

Rural Household Food Security and Coping Strategies in South-West, Nigeria: A Gender Differentials Perspective

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Abstract

Food insecurity remains a thorn in the flesh of most rural communities of Nigeria. Very few government efforts have succeeded in solving the problem of food shortages in rural Nigeria. Most of the previous food insecurity studies focused on rural farming communities without regard to gender issues. Focus on gender differentials in the knowledge of technologies for coping with food security has not yet been properly addressed. Study data were collected with structured questionnaire and observation technique from 126 farm household and analysed using descriptive, food poverty line, and coping strategies use index. Reduce the quantity of meal taken, reducing the number of time to eat, withdraw children from school, borrowing money from friends and relations, occupation diversification, planting of food crops on a small scale of land, purchasing food item on credit, sales of asset such as land, borrow money from bank, attending parties are the coping strategies used by the respondents, it was observed that there are more male headed household than female headed household in the study area, and that there are no significant sex differentials in the use of strategies to cope with food insecurity in south west Nigeria, but men have more control of the use of productive resources.

Keywords: Food security, Coping strategies, Gender Differentials, Rural household in South west, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of food security has been a major concern to the world in recent times; According to FAO(2003), over 8 million people in developed countries about 20 percent of the population, are chronically undernourished this situation is expected to worsen if action is not taken to improve on food security. A high proportion of rural households suffer from malnutrition and other diseases related to nutrition. Women in developing countries play significant roles in maintaining the three pillars of food security- food production, economic access to available food, and nutritional security. But they play these roles in the face of enormous social, cultural and economic constraints. However, the place of gender as a fundamental issue in assuring food security both at national, household and individual levels cannot be overemphasized. This is because increasing attention is now being paid to the gender dimension of poverty and development particularly in relation to the role of women in agricultural processes. Some organizations like the Food and Agricultural Organization-FAO have started talking about the “feminization of agriculture” in the developing world, based on the facts that women represent 66 percent of the economically active population working in the sector and are identified as major providers of food and income for their families and communities in rural areas, while men occupy the remaining 34 percent of the population.

Meanwhile, the word ‘gender’ relates to the socially assigned roles and behaviours of men and women. It is the social meaning of biological sex differences. “It affects the distribution of resources, wealth, work, decision-making and political power, and the enjoyment of rights and entitlements within the family as well as public life”(DAW,1999). While food security is traditionally viewed as having three dimensions which include spatial, temporal, and gender (FCND,1999). Identifying individuals’ household food security is mediated by individual actions and the choices they make in producing food, earning income or acquiring assets, feeding and caring for family members. Furthermore, improving women’s health and nutrition, and their access to education and training opportunities, enhances their human capital as an input to ensuring individual and household food security (FCND, 1999). According to FAO, rural women are responsible for half of the world’s food production and have a prominent role in agriculture at all levels, in home, farm production critical to household maintenance as well as in commercial agriculture mainly oriented to export crops. Differential access to resources and benefits is the fundamental feature of gender analysis, and ensuring equitable access and distribution will enhance food security.

Food is a basic human necessity, its availability (via production and distribution) and accessibility (i.e. affordability) remains a major challenge in developing economies. Food security has a long history as an “organizing principle” for social and economic development (Maxwell and Franken Berger, 1992). Over time, this concept has been operationally defined in a number of ways. In most cases, the definitions include elements of availability (supplies of food), accessibility (both physical and economic), and utilization (physiological

ability to absorb and utilize consumed nutrients) (USAID, 1997). In general food security exist when all people at all time have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their directly needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. According to FAO (2003) Rural household adopt different coping strategy to ensure that they are food secure, most especially among the male headed household and female headed household there are a special aggregate indicator category which serve both as process indicators (reflecting households' mechanisms of access to food in lean periods) as well as outcome indicators. They are widely regarded as early warning indicators of the food security status of vulnerable groups.

Coping strategies vary with, households' baseline situation, the severity of crisis, and with the household's stage in coping with the crisis. For instance coping Strategy Stage Indicators includes: Reduction in amount, frequency, or quality of meals, Borrowing food or purchasing food on credit, Use of famine food, Sales of productive asset such as livestock.

