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## **Rich but Poor”: Rural Women Condition and Status in Some Rural Areas of Kano, Nigeria**

Ibrahim Badamasi Lambu<sup>1</sup> and Bilkisu Yayaji Ahmed<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Geography, Faculty of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Bayero University Kano.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, Gombe State University

Correspondence : ([iblambu@yahoo.com](mailto:iblambu@yahoo.com)) 08036039266

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the cultural issues affecting rural women livelihood and their functional roles, as housewives. The aim of the paper is to evaluate the various occupational options that are available to women in some rural areas of Kano state with a view to ascertaining the variation of occupations in relation to the cultural norms of the people involved. Livelihood options were identified; hitches, risks and inconveniences as well as people responses were sought. It is a longitudinal research that involved the use of all types of data. Demographic characteristics of the women especially their ages and preferences of livelihood options were captured. Structured and In-depth interviews were employed for the quantitative and qualitative data. The study revealed the presence of indoor livelihoods option such as weaving, knitting, food selling and selling eatery items at homes are the available options in response to the Purdah cultural system. Despite vast resources, poverty affects women due to gender segregation. Many (73%) respondents opined that income generation is marginal because the capital is too low commensurate to the laboring nature of their occupations, burden and risk involved are also issues of concern. Some women described problems of domestic upkeep as a major factor affecting the growth of women wealth. Women economic assistance and support from their husbands, parents, relatives and family members are not adequate. The study made some revealing discovery that most husbands financially overburden their wives who are engaged in some occupations thereby retarding any perceived success. Women exposure to the sun and rain is traumatizing to their psychology, mental and moral well-being. The recommendation of this study includes empowerment and moral support by both family members and the community to alleviate the suffering of women who because of cultural beliefs and practices are turned to second-class citizens despite abundant rural resources.

**Keywords:** Rural, livelihood, preference, poverty, preference, segregation and resource.

### **Introduction**

Culturally human beings are fashioned into assigned varied sociocultural roles based on age, sex, class or status. “Our *fingers are not equals* “is an adage erroneously used for deception to discourage struggle for betterment of individuals. Human beings respond to things based on the meaning that things have for them due to significance of culture. Fear of seclusion, rejection or segregation composes people to certain code

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of living far beyond their choice and that is why women should be seen through the lenses of culture. The meaning culture attached to women made the society to handle them as precious assets that are kept under safe and lock condition (purdah). Even at the sharp-edge of poverty, males in the society agree to provide to their wives and regard their incapability in that direction, a shame and abomination. The cultural meaning escalates to the point that empowered women (by virtue

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of exposure or prestige) suffers some social stigma, exclusion and in some cases even to the extent of societal rejection. Livelihood options of women in the rural areas as the culture preserving pot of the society are under the decision of husbands. Empowerment for women is helpful towards eradication of poverty among families due to the support a woman gives to her children, husband or the entire family. Despite availability of resources in the rural areas domain (being the food basket of the society), the pangs of

working at home and extra domestic domains. Combinations of livelihood resources (different livelihood assets) are resulting in the ability of people to follow combination of strategies. Occupations available to women represent the basic need in the society especially in the rural settings. It is a platform upon which women's livelihood may be built into livelihood goals; it can be emphasized that everything that goes towards creating that livelihood can be thought of as a livelihood asset. For majority of women especially in the rural areas, life remain a drudgery with a host of problems and challenges in their various role as wives, mothers, care-givers, farmers, artisans and traders (ibid). The livelihood needs of the men and women are not always the same due to the culturally differentiated roles, responsibilities and resources available. The condition of women in the rural areas needs urgent attention from every segment of the society because they play their biological roles as well as extra cultural obligations despite unfriendly environmental settings. It is evidently acknowledged and incorporated in the United Nations Millennium Development goal (MDGs) (UN 2005). Nation member states have pledged to promote gender equality in primary and secondary education at all levels by 2015. The roles and contribution of women in

poverty is too severe by worsening the already impacted poor quality living condition such as foods, health and shelter. Rural household in Nigeria usually cope with both poverty and increase fluctuation in income. As rural women engage in a number of ventures including cultivation, rearing of animals and livelihood diversification, which enables them to attain sustainable chores, women in rural areas also, contribute to increase their household income as well as sustain families by w

development have never been given proper attention in the past. With recent agitations by women activist like the Feminists, gender studies and education are now attracting some priority. Women suffer from domestic labour food preparation. The study will among other things identify the available livelihood options and problems affecting women in the study area. The paper like its predecessors, adopts Tofa LGA due to its proximity with the metropolitan city of Kano where livelihood options may be available due to dual marketability of the area ( internally and the neighboring city). Secondly, Tofa town itself is a typical rural settlement where majority of the occupants engage in primary economic activities. Also the paper has interest in the family relationship between couples, and personal belonging of either of the couples aimed at understanding the sociocultural fulcrum of the people.

