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## RURAL WOMEN LIFESTYLES: LESSONS FROM NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Rural women's involvement in family life, social and economic development is growing following efforts to empower them. Efforts of foreign donor agencies, federal and state governments to ensure household food security and reduce poverty have been to establish development initiatives that will ensure rural women's full participation in development. However, most development activities have recorded low rural women's participation. The response of the research community to this low participation of rural women in development activities calls for the documentation of their social and economic activities. This will increase their participation in development activities and enhance gender mainstreaming in the development process. Also, major development initiatives have failed to recognise variations that exist in rural women situations. This study, therefore, investigated the lifestyles of rural women in Nigeria using a cross sectional survey. Results indicated that the women surveyed are mostly married, have average age and family size, low education, poor income base and practice a mix of religions. Also results indicated choices, modes and preference in their activities. These are all important variables, which will guide planning and execution of development initiatives and activities and appropriate technologies for rural women in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Lifestyles, rural-women, Nigeria.

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Lifestyle is generally described as the way of life of a group of individuals and expressed in both work and leisure behaviour patterns and in activities, attitude, interest, opinions, values and allocation of resources. These are factors relevant in the designing of development programs to empower women and enhance their participation in rural development activities. The interest of this study is informed by the prevalence of poverty among rural women (FOS, 1999) and participation in rural development activities.

Prevalence of poverty among rural women characterized by depressed output is largely attributed to low or lack of participation in development programs and non-adoption of new technologies. Governments at national and state levels have committed enormous resources and instituted public policy on efforts to enhance livelihoods/income-generating activities to alleviate poverty among rural women in

Nigeria. These efforts witnessed the establishment of development programmes directed at women. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and international agencies are part of these initiatives, working in partnership with government and various women groups. These attempts are yet to achieve the desired impact of improving rural women's productive capacity and economic base. Issues relating to this lack of appreciable improvement in rural women's situation have emerged.

One problem noted in literature is the reportage of outdated information relating to women's activities. Advances in women's studies were not without serious challenges, having gone through many eventful phases, starting with their total neglect (Imam, 1990). It is expected that literature will reflect current advances in women's studies. However, as knowledge continues to advance more often than not, many development practitioners and even researchers tend to maintain status quo, rather they advance the body of information about the activities, perspective, problems and potentials of women in the society (Olawoye, 2000). She further noted that despite the breakthrough and significant roles played by rural women in agriculture and allied activities the generalized nature of finding was often of limited value as input to gender-sensitive policy information. This situation is further compounded by the non-recognition of their lifestyles.

Differences do exist among rural women and this highlight lifestyle issues in development programme designed to help them. Women are generally treated as if they are all involved in the same activities, challenges and aspirations. According to Imam (1990), these cannot be an undifferentiated category of women as hierarchies exist among them. Specifically rural women differ by ethnic group, ecological sub zone, religious beliefs, income classes or stages in family life cycle, farming systems (Daneji, 1998) all of which have significant influence directly or indirectly on their lifestyles.

One major development concern of rural women's depressed production out-put, is the development of appropriate technologies and adoption of these technologies by women. The women-in-agricultural (WIA) component of the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) has the mandate of increasing the productivity and incomes of women farmers. Specifically WIA is charged among other objectives to identify challenges women encounter, source and when necessary collaborate with Research institutions to develop suitable technologies to meet identified constraints and needs (Mijindadi, 1993). Knowledge of women's lifestyle will to a large extent help to address these challenges.

Increasing agricultural production is thought to be achieved by simply increasing and improving agricultural inputs like fertilizers, hybrid seed and higher technology. Many development programmes in developing countries, which adopted this strategy, failed. Reason for failure was that rural people would not blindly accept

innovations that are not compatible with their needs, desires and lifestyles (Olawoye, 2000).

Insight from the work of numerous gender experts and studies conducted in Nigeria and elsewhere, lack of knowledge of rural women only become clear to social agricultural and development experts only after women refuse to adopt developed technologies. Often these specialists only recognize the perceived agricultural advantages of developed technologies, while the women evaluate these products different socio-cultural perspectives, all of which reflect their lifestyles.

Based on these insights, there is a need for empirical documentation on rural women's lifestyles.

The focus of this study is rural women who reside and derive their livelihood in Kajola LGA, Oyo state. There is no published research work that focused specifically on the lifestyles of the women in the study area. The purpose of this research was to determine and document lifestyles of rural women in Kajola, LGA. The objectives guiding this inquiry were to:

1. Determine the personal characteristics of women in Kajola LGA in Oyo State
2. Investigate the economic activities of women in the study and
3. Determine Socio-cultural activities of women in the study area.

