

## Challenges to Traditional Livelihood Activities of Women in Eastern Obolo, Niger Delta Region, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The study assessed the challenges to livelihood activities of women in Eastern Obolo Local Government Area. Two hundred respondents were selected using multi-stage sampling technique and data collected using interview schedule. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. The major livelihood activity of the women was processing of fish/other aquatic products (67.5%). Water pollution and poor storage/processing equipment were the major challenges to livelihood activities. Age ( $\chi^2 = 9.397$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and major livelihood activity ( $\chi^2 = 5.29$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) were significantly related with identified leading challenge to livelihood activities. Water pollution should be controlled and development of non-environmentally dependent livelihood activities encouraged.

**Key words:** Livelihood activities, Environmental degradation, Fishing, Fish processing, Water pollution

### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between environment, agriculture and livelihood in the Niger Delta region deserves a careful consideration, as this nexus represents important variable in the context of survival of the inhabitants of the region. The relative impact on each other, especially impact on livelihood requires effective management in order to sustain the environment. As observed by Farrington *et al* (1999), the environment is a natural asset and livelihood building block and is essential for agricultural production and related activities. Its elements include land, water, air and other free gifts of nature. These are sources of materials and processes required to build up the stock of other capital assets and are therefore tapped by inhabitants of the region for securing livelihood. Land, apart from its requirement for agricultural production is also needed for a variety

of other purposes including construction of residential quarters, recreational parks, social amenities and development of forest.

Agriculture, fishing and related activities are important sources of livelihood of majority of inhabitants of the Niger Delta. Moreover, inhabitants of the region do not stick to one particular activity, but combine many activities to make a living. These activities are environmentally and agriculturally oriented and provide employment for a vast majority of the people, as unskilled labourers easily adapt the processes involved.

Livelihood, according to Ellis (1999) is the activities, assets and the access that jointly determine the living gained by the rural households. It is sustainable when it has the capacity to meet the immediate needs of the people while its ability to meet future needs is not

jeopardised (Carney, 1998). However, the ability of livelihoods in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria to meet the needs of the people is seriously threatened. Fishing, agronomic and related activities which are the major livelihood activities of the people in this region are affected, resulting in declining production and productivity.

Though crude oil is the main-stay of the Nigerian economy, many Nigerians still engage in agriculture for their livelihood. However, crude oil exploration, exploitation and increased pressure on the environment for other uses deplete the ability of the environment to support sustainable agriculture and related livelihood activities. Consequently, most livelihood activities, especially of the poor are unable to meet neither the immediate nor future needs. Efforts to meet the immediate needs of the people result in further exploitation of the environment with no regards to its long-term effects. This pressure on the land and other natural resources reduces the sustainability of the environment and agriculture. Women are the most affected, as they constitute the bulk of the marginalised, landless and resource-poor members of the society. They are saddled with the responsibility of contributing to the wellbeing of the household, and in some households, they bear the burden and sole responsibility of providing the households' needs. This could be as a result of death of spouse or migration of males to towns and cities in search of white collar jobs (Yahaya and Olowu, 1998). Reducing the pressure on the environment and challenges to livelihood activities of the people become the bedrock of livelihood, agriculture and environment sustainability. The study was therefore conducted to assess the constraints to livelihood activities of women in

Eastern Obolo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State with a view to making recommendations to reduce their incidence and impact.

### **Objective of the study**

The general objective of the study was to assess the challenges to livelihood activities of women in Eastern Obolo Local Government Area. The specific objectives were to:

1. examine the personal characteristics of women in Eastern Obolo Local Government Area
2. identify the livelihood activities of women in Eastern Obolo local government area
3. assess the dimensions of challenges to livelihood activities of women in Eastern Obolo Local Government Area

### **Hypotheses of the study**

The following hypotheses were tested:

HO<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the personal characteristics of women in Eastern Obolo local Government Area and identified leading challenge to their livelihood activities

HO<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the major livelihood activity of women of Eastern Obolo Local Government Area and identified leading challenge to their livelihood activities

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study was carried out in Eastern Obolo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State with headquarters at Okoroete. Eastern Obolo Local Government Area is bounded by Ibeno, Onna, Ikot Abasi and Mkpat Enin Local

Government Areas (Ajana, 1996). It has a population of about 60,543 people (NPC, 2006). Eastern Obolo Local Government Area lies within the tropical rainforest zone and has two major seasons: a rainy season (May to October) and a dry season (November to April). The traditional livelihood activity of the people is fishing, though there is appreciable diversification to other livelihood activities. The Local Government Area has experienced many oil spills within the past few decades.

