chauvinism and other forms of female subjection that were peculiar Pauline injunctions are predominant in the society. Thus, the male folk use inferiority attributes as a medium of reducing women personality; the hue and cry of feminists in the quest for equality and egalitarian society. From the socio-cultural perspective of discrimination against women, Kemdirim, (1995) observed that the apparent experience of women subordination in the local churches results largely from the negative cultural attitudes that women have to submit. This position is largely attributed to the pre-colonial African hierarchy of male dominance. Hence, Little (1973) remarked that even when and where women play greater roles in certain religious practices, they were not totally free from male chauvinism as the "supernatural" is said to have rested in the hands of men who are still seen to be in control.

In response, the women folk now see feminism as an ideology for cultural change with a call for a new orientation of the male-female axis. It recognizes the dynamism of the polarity between male and female, without leading to false polarization of superiors and inferiors. The significance of the above observation does not input value to one over against the other. It is thus perceived by feminist as being crucial for well-being, liberation and the evolutionary future. Oduyoye (1994) made this observation. She posits that it is in this light that we are to view feminism as a precondition for a Christian anthropology and therefore worthy of having "apostles among both men and women". Thus, the desire to have apostles from both sexes has caught the attention of many Christians as well as scholars.

Ursula while commenting on the report from the conference devoted to Women in the World's' Religion Fast and Present said:

In the past women from all traditions have been regarded not only as inferior beings who were not likely to have the capacity to experience ultimate reality, but also as actual obstacles to men's spiritual progress. These obstacles have left a residue of bitterness in women, especially as they see few signs yet of men acknowledging their needs or indeed their mutual humanity. Many women are now beginning seriously to question whether the model of patriarchal religion has any place in it at all… (Ursula 1987, x).

The above submission being the synergy of the world: Women in the world's Religions, Past and Present Conference, has also been the bane of most scholars. They noted among other things that women have been subjected, suffered subordination and outright refusal in a patriarchal society. Ursula from the liberational point of view that represents the Sustainable Development Goals, suggested the way forward to include that of getting beyond the fixation of sex altogether and to find ways of worshipping; worship that is life-enhancing and transcending sexual orientation. We need to discover how to create situations, which wake up the basic insight and spiritual order that all humans have.

The challenges facing women today is that of rising up to the male folk and a re-visit to certain key biblical passages on the concept of "Imago Dei" as posited by Martey (1996) in (Genesis 1:26-27). The critical opinion shared on this concept of "Imago Dei" is to be located on the polarity of male and female, and that the primary concretization of the covenant between God and his creature, is to be found in the identification and relationship of man and woman.

According to Ulanor, if sex is under-valued, it will ultimately lead to the total destruction of the human race. She raised an important question: "if the feminine is neglected in its contra-sexual form within the masculine or misunderstood as a second best category of human sexuality, then not only is the fullness of human being damaged but ... the divine is damaged as well"(Ulanor,1995,293). The gender difference from the above should not merely be discussed in terms of physical expressions of sexuality but, also a symbol of our union with God. The creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, both male and female participated in the Imago Dei; there is no question of any belief in the inferior value of woman in creation.

Adewale (1998) observed that some scholars have used the instance of the fall in Genesis 3 like Paul as the basis for denying women equality with men, the model of patriarchy that is the making of men and not the standard of God at creation. This is the reason advanced to justify the theology of women subjection. Hence Enuwosa in his reflection on hupotasso (to subordinate) based on the Pauline epistles like: (Colossians 3:18-4:1; Ephesians 5:21-25; 1Corinthians 7:8-1l and 1Corinthians 14:33-36), stated that, "it is the regulation, which encouraged wife, slave and children to submit to the head of the family" (Enuwosa 2005, 1-5).

According to Walter (1987) in an exhaustive study which serves as a background for the position of subordination maintained by Paul in his letters, in which Enuwosa remarked that he handled with levity. However, Walter (1987) stated, that the Jewish-Christian religions received a masculine structure as only men were exclusively in contact with God. They elaborated the dogmas; organized and presided ... women were given a marginal place The hierarchy - God, man, woman brought about a legislation of masculine privileges in the Old Testament divorce law (Deuteronomy 24:1-3) and in the New Testament (1 Corinthians

14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:12). Paul gave theological sanctions to this seeming conflict with the doctrine of the 'head".

According to Hyacinth (1987) the Bible cannot be said to be closed because it speaks to anyone anytime it is opened. The above opinion is concretized by Boje (2005) who argues that, there are two basic uses: oppressive and liberative thus, defenders of the egalitarian concept use it liberatively from egalitarian standpoint as expressed in the Sustainable Development Goals. Akintunde expressed her view on *The Bible and Women: Oppressive or Liberative*? (Akintunde 2005, 100). She noted that though some have maintained and used it as a tool for promoting oppression, injustices, women alleged inferiority ... silence of women and male children preference, it is also seen as liberative for it contain texts on divine love.

Thus, it empowers women to find heroines in the Bible who are models in their own struggle to be a liberative force in their context. Commenting further on the general attitudes towards women. Obi (2005) in his work: *Decolonizing The Interpretation Of Paul's Teaching On The Position Of Women in The Church: 1Corinthians. 14:33-36* Revisited cited two recent articles Anglican Church Revisited Women Ordination by Peter Onwubuariri and Should Women be silent in the Church? By Gabriel Osu. The opinion expressed in these articles further buttressed Hyacinth's argument as earlier noted that the Bible, being alive is capable of speaking in every situation and its message is not closed.