The question to be asked includes;

What is their food security status?

How do men/women cope to food insecurity?

Is there any significant difference in the coping strategies adapted on gender basis?

From the foregoing, the objectives to answering these research questions are as follows

1. Identify the socio-economic characteristics of the respondent.
2. Determine the food security status of male headed household and female headed household heads.
3. Compare the coping strategies among the two households.

METHODOLOGY

Study area: The study area for this research is South-west geopolitical zone in Nigeria while the target population is the households in the area. For the study, three out of the six states making up the zone were selected. These states were Ekiti, Oyo and Osun state. Ekiti State is located between latitudes 7°25' and 8°05'N and between longitude 4°45' and 5°46'N East. The State is bounded to the south of Kwara and Kogi States while it is bounded by Osun State to the west. To the East of Ekiti State is Edo State and to the South is Ondo State. Ekiti State is a landlocked State, having no coastal boundary. The main occupation of Ekiti people is farming. There are 123,000 farm families in Ekiti State, hence the State is agrarian in nature and therefore has many rural settlements.

Oyo State is bounded partly by Ogun State in the south, Kwara State in the north, Republic of Benin in the west while in the east, it is bounded by Osun State. The state covers a total of 27,249km of landmass with a population of 5,591,589. The topography of Oyo state is one of the rolling lowland in the south, rising to a plateau 40metres and above in the north. The vegetation pattern of the state is that of rainforest in the south and guinea savannah in the north. The states are predominantly an agricultural area and most of the inhabitants (about 80%) are farmers. These farmers engaged primarily in the production of food crops and some cash crops being produced in Oyo state.

Osun State is bounded in the West by Oyo State, Ondo and Ekiti States in the East, Kwara State in the North and Ogun in the South. The State runs an agrarian economy with a vast majority of the populace taking to farming. The people of the State are mainly traders, artisans and farmers.

Data Requirements and Sources: The study used primary data collected with the aid of well-structured questionnaires. Open discussions, interviews and physical observation were also employed to complement. Data collected were those on:

- a) Socioeconomic/Demographic Data: Data under this category include-age of household head, gender, marital status, years of formal education, type of occupation, household type, household size, total household income
- b) Information on decision making within the households-Decisions on who provides money for food, the type of food to buy, food to eat, crops to grow, decision on how to spend income generated from proceeds, decision on acquisition of assets, whether the woman is involved at all or not, whether she has access to own private property .
- c) Coping strategies that each household use: reduce the quantity of meal taken and the sales of asset.

Sampling Techniques: A multistage sampling technique was employed for this study. Three states: Ekiti, Oyo and Osun states were selected from the south west geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Three communities popular for farming activities were selected across each of the three states. Forty two respondents were randomly selected and interviewed across communities for each states making an overall total respondents of one hundred and twenty six.

Analytical techniques

(i) Descriptive Statistics: This was employed to analyse the socioeconomic characteristics of the households, This include percentage and frequency tabulations

(ii) Construction of Food Poverty Line: This was done to categorise the respondents into food secure and nonfood secure group using the two-third mean per-capita food consumption expenditure (World Bank, 1986; IFPRI 2001; Oluwatayo, 2005) as the benchmark. Households whose mean consumption expenditure falls below the food poverty line are regarded as being food insecure while those with their expenditure above the benchmark are food secure. Per-capita Food Consumption Expenditure (PCFEXP) = Food Consumption Expenditure/Household Size

Total Per-capita Food Consumption Expenditure (TPCFEXP) = Summation of PCFEXP

Mean TPCEXP = TPCEXP/ Total Number of Households = MTPCEXP

Food Poverty Line (FPL) = $2/3 * MTPCEXP$

(iii) Coping Strategies Use Index (CSUI): This was also employed to access the extent of use of the coping strategies by these households. The formula used to obtain the CSI score was adapted from Islam and Kashem (1999) where they estimated the use of Ethno-veterinary medicine in livestock management and rearing. This was modified to obtain the CSI as:

$CSUI = \frac{3N_1 + 2N_2 + N_3 + N_4}{N_1 + N_2 + N_3 + N_4}$

Where:

CSUI = Coping strategies use index

N1= Number of households using a particular CSI frequently

N2= Number of households using a particular CSI occasionally

N3= Number of households using a particular CSI rarely

N4= Number of households not using any of the Coping strategies.

