



Factors Affecting Rural Women Livelihood Diversification in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the factors affecting rural women livelihood diversification in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State. Two-stage sampling technique was used to select 120 rural women for the study. Data was collected using questionnaire and interview schedule from 99 respondents and were analyzed with descriptive analytical tools. The findings of the study revealed that majority (76.8%) of the rural women were involved in non-farming activity. It was shown that the major reason for rural women livelihood diversification was to gain economic empowerment, assurance of food at all times and means of additional income in their families. The study further revealed that rural women in trying to diversify their livelihood are constrained by so many factors mainly inadequate infrastructures, increase domestic chores, high cost of labour, high cost of transportation, lack of the needed knowledge and skill, poor educational background, poor market network and working longer hours. The study recommended that adult education should be promoted through vocational skill acquisition to help rural women acquire the necessary education they need to diversify their livelihood. In addition, Government should also improve performance of rural women in livelihood diversification by ensuring adequate infrastructures are made available in the rural areas.

INTRODUCTION

Livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for means of living (UK Department for International Development, 1999). It is the means by which individuals secure their basic needs such as shelter, clothing and food. It comprises the individual's

capabilities, assets, income and activities geared toward making ends meet. Rural livelihood diversification is defined as the process by which rural families or individuals construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in order to survive and improve their standard of living (Ellis, 1998). It can also be seen as the continuous adaptive processes by which an individual adds new activities, maintain existing ones

or let go of others, thereby maintaining diversity and change in livelihood portfolios (Ellis, 2004). Individuals diversify their livelihood by taking up diverse activities in order to create more source of income.

Livelihood diversification or occupational diversification is one of the major characteristics of rural households as they find the need to diversify their livelihood as a survival strategy to cope with the risk and vulnerability associated with the undue reliance on agriculture (Bryceson, 1997; Ellis, 2000). According to the just mentioned authors, rural households have become more occupationally flexible, spatially mobile and are increasingly depending on non-agricultural income generating activities. Rural people look for diverse opportunities to increase and stabilize their incomes which are determined by their portfolio of assets whether social and material capital (Ellis, 1999, 2004). Diversification in this context involves strategic activities attempted by individuals and households to find new ways to raise income and reduce environmental risk, which differs sharply by the degree of freedom of choice (to diversify or not) and the reversibility of the outcome (Hussein & Nelson, 1998). These strategic activities could spread across several enterprises including agricultural and non-agricultural activities (Matthews-Njoku & Adesope, 2007). More than 50% of the income in rural farming communities of developing countries comes from non-farming sources (International fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), 2012).

The situation is not different in Okirika Local Government Area. Okrika people of the Ijaw extract mainly engaged in artisanal fishing, farming and trading (Tonye, 1989; Abam, 2012). When the westerners arrived in Nigeria, the people of Okrika were among the first set of Nigerians that have contact with the Europeans and this was the beginning point of diversification as many of them began to engage in trade with the Europeans. Over the years fishing and farming activities have been the known source of livelihood of the rural women in Okirika. But, with increasing threat of climate change and other stressors in agriculture such as the seasonality and perishability of crops, fish and other sea creatures, pollution of river, land degradation has drastically affected the rural women's primary source of livelihood and this has resulted to a frequent fluctuation in their income. Also, the unstable economic situation of the country has made it very difficult for rural families to be sustained by single livelihood means. Hence, most of the rural women have diversified their livelihood to cover a range of other productive activities that are non-agricultural so as to be able to overcome seasonality of farming activities, reduce poverty and vulnerability, which are often associated with undue reliance on agriculture (Ellis, 2004). The drift from agricultural forms of livelihood offers rural women the opportunity for occupational adjustment, multiple streams of income, re-orientation, social identification and spatial relocation

away from agricultural-based modes of livelihood (Bryceson, 1997).

Though the rural women in Okirika are engaging in other livelihood activities other than farming, a lot of factors still affect their livelihood diversification activities. These constraining factors are known to vary across regions and livelihoods groups. FAO (2002) noted that contributions made by rural women in occupational diversification are increasingly affected by changes external to the household. Ewebiyi (2014) stated that the major constraints to livelihood diversification in the Nigerian rural communities are poor asset base, lack of credit facilities, lack of awareness and training facilities, fear of taking risk and lack of rural infrastructure. In the same vein, Kumar, Sing and Mathew (2006) stated that availability and accessibility of livelihood assets by the rural households is directly proportional to the extent and type of livelihood activities of rural dwellers. They noted that most of the landless and small farmers in rural Nigeria do not have any asset which acts as a big barrier to livelihood diversification. Identification of constraints to livelihood diversification is crucial to policy formulation as well as planning impactful training and intervention programmes for the rural women. It is against this background that this research assessed the factors influencing rural women livelihood diversification in Okrika Local Government Area. Specifically, the study described the socio-economic characteristics of rural women in the study area; identified various livelihood activities adopted by the rural women in the study area; ascertained rural women's reasons for engagement in livelihood diversification in the study area and identified the constraints faced by rural women in livelihood diversification.