#### **METHODS**

Rural women in Kajola LGA, Oyo State constituted the population for this study. A multi-stage

Sampling technique was used to select respondent for this study. The Agricultural Development

Project (ADP) Operational structure was adopted as the sampling. The ADP in the study area has 16 cells and each cell averagely has 20 women. Eight cells were randomly selected and this produced 160 women which constituted the sample size of the study. Written interview schedules were developed for face-to-face data collection. The items in the interview schedule collected information such as women's personal characteristics which included age, marital status, family size, educational status, contact with development agencies and cosmopolitanism. The women activities included the following items- income generating activities, credit source, and market outlets, banking systems, and spending patterns. Variables which consider women's socio-cultural activities that are often neglected in development programmes included social and leisure activities, food habits, dress mode and preferences.

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, and percentages were used to analyze collected data, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

#### **Measurement of variables**

The following variables indicated to measure the lifestyle of women in the study area are discussed here.

#### **Women's profile:**

**Age:** A respondent's age is the actual number of years indicated by her as representing her chronological age.

**Education:** Education was measured as the number of years a respondent had attended formal schools.

**Marital status:** Respondent were asked to indicate if they were married, divorced, single parent or widowed.

**Number of Children per Woman:** This was measured as the number of children per woman.

**Cosmopolitaness:** Cosmopolitaness represented the number of visits each respondent made to the urban centres.

**Religion:** Each respondent's religious affiliation was based on Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion.

**Annual Income:** This was operationalized as estimates of monies derived by respondents at the end of a year.

#### **Women's economic activities:**

**Occupation:** Occupation was operationalized as economic or livelihood activities from which respondents derive income.

**Credit sources:** Respondents were asked to indicate if they obtained credit from banks, relatives, esusu or ajo.

**Saving-modes:** Each respondent was asked to indicate if she saved her money and how.

**Spending-Pattern:** Respondents if money they derived were spent on food, clothes, school fees, rent, family commitment, religion, transportation or investment in income-generating activities.

**Marketing-Outlets:** Mode of disposal of farm products through middlemen, or direct to consumers.

**Marketing-Hours:** Measured as daytime, evening and night-time.

**Link with-Organizations:** Operationalized as working relationship respondents have with institutions and organizations.

**Women's socio-cultural activities:**

**Leisure-Activities:** Respondents were asked to indicate activities they engage in for recreation.

**Healthcare-modes:** This was measured as the type of medical care respondents seek when needed.

**Food-preferences:** Food types consumed by respondents.

**Dress modes:** Measured as types of dresses respondents wore and preferred.

**Membership-Of societies:** This was determined by respondents indicating association affiliations.

**FINDINGS**

- Objective 1: To determine the personal characteristics of women in Kajola LGA in Oyo State.

**Table 1. Personal Characteristics Frequencies n = 160**

Variables	Categories	Percentage
Age	6	3.7
	<20	74
	21-40	64
	41-60	14
	61-80	2
>80		1.2
Education	40	25.0
	No education	32
	Functional	33
	Primary	46
	Secondary	9
>secondary		5.6

<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	117	73.1
Single parent	31	6.5
Widowed	12	7.5
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	91	56.0
Islam	56	35.0
Traditional	13	8.1
<b>No of children/respondent</b>		
None	8	5.0
1-2	31	19.8
3-4	90	56.2
5-6	25	15.6
>6	6	3.7
<b>Annual income</b>		
<₦25,000	60	37.5 (₦170=\$1)
₦25,000-50,000	68	42.5
₦50,000-75,000	8	5.0
>100,000	10	6.2
<b>Cosmo politeness</b>		
Often	60	37.5
Rarely	96	60.0
Never	4	2.5

Results on Table 2 show notable variations among the rural women in this study in terms of their personal characteristic variables, even though they reside in the same locality. The sample was found to consist of young women who are below 20 years of age. Most of them cluster mainly in the age bracket 21-40 years (46%) and 41-60 years (40%). Only a few of them are 60 years and above. Evidently, these groups of women are vibrant and in their economic/productive ages. Low educational levels among the women exist, although they have one form of education or another. Interestingly, over 50% are literate in Yoruba or English language and can read and write: literacy level among rural women is changing positively, who hitherto were described as non-literate in previous studies. The marriage institution is still very much valued in the African society. Most (37%) of the surveyed women are married. This figure is even higher considering that the widows were once married. Single parenthood is uncommon in the typical African setting and this may explain the low frequency recorded for single parenthood. Religion play vital spiritual roles in African rural setting, be it Traditional, Christianity or Islam. A mix of religion is evident among the women. Christian religion is prevalent, as there are more Christians

(56.88%) than Moslems (35%). Very few are traditionalists, an indication that the African traditional religion is gradually giving way to foreign religions in the study.

