

**CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES OF RURAL HOUSEHOLDS IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION AGENDA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Cultural issues have had significant influence in rural household economies, which over the years depend strongly on agriculture. Such issues come to the fore in the face of emerging innovations for agricultural transformation. The study analyzed the cultural factors affecting livelihood strategies of rural households in Southeast Nigeria, highlighting their implication for Agricultural transformation agenda. The specific objectives of the study were to identify the predominant livelihood strategies of rural households and analyze the cultural factors affecting livelihood strategies of rural households in the study area. With the aid of a structured and validated interview schedule, data were collected from a sample size of 180 household heads selected from a population of 754,702 household heads in the study area using a 5-stage random sampling procedure. The statistical tools used in data analysis included mean, frequencies, percentages and factor analysis. The result indicated that the predominant agricultural livelihood strategies found among rural households in southeast Nigeria includes crop farming, livestock farming, farm labour, farm product processing, among others while the predominant non-agricultural livelihood strategies includes petty trading, remittances from relatives, civil service among others. The cultural factors affecting livelihood strategies of rural households the study area were identified as: exclusive traditional role of household heads as income earner (mean = 2.92, the pressure of large household size on household resource base limits resource mobilization (mean = 3.21), gender gaps in access to productive factors (mean = 3.15), limited women involvement in productive activities (mean = 2.89), limited women access to social services and amenities (mean = 2.89), exclusive property rights for male members of the household (mean = 3.19), among others. Factor analysis result showed 3 major factor loadings that affect livelihood strategies of rural households in the study area as high dependency on household head, culture-based inequalities, and traditional gender-based property rights. It is therefore recommended that land use decree, tenancy and other property rights should be reviewed, modified and introduced into rural areas to improve access to land and other productive resources especially to enable women and youth pursue their livelihood interests, which depend critically on such resources.

**KEY WORDS**

Cultural factors; Livelihood strategies; Rural household; Agricultural transformation.

Many rural households in developing countries depend on a combination of activities to meet daily needs. This practice constitutes the livelihood strategies, which are attracting the attention and advocacy among development experts and scholars in recent years. Chambers and Conway (1992) construed livelihood strategy as comprising the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. In most rural households across the world, livelihood structures and patterns are complex and deriving from a combination of interlinked income earning activities which varies enormously according to opportunities, constraints and preferences. Generally, households in a typical rural setting engage in agricultural and non-

agricultural livelihood. According to Alimi, *et.al* (2001), about two-third of rural households earn their livelihood from subsistence agriculture, either as small-scale farmers or as low-paid farm workers while the remaining one-third engage in petty services. Understandably, agriculture had remained the bedrock of the rural household economies, especially among indigenous people. Many reasons account for this. It has been established that majority of rural households especially in developing countries live in rural areas and rely on agriculture for their livelihood (FAO, 2000; Akinlo, 2001; World Bank, 2006). Also, their access to land (a major input in agricultural enterprises) through various forms of traditional land holdings and the potential of agriculture to readily meet their physical needs (food, water, energy, shelter) and to a lesser extent cash needs (goods for reciprocal exchange and inputs in production) may have sustained their dependence on agriculture.

It is obvious that agriculture provides increased on-farm and off-farm employment opportunities capable of raising incomes of the rural households and their purchasing power. In this vein, World Bank (2006) noted that increased growth of the agriculture sector offers direct benefits to rural households such as income and food, contributes to broader food security objectives and help to establish forward linkages with high value-added, industries as well as linkages between rural and urban centres. Furthermore, agricultural activities which embrace crop and livestock farming have strong linkages with non-agricultural and/or off-farm livelihood activities which are common among rural households. Non-agricultural activities which include hire-labour, fabrication of tools, repair services, handicrafts, tailoring, trading, masonry, carpentry, welding, blacksmithing and arts apart from serving as stop-gaps, have helped to service rural agricultural sector while providing the needed income to meet household needs simultaneously.

The capacity to diversify or combine the above activities varies markedly among individual members of a particular household and across households in a given community. While some depend on farming, others depend on non-farming but some depend on a combination of agricultural and non-agricultural livelihood activities. However, the benefits accruing from the dependency on agricultural and non-agricultural livelihood strategies by a particular household cannot be over-emphasized. Working in different activities has helped to spread risks and manage uncertainty especially when such activities engaged in do not rely on the same resources. To many other households, diverse livelihood strategies serve as a measure to cope with insufficiency arising from shortcomings and failures in a major livelihood means. Sometimes and often, when a favored activity require working capital but the individual and household have no access to ready credit, they may likely undertake some other activities to generate cash to pay for the required inputs.