### **The Study area**

Tofa LGA is located has an attribute of location approximately between latitude 12° 17N and longitude 7°52E in the north east of Kano state Nigeria. It lies 10 kilometer away from metropolitan Kano along Gwarzo road. The total land mass of the LGA is 210.8 KM<sup>2</sup>. The LGA is tangentially criss crossed by Watari River a tributary to river Chalawa in Kano state. It is characterized by agricultural



The climatic is classified as tropical

Unguwar rimi, Janguza, Yanoko and Wangara towns.

### **Research methods**

This section explains the types, sources and stages in data collection. There are two types of data in the study, which includes quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data included number of people employable by an occupation, incomes, number of occupation, number of people engaged in each occupation etc. The qualitative data in this study include the choices and women preferences, satisfaction and meanings by individuals and groups in the study area. The primary sources of data in this paper include the data from respondents during interviews and questionnaires in various households on their livelihood strategies and options which they are involved in to earn a living. Record of occupations, jobs and services performed in the area as well as incentive and assistance from community services department of the LGA will be the secondary source. The instruments in the study include questionnaires, interviews, Digital Cameras, Recording Tape and writing materials.

The 19 wards were selected through convenient sampling. Random sampling of 450 people was made according to the sizes of the wards. For administration of interviews and questionnaires, 250 and 200 were respectively delivered. A purposive sampling technique was adopted in visiting the Department of Community services of the LGA to identify various occupations and record of assistance so far given to the rural women in the area. Similarly, the same approach was adopted in each ward, the village head was used in getting the name and address of women who are engaged in any occupation. This approach is considered for many reasons among which include an idea of getting approval and permission by

community leaders as well as a way of getting introduction and acceptance to the community (Lambu 2013). For subsequent treatment of the samples, snowballing process of sampling is adopted. The snow ball can facilitate easier contact with relevant respondents because most people especially women are often aware of their co occupants due to bilateral relationship

### **Results and discussions**

This section is dedicated to presentation of various findings of the study from both interviews and questionnaires. Despite some hitches encountered in the field such as anticipation of respondents to receive some assistance, show of annoyance due to failed promises of assistance by Government and NGOs, the data collection was successful. The pathways described above greased and smoothed the entire exercise. The traditional rulers attached some guides who introduced the research team to the respondents. In some localities, announcement was made and mandating the cooperation of all and sundry.

### **Level of educational attainment**

Attempt was made to look into the educational status of the respondents at least to ascertain the literacy level of the rural women. The study considers ability to read and write with comprehension in any language as literacy. Sizeable number of women attended primary education or Arabic-Islamic educational institution (*Islamiya*) schools hence some can read and write either in Hausa or Arabic language. Quite very few attended secondary schools hence some are capable of reading and writing in English. From the table1 it shows that educational background of the respondents are mostly primary school 26%, while Qur'anic Education with 60%, 12% passed through secondary school while 2% have higher institution certificate like H.I.S, Diploma and NCE. The implication of this

educational status is an indication of the fact that 86% of the respondents are full time housewives who can only be supported by indoor means of livelihood or to live under the fate of their husband solely for living no matter how impoverished the husbands might be. In this type of population, the type of empowerment needed most is small scale trading because due to the low level of literacy, majority cannot manage heavy financial investment. The result is also a testimony for very poor market potentiality of the population. In other word, the people can only support lower levels of goods and services. Any program meant for the people must be through the culture of the people using religious scholars, local dialects and through traditional institutions in order to break the conservative nature of rural live. The types of schools attended by the respondents are presented in Figure 2

