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Ownership of Productive Resources: A panacea for Empowering Rural Women in Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study assess the accessibility of rural women in Kwara State Nigeria to productive resources such as land, livestock, and capital in order to determine their level of socio-economic empowerment. The study adopted a case study design and collected data qualitatively and quantitatively. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to identify 7 locations in the State, where 88 women were selected based on simple random sampling technique. Information were elicited via focus group discussions and questionnaire. Gender analysis framework was used to explore and analyse the data generated for the study. The study found that the rural women desire to engage in gainful economic activities. However, cultural barriers prevent them from adequately exploring livelihood-improving opportunities. It was established that ownership of productive resources such as land and livestock can enhance their livelihoods provided cultural and governance issues do not deter them from accessing the services. It was therefore recommended that appropriate policies that will favour the women in terms of accessibility and ownership of assets should be put in place. The study provides a nuanced perspective on the influence and relevance of possession of physical assets in enhancing women's livelihood diversification and overall development of rural livelihoods.

Keywords: livelihoods, development, economic activities, socio-economic empowerment, rural women, diversification.

Introduction

Rural population in Nigeria is put at 48 per cent of the total populace with 35 million females living in rural areas (IFAD, 2010). The livelihoods of rural women in Nigeria are under increasing economic demands. Moreover, women are obliged to engage in economic activities in order to fend for families or to supplement husbands' incomes. This is associated with their cultural values which identify women as the carer in the family as well as their engagement in social reproduction tasks. This has socio-economic implications on their livelihoods as Meagher (2010) and Okunola and Ikuomola (2010) observed. They resort to livelihood diversification as a result of scarcity of natural and economic resources. The World Bank (2007) affirms that women comprise about 43 per cent of agricultural labour force in developing countries. They typically bear the responsibility of family nutrition and household provisioning. As observed by Jaitner *et al.* (2001) livestock keeping is the domain of rural women where they actively participate. It was observed that the demand for livestock products has increased more than that of crop

staples due to increased incomes in the past forty years (FAO, 2011). By implication, livestock farming systems become more pertinent as the need to continue to meet the nutritional requirements of both rural and urban dwellers becomes apparent. The rural households also use the sales of livestock products as buffer against strained economic resources, low incomes and by substituting it in diet. The indirect increase in responsibility on women in livestock as a result of the rise in demand for meat, milk and egg in commercial quantities cannot be ignored. Hence, there is the need for women to be able to access productive resources in the same manner that men could.

The women in rural areas involve in a number of income generating activities such as petty trading, selling of poultry/dairy products and farm produce as a way of diversifying their livelihoods. These livelihood activities are performed on a small scale with limited productive resources such as fixed assets and capital. Owing to the constraints faced by rural women in the course of pursuing a livelihood, this study examined and sought to establish how rural women can be empowered socially and economically so as to augment their livelihoods, given that they contribute significantly to household livelihoods. The objectives were to examine the accessibility of rural women to productive resources that can enhance their livelihoods. It also determined the level of socio-economic empowerment of the women when compared to that of their husbands. The study investigated whether women have the same level of equality with men when accessing the productive resources. Most significantly, the significance of ownership and control of productive resources in augmenting food production and improving livelihoods was established.

Culture and governance issues limit the availability and access of productive resources for rural households and rural women in particular (Garforth and Levy 2005; Garforth 2011). Therefore, knowledge gained informs that the possession and ownership of physical assets by rural women has an important role to play in improving rural livelihoods. Similarly, lack of access to extension services deter women from achieving their desired level of productivity and livelihood improvement. The establishment of collective action in form of self-help organisation among rural women will be an effective way of empowering them socio-economically (Meena *et al.*, 2008). Traditionally, Nigerian rural women are faced with cultural and political challenges which limit their access to a number of resources compared to men (Rahman and Haruna, 1999; IFAD, 2010). In Nigeria, men have higher social status but women's social status can be enhanced with ownership and access to resources such as land, livestock and capital (IFAD, 2010). It is based on this premise that this study employs the empowerment framework by Sarah Longwe to determine if and how rural women in Nigeria can be empowered both socially and economically so as to improve their livelihood standards.