The CSUI was used in rank order to reflect the relative position of each of the CSI in terms of their use.

Results And Discussion

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

Respondents socioeconomic characteristics- age, gender, marital status, household size, educational status, religion, occupation, were analyzed descriptively and the results are presented in Table 1. The results reveal that the mean age of household head in the study area is 46 years which shows that majority of the respondents could be classified as youth and it is expected that they are more likely to play crucial roles as care takers of household's food and nutrition security.

Household heads distribution by gender reveals that there are more male-headed households (57.1%) than female-headed households (42.9%) showing that the majority of the household were headed by male. Also there are more married household heads (72.2 percent) than single (6.4 percent), divorced (7.9 percent) and widowed (1.6 percent) household heads in the study area. This implies that most of the respondents in the study area are married which means they are responsible, and these also indicate the existences of marital stability in the study area.

Household sizes were grouped into the range of 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, more than 15. The distribution shows that 54% of the respondents fell into the range of 1-5, 39.6% fell into the range of 6-10, and 5.6% of the respondents fell into the range of 11-15, while 0.8 % of the respondents fell the range of 15 and above. This shows that the households' size is fairly large and can contribute to the rise in household consumption especially when the household members are jobless. Majority of the male and female in the study area have at least primary education. This show that majority of the households have low education background. This also implies that the respondents may not have access to government employment and if they have, their salary may not be sufficient to meet their endless need. Meanwhile, household heads distribution by religion indicates that Christianity (71.4 percent) is the predominant religion of the respondents, the next to this is Islam (17.4 percent), traditional worshipers (5.6 percent) while 5.6% of the respondents are in the others, which are neither in the listed religion.

However, in terms of occupational distribution of respondents, farming is the highest employer of labour (47.6 percent), this is closely followed by government salaried job (23.6 percent) while others are engaged in the informal sector. More so, households' distribution by secondary occupation reveals that even for those engaged in Non-farm activities as their primary occupation, they still rely on agriculture as their Secondary income source. This in other words explains how crucial farming activity is in the study area. Also the findings reveals that 24.6% of the respondents earn between N11,000-20,000 while 19.8% of the respondents earn between 21,000-30,000, 15.9% of the respondents earn between N41,000-50,000, 14.3% of the respondents earn between 31,000-40,000 while 12.7% of the respondents earn income less than 10,000 and income greater than 51,000 respectively. This shows that only 28.6% of the respondents can be classified into high socio-economic status, 58.7% of the respondents can be classified into medium socio-economic status while 12.7% of the respondents can be classified into low socio- economic status because they earn low income per month which cannot sustain their family not to talk on achievement food security by their member. based on mode of transportation 38.9% of the respondent's possess cars, 37.3% work with their legs [pedestrian] 20.6% possess

motorcycle while 3.2 posses bicycle.

Table 1: Distribution of Socio-economic characteristics of the selected Respondents

Respondent characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
<30	15	11.9
31-40	38	30.2
41-50	41	32.5
51-60	18	14.3
>61	14	11.1
Total	126	100
Gender		
Male	72	57.1
Female	54	42.9
Total	126	100
Marital status		
Single	10	7.9
Married	91	72.2
Divorced	15	11.9
Widowed	8	6.4
Others	2	1.6
Total	126	100
Household size		
1-5	68	54
6-10	50	39.6
11-15	7	5.6
>15	1	0.8
Total	126	100
Educational status		
Primary education	12	9.5
Secondary education	39	31
Tertiary education	53	42.1
No formal education	22	17.4
Total	126	100
Religion		
Christianity	90	71.4
Islam	22	17.4
African traditional worshiper	7	5.6
Other	7	5.6
Total	126	100
Major occupation		
Farming	9	7.0
Teaching	20	15.9
Civil servant	54	42.9
Petty trader	17	13.5
Fashion designer	6	4.8
Machanic	7	5.6
Others	13	10.3
Total	126	100

Source: Field Survey data, 2011

Estimates Of The Food Poverty Line [Ppl]
 DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY FOOD POVERTY STATUS AND GENDER.

