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Gender Utilization of Forest Products among Rural Dwellers in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study specifically determined male and female's level of utilization of forest products among rural dwellers in Osun State, Nigeria through the instrumentality of gender lens. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used in selecting a total of 240 respondents. Structured interview schedule and Focus Group Discussion Guide were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential tools. The results show that the mean level of utilization of forest products for male respondents was 266.99 ± 70.31 , while that of female respondents was 248.23 ± 72.04 (with a maximum obtainable score of 747). The results of t-test show that calculated t-value of 2.042 was higher than the critical t-value of 0.042 at $p \leq 0.05$ with 238 degrees of freedom. This result implies that there was a significant difference in the utilization of forest products by male and female respondents. The Focus Group Discussion results show that male respondents have favorable disposition in their utilization of economically viable forest products than females. This in turn has created a source of financial advantage through a robust economic engagement of males in the study area. However, females have always been at the receiving end of natural resource policies which tend to favor males at their detriment. This in turn has hindered sustainable utilization of forest products in the study area. In conclusion; there was a significant difference in the level of utilization of forest products by male and female respondents. The result of this statistical analysis indicates that the calculated t-value of 2.042 is higher than the critical t-value of 0.042 at 0.05 level of significance with 238 degree of freedom. Hence, the study seeks attention in addressing this inequality by engendering policy frameworks which tends to focus on gender equality in order to ensure sustainable forest resource utilization as a panacea for economic development.

Key words: Forest Products, Gender, Rural Dwellers, Gender Disaggregation, Utilization.
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Introduction

Forest resources are highly valued productive resources among rural dwellers in the African continent. This is due to the fact that rural people see forests and their resources as wealth creating and livelihood supporting assets (Adebayo *et al.*, 2010). Ehiagbanare (2007) reported that forests are known to be crucial to the welfare of males and females, and play a key role in climate and water cycles control, among other things. The people living in forests depend on them for survival in a number of ways. These include the provision of food, medicine, fuel-wood, shelter, clothing, timber, construction materials, etc. It is documented in literature that gender disparities in rights constrained the set of choices available to females in many aspects of life, often profoundly limiting their potential to partake in or benefit from all forms of development (Ijaiya, 2000). Hence, females in rural communities of the country command less variety of productive resources than males, especially land and forest resources. Also, there has been no empirical

evidence that males and females have equitable access to forest products in Nigeria. Furthermore, literature has revealed that in Nigeria females face unfavorable land tenure system that tend to deny them long term access to land for cultivation and harvesting of timber from natural forests, even as members of land holding communities of Africa (Osemeobo, 2004). To this extent, the objectives were established in line with gender disaggregation of the personal and socio-economic characteristics of male and female respondents and the level of utilization of forest products by rural male and female dwellers in Osun State, Nigeria.

Methodology

This study was conducted in Osun State. It is situated in the South-Western region of Nigeria. The study population comprised males and females in all the rural Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Osun State that made use of forest products from which the study sample was drawn. The study was carried out purposively in Ife/Ijesa agro-ecological zone of Osun State because of the availability of natural open forests. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used in selecting respondents. At the first stage, four rural local government areas (LGAs) having natural open forests were purposively selected viz: Ife South, Atakumosa East, Obokun and Oriade LGAs. At the second stage, three rural communities from each of the LGAs were randomly selected. At the third stage, twenty respondents (10 males and 10 females) were purposively interviewed since it was difficult to know the population size for gender equality and fairness in each of the rural communities through accidental sampling technique to give a total of 240 respondents.

Results and Discussions

Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Results of this study show gender disaggregated ages of respondents. Majority of the male respondents (66.7%) and female respondents (72.5%) fell within the age range of 30-60 years. The mean age of male respondents was 50.3 years with a standard deviation of 11.7, and that of female respondents was 43.9 years with a standard deviation of 10.8. This indicates that a good number of people involved in the utilization of forest products were both active youths and the weak adults respectively. This is in contrary to the findings of Odebiyi and Ogunjobi (2003) who reported that majority of exploiters of forest products (NTFPs) were within the age group 31-40 in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State. Many of the male respondents (58.3%) and majority of the female respondents (69.2%) were Christians, while 41.7 per cent of male and 30.8 per cent of female respondents respectively were Muslims. Adereti (2005) reported that most of the rural females who have access to and control over productive resources were Christians as this is significant because the type of work that can be done by the Christian females may differ from that of the Muslim females. Muslim rural males and females may not be allowed to perform specific activities in the area of agriculture and forestry such as piggery or even field work. This is in conformity with the assertion of Atte (2010) that the attitude of people towards forest conservation on one hand and its utilization on the other hand depends mostly on their belief system, cultural disposition, level of awareness, age, sex differences, and religious affiliation among others.