The Women's Empowerment (Longwe) Framework was proposed to help planners determine women's empowerment and equality in practice. It assesses critically the extent to which intervention is supporting this empowerment. For the purpose of this study, tools one and two of the Longwe Framework (March *et al.* 1999) were adapted to explore the level of economic empowerment of the rural women farmers. The Longwe Framework (Tool 1) centres on five levels of equality. It is assumed that if women have the same level of equality with men in these five levels, their level of empowerment is very much likely to be as high as that of men. If women have access and control over resources, as well as actively participating in programmes designed for them, then they can be said to be economically empowered, but lower levels of equality in control, access and participation indicate lack of empowerment. Possession and ownership of assets such as livestock, farmlands and capital were used to analyse women's empowerment based on the five levels of equality proposed by Longwe.

The ownership, access and control over assets such as livestock can empower women to participate better in decision-making processes both at family and community levels as livestock is a key asset for people of rural areas (FAO, 2011). Despite women's role in keeping livestock, they are socially barred from ownership and control as a result of cultural traits. Nonetheless, men value livestock and see it as store of wealth while women, on the other hand, use it as a buffer for shocks (UNDP, 2005).

Materials and Methods

The philosophy for this study is based on the pragmatist epistemology, a more recent philosophical perspective where a problem is solved using several methods to derive knowledge about it (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Unlike the positivists who adopt survey method such as questionnaires and the constructivists who adopts exploratory methods, the pragmatists employ both survey and exploratory research methods to carry out investigation. Furthermore, the positivists base their judgement on deductive reasoning while the constructivists give explanations for their research outcome, whereas the pragmatists combine the two approaches and use multiple sources of evidence, thereby producing a more convincing result than using a mono-method (Yin, 2010). The pragmatists encourage the people who are being studied to participate in the research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The study, therefore, adopted a case study strategy of inquiry to research Kwara State. Case studies help the investigator to explore deeply so as to be able to explain an activity in detail (Yin, 2010).

Kwara State was selected as the case study site because it has diverse cultures with different tribes and ethnic groups. Among these tribes and culture are: Yoruba,

Fulani, Hausa, Nupe, Bororo, Igbira, Baruba, and others. The study employed a multiple case study sites to carry out the research. The use of multiple case study sites served as direct replication and this makes data to be more robust (Hanna, 2005). This study drew a generalised cross-case sites conclusion as a result of the multiple study sites. Focus group discussions and questionnaire survey were employed to elicit information from the participants. The sampling procedure was based on a multi-stage sampling technique where 39% of the total population of rural women livestock farmers were sampled. Kwara State has sixteen Local Government Areas with rural areas cutting across the local government areas. Base on convenience, seven local government areas were purposively selected and they include Asa, Edu, Ekiti, Ilorin East, Ilorin-South, Ifelodun, and Offa. A snowballing technique was used to arrive at a sample size of 227 rural women livestock farmers in the selected LGAs out of which 88 (39%), who were willing to partake in the study were sampled. Simple frequencies and percentages were used to analyse the data obtained while the women’s empowerment framework by Sarah Longwe was used to interpret, analyse, and explain the data from focus group discussions. The women’s empowerment framework was used to assess the level of equality of women with men as well as determining women’s socio-economic empowerment.

Results and Discussion

The results in Table 1 show the number of people with socio-economic dependence on the sampled rural women. It was found that a few (9.1 %) of the sample have no dependant, less than half (30.7 %) of them have about 1-2 dependants while 37.5 per cent of the women have 3-4 dependants. The high dependency ratio can be attributed to extended family structure. This trend automatically inflate women’s familial and economic responsibility within households. The study found that rural women engage in agricultural activities and more in livestock management than men. These findings conform to that of Turner (2009).