The number of children recorded per woman averagely is between 3 and 4(56.25%). In time past, African women were noted for having many children. Current economic realities could be responsible for women having fewer children.

The bulk of women as indicated by findings earn between ₦25,000 and 50,000 annually which is rather low. The per capital income from National Sample Data is ₦332.00.(Federal Office Statistics,1999). Many activities of women in the rural areas in Nigeria are seasonal, low capital and technology based and thus low revenue based (Mabogunje, 1989).Hence rural women are generally characterized by low income base in Nigeria.

Movement outside the rural environment for many of the women (60%) to the urban cities is seldom, or occasional. Most rural women have difficulty dealing with the hustle and bustle of urban cities, particularly the vehicular and human traffic. Going across roads is always a scary exercise for them. The pace of life in the urban cities is just too fast for them. However, movement to urban cities for 37.5% of them is mainly for economic purposes particularly for those engaged in the sale of consumer products such as provisions, alcoholic beverages, body products and household items. Only a few (2.5%) indicated they have never visited urban cities.

**Objective 2:** To investigate the income generating activities of women in Kajola LGA.

**Table 2. Income Generating Activities of Women**

Lifestyle variables	Frequencies (n=160)
<b>Occupation Agriculture</b>	59(36.8)*
Arable crop production	49(30.6)
Wholesale/retail of farm produce	24(15.0)
Marketing of food crops	24(15.0)
Marketing of vegetables	27(16.8)
Marketing of small ruminant	27(16.8)
Marketing of poultry birds	14(9.0)
Vending of cooked food	
<b>Non-Agricultural Products</b>	38(23.7)
Marketing of Provisions/body products	38(23.7)
Casual labourers	10(6.2)
Tailoring	10(6.2)
Pottery	8(5.0)
Hairdressing	

<b>Credit sources</b>	
'Ajo'	82(51.2)
Relatives	28(17.5)
'Esusu'	15(9.1)
Personal savings	4(2.5)
<b>Saving modes</b>	
'Ajo'	45(28.1)
Self	45(28.1)
Bank	28(17.5)
Cooperatives	24(15.0)
<b>Spending patterns</b>	
Clothings	93(58.1)
School fees	93(58.1)
Household food	75(46.8)
Family commitments	71(43.7)
Reinvestment	41(25.6)
Transportation	23(14.0)
Religious commitments	6(3.7)
House rent	2(1.2)

*\*Figures in parenthesis are percentages.*

Lifestyle of a group of people to a large extent depends on the income generating activities they undertake. Table 1 illustrates a note able diversification in respondent's income generating activities. Surveyed women engaged in different income generating and related activities which span agriculture to non-agriculture based activities. However, agriculture appears to be the major income generating activity among the women. About 36.8% generate income from arable crop production, while 30.6% of them derive income from whole and retail sale of farm products. Common agricultural crops marketed are food crops (15%) and vegetables (15%). Rearing of small ruminant animals (16.8%) and poultry birds (16.8%) provide income for these women. A few (9%) sell cooked food for income.

Findings also showed that more women are taking up more non-agriculture based income generating activities, an indication that rural women are gradually moving away from agricultural based income generating activities. This was evident in the sale of provision items and body products (23.7%) which is increasingly becoming a popular income generating activity among women in the rural areas. More women (23.7%) work as casual labourers at building sites to earn income. This could be related to the current economic meltdown and non-ownership of land by women in the traditional African culture. Some of them operate alcoholic bars (6.2%) popularly

known as 'joints', hair salons (5%) -a new trend of income generation by rural women. Others include tailoring (6.2%), and pottery (6.2%).

Various credit sources were evident among the women. These included indigenous credits sources such as 'Ajo'(51.2%), and 'esusu' (9.3%). Others are relatives (17.5%),Community banks (17.5%) and personal savings (2.5%).The women indicated that marketing hours were mainly during the day (84.5%) and they sold wares directly to consumers(76.2%) and also through middlemen(17.5%).

Many of the women (93.7%) saved generated income, while saving modes were mainly through self (28.1%), 'ajo'(28.1%), banks (17.5%) and cooperative (15%). The results also revealed a variety of spending pattern among the women and on various items. Many of them indicated that they spend sizeable amount of their income on clothes (58.1%), school fees (58.1%), food (46.8%) and family obligations (43.7%). Less than half invested (25.6%) their income. About 14.0% said they spent part of income earned on transportation, religious obligations (3.7%) and house rent (1.5%).