The decision for a certain livelihood and/or a combination of livelihood strategies among rural dwellers is determined and affected by a number of forces. One of such forces is the cultural factors. Cultural factor refers to a set of beliefs, moral values, traditions, language and laws held by a nation, a community or other defined group. Issues associated with culture are deeply embedded in the tradition of the people which govern their indigenous knowledge system with wide applications in their livelihood pursuits. Over the years in most parts of the Nigerian nation, cultural issues have constituted a strong road block to the acceptance of innovations for effective agricultural transformation agenda. This becomes more critical in view of the nations long term food security drive. Against this background, the study analyzed the cultural factors affecting livelihood strategies of rural households in southeast Nigeria, highlighting its implication for agricultural transformation agenda.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in southeast Nigeria, situated east of River Niger. The population of the study comprised of 754,702 rural household heads generated with the help of key informants in the study area. The sample size was selected from the population using a 5-stage random sampling technique. It involved the random selection of 3 States out of the 5 States in southeast Nigeria; 3 zones; 6 local government areas; 18 communities and 10 household heads from each of the selected communities. This exercise gave a sample size

of 180 respondents. Data were collected with the aid of an interview schedule which was structured and validated by the researchers. The responses were measured on a 4-point type summated rating scale of agreement (strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree). The values of the scale (4, 3, 2 and 1) were summed up to obtain 10. The mean value of the sum gave 2.50, which served as the cut-off mean. This became the benchmark for accepting any item as livelihood strategy in the study area. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistical tools namely: frequency, mean and varimax rotated factor analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Agricultural Livelihood Strategies among Rural Households.* Agricultural livelihood strategies among rural households in the study area are presented on Table 1. The result revealed that crop farming (mean = 3.47). This result agrees with previous findings, which identified crop farming as the most important livelihood strategy among rural households (Amao *et. al*, 2003; Sinkaiye *et. al*, 2008). It is further held in evidence in view of small-scale backyard and outskirts farms in various rural communities in the study area with a combination of roots and tuber crops, fruit and vegetable crops, grain and cereal crops, tree and plantation crops. Rural households may have adopted crop farming as a livelihood strategy because the crops serve as common staples, propagules are easily sourced locally, cultural and agronomic practices have been developed and mastered over the years and the crops concerned appear to have adapted to local soil and environmental conditions. Above all, these crops are grown under various farming systems in practice in the study area such as mixed cropping, mono-cropping, inter-cropping, inter-planting and crop-rotations. This is in line with the view of Ikwelle *et al* (2003) that food crops in Nigeria are variously grown by farmers who inter-crop cocoyam with yam, maize, plantain, banana, vegetables and rice: The result also showed livestock rearing (mean = 3.13) as selected agricultural livelihood strategy in the study area. This finding is in line with Agumagu *et. al* (2006).

Table 1 - Agricultural Livelihood Strategies adopted by Rural Households in Southeast Nigeria

Variables	Mean	Remark
Crop farming	3.47	Accept
Livestock rearing	3.13	Accept
Farm labour	2.84	Accept
Fish farming	1.75	Reject
Bee keeping	1.42	Reject
Hunting of wild animals	2.27	Reject
Gathering and selling of forest products e.g. fuel wood	2.32	Reject
Farm product processing	2.82	Accept
Marketing of agricultural products	2.81	Accept
Palm-wine tapping and palm-fruit harvesting	2.31	Reject

Source: Field Survey Data, 2013.

Note: Any mean score <2.50 imply disagreement with any of the items; any mean score  $\geq$  2.50 imply agreement with any of the items.

