

INDIGENOUS DEVELOPMENT VARIABLES AND THE WELLBEING OF RURAL WOMEN IN NORTHERN SENATORIAL DISTRICT OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The wellbeing of the citizens of any country is the primary focus of any government. There are many factors that impinge on the wellbeing of people. Some are socio-economic while others may be indigenous to the people. The aim of this study was to examine the predictive relationship between the indigenous development activities of the rural women on their wellbeing using communities in the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. In order to achieve this research objective, four indigenous development variables were used. One composite research question was poised and one composite research hypothesis was proposed for testing. Data were collected from a random sample of 437 rural women in 20 communities from the five local government areas studied. A well-validated questionnaire titled 'Socio-economic and Indigenous Development Variables on the Wellbeing of Rural Women Questionnaire (SIDVWRWQ)' with a Cronbach alpha of 0.827 was used to gather data. The results of the analysis showed that: engagement in agricultural activities ($r=.622$, $p<.05$); engagement in small scale enterprises ($r=.570$, $p<.05$); engagement in cooperative activities ($r=.777$, $p<.05$) were positively and significantly correlated with the wellbeing of rural women, and that a weak, indirect (negative) but significant relationship exist between engagement in domestic chores and the wellbeing of the rural women in the study ($r=-.350$, $p<.05$). Finally, there was a significant predictive relationship existing between the set of indigenous development variables and the wellbeing of the rural women in the study ($F=234.769$, $p<.05$); with a very strong multiple correlation ($R=.828$) and the predictors accounting for about 68.5 percent of the explained variance ($R^2=.685$). It was recommended amongst others that conscious efforts towards engaging rural women in agricultural and cooperative activities that would guarantee access to finance and self-help should be put in place to improve the wellbeing of the rural women in the area.

Key words: Wellbeing, development, indigenous, rural, women.

Introduction

Rural women are pivotal to developments in African countries as they play diversified roles. They contribute to the family income as they participate in wage-earning activities such as agriculture, marketing and the distribution of foodstuff and play the roles of wives and mothers, thus ensuring the survival of the family

system and the society at large. Their domestic activities vitally contribute to the maintenance of the rural economy and enhance sustainable development. In some communities in Africa, rural women through communal efforts even help in building traditional houses. The Fulani communities are a good example of this. Therefore, the quality of life in the rural

communities is largely a function of the inputs from the rural women. Quality of life in the rural setting, according to Phillips (2006), is a multifaceted phenomenon determined by the cumulative and interactive impacts of numerous and varied factors like housing conditions, infrastructure, access to social amenities, income, standard of living and satisfaction in the physical and social environment. Quality of life may also be referred to as wellbeing.

Women are promoters of economic growth of any nation. Traditionally, women are regarded as homemakers, who oversee and coordinate the affairs and activities at home while their husbands and children go out to farm. At home, however, they are not idle as they engage in manual processing of food crops, and other farm produce in addition to their housekeeping (Lawanson, 2008). Researchers (e.g Lawson, 2008; Murphy & Parry, 2021; Kanu & Imatari, 2019) have shown the contributions of women in agricultural production and evidences suggest that women's contribution to farm work alone is as high as between 60 and 90 percent of the total farm tasks performed. The contribution of the women ranges from such tasks as land clearing, land tilling, planting, weeding, fertilizer/manure application to harvesting and preservation. Also, food processing, threshing, winnowing, milling, transportation and marketing as well as the management of livestock are tasks carried out by women, especially in the rural areas. Rural women, in particular, are responsible for more than half of the world's food production and they produce between 60 – 80 percent of the food items needed in most developing countries (Damisa, 2007). This is tremendous contribution to national growth and food security. Sodipo, (2017), adds that if women's involvement in agriculture was given the needed support and if the women farmers, which make up the 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries had the same access to inputs as men, then the agricultural output in developing countries of the world would rise by an unexpected average of up to 4% and this could reduce the number of undernourished people in those countries by as much as 17% and this could reduce approximately 150 million hungry people

in the world (FAO, 2011). Despite these laudable contributions of women to global food security, rural women in particular are frequently underestimated and overlooked in development strategies and considerations (World Bank, 2008).