Women in Eastern Obolo Local Government Area constituted the study population. Three villages; Iko, Okoroete and Elile were selected from the Local Government Area using simple random sampling method. Households were identified and systematic sampling method was used to select two hundred households. From each of the households, a woman was interviewed. Interview schedule was used to collect primary data from the respondents. Frequency count and percentage were used for data analysis while Chi-square was used to test the hypotheses.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The personal characteristics of the respondents as presented in Table 1 shows that 41.0% of the respondents were between 40 – 49 years old. This was followed by 27.0% of the respondents who were between 30-39 years of age. Only 0.5% of the respondents were below twenty years of age. This shows that most of the respondents were of age and have actually experienced the challenges to livelihood activities in the area and can easily identify them. Majority of the women (77%) were married, 3% were divorcees and only 7.5% were singles. With this

record, there is an expected increase in population in the area with its attendant effects on the already stretched stock of natural resources.

Table 1 also shows that 28.5% of the respondents were heads of their various households and non-household heads accounted for 71.5% of the respondents. Household headship attracts the responsibility of providing the household's needs, a responsibility that is equally saddled by these female heads of the households. In order to provide for the households, livelihood activities are intensified, with a resultant depletion of the environment and asset base of the area. About 49% of the respondents had no formal education, but 34% of the respondents had between 1 and 6 years of formal education while 13.5% of the respondents had between 7 and 12 years of formal education. This implies that, diversification to formal education-oriented activities by women in the area may be limited. A condition which could encourage continued dependence on agriculture and environment-based activities, with more pressure on the land.

Table 1 also shows that the modal household size was 4-6 people (49%), while 12.5% of the respondents had household size of 3 persons and below. Thirty-eight and a half percent (38.5%) of the respondents had household size of seven persons and above. With the moderately large household sizes, there is an expected continued pressure on the stock of natural capital in the region, as the household heads strive to provide for their households. Only 3.0% of the respondents had monthly income above N20, 000.00 while about 39.5% of the women had monthly income of only N5, 000 and below. This suggests that most of the women may be living below poverty line. The

consequence is intensification of environmental exploitation in the course of trying to meet the livelihood needs of members of the household.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Personal Characteristics

| Variables                        | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Age</b>                       |           |            |
| <20                              | 1         | 0.5        |
| 20 – 29                          | 18        | 9.0        |
| 30 – 39                          | 54        | 27.0       |
| 40 – 49                          | 82        | 41.0       |
| 50 – 59                          | 36        | 18.0       |
| 60 and above                     | 9         | 4.5        |
| <b>Marital Status</b>            |           |            |
| Single                           | 15        | 7.5        |
| Married                          | 154       | 77.0       |
| Divorced                         | 6         | 3.0        |
| Widowed                          | 25        | 12.5       |
| <b>Household Headship</b>        |           |            |
| Household head                   | 57        | 28.5       |
| Non-household head               | 143       | 71.5       |
| <b>Years of Formal Education</b> |           |            |
| >1year                           | 98        | 49         |
| 1 -6 years                       | 68        | 34         |
| 7-12 years                       | 27        | 13.5       |
| <12 years                        | 7         | 3.5        |
| <b>Household Size</b>            |           |            |
| 1-3                              | 25        | 12.5       |
| 4-6                              | 98        | 49.0       |
| 7-9                              | 68        | 34.0       |
| 10 and above                     | 9         | 4.5        |
| <b>Estimated Monthly Income</b>  |           |            |
| N5,000 and below                 | 79        | 39.5       |
| N5,001 – N10,000                 | 88        | 44.0       |
| N10,001 – N15,000                | 18        | 9.0        |
| N15,001 – N20,000                | 9         | 4.5        |
| N20,001 and above                | 6         | 3.0        |