Table 1: Distribution of the sampled Rural women based on their number of Dependants (n = 88)

Number of dependants	Frequency	Percentage
None	8	9.1
1-2	27	30.7
3-4	33	37.5
5-6	13	14.8
>7	7	7.9

Source: Questionnaire Survey (Rural women farmers), 2012

Additionally, Table 2 present the sources and incomes of the rural women. It shows that 12.5 per cent of the respondents have no source of income, although more than

67 per cent of the women engage in two to four income generating activities. These activities include petty trading, sale of textile materials, sale of dairy products, occasional sale of farm produce and sale of small livestock.

Table 2: Income generated by the rural women from their economic activities (n = 88)

Attribute	Frequency	Percentage
Sources of income		
None	11	12.5
2-4	59	67.0
>4	18	20.5
Total	88	100
Income per day		
<N100	34	44.2
N100-N200	39	50.6
>N200	4	5.2
Total	77	100

Source: Questionnaire Survey (Rural women farmers), 2012

The prevailing rate as at the time of survey was 1USD to 150 Nigerian Naira.

From Table 2, 44.2 per cent of the women earn around 0.70 US dollar daily while half of the women (50.6%) earn between 0.70 to 1.25 US dollars on a daily basis. Thus, these women face a situation of poverty as indicated by the Food and Agricultural Organisation who reported that more than 70 per cent of Nigerians live on less than 1.25 US dollars a day (IFAD, 2012). The United Nations also stated that more than 1 billion people struggle to survive on less than 1US dollar a day (Bird and Pratt, 2004).

During the course of the study, Khadijah (a focus group participant at Ifelodun LGA) stated that she sells some of her poultry products such as chickens and eggs around the festive period in order to meet the needs of her children. Her statements portray that of a woman, who is typically responsible for children's welfare. Similarly, majority of the participants in the focus group discussions assert that they engage in livestock production as their major source of income. One can therefore argue that women may not only be responsible for domestic activities within households, but also provision of the family's basic needs. Contrary to the submission that substantial income generated by rural households are from non-agricultural sources, this study shows that despite women's diversification in non-agricultural sources, livestock production and sale of livestock products remain their major source of income.

Availability of Productive Resources for Rural Women

From the study, the rural women do not have access to productive resources in their community, this problem is further exacerbated by lack of infrastructure that can enhance their living conditions. The rural communities in this study lack the basic social amenities such as schools, electricity, potable water, etc. There are also inadequacies in the areas of processing equipment that can add value to their products to enhance their livelihoods. The following paragraph amplifies on the lack or inadequacies in infrastructure and social services among the rural communities.

It was found that rural communities lack primary health care among many other social facilities. The researchers witnessed the case of a woman with a four year old child who is bedridden. The child was reported to have been sick since he was a year old. The mother was not able to take him to hospital because of the distance she had to travel and the cost involved. Shafaatu (focus group participant at Ekiti LGA and also mother of the sick child) therefore relied on local herbs to cure her child of his ailment. Additionally, the rural people mostly live in areas where they lack electricity supply and this deprive them the use of electrical appliances such as blenders, freezers, etc in processing their farm produce and thus decreasing the shelf life of the produce. The lack of rural infrastructure prevents the women from optimally exploring livelihood opportunities to the utmost capacity. Where these services are available, women may not be able to access them due to cultural barriers that limit women from exploring livelihood opportunities. Their houses are constructed with mud and thatched-roofs. These houses/roofs are easily washed or blown away during heavy rainfall, floods and winds.

This study sought to investigate whether women, like their male counterparts, are socio-economically empowered. Participants in the focus group discussion gave their comments in respect of availability of extension facilities. The participants indicated a shallow awareness of the knowledge of extension service and they exhibited the perception that extension agents are veterinary doctors. Hence, this study shows a lack of access to extension services which is caused, not by non-availability, but due to other influences such as cultural, religious, gender, political and governance issues. These factors do not encourage women's access to productive resources and extension services. Similarly, Juweri (focus group participant at Ifelodun LGA) noted that most extension services are brought to their communities by male workers, and that they rarely have the opportunity to access such services because culture does not permit them to mingle freely with male strangers. Previous studies have confirmed that certain cultures deter women from adequately accessing extension services (Garforth, 2011). It therefore, implies that the women and their communities may adequately benefit from extension services provided the cultural norms, laws and values of the communities do not restrict them from access. Furthermore, they might also adequately access extension services if

policy and governance issues favour rural settlements by making infrastructure available, so as to facilitate provision of extension services.

