

## Women Economic Empowerment for Sustainable Household Food Security in Rural Areas of Ondo State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Women's economic empowerment is crucial not only in eradicating abject poverty but also to achieve household food security. The study examined women economic empowerment for sustainable household food security in the rural areas of Ondo state. A multistage sampling technique was employed for the study and a total of one hundred and fifty (150) women were selected for the study. The primary data for the study were collected with the aid of a well structured questionnaire coupled with interview schedule. Data were analyzed with the aid of descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, mean and percentages while logistic regression analysis was employed to identify factors influencing household food security. The results showed a mean age of  $42.5 \pm 3.5$  years. The marital status revealed that 69.3% were married with average household size of  $7 \pm 3$  members indicating a fairly large household size which characterizes the rural areas of developing counties. On educational status, 62.4% had secondary education which affected the level of awareness on food security. The mean years of farming experience was  $9.4 \pm 2.3$  years. Factors militating against women economic empowerment for achieving household food security include, illiteracy, lack of access to resources, poor infrastructural/storage facilities, cultural/religious beliefs, among others. The logistic regression analysis revealed that age, household size, education, income, occupation and access to credit were positive and statistically significant in influencing food security in the households. It was recommended that women empowerment in terms of access to credit, education, skill acquisition, entrepreneurial training, among others will help to improve household food security.

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### 1. Introduction

Women all over the globe have substantial contributions both as a source of labour on the farm and as care giver at home, but their role are often not recognized in economic accounting (Todaro and Smith, 2009). Women experiences or suffer from various forms of economic, social, cultural and political biases which affect their emotions and their activities at home and on the farm. Several studies confirmed that women are confined to farming activities, which they engage in for longer hours than men (UNDP, 2004) moreover women have limited access to credit, education and employment opportunities relative to their male counterparts which has made them lagged behind men. Also, the relative absence of economic opportunities has been a major challenge for their minimal participation in decision making process and lack of support from family members. In areas, women exit in a state of economic, political, social and knowledge disempowerment which hindered economic development and caused food insecurity within the households.

The social and economic empowerment of women is very important not only in eradicating abject poverty in the society, but also to achieve household

food security and reduce hunger. Economic empowerment of women is not only beneficial to women themselves, but to the whole families and the communities at large. Like the popular saying that, when a man is educated, an individual is educated, but when you educate a woman, you educate a family or nation. So it could be rightly said that if you empower a woman economically, the whole family, nation, and the world will be better off. Globally, women are found to be at the core of some developmental issues such as health, education, environment, food security, among others (Ban Ki-Moon, 2014). The role of women in ensuring sustainable household food security cannot be over-emphasized in our society.

There are various forms of insecurity, health, nutritional, economic, emotional, job and above all food security which is the bane of all other forms of insecurity. The contributions of women to food production and household food security have attracted the attention of scholars in economic development literature (Adeyokun, 1986; Ibnouf, 2009). Women are responsible for over half of the world's food production and post-harvest food processing, storage, distribution and marketing (FAO, 2005; Sekitoleko, 2004; Ibnouf, 2009). Food and Agriculture

Organisation (2005) reported that women provide up to 90 percent of rice cultivation in South-East Asia and as much as 80 percent of basic foodstuffs for household consumption and sale in sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, 2005). Despite this, hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition have been a global challenge. Food is a vital ingredient for a healthy living and productive life. Abraham Maslow's theory revealed that a man that is starved will not take interest in the other needs in the hierarchy of needs (Kotler and Keller, 2006). Food is necessary for growth and repair of the body, provides energy necessary for work, and for the nourishment of body cells. Despite the importance of food in the life of individuals, most households in developing world are faced with food insecurity.

Food security as a situation in which both food supply and effective demand are sufficient to meet the nutritional requirements of individuals which entails expanding availability and accessibility of nutritional food substances on sustainable basis (Mittal, 2006). World Food Summit (1996) declared that food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life. However, food security alone is not sufficient to improve the nutritional status of individuals (Alderman, 1993; Alderman and Garcia, 1993). Ayanwuyi and Akintonde (2011) reported that there are four major elements that constitute food security which include availability, adequacy, accessibility and sustainability of access to food while the Rome Declaration of World Food Summit (1996) identified three major dimensions of food security as availability, accessibility and sustainability. According to POSTnote, (2006) food security is function of availability, access, quality and effective utilisation of the food for productive, functional and active healthy living. Several researches have been carried out on women activities and household food security at both local and international levels (Ayanwuyi and Akintonde, 2011; Karl, 2009; Adebayo, 2008; Omonona and Agoi, 2007) and among others. Women have been found to play crucial roles in food production and food security in the family and income generating activities. However, they are generally disadvantaged in terms of access to credit and other means of empowerments.