Akintunde (2005) posited as an African and indeed a Nigerian woman that rather than oppressive to women, the Bible has been a source of women emancipation and, has found in it role models. With particular reference to the language of Paul on women silence, she affirmed that it did not hold sway for the contemporary woman. Rather, women interpret these texts in a way that free them from patriarchal subjugation because Paul's statement in 1Corinthians 14 has no universal sway.

Aziza (2005) from The Roundtable Conference contends that all forms of discrimination against women should be stopped forthwith. Equal opportunities must be given to sons and daughters to excel in life. It was noted that men and women are endowed differently and their potentials can be harnessed to achieve greatness for Urhoboland. Through mutual love, respect and acceptance both men and women living in traditional Urhobo communities should be educated to see the need to encourage equal participation of both men and women in the affairs of the community. This would help to identify the women among them who have the potentials for leading such communities effectively.

Ekeh (2005) presented the Women's Roundtable Discussion, a forum strictly and solely for women. Some prominent Urhobo women who have distinguished themselves in the like of R. O. Aziza, L .O. Obiomah, Helen Ekeh, Felicia Emesiri and Alice Ukoko gathered together to brainstorm on the way forward for the betterment of the society and indeed the entire Urhobo nation.

Otete Okobiah, Rose O. Aziza, O. D. Ogisi and Mary Agbogidi all have unique character. They are mothers yet they serve in the public and private sector as professionals in their various fields. They thus exhibit the qualities of biblical Deborah the wife of Lipidoth; a mother, wife and judge in Israel yet she excelled both in public and private life. Whenever we hear of the companion of Apostle Paul, Priscilla and Aquila quickly comes to mind. Thus, Urhobo women can ably excel with the assistance and cooperation of their husbands. Yet, there are countless number of women in the Urhobo society who do not know what it is to be

a woman, wife and mother. These women therefore, need to be integrated in order to achieve the SDGs.

Materials and Methods

The study employed a stratified research design which include: exegetical, hermeneutical and phenomenological approaches, ensuring that participants were drawn proportionally from across the senatorial district under investigation. A total sample size of 800 respondents was selected to provide adequate representation of the population. The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, designed to capture both demographic information and responses related to the socio-economic implications of prosperity gospel. Data gathered through the questionnaires were systematically analyzed using simple percentages.

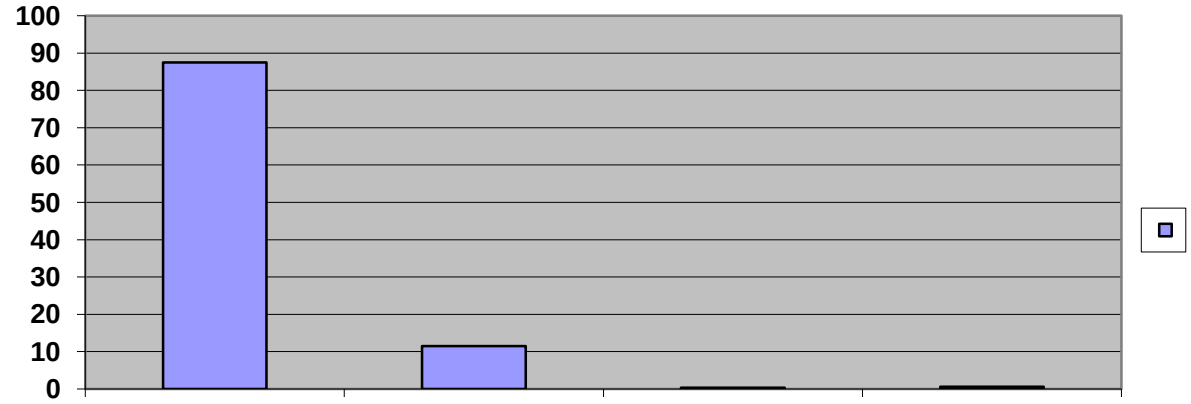
Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

The tables below contains results, data presentation and analysis

Patriarchal nature of the society

Table 4.1 To ascertain if sex-role is dominant in the community/church

	Yes	No	Irregular	Lost	Total
NO	700	92	3	5	800
%	87.50	11.5	0.38	0.62	100



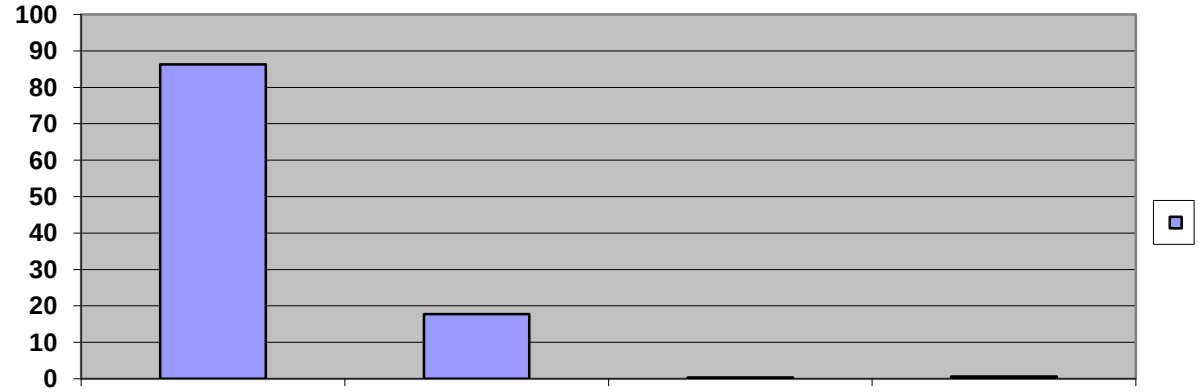
Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2016.