FOOD SECURED			FOOD INSECURE	
GENDER	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
Male	50	62.5	22	47.8
Female	30	37.5	24	52.2
Total	80	100	46	100

Source: Computed from survey data, 2010

Findings in the study area shows that male households are more food secure (62.5) than female households (37.5) in the study areas.

Ranking of Food Insecurity Coping Strategies

The ranking of food insecurity coping strategies is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Ranking of Food Insecurity Coping Strategies by coping strategy adopted

coping strategy	Frequently Used (3)	Occasionally Used (2)	Rarely Used (1)	Not Used (0)	CSUI	% of Households	rank
Reduce the quantity of Meals taken	7	69	31	19	190	8	4
Reduce the number of time to eat	8	62	28	28	176	7.3	6
Sale of asset such as land, jewelries	6	16	24	80	74	3.1	12
Borrow money from friends/relatives	18	55	19	34	183	7.6	5
Cut down expenditure on food items	13	54	26	33	173	7.2	7
Withdraw children from school	0	18	19	88	55	2.3	13
Engage children in hawking	22	12	10	82	100	4.2	11
Solve it spiritually by fasting and praying	20	29	35	42	153	6.3	10
harvesting of food crops from the farm	63	20	11	32	240	10	3
Occupation diversification	69	15	14	28	251	10.4	2
Planting of food crops in a small scale of land.	72	18	4	32	256	10.6	1
Borrow money from banks/cooperatives	19	30	37	40	154	6.4	9
Attending parties	15	44	34	33	167	6.9	8
Total					2406	100	

Source: Field Survey Data, 2011

The ranking was carried out with the aid of a four-point likert scale to score households' responses. These scores are 3, 2, 1 and zero for frequently used, occasionally used, rarely used and not used respectively. Generally, about 13 different coping strategies were very prominent among the available strategies employed. The study indicates that planting food crops on a small scale of land is the most widely used of all the informal coping strategies in the study area, despite the fact that most of the respondents are not full time farmers. This is closely followed by Occupation diversification, because some respondent income is very low and they have to look for another means. This is followed by harvesting food crops from the farm respectively. The respective percentages of households using these strategies are 10.6%, 10.4% and 10%. However, a good number of the respondents 3.1%

resort to selling their assets as means of coping with food security. The overall distribution explains the clearly importance of farming as insurance against food insecurity. Meanwhile, the least used of all the food insecurity coping strategies is withdrawing children from school where only about 2.3% of the respondents indicate its usage.

Conclusion and Recommendation

As revealed by the findings of this study, it is found that the food security status of the respondents is influenced by numbers of socio economic characteristics of the respondents, it is very clear that there is gender inequity in decision-making among the households surveyed and this is impacting negatively on the food security status of households in the study area.

Also, male-headed, small-sized, educated households are more food secure than female-headed, large-sized, uneducated respectively

Based on the findings in this study, the following recommendations will be of optimum usefulness:

- Households in the study area should be educated on the use of contraceptives of other family planning facilities so as to curtail their family size having found that large-sized households were less food secure.
- The rural household should be sensitized on the need to embrace family planning programmed to check mate household size so that consumption and production could be at balanced margin.
- Since some of the respondents are farmers and even though most of the respondents that are not farmers still use farming as their coping strategies, government should help the rural dwellers to increase their production through provision of highly subsidized agricultural input and provision of credit facilities in order to improve household engaging in farming on food security status.
- There should be redistribution of income to favour women more than men since it has been documented that women are better managers of homes and that the more the resources they are in control of the higher the likelihood of the household being food secure.

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