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Gender Analysis of Rural Dwellers Accessibility to Free Natural Resources in Ussa Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study analyzed gender accessibility of rural dwellers to free natural resources in Ussa Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaire. Sixty respondents were selected purposively to ensure that only forest resource gatherers were included in the study. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data collected. The findings of the study revealed that equal number of male and female respondents (41.4% each) were farmers. Also 32.4% and 31% of male and female respondents were landless. About 62% of male and 75.7% of female respondents were educated. About 87% and 90% of male and female had household sizes of over 5 persons. Men had more access to high income yielding forest resources than women. The result showed that the women took more of what they gathered home to meet household needs while a little was sold for income, while men sold most of what they collected with only little was left for home consumption. Based on the results of the study, it was recommended that increased gender based capacity building and responsibility for management of free natural resources should be encouraged among rural dwellers in order to ensure sustainability of the resources in contributing to food security and poverty alleviation among free natural resource gatherers in the study area.

Keywords: Gender, free natural resources, rural dwellers, accessibility

Introduction

The consideration of men and women as separate entities when examining development activities has become virtually universal. This is justified on the basis of past and continuing inequity (Oseni, 2004).

Gender affects the distribution of resources, wealth, work, decision-making, political power as well as the enjoyment of rights and entitlements within the family and in public life (Welch *et al.*, 2000). Due to their different gender roles and responsibilities, men and women use forest products in different ways.

The general trend is that women gather forest products, forest fuel, food, fodder, herbs for medicinal purpose, and raw material for small scale income-generating activities, whereas men gather wood for selling or for construction (WEDNET, 1991; Jacobson, 1992).

Men tend to play a greater role than women in extracting timber and non-wood forest products for commercial purposes, giving an indication of the accessibility to forest resources among men and women.

Traditionally, many villagers rely on gathering fishing and hunting in forests to get food as regular source of protein and fat. In some provinces, forest foods are the most important sources of food beside staples. This category of items includes wild fish from rivers and other

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aquatic animals, wild fruits, vegetables and mushrooms, insects and wildlife for meat.

The collection of non-timber forest products is both a source of food and a source of income to gatherers (Mulenga *et al.*, 2011).

Notion of gender are integral to understanding the social relations and decision-making process concerning access to natural resources (Kabeer, 2003).

Economic, social, cultural, political and legal environments affect the rights of women and men to control forest resources and own land. Even where women have ownership rights to land, the access to forest products and opportunity for forest-generated income may not be assured.

Different members of the community may have established informal rights to use of different parts of the forest or even of a tree. Women may have access to the vegetables, mushrooms, firewood and weaving materials while men in the rural community have full access to bush meat, honey, fish and timber.

This differentiation by gender has major implications for the ownership and right to the forest and its by-products, it affects the decision process in the selection of species for new plantings and it affects the management of the forest (FAO, 2003).

Studies have shown that gender based local knowledge is a central issue in the selection, collection and preparation of wild foods. While women are very much knowledgeable about direct food consumption activities, men are more knowledgeable and responsible for income generation for non-wood forest products (Ogle, 1996).

Thus, accessibility to free natural resources is a contributor to livelihoods and a means of poverty reduction among rural households with access to them. The existing low level of consciousness about the roles played by women in the forest resources management has resulted in deep rooted cultural beliefs and traditional practices that prevent women from having access to forest resources (UN, 2002).

However, issues of accessibility and the dependency on natural resources products are not well synthesized and documented (Kessy, 1998).

There exists sources of free natural resources in Nigeria but the role of men and women in the exploitation of these resources has not been given much attention by researchers. Considering the relevance of these free natural resources to food security and poverty reduction, this study intends to analyze gender accessibility of rural dwellers to free natural resources in Ussa LGA of Taraba State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study area was Ussa Local Government Area of Taraba State.

It is located at the Southern part of Taraba State. The area is made up of eight wards which include Fikyu, Kpambo-Puri, Kpambo, Rufu, Lissam I, Lissam II, Kwesati and Lumbu ward. Ussa has a total land area of 4,260 square kilometre which lies in latitude $7^{\circ} 11' 00''$ N and longitude $10^{\circ} 02' 00''$ E (Ministry of Land and Survey, 2003).