From the above table, a total of 700 respondents representing 87.50% answered YES while 92 respondents with 11.50% answered NO. There were 3 irregular entries with 0.38%, the respondents were neither here nor there with multiple entries and 0.62% for 5 lost because respondents did not made any entry for this item. The high percentage 87.50% shows the nature of the Urhobo society which is typical of any African society, majority of the activities among the Urhobo people are determined by sex-role. This has been the cultural pattern among the people. This is further affirmed by the little percentage of 11.50% who disagree with sex-role background of the Urhobo society. The summation of all respondents gives a total of 800, while the summation of the percentages gives a total of 100. The various percentages were represented in the pictorial graph as shown for each item.

Table 4.2: Impact of sex-role in society

Does sex determine the position or office as in Table 4.2?

	Yes	No	Irregular	Lost	Total
N^{O}	690	102	3	5	800
%	86.25	17.75	0.38	0.62	100



Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2016.

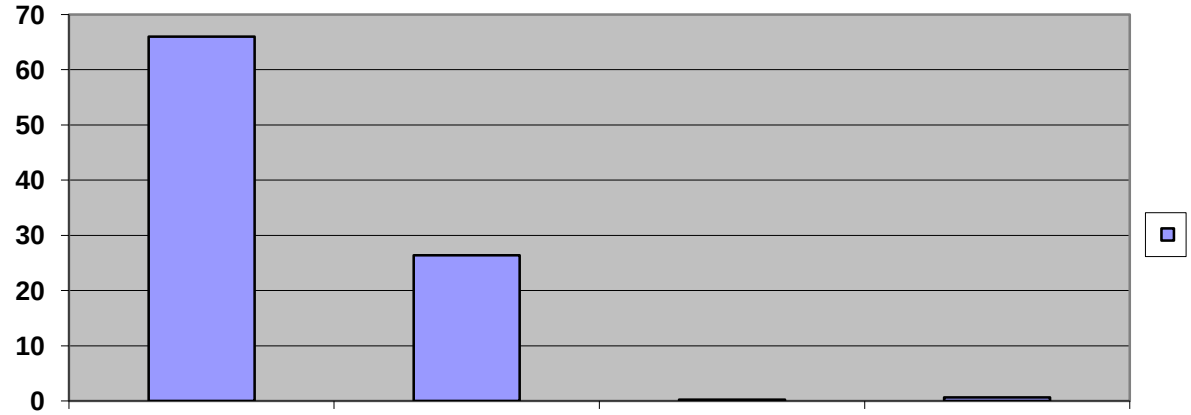
Using a column chart, we have the above table as a pictorial graph of the simple percentage for Table 4.2.

Table 2 just like the first table tries to ascertain the nature of the Urhobo society, sex plays a dominant role in whatever thing they do. 690 respondents agreed with YES, having 86.25% while 102 with 17.75% answered NO. The high percentage here goes to establish the role and or office that anyone can occupy in the Urhobo society. Sex defines the role and limit of participation in any office; thus, a young male could be elevated to occupy a high position while older female is left out based on sex as a factor. There were 3 irregular entries with 0.38% and 0.62 for the 5 lost respondents.

Table 4.3: Effects of Pauline Theology on women

Is Pauline injunction and tradition the determinants for any position in the church/community?

Respondents	Yes	No	Irregular	Lost	Total
N^{O}	582	211	2	5	800
%	66.00	26.38	0.25	0.63	100



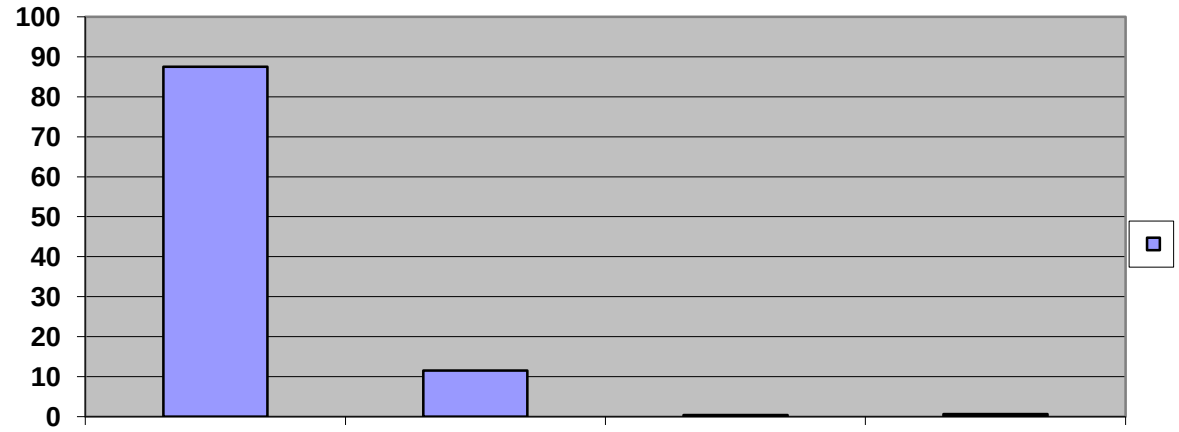
Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2016.