Level of Utilization of Forest Products

Results in Figure 1 show that many of the male respondents (55.8%) and female respondents (53.3%) moderately utilized forest products. The mean score for the level of utilization of forest products for male is 266.99 with a standard deviation of 70.32, while that of female respondents is 248.23 with a standard deviation of 72.04. The results of this finding are in tandem with the following reports by different researchers in the field of forestry; Emphasis has been placed on the fact that the knowledge, roles and skills of rural males and females differ with respect to forest utilization and management (Agarwal, 2009; Bechtel, 2010; Hecht, 2007; Mai *et al.*, 2011; Peach, 2011; Rocheleau and Edmunds, 1997). Previous researches have suggested that while the specific roles and responsibilities of males and females fluctuate across regions and cultures, they often follow similar broad gender divisions of labor (Bechtel, 2010; Mai

et al., 2011). For instance, males are typically reported to manage and use natural resources for cash-crop based agriculture, hunting, logging, construction, and the harvest of a smaller portfolio of high value forest products for sale (Cavendish, 2000; Shackleton et al., 2001; Shively, 1997).

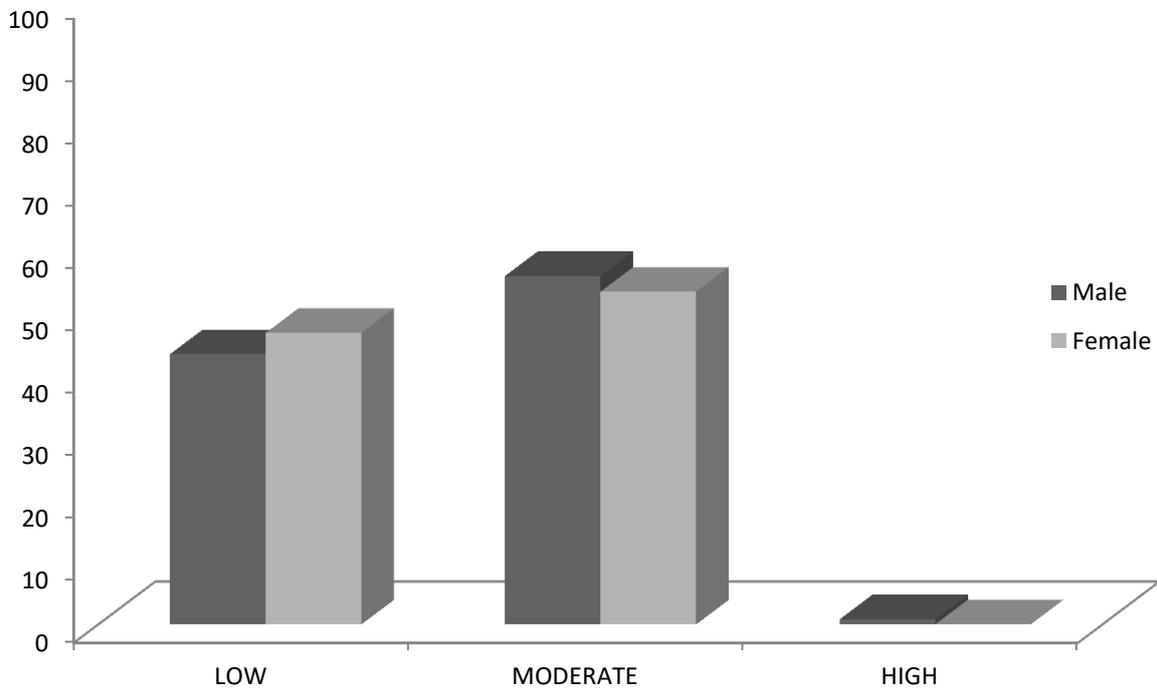


Fig. 1: Distribution of male and female respondents based on level of utilization of forest products

Source: Field Survey, 2015

The results in Table 1 indicate that the calculated t-value of 2.042 is higher than the critical t-value of 0.042 at 0.05 level of significance with 238 degree of freedom. This implies that there is a significant difference between the level of utilization of forest products by males and females in the study area. The excerpt from the FGD session held at Oloruntedo community, Atakumosa East LGA buttressed the findings:

We males are the ones that always use timber for different purposes, especially construction work and trade.....Male participants.

We females usually use the branches of felled trees and saw dust from the saw-mill to cook at home, as well as charcoal.....Female participants.

Some of we females also trade in timber products but not as much as males do because males have the capacity than females in terms of strength and money.....Female participants.

Table 1: Independent t-test Analysis of the Significant Difference of Gender on Level of Utilization of Forest Products

VARIABLES	N	MEAN DIFFERENCE	SD. ERROR	T
Male	120	18.77	9.19	2.042*
Female	120			

Significant at .05 level; df = 238; Critical t = 0.042

Source: Field survey, 2015.

Conclusion and Outlook

The regime of diversification should be made gender responsive to connect with the forest sector, since it provides the ground for agriculture through several services to boost productivity of rural male and female farmers in order save the country the cost of importation of agricultural commodities and other forest products. While the adoption of some models of community forestry practices in Nigeria which include; agroforestry, afforestation programme, taungya system, wood lot, forest homestead, shelterbelt or wind break, silvipasture, urban forestry and joint forest management are encouraged, we must never neglect the issue of gender to realizing the goals for which these practices were established since the fundamental roles taken up in forestry activities by males and females as discussed in this work are crucial to their socio-economic well-being.

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