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## HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY STATUS OF RURAL WOMEN IN USSA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Addressing global hunger and food insecurity requires immediate and unified efforts due to their broad nature and the potential for significant escalation in certain areas. This study assessed household food security status of women in the Ussa Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. A multistage sampling technique was used in sampling the respondents. Primary data for the study were obtained through the administration of well structured questionnaires to the respondents. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean and percentages; and food security were used to analyze data. The result indicates a mean age of 42.8 years and mean household size of seven (7) members. Most (56.3%) of the respondents were married and 51.3% of the respondents engaged in farming as their major occupation and source of livelihood. Majority (81.2%) attained one form of formal education or another. Findings of the study also shows that 65% of respondents were food insecure. The coping strategies mostly adopted to manage food insecurity by these women were storage of excess foodstuff, taking up additional income generating activities and management of available foods. It was therefore recommended that women should diversify their source of income.

**Keywords:** Rural women, Food security status, Diversification, Taraba State, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

More than 800 million people throughout the world and particularly in developing countries do not have enough food to meet their basic nutritional needs (Food and Agriculture organization (FAO, 2004). Constraints on access to food and continuing inability of household to purchase food, instability of supply and demand, as well as natural and manmade disasters prevent basic food needs from being fulfilled even though food supplies have increased substantially (Smyth et al., 2016). According to FAO (2020), the world food crisis challenged the prevailing complacency, food suddenly appeared to be in short supply on world markets, cereal prices rose sharply and food aid fell; those on whom the heaviest burden fell were the poor people in poor countries.

Food security, being one of the major issues of the present development dialogue, has been prioritized in domestic economic policies of many developing countries like Nigeria and also in the agendas of many international organizations especially in Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2022). Food security has four dimensions - food availability, food access food utilization and stability - and it can be analyzed in two levels; macro level and micro level. On a micro level, food security focuses on ensuring that individuals or households have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and lead active and healthy lives. It involves availability, access, utilization, and stability of food within households (Haile, 2015). Women play a crucial role in ensuring household food security. They are primarily responsible for managing and maintaining food production,

processing, and preparation within their households. Despite their indispensable contributions, women face numerous challenges and limitations that hinder their ability to fulfill this role effectively. One of the primary issues is the inadequate understanding and recognition of the vital role women play in household food security (Kassie et al., 2014). This inadequacy of recognition leads to a limited focus on addressing the specific needs and concerns of women in policies and interventions related to food security. Conventional gender norms tend to confine women to household responsibilities, which in turn hampers their opportunities to access vital resources, exert influence in decision-making processes, and have control over productive assets such as land and financial resources. These inequalities effectively curtail women's capacity to participate in agricultural endeavours, avail themselves of market opportunities, and exercise autonomy in determining food production and distribution within their own households (Choithani, 2020). To this end, the objectives of the study were to: describe the socioeconomic characteristics of women; determine the food security status of rural women and examine the coping strategies adopted by women in Ussa Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria.

## METHODOLOGY

**Study Area:** The study was conducted in Ussa Local Government Area (LGA), Taraba State, Nigeria. Ussa LGA is situated in the south-eastern part of the State covering an area of 1495 square kilometers (Taraba State Government, 2024) on Latitude 7° 5' 13" north and Longitude 10° 2' 17" east (Mapcarta, n.d) with a projected population of 143,000 as at 2022 (City population, n.d). It experiences a tropical climate with distinct wet and dry seasons. Agriculture is a significant economic activity. It is known for the cultivation of a variety of crops such as maize, millet, yam, cassava, rice, and groundnuts and livestock farming, such as the rearing of cattle, sheep, and goats (Shagba, 2019).

**Sampling Technique:** A multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. In the first stage, four (4) wards (Fikyu, Kwesati, Rufu and Acha) out of the 11 wards were randomly selected. The second stage involved the selection of 2 communities from each of the wards. The third stage involved the

random sampling of 5 women from each of the communities to make 80 respondents.

**Data Collection:** Primary data was used for this study and these were collected through the administration of structured questionnaire to the target respondents.

**Analytical Technique:** Descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean and percentages were used to analyze the socioeconomic characteristics and coping strategies adopted by the respondents in the study area while the food security index was used to determine the food security status of the respondents

**Model Specification:**

**Food security index:** The food security status was analyzed using the food security index, to classify the women into food secure and food insecure and it is specified as:

$$Food\ Security\ Index = \frac{h}{\frac{2}{3}h}$$

Where per capita food expenditure is the household monthly expenditure on food items. Any woman that spends above 2/3 mean per capita food expenditure is classified as food secured while those that spends below the 2/3 is categorized as food insecure.