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Table 2 provides information on the livelihood activities of women in the study area. It is observed that processing of fish/other aquatic products (67.5%) remains the major livelihood activity of women in the area. Moreover, 9.5% and 8.0% of the respondents engaged in gathering non-fish aquatic products and trading respectively as major sources of livelihood. The women also combined other activities for a living. Apart from

the major livelihood activities, 39.0%, 37.5% and 36.0% of the respondents engaged in fishing, crop farming and gathering non-timber forest products respectively as supplementary livelihood activities. The findings support the observation by Olawoye (2002), that the concept of occupation involving one activity by which livelihood needs are met as used in the western world is not relevant to the experience of most rural dwellers in developing countries. These activities are also dependent on the environment, implying continuous pressure on the environment. This could lead to environmental degradation and unsustainable livelihood.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents According to Involvement in Livelihood Activities

| Livelihood Activity                           | Major Activity | Minor Activity |
|---|----------------|----------------|
|   | Frequency (%)  | Frequency (%)  |
| Fishing                                       | 8 (4.0)        | 78 (39.0)      |
| Gathering non-fish aquatic products           | 19 (9.5)       | 140 (70.0)     |
| Processing of fish and other aquatic products | 135 (67.5)     | 52 (26.0)      |
| Crop farming                                  | 7 (3.5)        | 75 (37.5)      |
| Livestock rearing                             | 0 (0.0)        | 39 (19.5)      |
| Trading                                       | 16 (8.0)       | 82 (41.0)      |
| Hired Labouring                               | 2 (1.0)        | 9 (4.5)        |
| Civil Service/wage employment                 | 4 (2.0)        | 29 (1.0)       |
| Restaurants operations/food vending           | 3 (1.5)        | 1 (0.5)        |
| Hair dressing                                 | 1 (0.5)        | 3 (1.5)        |
| Gathering non-timber forest products          | 0 (0.0)        | 165 (82.5)     |
| Others  | 7 (3.5)        | 8 (4.0)        |

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Table 3 presents the challenges to livelihood activities of women in the study area. According to the result, major challenges to livelihood activities of women in the area are water pollution (57.0%) and poor processing/storage equipment (56.5%). Water is polluted as a result of oil spills and other oil exploration and exploitation activities. The implication is that many aquatic

lives are destroyed in the process, resulting in low fish catch and reduced quantity of fish and other aquatic products available for processing by the women. This suggests reduced income, increased poverty, unsecured livelihood and further pressure on the environment.

Another major challenge to livelihood activities of women in the region is poor and crude storage/processing equipment which leads to inefficiency in the storage/processing of the products. As a result, mangroves are constantly destroyed for firewood that is used in smoking and drying the fishes and other products. This causes deforestation and environmental degradation. About 37% and 36% of the respondents noted that inadequate capital/credit facilities and high cost of processing/storage equipment respectively are major challenges to their livelihood activities in the region. Other major challenges to livelihood activities of women in the area include poor transportation network (21%) and poor marketing structure (26%). Poor transportation network increases the cost of production as the products are transferred to where they are needed. Poor marketing structure encourage sale of the product at the beach or at the farm gate. The challenges reduce the gains derived from the trade. About 13.5% and 4.5% of the respondents indicated high cost of fishing equipment and poor soil structure/fertility respectively as challenges to their livelihood activities.

Table 3 also shows that, though the major livelihood activity of majority of women in the area is processing of fish/other aquatic products, 36% of the respondents indicated water pollution

as the leading challenge of all the challenges to livelihood activities of women in the area. This indication can be explained by the fact that fish must first be caught before they are processed, as water pollution reduces the daily fish catch. On the contrary, 32% of the respondents pointed out that poor processing/storage equipment is the leading challenge of all the challenges to livelihood activities of women in the area. The result is suggestive of continuous deforestation in the process of gathering firewood needed for drying the fishes and other products. Other challenges identified by the respondents as leading challenges include high cost of processing/storage equipment (17%), inadequate capital/credit facilities (6%) and high cost of fishing equipment (4.5%).

These challenges to livelihood activities of women have implications for sustainable livelihood, agriculture and environment. They reduce livelihood outcomes causing a short-fall in their ability to meet households' livelihood needs. To cope with this short-fall, environment, the stock of natural capital is further exploited. The uncontrolled exploitation of the environment leads to its degradation and inability to sustain agriculture and livelihood. The immediate and long term effects of this web of relationship are low and unsustainable livelihood outcomes, unsustainable agriculture and environmental degradation.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents According to Challenges to Livelihood Activities

