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AVAILABILITY AND USE OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AMONGST RURAL WOMEN IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigates rural women's use of indigenous knowledge in Nigeria, with particular reference to the Isoko ethnic nationality of Delta State. The survey research design was adopted for the study. A questionnaire was designed to collect data from women located in ten rural communities of Isoko South Local Government Area of Delta State that constitute the sample size for this study. Analyses were carried out using frequencies and percentage distributions. Findings reveal an extensive wealth and use of indigenous knowledge in agriculture, health care, child delivery, economic and child care. The study also reveals that majority of rural women dwellers are non-literate because they lack minimum basic education. The findings provide a platform for the development and application of indigenous knowledge for sustainable development in Nigeria

Introduction

Indigenous knowledge is central to Africa's development in all ramifications especially in the rural communities. Africans are endowed with special knowledge with which human development is enhanced. The efficacy of this "special knowledge" cannot be over emphasized and this is best described as indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is traditional knowledge associated with African tradition or culture. It is largely inherent in man. It is not associated with any form of formal learning/training but transmitted or learnt orally. It is associated with oral tradition and highly rooted in African culture. African cultural heritage consists of different cultural values, indigenous knowledge and heritage materials. Indigenous knowledge resides in the heads and on the lips of the custodians and passed down from generation to generation orally from the elderly to the younger. This is different from common sense. Even with the advent of computers, oral tradition remains an important means of preserving and transmitting indigenous knowledge. Oral tradition is the

oldest system of cultural memory (Goucher, Le Guine and Walton, 1998). This is done in form of folklores, folktales, bedtime stories, songs, among others.

In Nigeria, individuals in rural communities especially women are endowed with indigenous knowledge of traditional medicine, land use and management, family healthcare, breeding of food crop species, preservation of seeds and the domestication and use of wild edible plants (Olatokun and Ayanbode, 2009). Women pivotal role in sustainable development in rural communities is evident in their contributions to the family and society at large as wives and mothers. They engage in production and marketing of foodstuff to enhance the local economy.

Women, have been central to the production, processing and marketing of food. They are custodians of biodiversity and knowledgeable in land use and management, child delivery, family planning and health care. Women's contribution to the maintenance of the local economy is made possible through the use of their indigenous knowledge. As observed by Adebobola (2004) 86% of the rural women in Tonkerere Village in Ife Central local Government (South West Nigeria) are herb sellers, with the ability of detecting the medicinal value and viability of local herbs. In India, rural women were able to identify no fewer than 145 species of trees and their uses, while forestry expert were familiar with only 25 species (Shiva and Dankelmann, 2006). This is a reflection of indigenous knowledge inherent in rural women. With the help of indigenous knowledge, women in Burkina Faso carefully collect the fruit, leaves and roots of native plants, like the bark baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata*), red sorrel leaves (*Hibiscus Saddarifa*) Kapok leaves (*Ceiba pentandra*) and tigernut tubers (*cyperus esculentus L*) for use in diet of their families, supplementing the agricultural grain (Wole and Ayanbode 2009).

Rural women also use their indigenous knowledge to improve their livelihoods. Dirrar (2005) mentioned that two women groups operate community biogas plants (non-scientific in approach and nature) in Karnataka region of India. This is for the provision of tap water and light, to all the houses in the village. In Mali, rural women use indigenous knowledge to produce *Jatropha Curcas* oil as raw material and fuel (Hennig, 2002). They use Jatropha curcas for medicine (seeds as a laxative, later to stop bleeding and against infection, leaves against malaria) and for soap production. Jatropha system also helps in erosion control, soil improvement as well as renewable energy. There is no gainsaying the fact that women possess an enormous amount of knowledge about food production and processing, health, child rearing, breeding of food crop species, preservation of seeds and the domestication and use of wild edible plants. In the area of agriculture, rural women use their indigenous knowledge to raise agricultural productivity. Rural women's use of indigenous knowledge in Ethiopia in using oxen to plough land for farming has received wild commendation and applaud from the United Nations.

Indigenous knowledge has shown itself to be an important and effective resource in the life of rural Africa community, not only in the area of science, agriculture and medicine but also in the other areas, such as education, cultural affair e.t.c. The rural woman is greatly endowed with the special knowledge with which activities are carried out and notable progress mode as a wife and mother, to ensure the survival of the family and the society at large. Their domestic activity essentially contributes to the maintenance of the local economy to enhance sustainable development. However, indigenous knowledge has not been properly

mainstreamed into developments projects, especially in Nigeria. Indigenous knowlege has not been given the rightful position in development initiatives. More importantly, rural women as custodians of this knowledge should be recognized and encouraged. It is against this background that this study attempts to investigate the rural women's wealth and use of indigenous knowledge in the development of Nigeria, with particular reference to the Isoko speaking ethic nationality of Delta State.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to investigate the rural women's use of indigenous knowledge in the development of Delta State, Southern Nigeria.