Small scale enterprise has remained a critical means to the sustenance of women in Nigeria. Women who engage in small scale businesses have successfully exploited the commercial and industrial opportunities on a small scale that have long been recognized and cannot be underestimated as a key role in economic growth (Garga & Bagga, 2009). Women as small-scale business holders have a key role in improving the economy of any nation most especially the small-scale enterprises. For instance, Normaizatul, Nursafeda, Noraini, Hamidah, Norhanizah and Mohamad (2017) have shown that the field of entrepreneurship is not limited to certain gender. Women entrepreneurship is very critical for the growth of any economy of the world. In Nigeria, entrepreneurship is taught in tertiary institutions to prepare school leavers, boys and girls, for their engagement in small scale businesses in order to create a better future and wellbeing. Women entrepreneurship, also, is aimed at enhancing small scale enterprises which are expected to help alleviate poverty, improve on their wellbeing and then grow the economy. In Nigeria, various policies have been in place, targeting rural women in businesses. One of such is the *traders' monie* initiated by the Buhari's Administration to empower women for small businesses. Others include Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEDEN), Bank of Industry (BOI) grants and politicians are daily engaging themselves in empowerment programmes in the rural areas across the country. The success or otherwise of these policies and programmes on the socio-economic wellbeing of the beneficiaries and the rural women especially, forms a basis for research in developmental studies.

Cooperative activities have remained a viable means to improve the wellbeing of women in Nigeria. There is no gainsaying the fact that rural women's contributions to individual households

and communities have improved local and global economies. Co-operative activities have been means through which rural women collect credit facilities to start businesses, receive grants from governments and non-governmental organizations and buy goods at cheaper prices from manufacturing organizations. Co-operative societies are very common in most rural areas in Nigeria and serve as a socio-economic and political force that unites and empowers members. The participation of rural women in cooperative activities has immensely contributed to achieving better incomes through their various engagement activities and has improved on rural livelihoods and wellbeing (Vercillo, 2016; Jabeen, 2020). But more studies are needed to unravel this phenomenon in many rural communities and this is the essence of this research.

Domestic chores are activities carried out by women as part of their cultural and statutory responsibilities as mothers, wives and women. They are usually time-consuming, time-demanding and energy-draining activities mostly carried out by women. They include fetching of water, firewood, cooking, bathing of children, washing of clothes and utensils and so on. Most rural women often face the challenge to allocate time for both domestic/household chores versus income generation activities on a daily basis and that influence their wealth status. The burden of household chores consumes many hours and hinders many rural women from participating effectively in income generation activities. This equally has negative implications on their socio-economic wellbeing (Ochola, 2021; Dutta, 2022). Rural women in the Northern Cross River State also engage in household chores, combining this with other business or agricultural engagement. The implications may be overwhelming on their wellbeing.

In sub-Saharan Africa, rural women spend many hours on household chores, as unpaid activities, being their responsibilities (Nkengla-Asi, 2019; Dinkelman and Ngai, 2022). Statistics have shown that, in sub-Saharan Africa, 71% of the task of collecting water, cooking, taking care of children and other household workloads falls on

women and girls (Wanjala, 2021). However, women with higher wealth status are likely to adopt labour-saving technologies to reduce the burden of household chores and therefore save their time when compared to their counterparts with low incomes (Johnson et al., 2019; Tiruneh, 2020; Hertog et al., 2022). It is observed that the failure to reduce the workload of household chores forces rural women to consume many man-hours and keeps them disadvantaged from participating effectively in income generation activities to improve their wealth status. In Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, like other places in Nigeria, rural women experience the heavy workload of household chores that is attributed to traditional distribution of labour (Gibore & Bali, 2020).

