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**LIVELIHOOD SYSTEMS OF WOMEN IN ODO-OTIN LOCAL
GOVERNMENT AREA, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA**

BY

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Abstract

The situation of women, particularly in the developing countries continues to attract global attention, hence current development trends are people centred, with a view of enhancing their livelihood systems. This study thus examined the livelihood systems of women in Odo-Otin LGA of Osun State, and focused on their resource base and predisposition to the livelihood systems. A total of 100 women were randomly selected from 4 of the 11 political wards in the LGA. Data were collected through the use of a structured questionnaire and focus group discussion. Findings revealed that trading is the major livelihood activity among women. However, these women engage in several livelihood activities alongside the major ones. The women obtain input for their livelihood activities from personal savings, loans, husbands, relatives and friends among others.

INTRODUCTION

Human resources development, employment, opportunities and income generation are the prime motivator of several approaches to ensure sustainable development worldwide (Bishara 1996). Households, communities and nations have this as their focus in order to solve the problem of growing poverty and other forms of social economic, political, cultural and environmental degradation. Consequently, these are indications that basic needs such as food, shelter, healthcare and education are becoming more and more difficult to satisfy in contemporary human societies especially in developing countries.

The lack of basic needs, especially in developing countries has greater impact on women and their activities than men. There are indications that women are the poorest of the poor. Universities

Nation's Fund for Women (UNIFEM) (1989) indicated that feminization of poverty in world wide, and destabilized economies, social disorder, changing technologies and environmental degradation yield threats of increased transmission of intergenerational poverty along gender lines.

Similarly, Neoleen (1996), reported that poverty has a female face and stated that more than 564 million women live in absolute poverty in rural areas (60% of the world's one billion rural poor).

In spite of the current loss of economic and social duties of women, they are still regarded as the 'building blocks' upon which the foundation of happy homes and families and society at large are built. This is because their activities provide people with their basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, childcare, among others within the context of their households and communities. These multiple roles of women in economic growth, social stability and securing livelihoods make women to assume double burden as family and paid workers. Rural women particularly engage in three to five income generating activities such as crop farming, livestock rearing, petty trading, selling gathered forest products, basket weaving, pot making, process agricultural products and selling cooked food or snacks (Olawoye, 1996). They do these apart from their social and domestic work. It is now a fact that women are poor and their poor situation is taking alarming dimensions. A number of coping mechanisms are in place for women. These activities transcend major income generating activities. The networks of these multifarious activities are the indicators of their livelihood systems. This concept embraces the means of earning living at the present time and security against the future. Meanwhile, these activities often do not contribute to measure economic growth and also they are undervalued by policy makers (David, 1996).

Consequently, since women operate in a dynamic environment, there is need for more empirical data on how their situations and roles, activities and responsibilities have been changing. This study thus investigates: (1) livelihood activities of women (2) sources of inputs for securing livelihoods and (3) their predisposition towards their livelihood activities in Odo-Otin LGA of Osun state.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The prerequisite for sustainable development is sustainable livelihood. Meanwhile, the latter can only be meaningfully achieved if the disadvantaged women are made advantaged. Mariam (1999) emphasized that sustainable development presupposes the active participation of the disadvantaged people. Women rank among the poorest and they can determine and control the development process. Women are the key actors in household economies and environmental protection. This is clearly justified by the expression of Aina and Salau (1992) that in order to achieve sustainable development with human and natural resources brought in dynamic equilibrium, the skills and knowledge of women must be utilized, since they are aware of the environmental degradation and are determined to do something about it.

The relevance of women in agricultural production is also surprisingly great. Indeed in Africa, the agricultural sector is sustained by women. Tadesse (1994) described Africa as a region of female per excellence where women provide 60-80 percent of the agricultural labour force and provide some 80 percent of food for the family consumption. Hence Aidoo (1988) and Chitepo (1999) claimed that women are the backbone of rural agricultural production.

Meanwhile, the mixed income generating activities, domestic and social duties of women prevent them from being seen as useful and key actors in ensuring functioning, caring families and households which is the foundation towards ensuring sustainable economic growth and development and social stability (Richardson, 1987). This trend of women's roles, activities and duties is changing with the trend of dynamic nature of our social, economic, physical and political environment.