Table 4.3 shows the analysis based on the determinant factor for any position. It tries to establish the major reasons while there are preferences. 582 respondents out of 800 with 66% said YES. His teaching is contained in the Bible; it is the basis for judging everything that we do in the society. However, 211 answered NO with 26.38%. There are certain personal limitations that cannot be adduced to Paul's injunction as the prime determinant for any position. Once you are equipped, your credential becomes presentable for any position; this view rather reflects a pragmatic opinion about the nature of the society. There are 2 irregular entries while 5 were lost.

Table 4.4: Women potentiality

Do you see women as having potentials that need to be fanned into flame so as to serve as men in every capacity within the society?

	Yes	No	Irregular	Lost	Total
N^{O}	700	92	3	5	800
%	87.50	11.50	0.38	0.63	100



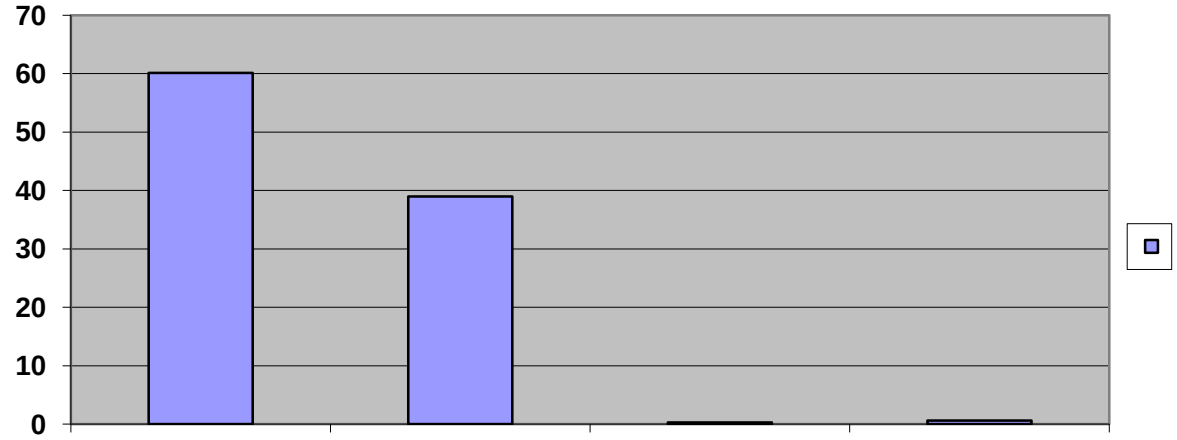
Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2016.

The respondent views as expressed on Table show the dynamism in any culture. A total of 700 respondents with 87.50% were of the opinion that women possess the potentials that need be fanned into flame so as to serve in capacities just like men. Again, this is a pragmatic view from the society about the society. However, 92 respondents with 11.50% disagreed with the opinion that women do have potentials that can be developed and utilised just like men to serve in higher capacity. Women's defined roles are centred on the home, to be indoors, protected and cared for while their husbands go about the social and community affairs. The status quo should be maintained, women are not as good.

Table 4.5: Women in Global Challenges

Paul asked all women to be silent in the churches 1Cor.14:33-36. Will you accept this today in light of global challenges like the SDGs in Urhobo society?

	Yes	No	Irregular	Lost	Total
N^{O}	481	312	2	5	800
%	60.13	39.00	0.25	0.63	100



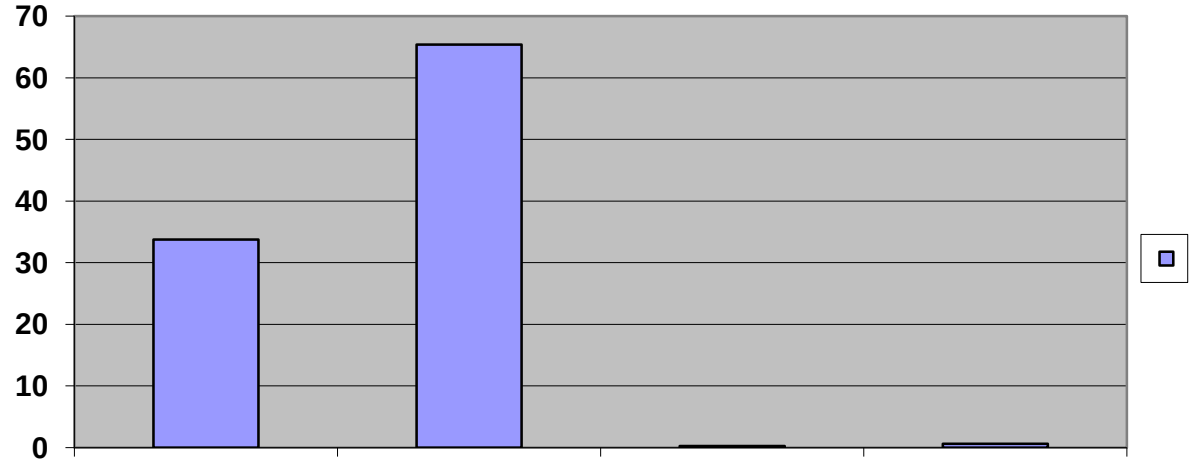
Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2016.