Women are more into household food security in the family than men however; it is not well acknowledged the effects of women economic empowerment on household food security. Therefore, this study focuses on the economic empowerment of women for household food security. This study will also help policy makers and other state holders in the

design of policy framework for household food security. Arising from the above, what are the socio-economic characteristics of the rural women? What are the contributions of women to household food security? What are the challenges of women household food security in rural area? What are the factors influencing household food security? In order to address the above questions, the following objectives are generated;

1. To examine the socio-economic characteristics of the women in the study area.
2. To identify challenges facing household food security in the study area.
3. To assess the contributions of women economic empowerment to household food security.
4. To identify factors influencing access to household food security in the study area.

## 2. Methodology

This study was carried out in Ondo state with a particular focus on rural women economic empowerment for household food security. Women formed a substantial proportion of the population in Ondo state with 1, 679,761 people (NPC, 2006). Most women in the study area were into the cultivation of arable crops, processing of agricultural products, petty trading, and other non-farm activities. A multistage sampling technique was used for the study with a local government randomly selected from each of the three senatorial districts in the state. Ten wards were randomly selected from each of the three local government areas, and five women household heads were randomly selected from each of the wards selected for the study. A total of one hundred and fifty (150) women household heads were selected for the study. The primary data for this study was collected with the aid of a well structured questionnaire. The analytical tools employed for the study included; descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, mean, standard deviation, and percentages to describe the socio-economic variables of the respondents. The regression analysis was used to determine factors influencing access to food security within households.

## 3. Results and Discussions

Table 1 shows that 7.3% of the respondents were less than 25years of age, 70.7% of the respondents were between age 25-50years, while 10.0% and 12.0% have respondents between 51-65years and above 65years of age respectively. The mean age of the respondents was 42.5years of age. This implies that majority of the respondents are still in the economically active age. The marital status revealed that 69.3% of the respondents were married, 6.0% were single and 16.0% and 8.7% were widowed and divorced respectively. This implies that there were

more married women in the study area which is a symbol of responsibility and of an ideal society (Balogun, 2011).

Table 1: Age, marital status and household size of respondents. n= 150

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Age(Yrs)</b>		
<25	11	7.3
25-50	106	70.7
51-65	15	10.0
>65	18	12.0
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	9	6.0
Married	104	69.3
Widowed	24	16.0
Divorced	13	8.7
<b>Household Size</b>		
<5	10	6.7
5-10	111	74.0
11-16	26	17.3
>16	3	2.0

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Table 2 shows on household size, 6.7% of the respondents have less than 5 members, while 74.0%, 17.3% and 2.0% of the respondents had between 5-10 members, 11-16 members and above 16 members respectively. The mean household size was about  $7\pm 3$

members. This implies that the household size in the study area is fairly large and this may have contributed to the household food requirements hence, the need for food security and sustainability among the family members. This is in line with World Development Report (2008) that households with bigger families were less successful than those with smaller family sizes this may not be unconnected with the fact that increased use of the family income to feed, clothe and educate a larger number of children.

The educational attainment of respondents revealed that, 62.7% had secondary school education, 28.0% had primary school education while 6.0% and 3.3% respectively had tertiary education and adult literacy education. This indicates that majority had secondary school education thereby increasing their level of awareness on food security programmes (Islam, 1997). On occupation, 62.0% of the respondents were into farming, 22.0% engaged in petty trading while 7.3% and 8.7% were civil servants and artisans respectively. This implies that majority (62.0%) of the women population engaged in farming in order to boost their food production and economic potentials thus enhance food security in the household. The above assertion is in line with Todaro and Smith, (2009) that women are the invisible farmers of the developing countries.