METHODS

The study was carried out in Okrika Local Government Area. Okrika is a Port town in Rivers State, Nigeria. The town is sited on a small island south of Port Harcourt making it a suburb of the larger city. It lies on the geographical co-ordinate of latitude 4° 44'23" N and longitude 7° E 4'58" sharing boundaries with Port Harcourt to the north, Degema to the west, Bonny to the south, Ogu/Bolo to the South East and Eleme to the North East. According to the National Population Commission (NPC 2006), Okrika has an estimated population of about 222,285 people of which 108,323 are females. The primary occupation in the area is fishing although a large number of persons in the area have diversified their livelihood from fishing to other non-farming activities. Okrika Local Government comprises of four towns namely Kirike (Okrika), Ogoloma, Ogbogbo, Ibaka, with 61 satellite communities and fishing settlement.

The population of the study included all the women from the four towns in Okrika Local Government Area. A Two-Stage sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. Stage one involved a proportionate selection of 70% of the satellite communities in each of the four towns in Okrika giving a total of 43 communities. This was to ensure equal representation of all towns in Okrika local government area. Stage two involved a purposive sampling of 3 women from each of the selected satellite communities making a total of 129 respondents. Purposive sample selection was used to ensure that only women who engage in more than one livelihood activities were selected for the study. Data for the study were collected through the use of questionnaire and interview schedule in the case of illiterate women. One hundred and twenty-nine copies of questionnaire were used for the study of which 30 copies were not properly filled, leaving a total of 99 copies for the analysis. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics namely; frequency, mean and percentage. Reasons for livelihood diversification among the rural women in the study area were captured using 19-items respectively. These items were rated on a four-point scale with values of strongly agree =4; agree =3; disagree =2; strongly disagree =1. A midpoint of 2.50 was obtained and based on this, decision rule was that any mean score greater than or equal to 2.50 implies that the rural women are in agreement with the statement and any mean score less than 2.50 implies disagreement. Constraints towards livelihood diversification were captured using 25-item statement which was rated on a three-point scale of large extent = 3, some extent = 2 and no extent = 1. A midpoint of 2.0 was obtained and based on this, decision rule was that any mean score greater than or equal 2.0 means agreement with the statement while mean score of less than 2.0 means disagreement.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

The results revealed that 44% of the rural women were within the age brackets of 40 – 59 years. The mean age was found to be 44years. This implies that most of them were still in their productive age. Hence, they have the capacity to engage in diverse occupational activities whether farming or non-farm occupation. But, as rural women grow older, they become less involved in occupational diversification. Abdulia and Crole, (2001) noted that women participate more in non-farm occupations when they are around the age of 30 years and there after reduces their involvement as they grow older. Similarly, it is noted that most of the labour forces in rural areas are mainly between the ages of 20 to 55years (Oyesola & Ademola, 2011). This implies that as people grow older, their involvement in diversification

reduces mainly as a result of insufficient strength to effectively manage different livelihoods. As regards marital status, greater proportion (59%) of the rural women were married. while, 41% were single. This shows that most of the respondents have husbands and children. They have more responsibilities in terms of providing for their family. Hence, they diversify their livelihood sources in order to raise more income to cater for their family responsibilities. About 70.6% of the rural women had at least secondary education. The mean number of years spent in school was 11 years. This indicates that majority of the rural women in the study area were literates. They are better equipped and have the capacity to diversify their livelihoods. Ranjan (2006) asserts that the level of education of the rural women increase their participation rate in various occupations. Higher education enhances business ideas, skills, innovation and managerial ability for business sustainability. Nwibo & Okorie (2013) noted that as an individual increases his educational attainment, his managerial ability for business sustainability also increases.