Table 4.5 presents rather more challenging views of the society. It reflects a downward reduction in the respondent's population. 481 respondents with 60.13% answered yes, this is relatively low compared to the high percentage recorded in earlier responses. A total of 312 respondents with 39.00 percent answered no. From here, we see a growing number of responses who were against the positive view. They aver that the Pauline statement of silence of women in light of global challenges should be ignored completely as it is retrogressive and antidevelopment. Consequently, women should be encouraged to achieve and maximise their potentials so that they can meaningfully contribute their quota. There were 2 irregular entries while 5 were lost.

Table 4.6: Demand for Women Silence

Paul in other passages wrote that women should submit to their husbands and to learn at home. Do you see this teaching as good as to meet the contemporary global challenges?

Respondents	Yes	No	Irregular	Lost	Total
N^{O}	270	523	2	5	800
%	33.75	65.38	0.25	0.63	100



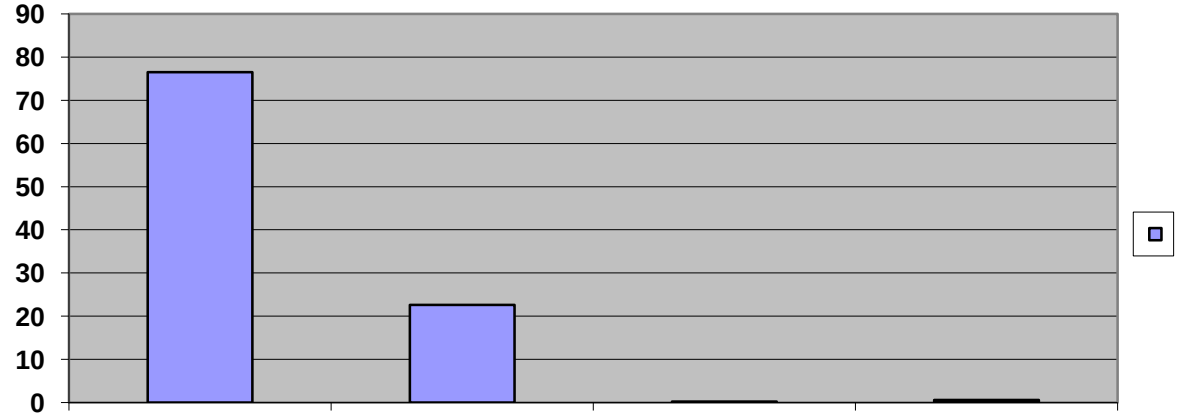
Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2016.

From Table 4.6, we have a complete overturn and a reversal in the order of response. Those who accepted these teachings hook line and sinker with the conservative ideas were 270 with 33.75% while 523 with 65.38% said no. This large percentage represents those with a dynamic view of the society, knowing fully that if women should be excluded from the contemporary society, men cannot literally be responsible for every activity and challenge of modern society. It also tilts towards feminist views about the society in trying to reclaim equality with men in everything.

Table 4.8: Benefits of Women Silence

Do you see women's submission to their husbands as Paul admonished as a channel for development within the society?

	Yes	No	Irregular	Lost	Total
N^{O}	612	181	2	5	800
%	76.50	22.63	0.25	0.63	100



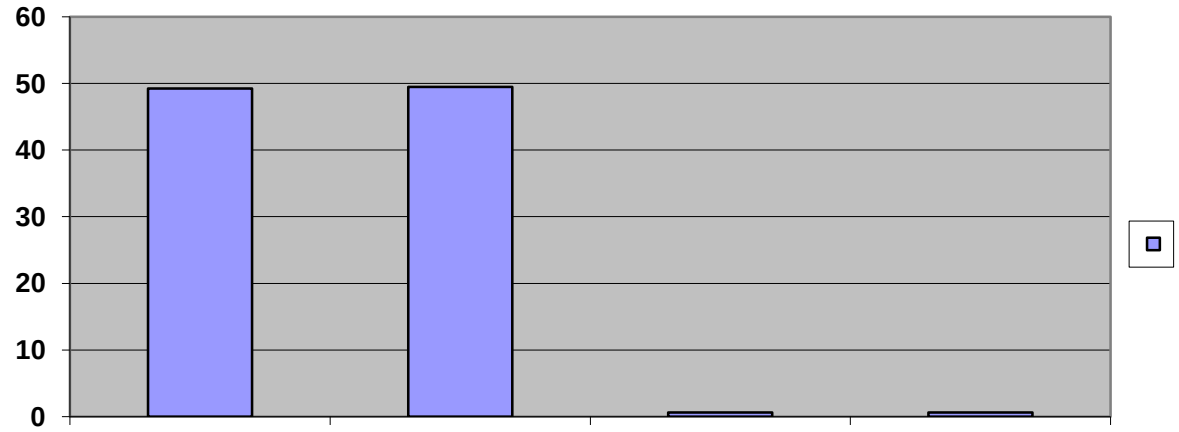
Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2016.

The response to Table 4.7 above shows that 76.50% from 612 respondents were optimistic about the Pauline teachings on women's submission to their husbands and their husband will in turn be responsible for their overall development. This is the path greatness, unity of the family and society that will produce the ideal church according to Apostle Paul. Women should be subject to their husbands. However, 181 respondents with 22.63% perceived it differently from Paul's perspective. They may have personal reasons for objecting to this which include the feminists' objection to marriage and submission to any man in the name of marriage only to beg for freedom from any man.