Researchers (e.g. Lawanson, 2008; Akpama & Isaac, 2018; Adeleke & Alan, 2020) have carried out several studies to examine indices associated with the wellbeing of rural women in order to solve the problem. For instance, Adeleke and Alan (2020) showed that participation in socio-economic activities was an important factor in rural women's wellbeing. Thus, to improve on the wellbeing of rural women, interest must be on some verifiable socioeconomic factors congruent to the area and individuals. Akpama and Isaac (2018) showed that engagement in cooperative activities was also an important indicator and Lawanson (2008) stated that rural women engage tremendously in agricultural activities and therefore such engagements could improve their wellbeing if taken seriously.

Objective of the study

The main objective of the study was to examine the predictive relationship between the four indigenous development variables (engagement in cooperatives, engagement in agricultural activities, engagement in small scale enterprises and engagement in domestic chores) and the wellbeing of rural women in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Research hypothesis

- (I) There is no significant predictive relationship between the indigenous development variables and the wellbeing

of rural women in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Research Method:

The survey research design was used. The research was carried out in the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria which is made up of five local government areas: Yala, Ogoja, Bekwarra, Obudu and Obanliku. The sample for the study was 437 rural women randomly selected from 424,905 rural women in the area. This was selected using the multi-stage sampling approach. The main instrument for data collection was a well validated 41-item questionnaire titled "Socio-economic and Indigenous Development Variables on the Wellbeing of Rural Women Questionnaire

(SIDVWRWQ), having three sections, A, B and C with items on different response scales depending on the section. Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to test the reliability, which yielded 0.827. The Focus Group Discussion Guide was a supplementary instrument for oral interview. Members of six age grades and social groups amongst the rural women in the study area were interviewed. Data collected were analysed using the SPSS version 23.0

Results and discussion of findings

Hypothesis One: There is no significant predictive relationship between the indigenous development activities used in this study and the wellbeing of rural women in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. The results of this analysis are presented on Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Summary of Pearson correlation coefficient, r , of the relationship between indigenous development variable and the wellbeing of rural women in the study ($n=437$)

S/n	Variables	No. of items	Mean	Sd	r	p-value
1.	Engagement in Agriculture	8	17.42	2.98	0.622*	.0000
2.	Eng. in small scale business	8	15.14	2.89	0.570*	.0000
3.	Eng. in cooperative activities	8	13.68	3.32	0.777*	.0000
4.	Eng. In domestic chores	8	14.91	3.94	-0.350*	.0000
5.	Wellbeing of rural women	10	15.90	3.92		

*Significant, $p < .05$; critical $r = .139$, $\alpha = .05$

The result on Table 1 showed that the mean measure of the extent of rural women's engagement in agricultural activities was 17.42 ($SD = 2.98$) and the mean wellbeing of the rural women was 15.90 ($SD = 3.92$). The calculated r -value between these two variables was 0.622 ($p < 0.05$). This r -value ($r = 0.622$) was positive, strong and higher than the critical r -value of 0.139 ($\alpha = 0.05$, $n = 437$), hence the study concluded that there was a strong, positive and significant relationship between engagement in agricultural activities and the wellbeing of rural women in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River state, Nigeria.

Also, the mean rural women wellbeing was 15.90 ($SD = 3.92$) and that engagement in small scale businesses was 15.14 ($SD = 2.89$). The calculated r -value of the test statistic between these two

variables was 0.570 ($p < 0.05$). This was positive, fairly strong and higher than the critical r -value of 0.139 ($\alpha = 0.05$, $n = 437$). To this end, engagement in small scale enterprises is positively and significantly related with the wellbeing of rural women in Northern senatorial district of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Furthermore, the mean measure of the women's engagement in cooperative activities was 13.68 ($SD = 3.32$) while the mean wellbeing was 15.90 ($SD = 3.92$) and the calculated r -value, from data evidence, between these two variables was 0.777 ($p < .05$). This value of r ($r = 0.777$; $p < .05$) was very strong, positive and higher than the critical r -value of 0.139 ($n = 437$, $\alpha = .05$); hence, the test was significant. To this end, engagement in cooperative activities was very strongly, positively (directly) and significantly related to