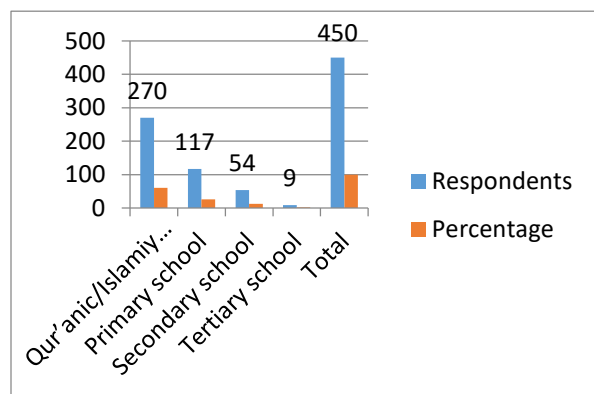


Figure 2: The educational attainment of respondents  
Source: Fieldwork 2015.

### Nature of income of the respondents

The study gathered the ways by which the respondents obtain their income in the area. From the Table 2, it shows that the nature of income of the respondents, which comprises of erratic income for 73.5% from the occupations which are used for other expenses to improve the well-being of the family or contribution during ceremonies

(Gudmmawa), while regular daily income earners are 24% mostly wives of civil servants and business men who are given money on a daily basis for the upkeep of the family. A few women fall within the monthly regular income earners with just 2.5% these are categories of women engaged in domestic services in the homes of rich individuals who pay them on monthly basis. Table 1 is an indication of the population characterized by irregular income with a high probability of uncertainty. Almost three-quarters of the women in the area are living under the fate of uncertainty by implication because even their husbands are within the category of casual labourers who scout daily for jobs. Issues of feeding, health, and daily needs are at stake.

Table 2: Nature of income earning of Respondents

Sources of income	Respondents	Percentage
Erratic or Non regular earners	331	73.5
Monthly regular earners	11	2.5
Daily regular earners	108	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2015.

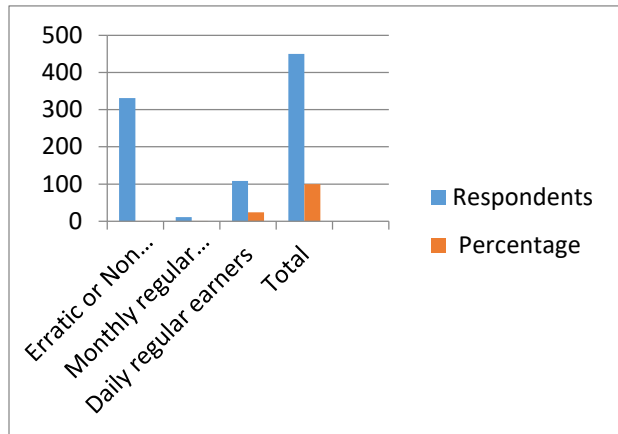


Fig.2: Nature of Income Accruing to women  
Source: Field Survey, 2015.

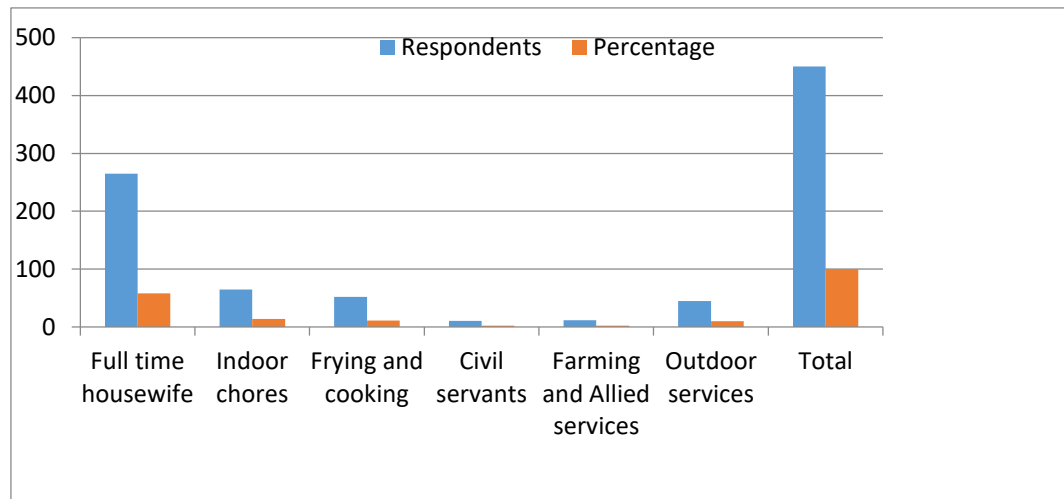
### Livelihood status of the respondents