Table 4.8: A Call for Change

Should we re-interpret Pauline injunction on women's silence since it is based on ancient tradition as to encourage women to achieve and utilise their God-given potentials?

	Yes	No	Irregular	Lost	Total
N^{O}	394	396	5	5	800
%	49.25	49.50	0.63	0.63	100



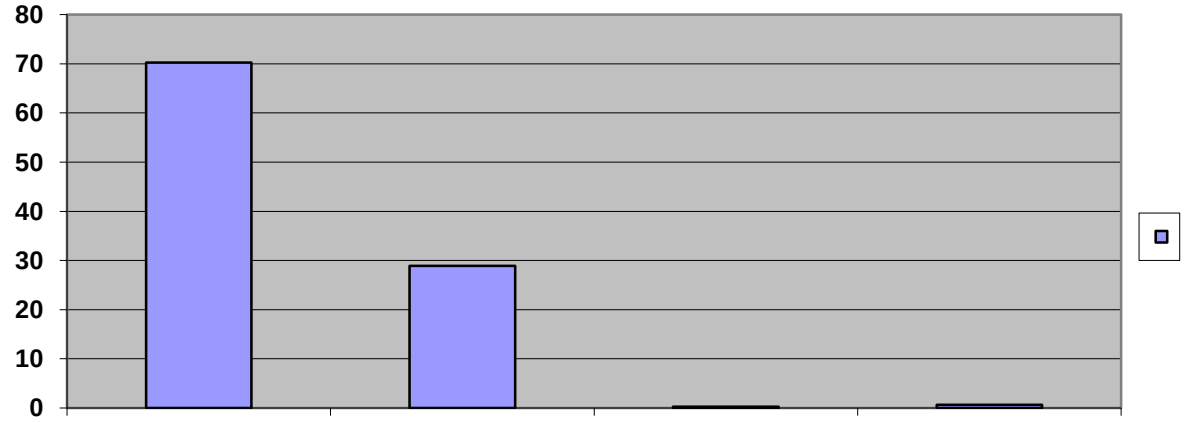
Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2016.

Table 4.8 is a rabble-rouser for re-interpretation of Paul. Yes, 394 respondents with 49.25% clamoured for it while 396 respondents with 49.50% argued against the re-interpretation of Paul. The difference in margin between yes, Paul should be re-interpreted and not to be, is only 0.25%. This slim margin goes to show that the conservative idea about the passage is gradually eroding, giving way to a more liberal interpretation and accommodation of women in the society than in the days of Apostle Paul. There were 5 irregular entries as well as lost but in all, we have 800.

Table 4.9: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Are you aware of the lofty objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals aimed at bringing succour and smile to the deprived and oppressed in the society?

	Yes	No	Irregular	Lost	Total
N^{O}	562	231	2	5	800
%	70.25	28.88	0.25	0.63	100



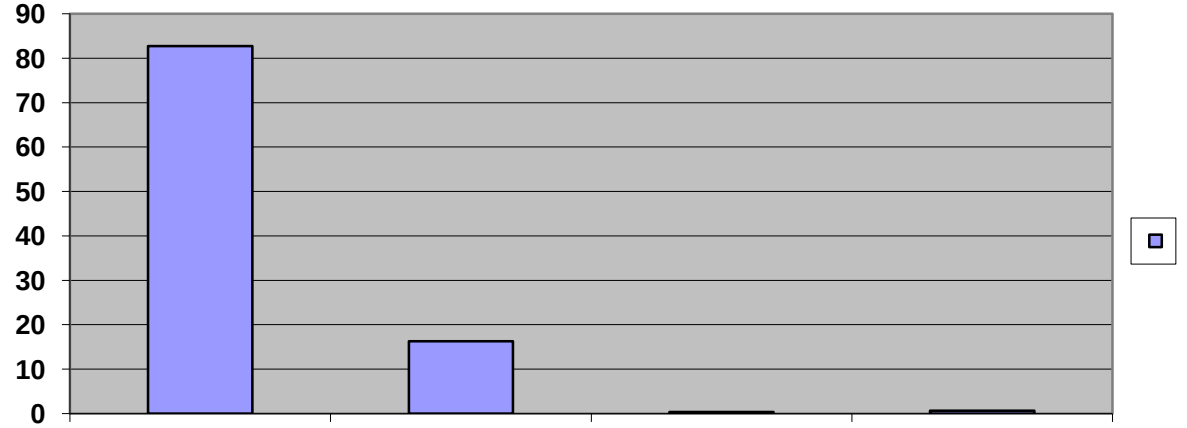
Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2016.

Table 4.9 shows the level of awareness among respondents. Considering the relevance of the SDGs as sumum bonum for the poor in the society to get empowerment, 562 respondents agreed that they are aware of the SDGs programme while 231 respondents with 28.88% said they are not aware of the SDGs programme. Here, these respondents were candid about their answers in relation to their knowledge about the benefits it has to offer. They probably will appreciate a better knowledge possibly if the opportunity is given and they will appreciate it too, since it has to do with women's empowerment and elevation. 2 irregular entries here while 5 were lost.