It is bounded in the north east by Kurmi Local Government, in the south and south east by the Republic of Cameroun and north by Takum Local Government Area. According to 2006 census, Ussa Local Government Area has an estimated population of 102,763.89.

Data were obtained through the use of structured questionnaire and oral interview which were administered illiterate respondents. The simple random sampling technique was used to select three wards which included Kwesati, Rufu and Kpambo out of the eight wards in the study area.

From each of these three wards, twenty respondents were purposively selected to include only forest resource gatherers. A total of 60 respondents were selected but only 58 of respondents gave complete responses. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data collected. The descriptive statistical tools involved the use of tables, means, frequency distributions and percentages.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents considered in this study were: marital status, education attainment, occupation, age, farm size and household size. They were analyzed descriptively and the results were presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Socio-economic characteristics	Description	Male (%)	Female (%)
Marital status	Married	72.4	27.6
	Single	17.2	20.7
	Divorced	3.4	20.7
	Widowed	6.9	31.0
Educational attainment	No formal education	37.9	24.1
	Primary education	13.8	24.1
	Secondary education	17.2	27.6
	Tertiary education	31.0	24.1
Occupation	Civil servant	17.2	13.8
	Farming	41.9	41.4
	Artisan	13.8	20.7
	Trading	3.4	10.3
	Forest resources marketer	13.8	10.3
	Fisher	10.3	3.4
Age	≤ 20	3.4	6.9
	21-30	17.2	41.4
	31-40	34.5	31.0
	41-50	37.9	20.7
	Above 50	6.9	-
Farm size	1-5	69.9	65.5
	6-10	27.6	3.4
	Landless	3.4	31.0
Household size	1-5	27.6	48.3
	6-10	58.6	41.4
	11-15	13.8	10.3

Source: Field survey, 2012

Table 1 revealed that about 73.4% of male respondents were married as compared to 27.6% of female respondents in the study area. This was because forest resource gathering was more commonly undertaken by married men and single women in the study area. This was probably a custom in the area.

The result also showed that 62% of male respondents and 75.9% of female respondents had different levels of formal education. It is expected that those that were educated will be better informed on how they could properly manage the resources than the uneducated. A large number of male respondents (41.9%) and female respondents (41.9%) were farmers. This

implied that farming was the commonest occupation among the respondents.

Furthermore, 51.7% of male and 72.4% of female respondents was within the age range of 21 to 40 years.

This indicated that the majority of the population in the study was made up of physically active people in their productive years. Such people had the strength to search for forest resources outside their regular occupation which in most cases was farming. Most of the male respondents (69.9%) and female respondents (65.5%) had farm sizes of 1 to 5 ha.

This showed that most men and women in the area were small scale farmers. There were also 3.4% of male and 31% of female respondents that were landless.

Considering that about 58.6% of male and 41.4% of female had household size of over 5 persons, the tendency for these households to need extra sources of food and income presumes that the people in the study area were likely to make effort to acquire free natural resources to augment their household food and income sources.

The result also showed that men were more endowed with farm land than women, implying that women may rely more heavily on free natural resources to meet their household food needs especially among female headed households.

Large household sizes usually had impact on household labour provision. This agrees with the findings of Parikh and Shah (1994) that large

family size contributes to production than small family size. Part of the food provision is that of gathering free natural resources for food and income, the implication of the finding of this study is that large households will gather more free natural resources than small households because of larger labour force and more people's needs to be met.

Free natural resources in the study area

This section unveiled different types of free natural resources found in the study area. Table 2 showed that 51.7% of respondents were gatherers of vegetables. This implied that vegetable was the most popular and probably the most common free natural resources in the area. Due to its availability, vegetables were usually collected freely from forest by the respondents.

This confirms the findings of Robinson and Kajembe (2009) who observed that vegetables were collected regularly by some households due to elastic demand.