With the realization of the contribution of women to the economy, there has been a great concern for empowering women socially, economically and legally. Several organizations have been instituted at local, state, national and international levels for women empowerment. Society for International Development (SID), International Labour Organization (ILO), (UNIFEM) and other international development organizations, since the last decade up till now, have concern for women development and empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

Four wards were randomly selected from the eleven wards in Odo-Otin LGA of Osun State. The selected wards are Okuku, Ijabe/Ilaodo, Inisha, Ekusa/Okua. Twenty-five women were selected from each ward and a total of one hundred women constituted the study sample. Questionnaire and focus group discussion were used for data collection. The variables in the study were measured as follows:

Personal characteristics - Age, educational levels and family size of respondents were determined as follows: Age: chronological age as indicated by respondents, educational level: this was measured by asking the respondents to indicate educational level attained.

Family Size: this is the number of individuals within a family.

Sources of income: this is how the respondents obtain resources for their livelihood activities.

Livelihood activities - activities that women engage in and derive benefit or income either in cash or kind.

Major livelihood activity - primary occupation of individual women

Predisposition - women's satisfaction with livelihood activities based on given reasons.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

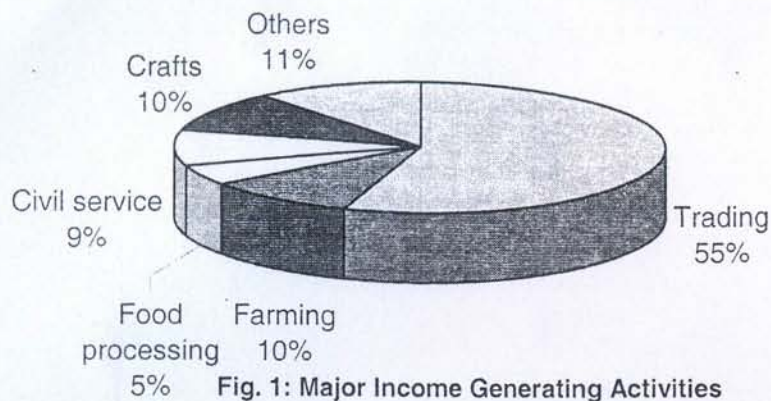
Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the women. Majority of the women were less 50 years of age representing about 71 percent of the women interviewed. This implies that majority of the women fell within active productive and reproductive ages. Hence, there is the likelihood of the majority of the women being economically active in their quest toward securing livelihoods for their entire family members. In an attempt to get an estimate of the women's income, they were asked to mention all their possible sources of income and the corresponding realizable income in a month, and in a year. Probably this account for why the income levels seem to be higher than the general income levels that are often associated with rural women. An estimation from their own calculation reveals that 28 percent of the women earn annual income of between N20,001 - N30,000 annually (Table 1).

Thirty percent of the women have no formal education. Those that have educational qualification higher than primary school education constitute 60 percent (Table 1). This indicates that majority of the women had access to formal education. This is

contrary to the general conception that majority of the rural women have no formal education. Table 1 reveals that 6 percent of the women have family size with less than 4 members. It could then easily be inferred that there is predominance of large family size in the study area.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Demographic Characteristics of Women

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
(A) Age range		
21-25 ≤ 30	6	6
26-30	11	11
31-35	19	19
36-40	25	25
41-45	16	16
46-50	11	11
Above 50	12	12
Total	100	100
(B) Income level		
Below 10,000	15	15
10,001-20,000	24	24
20,001-30,000	28	28
30,001-40,000	13	13
40,001-50,000	8	8
Above 50,000	12	12
Total	100	100
(c) Educational level		
No formal education	30	30
Primary school education	9	9
Secondary school education	16	16
Modern III	17	17
Grade II	14	14
NCE, ND, OND	11	11
B.Sc., HND	3	3
Total	100	100
(D) Family size		
Below 4	6	6
4-7	44	44
8-11	21	21
12-15	8	8
16-19	8	8
Above 19	3	3
Total	100	100



DISTRIBUTION OF MAJOR INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN

Trading is predominantly the major occupation of women, representing 55 percent of the total sample. The items that they buy and sell include: raw food, cooked food, provisions, stationeries, local soap, fuel wood, jewelries, clothing materials etc.

About 10 percent take farming as their primary occupation. The craft occupation includes tailoring, goldsmithing, cloth weaving, hairdressing, photography, knitting etc. Women in food processing and civil services constitute 5 percent and 9 percent respectively. Other income generating activities taken as primary occupation are clergy work, thrift collection, serving as hired labour etc.

LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES

Although women have their primary occupation, it was observed that women have other occupations and means of meeting their needs. Figure 2 shows the proportion of women involved in trading, farming, food processing, domestic work, social duties as additional source of livelihood.