It is aimed at knowing:

- What indigenous knowledge exists among rural women of Isoko ethnic nationality in Nigeria?
- In what areas of life is indigenous knowledge used?
- What are the impacts on developments?

It is hoped that this study will highlight the rural women's potentials and innovation in the use of indigenous knowledge for sustainable development.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research method was adopted for this study. A questionnaire was designed and used for data collection. The population of the study comprised women located in rural communities of Isoko South and North Local Government Areas of Delta State. The ramdom sampling technique was used to select ten (10) rural communities from Isoko South and North Local Government Areas. Isoko ethnic nationality was chosen amongst other ethnic groups in Delta State because it has many rural communities with existence of large population of women with appreciable use of indigenous knowledge to enhance live hood. The questionnaire was administered with the help of 3 research assistants from October-December 2013. Due to the low level of literacy of majority of the rural women, the questionnaire was interviewer- administered. Descriptive statistic was used to analyze data.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Responding rural communities.

S/N	Name of community	No of Respondent	Percentage
1	Uro	45	11.25%
2	Ivrogbor	45	11.25%
3	Orie	45	11.25%
4	Ukpude	45	11.25%

5	Irri	40	10%
6	Ivori	40	10.%
7	Egbo-Igbide	39	9.75%
8	Oviri-Olomoro	35	8.75%
9	Akiewhe	29	7.25%
10	Otor-igho	37	7.25%
	Total	**400**	**100%**

Table 1 above shows rural communities chosen for the study. The frequency of respondents gathered varied from one locality to the other. The respondents were all women.

Table 2: Demographic information of Respondent

Table 2 shows the demographic information of respondents.

Occupation	**No.**	**Percentage**
Farming	214	53.5%
Food Processing	89	22.25%
Petty Trading	42	10.5%
Hair Dressing	20	5%
Tailoring	20	5%
Herb making/ Selling	15	3.75%
Total	**400**	**100%**
Literacy Level		
Can neither read nor write	266	66.5%
Can only read	77	19.25%
Able to read and write	57	14.25%
Total	**400**	**100**
Level of education		

No formal education	266	66.5%
SSCE	79	19.75%
Primary education	55	13.75%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Table 2 above reveals that the major occupation with the highest percentage was farming 214(53.5%) followed by food processing 89 (22.25%), trading 42 (10.5%), hair dressing 20(5%), tailoring 20(5%) and herb making/ selling 15 (3.75%). Majority of the respondents were farmers. On literacy level of the respondents 266(60.5%), can neither read nor write, 77(19.25%) can only read, while only 75(14.5%) were able to read and write showing high level of illiteracy among the respondents. The high percentages of respondents who can neither neither read nor write 266 (66.5%) is a pointer to why majority of them were farmers 214 (53.5%) as presented above. On their reading skill, out of the 266(66.5%) respondents that can read, only 57(14.5%) can read both in Isoko and English languages. The percentage of the respondents that can read only in English language are 15(3.7%), while those that can read only in Isoko language were 42(11.4%), showing that the majority of those who can read only do so in Isoko. On the level of education, of the respondents, a very large proportion 266(66.5%) of the respondents had no formal education. Only a small minority 79(19.75%) completed secondary school education, while 55 (13.75%) of them completed primary education correlating with the literacy and reading skills

Table 3: indigenous knowledge among rural women

Table 3 show a wide range of available indigenous knowledge amongst the Isoko ethnic group.

Indigenous Knowledge	Use
Family health	Fever --*Agbo; herbal leaves include pawpaw, guava, mango,* etc. Stomach ache- *ologbo* mixture. Body pains --*Udeibi* Measles—*Udeibi* mixed with local herbs (*ebe-orise, erhenre, atanene*)
Food processing	*Emoizi*- processing of starch *Igari*-preparation from cassava *Egu* – fufu *Eguole*- pounded yam *Ifoniya*- tapioca
Food preservation	*Eru*—for yams *Aha*—fish drying and spices, corn *Evru* --- smoking of fresh fish *Uvu eri* (made of wood and palm fruits) Used for drying fishes and meat

Fishing	*Uge* (trap) manufactured from palm tree For catching fish
Marriage ceremony	*Oyawho*—circumcision *Esukpo*- excursion
Burial ceremonies	*Ewe ahor*—ceremonial goat slaughtering signalling the end of the burial. *Ukurale*---sharing of properties
Udu'bi (locally made pomade)	Used for the treatment of cold and catarrh in infants.