the wellbeing of rural women in the northern senatorial district of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Finally, from the table the calculated the mean rural women's engagement in domestic chores was 14.91 (SD=3.94) and the calculated r- value between it and the wellbeing of rural women was -.350 ($p < .05$). This r- value ($r = -.350$, $p < .05$) was negative indicating inverse or indirect relationship; however, its absolute value $|r| = .350$ was higher than the absolute critical value $|r| = 0.139$ ($n = 437$, $\alpha = .05$). To this end, the test was significant and the study outcome showed that

engagement in domestic chores is significantly and inversely (or indirectly) related with the wellbeing of rural women in the study area.

In conclusion, all the indigenous development variables studied significantly correlated with the wellbeing of the rural women in the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State; however, only engagement in domestic chores was a negative correlate of the wellbeing of the rural women. Therefore, there was a significant relationship between the indigenous development variables in the study and the wellbeing of rural women in the study area.

Table 2: Summary of the multiple regression analysis of the predictive relationship between the indigenous development variables and the wellbeing of rural women in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State.

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	4588.660	4	1147.165	234.769*	.000 ^b
Residual	2110.910	432	4.886		
Total	6699.570	436			

a. Dependent Variable: Wellbeing of Rural Women

b. Predictors: (Constant), Engagement in Domestic Chores, Small Scale Enterprises, Engagement in Agricultural Activities, Engagement in Co-operative Activities

*Significant, $p < .05$; $R = .828$, $R^2 = .685$ (Adj $R^2 = .682$).

On Table 2, the calculated F-value was 234.769 ($p < .05$) with $p = .000$. This test was statistically significant, indicating that data evidence suggested the rejection of the null hypothesis. To this end, the study concluded that there exists a significant predictive relationship between the indigenous development variables used in the study and the wellbeing of rural women in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. Also, the multiple correlation coefficient, R , was 0.828, indicating a very strong joint relationship between the set of indigenous development variables (Engagement in Domestic Chores, Small Scale Enterprises, Engagement in Agricultural Activities, Engagement in Co-operative Activities) and the wellbeing of rural women in the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State.

Furthermore, the explained variance was 68.5 % ($R^2 = .685$), indicating that the set of indigenous development variables collectively explained

and accounted for about 68.5 percent of the variations in the wellbeing of the rural women. This amount is reasonably high enough to justify the attention of stakeholders in improving livelihood and the well being of the rural women in the study area using these indigenous development variables.

The results showed, for instance, the potency of agricultural activities in the improvement of the wellbeing of rural women in the study area. Indeed, the strong positive relationship from the study can be attributed to the fact that the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria is mainly (as it is for the whole of Cross River State) an agrarian economy. Majority of the rural women take agricultural activities as their primary occupation; either as a major means of livelihood or as minor that is attached to their main occupation. Most rural women engage in food and cash crop production, sales of

agricultural products and in the distributive chain of agriculture products for livelihood.

Furthermore, the direct/positive correlation coefficient of engagement in agriculture ($r = .622, p < .05$) from the study is an indication that as the engagement in agricultural activities increases, the wellbeing of the rural women also improves. The finding is supported by earlier studies (e.g Anuoluwapo & Anuoluwapo, 2019; FAO, 2007, Dessie & Ogle, 2001) which showed that rural women are heavily involved in agricultural activities; not just food production but poultry and small livestock farming activities and that proceeds from such activities help them to meet their needs like paying of children school fees, buying their needs and paying their bills. Also, research by Ironkwe and Ekue (2015) noted that rural women who are farmers are involved in fisheries, rabbitry, goatry as well as poultry and these have added value to their wellbeing.