Table 4.10: The Need for the SDGs

Do you see this programme as opportunity to bridge the gap between gender and other societal problems like poverty, health and gainful employment for women?

	Yes	No	Irregular	Lost	Total
N^{O}	662	130	3	5	800
%	82.75	16.25	0.38	0.63	100



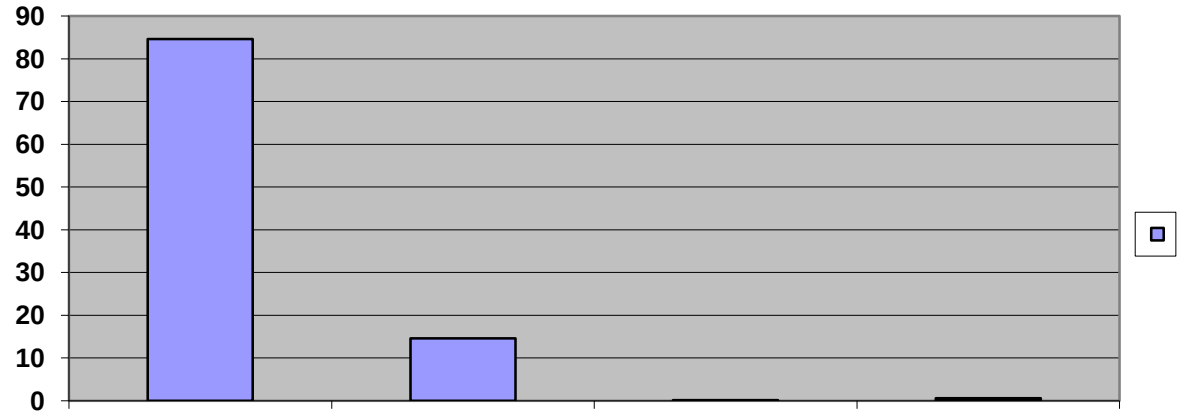
Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2016.

Table 4.10 shows the progression from Table 10, the number of respondents who now see the SDGs as a window for women empowerment, job creation, poverty alleviation and women/girl child education. 662 respondents with a total of 82.75% were in affirmative, they applauded the goals of the SDGs especially in bringing succour to women. However, 130 respondents did not see it from this angle; certain factors like cultural background of the SDGs, religious beliefs and practices here played a major role by not keying into the programme. 5 copies were lost to respondents while 3 respondents made irregular entries.

Table 4.11: Importance of the SDGs

Paul praises the dignity of labour and encourages all. Do you see the Sustainable Development Goals in this light and as avenue of empowerment for women?

Respondents	Yes	No	Irregular	Lost	Total
N^{O}	677	117	1	5	800
%	84.63	14.63	0.13	0.63	100



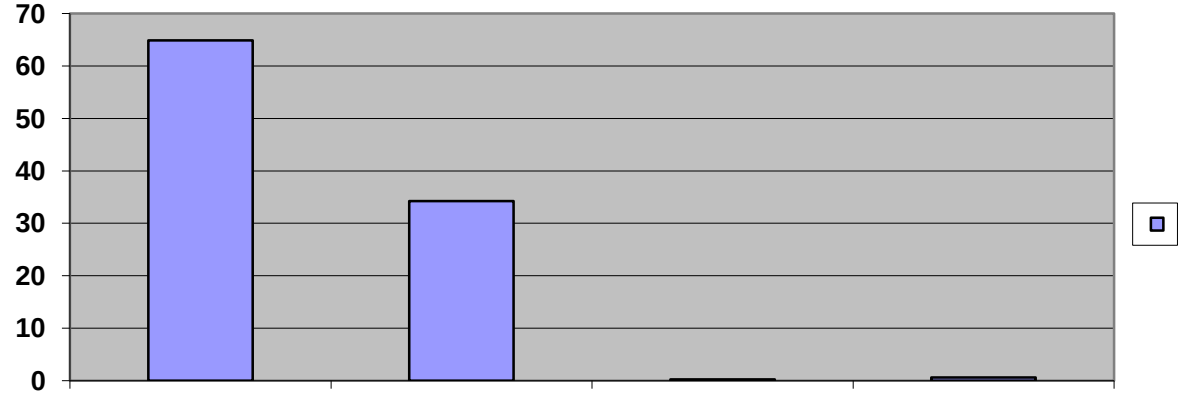
Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2016.

In Table 4.11, 677 respondents with 84.63% see the SDGs from a positive dimension for the empowerment of women. Empowered women were the companions of Apostle Paul in his missionary activities and as such, he encouraged the dignity of labour which is the primary goal of the SDGs, to eradicate poverty through gainful employment. The whooping sums of 84.63% were very happy with the scheme. However, 14.63% representing 117 respondents failed to see it as avenue for women's empowerment rather; they argued that it served as a springboard for women's pride and arrogance in the home and society. Consequently, they might become unruly at home and society causing a major crack on the family walls. There was an irregular entry while 5 respondents were lost.

Table 4.12: Challenges of the SDGs

Women are so enterprising and persisting hence they are the largest labour force though not recognised. Do you see the Sustainable Development Goals as avenue to enhance their capacity in entrepreneurship?