The finding could be justifiable in view of the fact that animals are kept under local conditions without improved husbandry practices, which could impose serious demand on the household. For instance no demand for improved pens, except if necessary locally improvised enclosures for animals to retire at night, animals are on free-range, fending for themselves and serve various livelihood needs for the household. No wonder the sight of local breeds of poultry and other domesticated animals (ruminants and non-ruminants) roaming the villages in the study area. Furthermore, the result revealed farm labour (mean = 2.84) as a livelihood strategy among rural households. This finding is consistent with report that indicated casual labour in the farms as livelihood strategy of the poorest household group in rural communities (Ashley *et al*, 2005). Substantively, farm labours do not require any special training or skill, but just a physical ability and willingness to work. It serves as

safety nets and easiest source of income to meet immediate survival needs of the household. Indeed, since the onset of rural-urban migration of the last century in Nigeria, rural labour in the farms appear to be scarce, costly and a lucrative means of livelihood for poorer households in rural communities. The result also indicated that farm product processing (mean = 2.81) is a livelihood strategy among rural households in the study area. This finding is in accordance with Olaleye (2003). The finding becomes remarkable in view of the fact that a whole range of agricultural products undergo processing to attract better market, prevent spoilage and wastage, especially at the peak of harvests. No wonder cassava processing, palm fruit processing, etc with wide range of marketable products, are becoming lucrative livelihood base among many rural households. According to the result, marketing of agricultural products (mean = 2.81) is an agricultural livelihood strategy among rural households covered in the study. The abundance of fruit and vegetable tree species as well as increased processing of agricultural products has helped to flourish this means of livelihood especially among women in rural communities covered in the study.

*Non-agricultural Livelihood Strategies adopted by Rural Households.* However, the above livelihood strategies associated with agriculture and farming appears seasonal and may not be sustainable for the households. No wonder, rural households seek for alternative sources of income in non-farm livelihood base to complement. This practice corresponds with Reardon et al (1998) that about 36 percent of total rural incomes in West Africa come from non-farm activities. In view of this, results presented on Table 2 indicated non-agricultural livelihood strategies among rural resource-poor households in southeast Nigeria. The result showed civil service (mean = 2.58) as a non-agricultural livelihood strategy among rural-resource-poor household. Previous study by Agumagu et al (2006) agrees with this finding. It may be validated in view of the increasing employment opportunities created in various local government areas, rural cottage industries and other service centres in the study areas. Besides, a good number of government and non-governmental agencies have in recent years targeted rural households in their skill acquisition and training programmes for capacity building of many rural beneficiaries. These efforts may have been responsible in improving their chances for civil service employments as shown in the result. Furthermore, petty trading (mean = 3.13) is shown in the result as a non-agricultural livelihood strategy in the study area. Previous studies with similar findings corroborate this present result (Ellis, 2000; Olawoye, 2000; Matthews- Njoku and Adesope, 2007). In fact, petty and small-scale articles of trade ranging from candies and beverages to other food items as well as non consumables in the study area are common sights among rural households. While these items of trade are easily available to meet the household needs, sales from such items also provide ready income to meet other household requirements.

Table 2 - Non-agricultural Livelihood Strategies adopted by Rural Households

Variables	Mean	Remark
Civil service	2.58	Accept
Saloon operators	2.48	Reject
Carpentry and furniture making	2.06	Reject
Building/masonry	2.24	Reject
Petty trading	3.13	Accept
Tailoring and weaving	2.53	Accept
Transport services	2.33	Reject
Food vending	2.26	Reject
Music/entertainment	2.07	Reject
Remittance from relatives	2.70	Accept

Source: Field Survey Data, 2013

Note: Any mean score <2.50 imply disagreement with any of the items; any mean score  $\geq$  2.50 imply agreement with any of the items.

Petty trading appear lucrative because of small initial investible capital required for a start, which households could afford through their menial savings. Also tailoring and weaving (mean = 2.53) was indicated as a livelihood strategy in the result. This appears to be one of

the age-long livelihood bases that have persisted in rural economies despite transformations in modern times. Tailoring and weaving seem to sustain the interest of men and women from resource-poor households and makes minimal and affordable demand in the course of its skill training. Above all, the service it renders in rural areas has made it an indispensable livelihood base. In another result, remittances from relatives (mean = 2.70) were shown as a veritable non-agricultural livelihood strategy in the study area. Previous survey by Bryceson (2000) supports this present finding. This further underscores the place of extended family relationship in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Indeed, many rural household members are sustained through incomes remitted to them from migrated and non-resident relations. This livelihood base is characteristic of locations where populations are extremely mobile at specific stages of their lifecycle. In line with this view, Bryceson (1999) stated that rural dwellers place serious importance on the frequency of visits from their urban based relations. This might be because such visits often translate to financial and other gifts from such visitors which enhance their livelihoods.