FSI = Food security index

FSI ≥ 1 = respondent is food secure

FSI < 1 = respondent is food insecure

To determine the food security status of the rural farming households, the households were classified into food secure and food insecure households, using the food security index. The food security index formula is given by:  $F_i = \frac{\text{Per capita food expenditure for the } i\text{th household}}{\frac{2}{3} \text{ mean per capita food expenditure of all households}}$  Where  $F_i$  = Food security index When  $F_i > 1$  = Food secure  $i$ th household  $F_i < 1$  = Food insecure  $i$ th household. A food secure household is therefore that whose per capita monthly food expenditure fall above or is equal to two third of the mean per capita food expenditure. On the other hand, a food insecure

household is that whose per capita food expenditure falls below two-third of the mean monthly per capita food expenditure (Omonona et al., 2007). Additionally, the number of food secure/insecure households in the state was determined by taking the frequency of the food secure/insecure households. The headcount ratio (H) of food security was calculated to measure the percentage of the population of households that are food secure/insecure. The headcount index formula is given by; Headcount index (H) = M/N Where M = number of food secure/insecure households N = the number of households in the sample

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents:** The distribution of respondents by their socioeconomic characteristics is presented in Table 1. The result shows that the mean age of the respondents was 42.75 years implying that the respondents were still in their active years. The highest proportion lies between 41-60 years of age. This finding is consistent with that of Adepoju et al. (2015) who recorded a mean age of 42.11 years. Most (56.3%) of the women are married. This result agrees with that of Antriyandarti (2024) who found that majority (84%) of the women were married.

Majority (81.2%) of the women attained one form of formal education or another implying that the respondents were relatively literate. More than half (51.3%) of the women were farmers. This implies that the women have opportunity to engage in other income generating activities.

**Food Security Status of Respondents:** The food security line is presented in Table 2. Women whose per capita food expenditure falls below ₦4533.23 were designated food insecure, while women whose per capita food expenditure equals or is greater than ₦4533.23 were food secure.

The food security status of respondents is presented in Table 3. The result shows that most (92.5%) of the respondents were food secure, indicating the ability to afford sufficient, affordable, and nutritious food. Conversely, only 7.5% of the respondents are food insecure. These findings agrees with Adepoju et al., (2015) that reported a high level (76.7%) of food security among women in Osun State, Nigeria.

**Coping Strategies Adopted by Women:** The coping strategies adopted by respondents is presented in Table 3. The result shows that the most common coping strategies adopted were storage of food stuff, taking up additional income generating activities asides their major source of livelihood and management of available foodstuff. The least adopted coping strategies by the women were home gardening, buying of food items in surplus season, seeking assistance from government programs, NGOs or humanitarian organizations providing food aid. This result agrees with the study of Farzana, et al., (2017) which found that coping strategies among women were with storage of excess foodstuff, taking up additional generating activities, and engaging in food preservation techniques being commonly used strategies.

## CONCLUSION

Most of the women in the study area were married, formally educated, engaged in farming and were food insecure. Storage of excess foodstuff is a coping strategy adopted by all the women.

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**Table 1:** Distribution of Respondents by Socioeconomic Characteristics

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Mean (standard deviation)</b>
Age < 20	1	1.3	
21-40	32	40.0	
41-60	44	55.0	
61-80	3	3.8	
Total	80	100.0	42.8 (9.93)
<b>Marital status</b>			
Single	35	43.7	
Married	45	56.3	
<b>Educational level</b>			
No Formal Education	15	18.8	
First School Leaving Certificate	25	31.3	
Senior Secondary Certificate	30	37.5	
Tertiary	10	12.5	
Total	80	100.0	
<b>Major occupation</b>			
Farming	41	51.3	
Civil Servant	22	27.5	
Business	17	21.3	
Total	80	100.0	
<b>Household size</b>			
1-5	1	1.3	
6-10	32	40.0	
11-15	44	55.0	
Total	80	100.0	6 (3)
<b>Household expenditure</b>			
1-100000	28	35.0	
100001-200000	51	63.8	
>200000	1	1.3	
Total	80	100.0	106321.38 (27973.00705)

Source: Field survey 2024

**Table 2:** Food security line for respondents

Quartiles	Mean per capita food expenditure (MPCFE) (₦)
1	6690.42
2	6772.29
3	7051.46
4	6549.92
MPCFE	6766.02
2/3 MPCFE	4533.23

Source: Data analysis, 2024

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MPCFE	6766.02
2/3 MPCFE	4533.23

Source: Data analysis, 2024

**Table 3:** Food security status of respondents

Security Status	Frequency	Percentage
Food insecure	6	7.5
Food Secure	74	92.5
Total	80	100

Source: Data analysis, 2024

**Table 3:** Coping strategies adopted by women

Coping Strategy	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
Storage of excess foodstuff	80	100.0	1st
Taking up additional income generating activities to purchase food, especially during time of food scarcity	76	95.0	2nd
Management of available foods	75	93.8	3rd
Engagement in food preservation techniques, to extend the shelf life of available food	74	92.5	4th
Skipping meal	70	87.5	5th
Cutting back on non-food expenditures to allocate more resources to food	69	86.3	6th
Diversifying family's diet by foraging for wild foods, growing a variety of crops or raising different types of livestock	68	85.0	7th
Taking out loans to purchase food during times of shortage, with the intension of repaying the loan when circumstances improve	64	80.0	8th
Home Gardening	64	80.0	8th
Buying of food items in surplus season	60	75.0	10 <sup>th</sup>
Seeking assistance from government programs, NGOs or humanitarian organizations providing food aid	24	30.0	11 <sup>th</sup>

Multiple responses

Source: Field Survey 2024