Table 2: Educational attainment and major occupation of respondents. n= 150

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Educational Attainment</b>		
Adult Literacy Education	5	3.3
Primary Education	42	28.0
Secondary Education	94	62.7
Tertiary Education	9	6.0
<b>Major Occupation</b>		
Farming	93	62.0
Petty Trading	33	22.0
Civil Servant	11	7.3
Artisans	13	8.7

Source: Field Survey, 2014

The results on Table 3 revealed that 40.7% of the respondents lack access to credit and this is the major constraint experienced by the women in the study area. This suggests that access to credit is the main constraint faced by the women in the study area and this may hinder their contribution toward household food security. This finding is supported by (IFPRI, 2005) report that access to credit improves food nutrition and security. Equally, 22.7% reported that high cost of food/food scarcity affects the attainment of food security within the households. This is in

agreement with POSTnote (2009) that high cost of food items has been a serious challenge in ensuring food security among rural households. Poor access to farmland or cultivable land affects food security as reported by 16.7% of the respondents. This implies that lack of access to farm land may hinder the women contribution to household food security. This is in line with Burfisher and Horestein (1985) that much more still to be done to ensure women's access to land coupled with the control of over-exploitation of resources to alleviate the constraints of providing food

for the household. Other constraints identified included poor storage/preservation practices (10.6%) and lack of access to credit (9.3%). The above assertion is consistent with Dangol, (2010) that women lack access to input and erratic supply of power and lack of adequate infrastructure affect the processing and preservation of agricultural products which increases post-harvest losses.

Table 3: Challenges of Women in Household Food Security. n = 150

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poor access to credit	61	40.7
Lack of access to land	25	16.7
Low access to farm inputs	14	9.3
High cost/Food scarcity	34	22.7
Poor storage/Preservation	16	10.6

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

Table 4 shows the contributions of women economic empowerment to household food security. The result shows that 58.7% of the respondents reported that there was increase in their access to resources/income after taking part in economic empowerment programme. This is in line with Dangol, (2012) that women economic empowerment increases access to participate in saving and credit groups, savings mobilization, loan provision, material support among others. He stressed further that by making people to be aware of their own capacities and resources can help increase the options available to them. Access to food/good nutrition accounted for 14.0% of the respondent. This implies that women

empowerment is related to food consumption as well as food security.

The result also shows that 13.3%, 8.0% and 6.0% of the respondents respectively indicated that women economic empowerment contributes to their capacity to access basic skill acquisition training procure inputs/equipment and access basic information on food and food security programmes and training. Dangol, (2012) reported that skill based training is designed to advance individuals' general proficiency, especially in relation to their present or future occupations. Skill training prepares individuals for jobs that are based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic and totally related to a specific trade or occupation.

Table 4: Contributions of Empowerment to Food Security. n= 150

Contributions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Access to food/nutrition	21	14.0
Access to resources/income	88	58.7
Access to information	9	6.0
Access to skill training	20	13.3
Procurement of inputs	12	8.0

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

The result of regression (Table 5) showed that there is significant relationship between household food security and educational attainment, occupation, household size and access to credit contributed 58.1% ( $R^2 = 0.581$ ) of variation in household food security. This explains that educational attainment, occupation, household size and access to credit have influenced household access to food in the study area.

Table 5: Logistic Regression results of Factors Influencing Household Food Security

Variables	B	Std.Error	T	Sig.
Constant	1.538	.347	4.438	.000**
Agex1	-.003	.006	-.519	.606
Sex X2	-.125	.100	-1.243	.220
Marital Statusx3	.028	.070	.396	.693
Education X4	.308	.044	6.937	.000**
Occupation X5	.213	.089	2.401	.020*
Household Sizex6	.050	.018	2.739	.009**
Experiencex7	-.013	.016	-.779	.439
Access To Credit X8	.007	.009	.775	.002**
Income Levelx9	-2.208E-7	.000	-.532	.597

\* and \*\* Significant @ 5% and 1%;  $R = 0.762$ ;  $R^2 = 0.581$ ;  $AR^2 = 0.505$ .

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Women's social and economic empowerment is very important not only in eradicating abject poverty but also in reducing hunger and enhance household food security. The study examined women economic empowerment for household food sustainability. The findings from the study show the mean age of

42.5±3.5 years with 69.3% married women and 7±3members per household. The educational status shows that 62.4% had secondary education while the mean years of farming experience was 9.4±2.3 years. The constraints of women economic empowerment on household food security includes; illiteracy, poor access to finance, poor storage facilities, among others

while the contributions of women empowerment to household food security includes, access to credit, information, training, inputs and equipments. The result of the logistic regression shows that age, household size, education, income among others are statistically significant in influencing access to household food security in the study area. It is recommended that government should promote women economic empowerment to increase access to resources. Also, training and sensitization programme should be intensified.

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