The respondents mentioned the above indigenous knowledge as been available and use in human areas of life. Through the use of taboo, telling of folks tales, methods of informal training and periodic celebration of traditional festivals, culture is transferred and preserved; daily money contribution (*osusu*) helps to save and lend money; different herbs are collected from the bush, prepared and used to treat or prevent infant's and adult's disease; incision are made around the waist, to enhance birth control. Shifting cultivation is done to enhance renewal of land. Farm pests are controlled by the use of different IK; sun drying is used in preserving majority of the food e.g. *garri, groundnut*, etc

Table 4: Areas of rural women's use of IK
Table 4 below presents frequency distribution of areas of rural women's use of IK.

Areas	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Savings	191	47.75
Family health needs	230	57.5
Food processing	328	82
Lending	203	50.75
cultural preservation	278	69
Women empowerment	112	28
Economic growth	141	35.25
Birth control	112	28
Food preservation	151	37.75
Family nutrition	214	53.5

The responses to the contributions of rural women's use IK to the development of Delta State are presented in Table 4. These contributions were stated in terms of the development variables in different areas of life. The highest contribution of IK to development amongst the Isoko ethnic nationality was in terms of availability of food 328 (82.0%), followed by cultural promotion 278 (69%), provision of good health care 230 (57.5%), reduction of infant mortality 112 (28%), food preservation 151 (37.75%), women empowerment 112 (28%), economic growth 141 (35.25%), etc. Only about 50.5% were able to give some explanations to their responses. Farming activities are done with the use of IK, which is less expensive resulting in more crop production and consequently more supply of food. The alternative, less expensive and readily accessible means or methods of preventing and treating diseases have increased chances of survival of both infants and adults. The sales of farm products and trading activities have made for income generation with which other necessities of life are

possessed. It is the organisation of women group that has enhanced mobilization and support to strengthen women's participation in politics, especially at the grassroots (rural communities).

Table 5: Impact of rural women's use of IK on the development of the communities
Table 5 presents frequency distribution of the impact of IK use on the development of the communities and Delta State.

Impact	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Availability of food	338	84.5
Cultural promotion	224	56
Provision of healthcare	191	47.75
Reduction of infant mortality	121	30.25
Social stability	152	38
Women empowerment	106	26.5
Economic growth	96	24
Poverty reduction	112	28
Political stability	82	20.5
Resources management	71	17.75

The respondents were asked to rank their choices (1 – 10) indicating the most important and the least contributions. Availability of food ranked first. Cultural promotion ranked second provision of good healthcare ranked third (Table 5). It is believed that these results are strongly indicative of the development of Delta State. The last four contributions –economic growth, poverty reduction, political stability and resource management ranked lowest; probable because majority of the respondents were not able to really measure the level of their contributions in these areas. Moreover, many of them believed that their savings base or income was too small to have had a high significant impact on the economy of Delta State. To them, it was only enough to enhance their survival. There is an indication that the majority of the respondents are poverty stricken. It should be noted that lack of good water supply, good food, inadequate treatment and equipments, lack of education or employment and discrimination against women are some of the numerous factors that contribute to poverty. For poverty reduction (ranked 8 out of 10), shows that majority of the respondents have not been able to combat all factors of poverty except food supply. Furthermore, one can equally suggest that the ninth rank of political stability (as a contribution), shows how indecisive majority of the respondents were; may be because they have not experienced political crisis in their localities or were not interested in politics. Only a small proportion of those who were farmers might have indicated their contribution to resource management in the area of land use.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The level of literacy of the rural women were so low that majority of them cannot read nor write. There is an indication therefore; that the socio-economic conditions of the communities where the rural women dwell coupled with their high level of illiteracy dictated their choice of occupation, which is largely farming. Apart from the indigenous knowledge like *Agbo, Osusu* wshich are generally used by all, other IK are used by rural women based on choice and as major occupation demands. In spite of the very small population of rural women who are herb sellers, majority of them possess and use IK of traditional medicine. This is an indication that they use herb as preventive medicine and as alternative means of treating diseases. The use of herbs as preventive medicine has contributed to reduction of infant mortality. Malaria and measles are the major diseases that kill infants especially in the rural areas. Social stability is also enhanced by the use of taboo. To them, respect and fear associated with the taboo has brought about peaceful and harmonious living with low level of social conflicts.

Rural women use of indigenous knowledge is pivotal to development in African countries and as such need to be acknowledged and given priority in our developmental agenda. To this end the following recommendations becomes necessary:

- ✓ Effort should be made to increase the literacy level of the rural women, through adult education programmes with a view to documenting IK.
- ✓ development stakeholders should encourage and support the rural women to confidently use their Indigenous Knowledge by ensuring their participation in the development process;
- ✓ information professionals should gear effort towards capturing, storing and disseminating IK through the use of Information Technology;
- ✓ Development stakeholders need to study and integrate IK into policymaking and extension practice.

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