The result of the study from both interviews and questionnaires depicted an amazing scenario. The data show that the status of the respondents are mainly mostly full time

the only options available to female's remains the chores that males regard too derogatory to alternatives. Only 10% of the women are engaged in outdoor services and they are women of advanced age, have no husbands and no relatives to sustain their living. The outdoor activities usually constitute collection of firewood in the bushes, dehusking and hawking of milk and butter (Nono da mai). Majority of women in this category are not happy with their situation because apart from the social stigma of being out-poured, the income is not commensurate with the daily trekking and hard laboring as well as the risks involved. Could they be

housewives with 58.4%, some are engaged in indoor chores at rich people homes with 14.3%, while few are into domestic services like frying or cooking services 11%. This shows that majority of the women in this place are complete housewives of which all their livelihoods are from their husbands. Over half the population of women in the study rural areas are dependently supported by the income of their spouses who are or are not capable of satisfying their basic needs like food, clothing, health and a times shelter. It is an indication that over 50% of rural women in the area cannot make decision on what, when, where, why and how to buy even if it is for their own personal needs. This may worsen women's occupations further as the potential buyers are males who may due to various reasons (including culture) choose to patronize their male counter parts. It means participate in and it is left for the women to engage in because they have no other supported, these category of women would choose to be camped at home no matter how meager the income. The civil servants in the area are so negligible and insignificance to create any impact. They are women of junior cadre who teach in primary schools and Midwives at village dispensaries. Pathetically the area is just a second home to them because it is marriage that brought them there; they have little sense of belonging and therefore share little or have no regard for the rural women's plights.





**Figure 3: Livelihood of rural women**  
Source: Field Survey, 2015

### Women's choice of livelihood options

Most women in the study area are more contented with being full time housewives. They described earning income through other options as tedious, non-rewarding and stressful. *'If your husband realizes that you are making #100 in a day, he can allow you to take care of domestic problem of #150. It means your capital is declining by #50 and before you know it you are already indebted'* said a respondent in the area. From 250 respondent interviewed, over 200 are of the opinion that it is the responsibility of men to take care of the family so they do not consider engaging in any type of occupation, since their husbands are in charge of sustaining buying cosmetics, Jewelries and so on. *I am trading at home but for my own benefit, since polygamous wife responded. About 22.5% responded that the upkeep of their homes is collective responsibility of all, so they are engaged in other occupations to help their husbands. 'They take care of us, handling us like a precious asset and even denying themselves many things for our own sake; we need to show that we are grateful. We need them like they need us, women must assist their husbands in everything because without*

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their livelihood. *Even if I have money, my husband is responsible for the upkeep of the family, so I cannot trouble myself now* added another respondent. A bitter response from one that attended secondary school said *'we cook for the family, cater for the children and even the husband, so all these are not enough? If they say that they are tired of taking the responsibility, let them come and cook, the women can then go to the farm and work, is that what you mean?'* About 20 women (4%) showed desire to engage in other livelihood options but not for assisting in the upkeep of their homes rather to help them in solving personal problems like contribution during ceremonies (Gudunmawa or Ajo) or *he (husband) has money to marry another woman, I cannot spare a naira for his sake, a them we are nothing'* contributed another respondent. An amazing finding on this regard is the response by some women (21.2%) describing their opinion that they prefer to have alternative livelihood options instead of depending on their husbands. One responded said that *'one must prepare for the rainy day; your husband can be sick, die or part with you! Remember you started living without him, you may also have to live one*

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*day without him so you should have an alternative before it is late!’*

**Table 4: Choice of livelihood options by women in the area**

Options	Respondents	Percentages
Full time housewife	111	44.4
Indoor occupation	56	22.5
Outdoor occupation	53	21.2
Total	250	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