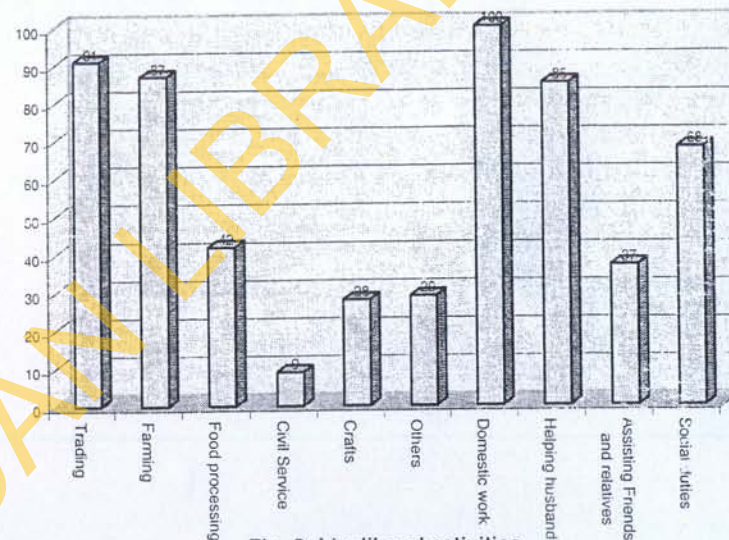


Fig. 2: Livelihood activities

DISTRIBUTION OF LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN

Examples of the social duties include involvement in social celebrations, religious activities etc; while the domestic work includes house management, child caring, household food preparations etc. A comparison between the number of women that have a specific occupation as their major income generating activity (Figure 1) and the total number of women involved in such occupation (Figure 2) shows that women have combined livelihood activities. As an example, while 55 percent of the respondents engage in trading as their major occupation (Figure 1), 91 percent are involved in trading as primary or secondary occupation (Figure 2).

All the women claimed that they perform domestic duties while 85 percent maintained that they assist their husbands in their occupation or at home. The women also assist friends and relatives, and perform social duties (Figure 2). An implication of this finding is that women actively participate in social, domestic and economic activities.

Through focus group discussion, it was found out that women have multiple occupations apart from the social and domestic duties that they perform. While only very few of the activities attract financial reward, a great number are non-remunerated. The benefits from the non-remunerated activities include the following:

- i. Personal satisfaction
- ii. Maintaining good relationship with others
- iii. Fulfillment of religious obligations
- iv. Reciprocal services etc.

This implies that women perform their socio-economic duties not only for financial gain but also due to other reasons that are the basis for social bond within their households and the community as a whole.

SOURCE OF INPUT FOR SECURING LIVELIHOOD

It was discovered that 34.7 percent of the women finance their livelihood activities from their own privately accumulated income. 19.6 percent received husbands' assistance, 14.7 percent through loans, 14.0 percent through friends and neighbours while 13.6 percent secured fund through relatives (Figure 3). Other sources of income include gift from children and relatives etc. Hence, since the largest percentage of women finance their livelihood activities through their personal savings, if their level of income is low, their ability to finance their livelihood activities will be low and vice-versa.

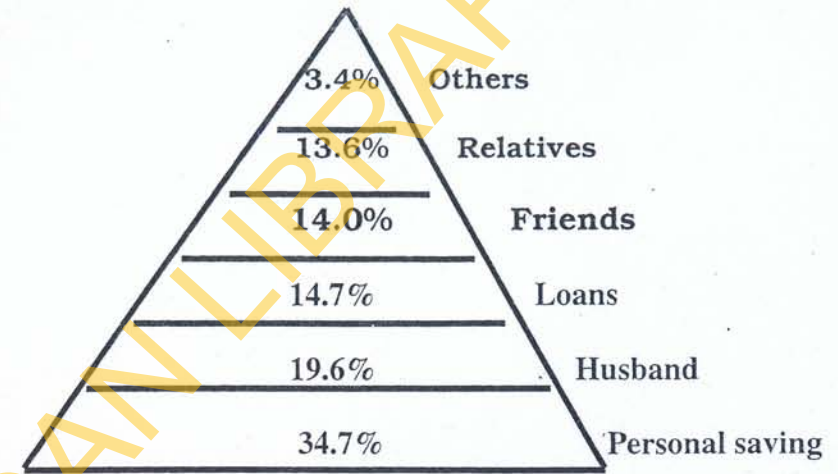


Fig. 3: Distribution of Sources of Input for Securing Livelihoods

PREDISPOSITION TOWARDS LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES

Fig. 4 shows that the proportion of those that are satisfied with their livelihood activities greatly outweighs those that are not satisfied. Among the 73 percent that are satisfied, 56.8 percent gave the nature of the activities as reasons for their satisfaction. The peculiar characteristics of the activities of the choice include: (1) low risks, (2) less energy sapping (3) self reliance, (4) eliminating idleness.