**Objective 3. To Determine the socio-cultural activities of women.**

**Table 3. Women's Socio- Cultural Activities**

Variables	Frequencies (n=160)
<b>Social activities</b>	
Participation in socio-cultural activities within community	96(60.0)
Participation in social activities outside community	60(37.5)
<b>Membership of associations</b>	
Yes	44(27.5)
Benefit derived (financial /ceremonial)	146(63.3)
Price control	9(20.3)
Religious	5(3.1)
<b>Linkage with organization</b>	
LGA agric dept	76(47.5)
No linkage	67(41.4)
Research Institution (IAR&T)	8(5.0)
NGO (OODAP)	9(5.6)
<b>Leisure activities</b>	
Storytelling	82(51.2)
Ayo Olopon(game)	38(23.7)
<b>Folktales</b>	
Health care modes	29(18.1)
Western medication	114(71.8)
Traditional medication	45(28.1)

**Food preferences**

Amala	104(65)
Beans	102(63.7)
Rice	65(40.6)
Pounded	56(35.6)
Pap(Ogi)/Eko	45(28.7)
Eba	33(20.6)
Boiled yam	33(20.6)

Various social and cultural activities exist among the women in the study area as revealed by the results on Table 3. Most of their socio-cultural activities are within their community and 60% participate in these activities. However, 37.5% of women indicated they often visited neighbouring cities for one social obligation or the other, while 2.5% said that they have never moved outside their community for any social activities. Majority (72.5%) of these women do not belong to any associations. A few (27.5%) are members of one association or another. Benefits they derived as members were mainly financial or ceremonial (68.3%), buying good items at controlled price (20.3%) and assistance from their religious groups from time to time (11.4%).

Findings also showed that most (41.8%) of the surveyed women have no link with any development organization. The study area is remote from Ibadan the state capital. This may explain the weak presence of development agencies in the study area, which confirms the concentration of development activities in urban cities (Yahaya, 2001). However, the Local government Agriculture Department is the major organization the women have link with (47.5%). Other organizations with working relationship with these women are OODAP (5.6%) and IAT&T (5.0%). Organizations working with the women for development purposes are few. The Local Government Agriculture Department is the major institution in the study area working with women (47.5%).

Indicated leisure activities in this study, included viewing local television programmes (98.7), radio listening (90.6%), storytelling (51.2%), Ayo-Olopon (23.7%), folktales (18.1%), and ludo game (3.1%). Only 3.7% of the women indicated that they do not engage in any leisure activities. Health care choices vary among the women. Many women (71.8%) indicated they treated in the LGA Health care centre whenever need be, while 28.1% of them visited herbalist and preferred the traditional herbs.

The results also revealed that women interviewed eat local food items such as amala (yam pudding-65.0%), beans (63.7%), rice (40.6%), pounded yam (35.6%), pap (28.7%), eba (20.6%), and boiled yam (16.8%). Dress mode among the women is mix of indigenous (Buba and iro) and western (Gown, skirt and blouse) clothes.

### Lessons Emerging from study and recommendations

The face of the rural area is gradually changing structurally, socio-economically and culturally so also is the lifestyles of women. Lessons emanating from this study show that the studied women young adults and middle age, married, with at least some level of literacy and cosmopolite and now have fewer numbers of children. However annual income among them is still low. Non agricultural income generating activities is on the rise and gaining grounds. Credit sources are still largely indigenous. Community banks which are hitherto non-existent are now available and replacing the traditional modes of saving and credit sources among the women. Only a small fraction of generated income is reinvested. Membership of associations, participation in socio-cultural activities and linkage with outside organizations among women are low. Television viewing and listening to radio programmes, telling of moon-light stories and playing 'ayo-olopon are popular leisure activities. Local foods are consumed mainly, health care choices are western and dress mode is a mix of both western and indigenous. Based on the forgoing, it is recommended that additional research be conducted and these emerging lifestyles considered when designing development programme for them. Rural women should be studied to determine their increasing involvement in non agriculture based income generating activities. This will indicate how their income generating activities can be enhanced. Women's literacy level is on the rise. Research should be done to determine what potentials this has for information technology programmes, income generating activities and participation in development programmes for women. We are in the information age. Television and radio programmes should be used to reach and provide women with relevant and timely information as the usage of these information channels is high among them. Also similar studies should be replicated in different locations as rural women have unique economic, social, traditional and ecological lifestyles.

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