Assessment of women’s empowerment using the Longwe Framework

It is shown in Table 3 that women do not have equal opportunities with their husbands in the areas of ownership of productive assets and access to capital. The women however, have access to the farmlands and participate in decisions regarding farming activities thus have control over the use of farmlands (Table 2). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is some level of equal opportunities over productive resources such as farmlands. Despite the level of equality of men and women in the control of farmlands, the table has shown that women neither own nor control the productive assets such as land, crop inputs, livestock inputs, and capital. It can be argued from these findings that the women appear not to be economically empowered. For further clarification, Longwe tools one and two were used to determine if the women recognises that access and control of those productive resources can facilitate increases in their income and economic empowerment. The results are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Access and Control over Productive Resources for rural women

Level of equality	Herd ownership	Farmlands	Capital
Control	No	Yes	No
Participation in household decisions	No	Yes/No*	No
Conscientisation	No	No	No
Access	No	Yes	No
Welfare	No	Yes	No

Yes/No - this implies a degree of neutrality by rural women. They believe that there is some level of equality in those areas. (Table 3 is based on data collected through the focus group discussions and questionnaire survey, 2012).*

Note that farmland in this study is a piece of land at the back of their huts for cultivation. It is different from land as a source of capital.

Table 4: Economic empowerment for rural women

Sector	Levels of equality		Level of recognition of inadequacies
	Access	Control	
Natural capital			
Land	No	No	Positive
Physical capital			
Livestock ownership	No	No	Positive
Human capital			
Education	No	No	Positive
Social capital			
Culture	Yes	No	Negative
Infrastructure	No	No	Positive
Financial capital			
Credit	No	No	Positive

Source: Table derived from focus group discussions and questionnaire survey, 2012.

From Table 4, it was shown that women do not have equal access and control with their husbands over some assets such as land, livestock, credit facilities and education. However, attitudes and responses of women to survey data indicate that they are aware of the implications of their lack of access and control over those resources. The Longwe framework maps out a positive estimation that women recognise the need for those productive resources to boost their income so as to improve their livelihoods. As regards the aspect of culture, the negative perception of women towards the recognition of deficiencies in their cultural values shows their acceptance to the barrier culture imposes on them. Unfortunately, this value limits them from accessing services that can enhance their livelihoods. There is need for the women to recognise that culture is a construct of a people (March *et al.*, 1999). Thus there may be reasons to reconstruct or deconstruct such traditions to allow for change. Hence, a change in the attitude of women towards their cultural barriers can lead to increase in income, thereby improving their livelihoods. It can thus be argued from these findings that rural women in this study are not economically empowered.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made. The dependency level on women as carer for the family is high. A large proportion of the sampled women have 3-4 dependants while a few have none. More than half of them engage in two-four income generating activities while only a few have no source of income. In addition, less than half of the women earn around 0.70 US dollars daily while half of them earn between 0.70US dollars to 1.25 US dollars on a

daily basis. Moreover, the lack of social amenities and access to extension services, thus, have an adverse effect on their production, processing and storage. It was evidently found that women do not have equal opportunities with their husbands in ownerships of productive assets and access to capital thus hindering their productivity and income level.

A clearer understanding of the effect of ownership of productive resources, such as assets and social services by women would make it possible for relevant stakeholders to develop holistic developmental interventions with a view to enhancing their livelihood strategies. Policy makers should empower women by designing favourable policies that will aid accessibility of resources. Extension programmes should be designed in a way that women will be represented in decision making and are able to participate effectively in policy implementation. Relevant and adequate provision of extension services by government or private sector to the dwellers of rural areas can help augment women's empowerment processes.

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