*Cultural Factors affecting Livelihood Strategies of Rural Households.* Respondents were requested to indicate their perceptions on certain cultural factors affecting their household livelihood strategies and the results are presented on Table 3. The traditional role of household heads as income earner (mean = 2.92) was indicated as one of the cultural factors. The finding upholds the trans-cultural philosophy strongly held especially among the Ibo ethnic group in southeast Nigeria, which holds that «husband is supreme». By this belief, livelihood initiatives are of the male household-head who eventually is the centre piece of the household survival. Women, youths and children render unpaid services and derive care within the limits of the household resources. Indeed for now and foreseeable future, household-heads may not likely relinquish this role. Even when it is apparent that their capacity to assume this role is unrealistic in the present World order. The implication is that in very poor rural households, women tend to be docile in their quest for livelihood means because they depend largely on their husbands as household-heads. Also, the weight of household duties and responsibilities to the young, old, and sick members of the household leads to non-cooperation (mean = 3.09) was identified as a cultural factor.

Table 3 - Cultural Factors Affecting Livelihood Strategies of Rural Households

Variables	Mean	Remark
The traditional role of household heads as income earner	2.92	Accept
The weight of household duties and responsibility to the young, old and sick members of the household lead to non-cooperation.	3.09	Accept
Large household size places pressure on the household resource base and limits the household income capability.	3.21	Accept
Gender gaps in access to productive factors.	3.15	Accept
Women involvement in productive activities are limited	2.89	Accept
Women access to some social services and amenities are limited	2.89	Accept
Property rights are exclusively for male members of the household.	3.19	Accept
Unequal roles and opportunities to participate in productive activities are governed by gender and age.	3.04	Accept
In the inheritance tradition of the community, women don't have right to own properties and assets.	2.31	Reject

Source: Field Survey Data, 2013.

Note: Any mean score <2.50 imply disagreement with any of the items; any grand mean score  $\geq$  2.50 imply agreement with any of the items.

This finding further establishes the cultural practice of being «your brothers' keeper» embedded in the fabrics of the extended family system practiced in Nigerian society. Badly affected are the women and youths, denied of involvement in some livelihood activities outside their homes due to perhaps care for a sick and bed-ridden member of the household, the infants and other household obligations that restricts movement. This finding receives support from the view of Ogwumike (2001) that the weight of family obligations aggravates peoples' unwillingness to move from an area of low livelihood opportunities to an area of

better prospects. As a cultural factor, large household size places pressure on the household resource base and limits the household income capability (mean = 3.21). Though rural households appreciate the burden to their livelihoods arising from their large household size, it is generally contended among rural dwellers that so many benefits such as free labour for livelihood strategies outweighs the odds. However, the dependency and consumption levels tend to affect savings and livelihood decisions. In line with this finding, Aluko (2001) noted that in large households, dependency ratio is high and places great pressure on available limited resources, the propensity to save will be low and head of the household in most cases does not usually have enough resources to sustain and cater for the family at all fronts satisfactorily. Furthermore, gender gap in access to productive factors (mean = 3.15) is revealed as a cultural factor. In the communities covered in the study, the cultural forces that reinforce the gender gaps and disparities appear not to have been mitigated by the current global campaign for gender equality. Though several studies have established that women in Africa perform the bulk of farm work and other livelihood activities (Caloni, 1987; Okeke, 1995; Nweze, 1995), their access to assets such as land, labour, credit facilities and public property is still prohibitive. This might be the reason for rural women's low productivity and income. The result finds support in the view of Palmer (1991) that in most parts of Africa women are denied access to land on permanent basis while men do have lifelong tenancy rights, which is tantamount to ownership. In another result, women involvement in productive activities is limited (mean = 2.89).

Table 4 - Varimax Rotated Factor Matrix of Cultural Factors affecting Livelihood Strategies of Rural Households

Variables	Factor 1: High dependency on household head	Factor 2: Culture-based inequalities	Factor 3: Traditional gender-biased property rights
The traditional role of household heads as the income earner.	0.887	0.188	-0.084
Household duties and responsibility to the young old and sick members of the household leads to non-cooperation.	0.868	0.131	0.161
Large household size places pressure on the household resource base and limits the household income capability.	0.664	0.368	-0.025
Gender gaps in access to productive factors	0.553	0.419	0.331
Women involvement in productive activities is limited.	0.236	0.761	-0.045
Women access to social services and amenities are limited.	0.234	0.757	0.322
Property rights are exclusively for male members of the household.	0.329	0.699	0.225
Unequal roles and opportunities to participate in productive activities are governed by gender and age.	0.099	0.696	-0.378
In the inheritance tradition of the community, women don't have right to own properties and assets.	0.048	0.036	0.880