| Challenge                                      | Not a Challenge | Minor Challenge | Major Challenge | Leading Challenge |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| High cost of fishing equipment                 | 150 (75.0)      | 22 (11.0)       | 28 (14.0)       | 9 (5.5)           |
| Low processing capability                      | 147 (73.5)      | 19 (9.5)        | 34 (17.0)       | 1 (0.5)           |
| Poor processing/storage equipment              | 58 (29.0)       | 29 (14.5)       | 113 (56.5)      | 64 (32.0)         |
| High cost of processing/storage equipment      | 93 (46.5)       | 35 (17.5)       | 72 (36.0)       | 34 (17.0)         |
| Water pollution                                | 64 (32.0)       | 22 (11.0)       | 114 (57.0)      | 72 (36.0)         |
| Deforestation                                  | 156 (78.0)      | 31 (15.5)       | 13 (6.5)        | 0 (0.0)           |
| Insufficient land                              | 193 (96.5)      | 5 (2.5)         | 2 (1.0)         | 0 (0.0)           |
| Poor marketing structure                       | 91 (45.5)       | 57 (28.5)       | 52 (26.0)       | 5 (2.5)           |
| Poor/obsolete farm tools                       | 188 (94.0)      | 9 (4.5)         | 3 (1.5)         | 0 (0.0)           |
| Inferior cultivar/breeds of agricultural input | 181 (90.5)      | 12 (6.0)        | 7 (3.5)         | 0 (0.0)           |
| Poor soil structure/fertility                  | 151 (75.5)      | 40 (20.0)       | 9 (4.5)         | 0 (0.0)           |
| Inadequate capital/credit facilities           | 71 (35.5)       | 55 (27.5)       | 74 (37.0)       | 12 (6.0)          |
| Poor extension services                        | 184 (92.0)      | 12 (6.0)        | 4 (2.0)         | 0 (0.0)           |
| Poor transportation network                    | 102 (51.0)      | 55 (27.5)       | 43 (21.5)       | 3 (1.5)           |

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Analysis of the relationship between personal characteristics of the respondents and identified leading challenge to livelihood activities of women is presented in Table 4. The table shows that age of the respondent ( $\chi^2 = 9.397$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) was significantly related to the identified leading challenge to livelihood activities of women in the area. This suggests that women of various age groups in the study area have peculiar challenge and disposition to what constitutes leading challenge to livelihood activities of women in the area. This could be a direct influence of the length of time spent in the area, on their various livelihood activities and the experience gathered overtime. Marital status ( $\chi^2 = 2.346$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), household headship ( $\chi^2 = 3.221$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), years of formal education ( $\chi^2 = 4.043$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), household size ( $\chi^2 = 0.265$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and monthly income ( $\chi^2 = 1.528$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) were not significantly related to identified leading challenge to livelihood activities of women in the area.

Table 4: Analysis of the Relationship between the Personal Characteristics and Identified Leading Challenge to Livelihood Activities of Women in the Area

| Variable                  | $\chi^2$ | cc    | p     | Remarks |
|---------------------------|----------|-------|-------|---------|
| Age                       | 9.397    | 0.168 | 0.044 | S       |
| Marital status            | 2.346    | 0.143 | 0.483 | NS      |
| Household headship        | 3.221    | 0.067 | 0.768 | NS      |
| Years of formal education | 4.043    | 0.107 | 0.611 | NS      |
| Household size            | 0.265    | 0.071 | 0.520 | NS      |
| Monthly income            | 1.528    | 0.048 | 0.092 | NS      |

NS = Not significant

S = Significant at 0.05%

Table 5 shows that there is a significant relationship between the major livelihood activities of the respondents and identified leading challenge ( $\chi^2 = 5.292$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The result suggests that the difficulties encountered in the execution of the major livelihood activity of a respondent influence the leading challenge to the livelihood activities identified by the respondents. The implication is

that as majority of the respondents engage in activities that are dependent on the environment, the identified leading challenge will also be environment oriented. Therefore, if effective and sustainable relief to the challenge is not provided, there is bound to be a continuous exploitation and consequent degradation of the environment.

Table 5. Chi-square Analysis of the Relationship between Major Livelihood Activity and Identified Leading Challenge to Livelihood Activities of Women in the Area

| Variable                  | $\chi^2$ | cc    | p     | Remark |
|---------------------------|----------|-------|-------|--------|
| Major livelihood Activity | 5.292    | 0.211 | 0.025 | S      |

NS = Not significant

S = Significant at 0.05%

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women in Eastern Obolo Local Government Area engaged in multiple activities to make a living. These activities face a lot of challenges, leading to declining livelihood outcomes and unsustainable environment. It is therefore recommended that efforts be made to improve the livelihood portfolios of women in the area to make them sustainable. This could be achieved by controlling water pollution caused by oil exploration and exploitation activities, provision of modern processing/storage facilities and provision of credit facilities at low interest rate. Good roads and a responsive marketing structure should be put in place. Policies should also be directed towards creating enabling environment for diversification to other livelihood activities that are not directly dependent on the environment.

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