### Demographic variations and the choice of livelihood

The adoption of the theory of symbolic interaction proved to be meaningful / relevant to this paper. Women of lower age from 14 to 24 years are reluctant to show any desire or even appreciate the value for engaging in other occupations. The reason is just obvious, due to the conspicuous nature and their tender age, the husbands put extra care in maintenance and upkeep of the homes and hence needing virtually nothing in life so that is why they remain full house wives. Around these ages, the number or size of the family is manageable hence; the expenses are within the range a husband can satisfactorily discharge. Women at those ages are treated so goldly that 87% of the husbands refused giving approval for interview with their wives. It was when some realized that the interview was holding in their presence before they allowed the wives to remain and respond to our questions. At some instances, a female research Assistant was used in interviewing the women especially in the Fulani areas like Yanoko, Gajida and Dindere. Tender aged ladies regarded some occupations as derogatory, show down or even a humiliation of personality. Cultural seasoning butter made from Shea nut (Daddawa) is one of the hated options among ladies. On their preferences, the *New arrivals* like light and fashionable indoor occupations like knitting, weaving or selling snacks to children who are frequently with them especially new Brides.

Occupations practiced by medium-age class women who are within 25 to 46 ranges from selling of cooked food (like Rice and Beans) at home, Frying of Bean’s cake (Kosai and Awara) or selling of cooking materials like salt, sugar, fresh vegetables etc. The mothers of higher ages who according to this study are mostly widows aged 47 years and above are easy-goers who are ready to take the available jobs rather than the desirable ones. Some are making Pap (Koko), Gruel (Kunu), Local Bread (Gurasa) and so on. Women of 60 years and above do partake in activities like Ground nut cake and oil (Kuli da mai) and Shea butter seasoning (daddawa). Some even trek outdoors to hawk and sell their materials by themselves especially if they do not have a girl to assist them in the sale.

**Table 5 Variation of opinion on livelihood option**

Age classes	Types of option	Respondents	Percentages
14 - 24	Design and fashion	35	14
25 - 35	Knitting and weaving	64	25.6
36 - 46	Cooked food	76	30.4
47 – above	Frying	75	30

Source: Field Survey, 2015

It is not out of place to seek the indulgence of the reader that it was after some major findings were achieved, that the research decided to involve some husbands in the

study to serve as triangulation or something of that nature. About 50 husbands were interviewed especially those that were reluctant to allow their wives to be interviewed. Interestingly, 60% are of the opinion that they want shoulder the responsibilities of their houses. Majority described assistance of wife for home upkeep as a slap on their face. *Only stupid husband can live his wife to buy the needed items at home, in fact that person is not a man and cannot control the house* said one respondent. On the issue of allowing women to go for outdoor occupations, many men declined negatively emphasizing the religious injunction on Purdah (seclusion) of married women. Exceptional instances were obtained at Janguza where 6 respondents agreed to allow their wives to work outside their homes. On close observation, the study learn that the habit may not be unconnected with the effect of a neighbourhood with a Military Barrack at Janguza who are culturally heterogeneous and their wives are engaged in outdoor occupations.

### Conclusion

It can be concluded with emphasis that poverty and cultural restrictions affect women's livelihood options in rural areas of Tofa LGA. The environment had conditioned the women to adopt and adapt themselves to live within culture-friendly occupations even if the options are not profitable Age affects women socioeconomic roles and responsibilities in the rural environment. Occupations are being patronized by women based on their age cadre due to cultural and personal choices and preferences in the rural domain.

Western education in the rural environment is at its because majority of rural women only attend primary schools if at all, the study was not able to sight an indigenous women

graduate that is a female with an academic degree.

### Recommendations

- i. The study recommends in strong terms that the Government should intensify efforts towards provision of education to the rural women as well as enlightenment campaigns should be vigorously given priority so that life of the poor rural women and the entire families can improve and become more meaningful
- ii. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like WOFAN and its allied need to come to the aid of rural women in areas of education and as well as training them in hand crafts, small scale enterprises and so on. This can alleviate the suffering of many families especially women who are the natural care-givers to children and even to their husbands.
- iii. The males need to relax some of the restrictions and allow their girl child to attend schools as well as to allow them to partake in gainful business both indoors and beyond. Women's success is the family's success hence women need to be nurtured and uplifted so that happy families are cultured for better living.
- iv. Women on their side should try to understand their capabilities, potentialities and resourcefulness so that hard work, dedication and industry are incorporated in their life styles to face the challenges of the environment and break all barriers that impede the development of rural life.

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