The economic consideration that accounted for the 27.2 percent of the reasons given for this satisfaction includes daily returns and profitability, especially if they are well funded. About 10.4 percent are satisfied mainly because of personal ego, while 3.9 percent gave the reason of socio-cultural consideration such as religious belief. Other reasons given include making someone popular and community service.

Of the 23 percent that are not satisfied with their livelihood activities, economic considerations constitute 65.2 percent. Low return/profit from those activities was the main issue considered by them. Furthermore, 26.1 percent were not favourably disposed to their livelihood activities because they command little or no respect, and that they are dirty jobs, seasonal and energy sapping. Other

reasons given by 8.7 percent are that the activities give little or no time for rest, insufficient capital and uncertainties.

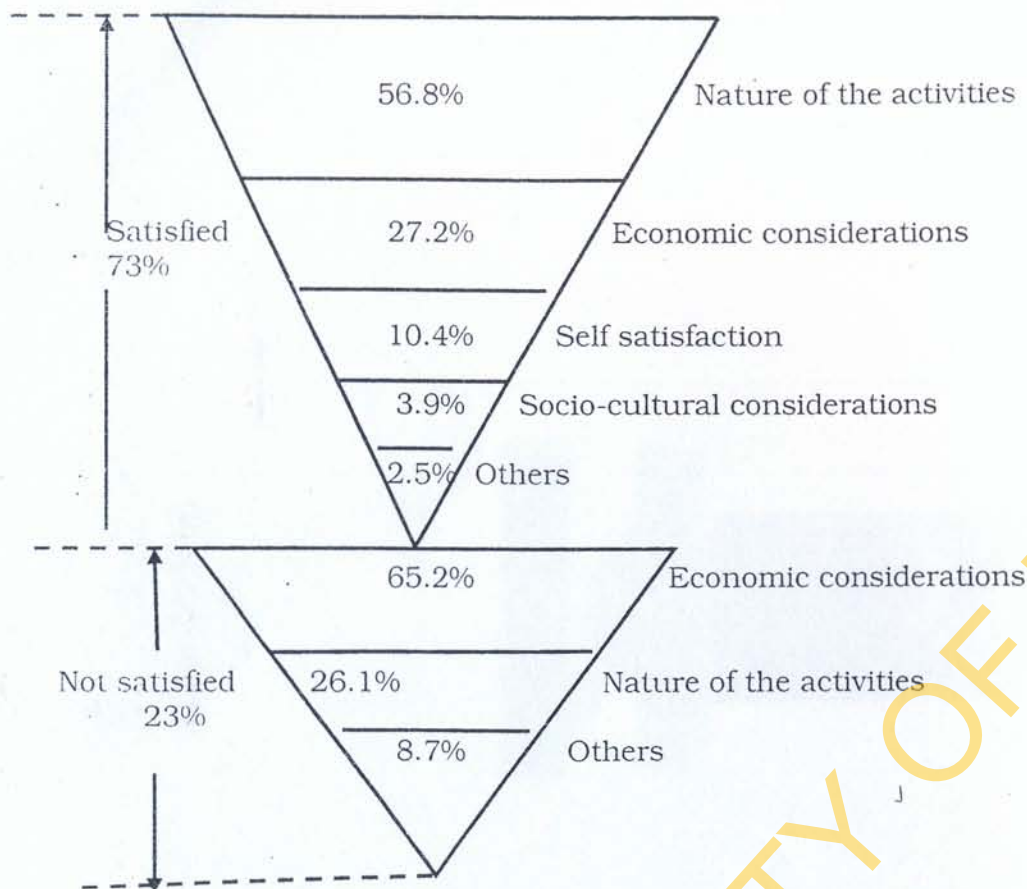


Fig.3: Women's Predisposition towards their Livelihood Activities

CONCLUSION

The study shows that trading is the commonest primary income generating activities of the women. Although, every woman has major occupation, they all combine several other livelihood activities so as to meet their numerous but interdependent needs. Women are generally important in ensuring sustainable livelihood of their households. They promote social unity, and peaceful

existence of their communities. This is because of the relevance of their social, domestic and economic duties and obligations to the survival of their family members, neighbours and friends. Women aspire not only to meet their own needs but also that of their kins, neighbours, friends and communities. These aspirations are integral components of livelihood systems of women.

In spite of the multiplicity and nature of women's activities, majority of them are favourably predisposed to their livelihood activities. Hence, capacity building involving strengthening their livelihood activities and making them more responsive to their needs will automatically put in place sustainable livelihood and sustainable development at all levels of social organizations in human society.

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