Most (44.4%) of the rural women had a household size of 4-6 persons with the mean household size being 6 persons. This indicates a relatively large household size, implying that these rural women have more persons to feed, more responsibilities such as school fees, house rent, health care bills and as such they need to assist their families. Hence the need to diversity their livelihood in other to make ends meet. Also with the relatively high household size, more manpower for farm labour will be available. This result is in line with Aderinto (2012) and Fabusoro, Omotayo, Apantaku and Okuneye (2010) that a fairly large household size is dominant in rural Nigeria. Similarly, research has shown that female-headed large sized poor households are more diversified in their livelihood activities (Oluwatayo, 2009). About 67.7% of the rural women have been farming for about five years or less while 2% have between 21-25years farming experience. This shows that most of the respondents have relatively little farming experience indicating a higher involvement in non-farm livelihood within the study area. As regards the number of non-farming livelihood activities engaged in by rural women, about 46.5% of the respondents engaged in one form of non-farm occupation, 26.3% are engaged in 2 forms of non-farming occupation. While, only 3.0% are engaged in 3 or more forms of non-farming occupation. About 23.2% do not engage in any other farming activity other than farming. This indicates that rural women within the study area diversified their livelihood sources to cover both farming and non-farming occupations. This is to enable them obtain additional income to empower themselves financially. Result shows that majority (68.7%) of the rural women engaged in 2 sources of livelihood. This implies that the level of livelihood diversification among the rural women in the study area is relatively low.

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of rural women

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Age			44
20-29	18	18	
30-39	21	21	
40-49	22	22	
50-59	22	22	
60-69	10	11	
70 and above	6	6	
Marital status			
Single	41	41	
Married	58	59	
Educational level			11
No formal education	17	17.2	
Primary education	12	12	
Secondary education	35	35.4	
Tertiary education	35	35.4	
Number of livelihood activities engaged in			2
2	68	68.7	
3	20	20.2	
4	9	9.1	
5	2	2.0	
Household size			6
1-3	22	22.2	
4-6	44	44.4	
7-9	24	24.2	
10-12	7	7.07	
13-15	2	2.13	
Farming experience			6
1 - 5	67	67.7	
6 - 10	15	15.1	
11 - 15	5	5.1	
16 - 20	6	6.1	
21 - 25	2	2.0	
26 - 30	4	4.0	
Number of non-farming livelihood activities engaged in			
0	23	23.2	
1	46	46.5	
2	26	26.3	
3	3	3.0	
4	1	1.0	

Source: Field survey, 2017

Rural women's reasons for engagement in livelihood diversification

The major reasons for involvement in livelihood diversification as indicated by the rural women in the study area includes: economic empowerment (Mean = 3.69), poverty reduction (Mean = 3.61), food assurance and security in households (Mean = 3.47), additional income (Mean = 3.44), improve labour market opportunities (Mean = 3.41). Death of husband (Mean =

1.90) was not seen by the women as a major reason for livelihood diversification.

This implies that the rural women were involved in occupational diversification in order to reduce poverty by getting additional income to empower themselves economically; to withstand the risk and vulnerabilities associated with farming and non-farming occupations; to support their husbands and meet family responsibilities. Expansion of market due to urbanization and improve labour market opportunities were also reasons for

diversification that encouraged the involvement of rural women in non-farming occupation and creation of more livelihood sources within the study area and nearby rural communities. This is in agreement with Ewebiyi, (2014)

who suggested that livelihood diversification is a matter of choice. Hence individuals have different reasons for diversifying their livelihood sources.

Table 2: Reasons for Occupational Diversification among Rural Woman

S/N	Reasons for occupation diversification	SA	A	DA	SD	Mean	Remark
1.	Economic empowerment	71	26	1	1	3.69	Agreed
2.	For additional income	52	42	2	3	3.44	Agreed
3.	Want to be Independent	72	21	-	6	3.32	Agreed
4.	Assurance of food security in household	59	32	4	4	3.47	Agreed
5.	Reduce poverty	72	21	-	6	3.61	Agreed
6.	Overcome risk and seasonality of farming occupation	39	30	11	19	2.90	Agreed
7.	No access to farm input	24	21	32	22	2.47	Disagreed
8.	Risk insurance against crop failure	34	25	20	20	2.74	Agreed
9.	High perishability of fish and other sea creature	40	24	24	11	2.94	Agreed
10.	Reduce fishing activities due to oil spillage in surrounding rivers	38	18	24	19	2.76	Agreed
11.	Improve labour market opportunities	61	26	4	8	3.41	Agreed
12.	Expansion of market due to urbanization	51	33	5	10	3.26	Agreed
13.	Increase family responsibility such as school fee, house rent.	53	29	6	11	3.25	Agreed
14.	Husband is unemployed	26	12	21	40	3.24	Disagreed
15.	Husband is dead	20	8	13	58	1.90	Disagreed
16.	To support husband	54	24	6	15	3.18	Agreed
17.	Acquire more capital for further investment	53	36	5	5	3.38	Agreed
18.	Increase knowledge and skill	56	24	7	12	3.25	Agreed
19.	To kill boredom	36	21	17	25	2.69	Agreed

SA =Strongly Agree, A= Agree, DA= Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree

- Mean equal to or above 2.5 denotes agreement with the statement

Constraints to livelihood diversification

Table 3 shows the various constraints affecting livelihood diversification of the respondents. It indicates that the major constraints were lack of infrastructures (\bar{x} 2.44), accessible road (\bar{x} = 2.44) increase domestic chores (\bar{x} = 2.39), high cost of labour (\bar{x} = 2.38), High cost of transportation (\bar{x} = 2.37), poor market network (\bar{x} = 2.35), working longer hours (\bar{x} = 2.30) among others. Health challenges (\bar{x} = 1.77), low self-esteem low confidence (\bar{x} = 1.73), sexual harassment (\bar{x} = 1.72), pregnancy and childbirth (\bar{x} = 1.93) were not considered as major constraints by the women. The

findings of the study are in agreement with (Bloom, Craig & Malaney, 2001). They noted that rural women continue to struggle with dual responsibilities of economic product and domestic labour. Most of them are confronted by poverty, illiteracy, high health risk and inadequate access to production resources. Similarly, Ewebiyi (2014) found that inadequate basic infrastructures, poor transportation system and inadequate credit and marketing facilities as severe constraints to livelihood diversification among rural household in southern Nigeria. Government negligence of rural areas has increased the problem of inadequate basic infrastructure. This will severely militate against the

ability of these rural women to diversify their livelihood as many of them do not have the infrastructural capacity to do that hence depend on the provision of these infrastructures by the government.

Pregnancy and child birth were found not to be a major constraining factor. This is an indication that most women are learning to balance their basic household responsibilities and other responsibilities.

Table 4: Constraints of livelihood diversification among rural women in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Constraint	LE	SE	NE	Mean	Remark
1. Poor educational background	46	20	33	2.13	Agreed
2. Social norms restricting females from working outside household	30	51	18	2.12	Agreed
3. Increase domestic chores	57	24	18	2.39	Agreed
4. Inadequate training and skill acquisition programme	38	43	18	2.20	Agreed
5. Insecurity/poor working condition	43	38	18	2.25	Agreed
6. Low income	42	29	28	2.13	Agreed
7. Inadequate finance/credit facilities (loan)	42	35	22	2.20	Agreed
8. Working longer hours	43	43	13	2.30	Agreed
9. Health challenges	24	28	47	1.77	Disagreed
10. Low self-esteem/no confidence	25	22	52	1.73	Disagreed
11. Sexual harassment	26	19	54	1.72	Disagreed
12. Inaccessibility of modern technology	35	37	27	2.08	Agreed
13. High production lost	41	36	22	2.19	Agreed
14. Poor market information on price of goods and services	41	41	17	2.24	Agreed
15. Poor market network	48	38	13	2.35	Agreed
16. High cost of transportation	54	28	17	2.37	Agreed
17. Government policy due to taxes (multiple taxation), low minimum wage	44	28	27	2.17	Agreed
18. Delay in salaries/wages	47	32	20	2.27	Agreed
19. High cost of labour	51	35	13	2.38	Agreed
20. Lack of capital/input	40	37	22	2.18	Agreed
21. Pregnancy and child birth	28	36	35	1.93	Disagreed
22. Lack of basic infrastructure such as electricity, accessible road	57	29	13	2.44	Agreed
23. Lack of support from husband and members of the family	32	35	32	2.00	Agreed
24. Lack of good policies to encourage women's enterprises	35	51	13	2.22	Agreed
25. Landing domestic chore alongside occupation responsibilities	41	41	17	2.24	Agreed

LE = large extent, SE = some extent, NE = no extent

- Mean equal to or more than 2.0 denotes agreement with the statement

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Livelihood diversification is relatively high in Okrika Local Government Area with involvement in both non-farming and farming occupation with more diversification in the non-farming sector. However, the occupational activities of the rural women were constrained by lack of infrastructures such as electricity, accessible road, increase domestic chores, high cost of labour, high cost of transportation, poor market network, working longer hours, among others.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

Proactive actions are needed to handle constraints experienced by rural women in diversifying their livelihood.

First, human capacity development through vocational skill acquisitions and training are major keys to improving rural women productivity level, boost their self-confidence and make them employable. Adult literacy programmes through adult education, vocational skills acquisition should be introduced for the rural

women to acquire necessary education that will help them diversify their livelihood

Financial institutions such as micro-finance banks, bank of agriculture should provide credit facilities to support the rural women.

Government should promote supportive policies that will encourage the development of human capital by equipping rural women with the necessary skills to work. Government should improve the performance of the rural women in occupational diversification by ensuring adequate rural infrastructure. Also, rural women could come together to form cooperative societies, this will enable them pool resources together and provide some basic amenities for themselves.

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