The study area enhances agricultural activities. For instance, in the zone, there is abundance of yam, groundnut, cowpea, rice, cassava, beans, maize, okra, vegetables, cocoa, palm fruits, plantain, banana and so on. So, a strong and able woman farmer can make good money almost every month of the year by planting and selling different crops. Mahmood (2001) had reported that about 60 to 80% of the food produce comes from rural areas and some are sold to those in urban centres. Also, Falola, Fakayode, Kayode and Amusa (2020) showed that 54.4% of the rural women in their study were involved in agro-processing activities and earn an average of N15,344.64, which had great impact on their wellbeing.

The finding of the hypothesis also showed that engagement in small scale enterprises is fairly strong, positively and significantly related with the wellbeing of the rural women. The works of Alakali, Jijani and Kura (2021) had shown that about 42.7% of the rural women studied in Borno State were preoccupied by their businesses and that 59% of them were into petty trading as a means of livelihood. Thus, the present finding is not surprising as women from the area are also

involved in small scale business activities ranging from table shops (provisions) to artisanal activities like tailoring, hairdressing, baking, food vendors, selling of food items and so on. Many markets exist in the study area, popular amongst them are Utanga Market in Obanliku, Obudu Market, Ugidi (Begwarra), Okuku, Wanikade in Yala, and Ishibori market in Ogoja for which the major players are rural women selling pepper, tomatoes, yams, chicken, fish, clothes, soup condiments and so on. The profits from these ventures are sometimes enough to sustain their needs and add value to their livelihood. Omobolanle (2010) had shown that poor people who participate in small and medium scale enterprises and have access to finance were able to improve their wellbeing.

Again, there was a very strong, positive and significant correlation between engagement in cooperative activities and the wellbeing of rural women in the study ($r = .777, p < .05$). The outcome of the finding may be due to the fact that cooperatives are usually community based, rooted in democracy, flexible and have participatory involvement which makes for easy accessibility, membership and benefits (Dogaruwa, 2008). From the co-operative activities, members have access to interventions or grants from the governments to engage in farming and business activities. Such interventions or grants include fertilizers, chemical (herbicide, insecticide) and seedlings (improved varieties). Kakanova (2009) stated that engagement in co-operative activities is for the purpose of improving the members' socioeconomic conditions and those of their families; and this is exactly why in this work, there is a strong direct relationship between the rural women's engagement in co-operative activities and their wellbeing. Akinwumi and Abdulahi (2020), have shown that most co-operative societies with the highest number of women memberships are in the rural areas and are formed virtually in almost all the rural communities to cater for various needs of the farming and peasant members.

Furthermore, the findings of this study showed that there exists a significant but negative

relationship between engagement in domestic chores and the wellbeing of rural women in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria ($r = -.350, p < .05$). The implication of this finding is that rural women with heavy burden of domestic chores are not likely to live well; that is, they suffer adverse impact on the level of their wellbeing. This is true because, rural women with heavy domestic chores may not be able to go out to look for other means of income to take care of their families. Thus, they are limited in income generating ability but dependent on their husbands and other family members for their wellbeing. The finding is in agreement with the study of Deborah (2022) which showed that the rural women in the study area used approximately six hours for conducting household chores and at least two hours for income generation activities per day; which was not sufficient to break the cycle of poverty.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the indigenous development variables used in this study were significant correlates and predictors of the wellbeing of the rural women. While engagement in agricultural activities, engagement in small scale enterprises

and engagement in co-operative activities were significant positive correlates only engagement in domestic activities was negatively but significantly correlated with the wellbeing of the women in the study.

Recommendations

- (i) Rural women should be encouraged to join co-operative societies. Co-operative societies are good channels to empowered members to start-up businesses and obtain grants.
- (ii) Government and non-government organizations should pursue women empowerment programs vigorously in the rural areas using agricultural chain-value programmes.
- (iii) Advocacy programmes should be carried out to sensitize rural dwellers on the effect of being a full-time house wife and the effect of domestic chores; noting that the burden of domestic chores on women is counterproductive to their wellbeing.
- (5) Government should enact legislations that will create easy access to business financing especially for women in the rural areas.

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