Table 2: Distribution of free natural resources in the study area

Resources	%	Rank
Vegetable	51.7	1
Fuel wood	48.3	2
Fish	48.3	2
Mushroom	41.4	4
Bush meat	41.4	4
Honey	34.5	6
Fruits	34.5	6
Medicinal plants	34.5	6
Roofing materials	24.1	9
Mat making material	20.7	10
Rope materials	13.8	11
Ritual materials	6.9	12

Source: Field survey, 2012

It was observed that fuel wood and fish accounted for the same percentage (48.3%) which indicates that fuel wood and fish were equally demanded and were the second most demanded resources in the study area.

Fish was collected from water bodies while fuel wood was the product of forests. Mushroom and bush meat had the same percentage (41.4%) demand. Honey, fruits and medicinal plants had the same percentage (34.5% each) of number of

gatherers. They were the fourth most popular group of resources which could be collected from the forest.

Roofing materials (24.1%); mat making material (20.7%); rope materials (13.8%) and ritual materials (6.9%) were the least frequently sought after. This was probably because their demand was dependent on need and they were apparently not as frequently demanded as the others. The others were Food and drug related

resources. The food resources like vegetables, fuel wood and fish were the most frequently collected natural resources implying that they were the most frequently utilized free natural resources. Mushroom, bush meat, honey and fruit which were also food related were the next set of most demanded resources.

It was observed that all food related resources were more frequently collected than the non-food resources implying that these food resources were important contributors to food security in the area.

Reasons for gathering free natural resources
 People in the rural areas gather free natural resources for a number of reasons. This section

focuses on the reasons why respondents used free natural resources in the study area. The result in Table 3 showed that free natural resources were gathered basically for home consumption and as a source of income. Collection of free natural resources in the area was along gender lines as shown in Table 3.

Accessibility to the free natural resources was observed to be determined by social norms that allocated resource collection along gender lines. The study revealed that the male respondents some resources, female respondents collected others, and a few others resources were accessible to male and female members of the community.

Table 3: Gender based reasons for collecting free natural resources

Resources	Income		Consumption	
	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Vegetable	-	6.9	-	44.8
Fuel wood	-	10.3	-	37.9
Fish	17.2	3.4	13.8	10.3
Mushroom	-	10.3	-	31.0
Bush meat	20.7	-	20.7	-
Honey	20.7	-	13.8	-
Fruits	10.3	10.3	3.4	13.8
Medicinal plants	6.9	-	6.9	6.9
Roofing materials	6.9	-	17.2	-
Mat making material	6.9	-	13.8	-
Rope materials	3.4	-	10.3	-
Ritual materials	6.9	-	10.3	-

Source: Field survey, 2012

Women traditionally collected vegetables, fish, fruit, fuel wood and mushrooms while men were traditional collectors of bush meat, honey, roofing, ritual and rope making materials, as well as fish and fruit. Fish and fruit were the resources commonly Table 3 showed that in the study area, women collected more mushroom, fuel wood fruits, fish and vegetables for household consumption (31%, 37.9%, 13.8%, 10.3% and 44.8% respectively) (10.3%) than for income (10.3%, 10.3%, 3.4%, 6.9%).

The result showed that the women in the study gathered free natural resource more for the purpose of meeting household food needs than for making income. This is a common feature

with women who are usually concerned about meeting immediate needs of their households.

As shown on Table 3, Men gathered more honey, fish and fruit which had high market value for the purpose of making income than for household consumption

The male respondents in this study were observed to be more prone to making money from marketable natural resources than taking the raw resources for home consumption

Conclusion

This study examined the accessibility of rural dwellers to free natural resources found in their

natural environments (forest and water bodies). The study showed the gender role of men and women in free natural resources.

It also identifies the resources that were most commonly collected in the area. These included bush meat, honey, vegetables, fuel wood, fish and fruits.

Collection of all kinds of natural resources was traditionally determined by gender based cultural norms. Reason for women's free natural resource collection was most often for household consumption while men aimed more at income generation from the resources.

This study further established that free natural resources contributed either directly or indirectly to household food security which made life better for rural dwellers. Considering the importance of free natural resources to men and women both for food security and poverty alleviation, it was recommended that a gender based free natural resource management capacity building outreach should be aimed at the people of the area. This is so as to enhance the sustainable access to the resources.

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