	Yes	No	Irregular	Lost	Total
N^{O}	519	274	2	5	800
%	64.88	34.25	0.25	0.63	100



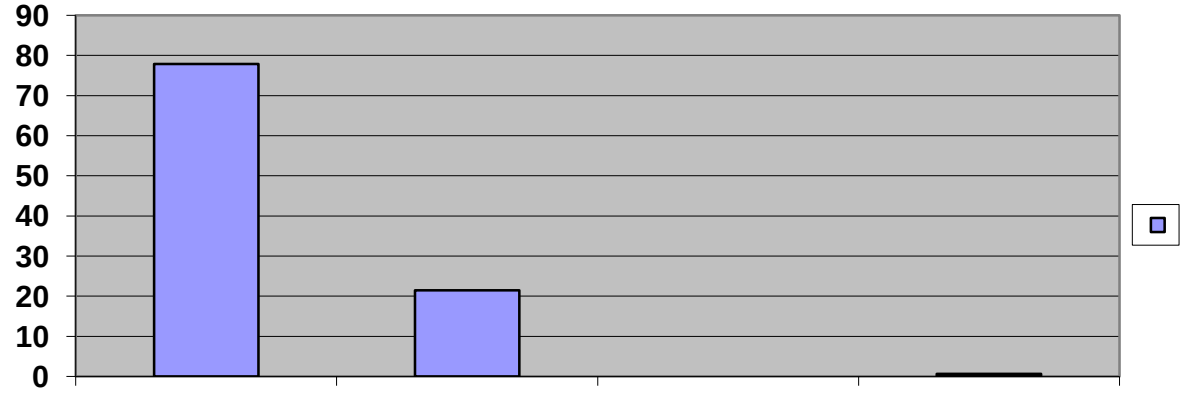
Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2016.

The percentage of response in favour of the nexus between the SDGs and women entrepreneurship was 64.88% from 519 respondents against 274 respondents with 34.25 %. From a general outlook, more respondents are affirmative about the programme of the Sustainable Development Goals. Consequently, there is a yearning for the implementation even at the grassroots among the people. This aspiration however, does not totally eradicate the conservative point of view about women as expressed by the 34.25% who believe that women must live beggarly on their husband without achieving economic freedom. More so, they are culturally bound to be subjected to their husbands in everything, so the SDGs agenda of raising women to financial freedom is seen as intruder into the private domain of the men. 5 respondents' views were lost while 2 made irregular entries.

Table 4.13: The Jesus Attitude

Jesus' attitude towards women portrays him as a social liberator in his days. Should the church conform to this standard set by Jesus Christ as envisioned in the Sustainable Development Goals with no discrimination and gender bias?

	Yes	No	Irregular	Lost	Total
N^{O}	623	172	0	5	800
%	77.88	21.50	0	0.62	100



Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2016.

Finally, Table 4.13 pops a question about the life of Jesus Christ as being exemplary in promoting gender relation as later enshrined in the SDGs. On the need for the church and society to conform to this standard, 623 respondents represented by 77.88% see the need to follow after Christ's model as a paradigm for achieving gender free society. As good as this high percentage maybe, so intimidating yet, the SDGs lacks cultural context. Jesus in his earthly time was not confrontational with the leaders of the society; he actually worked on few men with whom he impacted the entire society most unlike the feminists today.

Only 21.50% disagreed with this item, the ruminants few that cherish the "old pattern." It is better to exercise caution in the way and manner in which we copy Western philosophy and ideology as African. The earlier the MDG programme is inculturated among the Urhobo people the better the end results.

Contributions to Knowledge

The following are contributions to knowledge based on the study:

i. The study demonstrates that Apostle Paul's household codes (*haustafeln*)—though often criticized—were originally intended to foster unity, not oppression, thereby offering a nuanced theological perspective on submission (*hypotasso*) within first-century culture.

ii. It establishes a cultural parallel between Pauline thought and Urhobo traditions of women's submission, showing how both functioned historically as stabilizing practices rather than instruments of enslavement.

iii. by aligning Pauline injunctions with Sustainable Development Goal 5, the research contributes to contextual theology that affirms gender equality and women's empowerment within African societies.

Conclusion

Apostle Paul's household codes *haustafeln* have often been criticized, yet they remain influential in shaping family and social harmony. His emphasis on *hypotasso* (submission), rooted in first-century culture, was intended to foster unity rather than oppression. Among the Urhobo people, similar traditions of women's submission are understood as a stabilizing practice rather than enslavement, reflecting a cultural parallel with Pauline thought.

In the context of development, these principles can be re-examined through the lens of Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality, which calls for the empowerment of women and the elimination of discriminatory practices. While Paul's injunctions addressed specific social settings, his broader ministry demonstrated inclusivity, with literate and capable women playing active roles. Jesus himself modeled egalitarian engagement by interacting openly with women, setting a precedent that transcends cultural boundaries. Thus, interpreting passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34–36 alongside Galatians 3:28 allows for a contextualized approach that affirms equality, aligns with SDG 5, and supports the empowerment of Urhobo women in achieving both social cohesion and developmental progress.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were also made based on the study

i. Pauline texts such as 1 Corinthians 14:34–36 should be re-examined alongside Galatians 3:28 to promote contextual interpretations that affirm equality and inclusivity for Urhobo women.
ii. Churches and theological institutions should integrate feminist hermeneutics into biblical studies, ensuring that women's voices and roles are recognized in both family and ecclesial settings.
iii. Policymakers and community leaders in Urhoboland should apply insights from feminist theology to strengthen gender equality initiatives, thereby advancing SDG 5 and enhancing social cohesion.

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