*Note: Coefficients on the Table above represents regression weights.*

This result might also be linked to gender roles inherent in various cultures in the study area. Besides, access to productive factors might have strong influence on the choice and potentials for broader livelihood activities. Women lack access to productive factors as earlier established. No wonder their limited involvement in productive activities is apparent. This finding could be upheld in view of an assertion by Ogwumike (2001) that culture and religion moderate the role and livelihood activities of women in most parts of Nigeria as well as their access to land and other productive resources. It was also revealed that women access to some social services and amenities are limited (mean = 2.89). This finding establishes the reason why certain activities of women hardly receive publicity except those to which their

husbands and male members of the community subscribe to. One of the cultural factors as indicated in the result holds that property rights are exclusively for male members of the households (mean = 3.19). The finding further highlights the reason why women contribution in the rural communities covered in the study are hardly recognized, but are ascribed to their husbands and male members of the community. Against this practice, women may likely soft-pedal in their pursuit for livelihood activities and outcomes. Result also showed unequal roles and opportunities to participate in productive activities are governed by gender and age as a cultural factor undermining livelihood strategies in the study area (mean = 3.04). Indeed, various cultures ascribe roles and opportunities to men, women, youth and children. Role conflicts are sanctioned strictly. For instance, in many rural communities in the study area, only male household-heads are entitled to share from the communal land. And so in a predominantly farm-family agricultural labour is ascribed to the household-head, since he has right to the landed property. Generally, the above cultural factors as indicated by the respondents to a great extent influences livelihood decisions of rural households in the study area and altogether undermines the entire agricultural transformation agenda.

Results on the cultural factors affecting livelihood survival strategies of rural resource-poor households are presented on Table 4. Factor 1 was renamed high dependency on household-head and included major loaded items as the traditional role of household heads as the income earner (0.887), the weight of household duties and responsibilities to the young, old and sick members of the household leads to non- co-operation (0.868), large household size places pressure on the household income capability (0.664) and gender gaps in access to productive factors (0.553). The high dependency on household head for livelihood needs of members of the household is deepened in the cultural ethos of people of the southeastern Nigeria. The household-head bears the burden for care and support to the woman, the young, old, weak and strong members of the household. In the same vein, he controls the household assets and productive resources, initiates and mobilizes household members towards livelihood pursuits based on his experience and available resources. This tends to stifle livelihood initiatives of other members of the household. Studies have indicated that women and children render unpaid services in rural households (Adekanye, 1993, Okeke, 1995; Oladoja, 2000). High dependency ratio is likely to affect consumption levels, household savings and prospect for investing on livelihood activities. Furthermore, factor 2 was renamed culture-based inequalities and embraced major loaded items such as limited women involvements in productive activities (0.761), limited women access to social services and amenities (0.757) and property rights are exclusively for male members of the household (0.699). Culture-based inequalities are the basis for gender gaps and youths exclusion in access to productive resources in many rural communities. Because of culture-based inequalities, livelihood roles assigned to women in households are concentrated more on the non-monetized activities such as child birth, household-keeping, etc. This view is upheld in Ogwumike (2001) that discrimination, a situation where unequal opportunities are given to some people to participate in the production process on the basis of gender, age and ethnic considerations has impeded livelihood activities a great deal. Also factor 3 was term gender-biased property rights and included major loaded items such as, in the tradition of the community, women don't have right to own properties and assets (0.880) and gender gaps in access to productive factors (0.331). In most parts of the study area, women do not inherit landed property and scarcely establishes right to other livelihood resources. Even where use rights to land and other productive assets is secured; women are rarely free to act as independent agents. This gender-based property right restricts women livelihood pursuit in rural areas. This is because their rights derive from their status as wives or wards- that is mothers, daughters, sisters, or widows while their degree of access to land and other properties varies with and reflects, the social status of the male members of the household (ILO, 1999).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that livelihood strategies among rural households in the study area cut across agricultural and non-agricultural activities. A network of cultural factors undermine rural household in pursuit of their livelihood survival strategies in line with the agricultural transformation agenda.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings it is recommended that tenancy and other property rights should be reviewed, modified, made functional in rural areas to enable women and youths have access to productive resources to pursue their livelihood interests, which depend critically on such resources.

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