

Political Factors Affecting Livelihood Strategies of Rural Households in Southeast Nigeria

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Abstract: Several variables that are endemic in the fabrics of political arrangements in Nigeria tend to constitute road blocks to sustainable livelihoods in rural Nigeria. This study analysed the political factors affecting rural household livelihoods in Southeast Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study identified the predominant rural household livelihoods and analysed the political factors affecting rural household livelihoods in the study area. With the aid of a structured and validated interview schedule, data were collected from a sample size of 180 household-heads selected in the study area using a multistage sampling procedure. The statistical tools used in data analysis included mean, frequency, percentage and factor analysis. The result shows that the predominant rural household livelihoods in southeast Nigeria included crop farming (mean = 3.47), livestock farming (mean = 3.13), farm labour (mean = 2.84) and farm product processing (mean = 2.82), petty trading (mean = 3.13), remittances from relatives (mean = 2.70) and civil service (mean = 2.58). The political factors affecting rural household livelihoods in the study area were lack of continuity in government development programmes (mean = 3.42), lack of government presence and attention in communities in terms of development projects (mean = 3.40), irresponsible lifestyle of elected representatives in government (mean = 3.42), poor targeting and miscarriage of government development programmes and policies (mean = 3.39), exploitative government policies such as unfavourable taxes, subsidy removal on farm inputs, land reforms etc (mean = 3.36), marginalisation of some communities in government affairs (mean = 3.24), lack of social welfare policies (mean = 3.28), insensitivity of government to the plight of people in communities (mean = 3.42), political upheavals (3.36). Factor analysis result showed 2 major social factor loadings affecting livelihood strategies of households in the study area as ineffective rural development implementation policy and inadequate social security policy. It is concluded that political factors affected rural household livelihood in Southeast Nigeria. It is therefore recommended that sustainable programmes on political reforms and value re-orientation should be carried out in Nigeria.

Keywords: Political factors; rural livelihoods, social security.

1. INTRODUCTION

The last two decades of the 20th century will remain historic as a period of momentous change in the Nigerian economy orchestrated by various forms of political maneuver, shift and experimentation on various policies in governance guided by capitalist ideology. This period was characterized by the burden of servicing and rescheduling external debts, stringent fiscal policies such as Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), reduction in capacity utilization, hyper-inflation and the challenge of providing for the developmental and livelihood needs of the citizenry. Consequently, livelihoods of the citizenry were seriously compromised resulting to out migration of household members in search of “greener pastures”. At the national level, Nigeria has continued to experience a vicious migration pattern of its nationals unprecedented in

modern nation states. Out-migration of household members has created cracks in many rural Nigerian family structures with attendant dysfunctional implications on internal patriarchal authority within rural households and community leaderships.

The impact of the above trends on the livelihood of rural households is enormous. Amidst high levels of material uncertainty and survival risks in Nigeria, it has been indicated that about 70% of Nigerian population are still living in rural communities (Fadiji, 2006). The prevailing livelihood strategies and structures adopted by this vast population have been at the centre of many development programme and occupying an important niche in many research and scholarly efforts in recent times. According to Tamuno *et al* (2007), livelihoods are means and processes by which people earn a living and comprise the capabilities and assets of individuals or family units. Livelihood structures and patterns are complex and derived from a combination of interlinked income earning activities which varies enormously according to opportunities, constraints and preferences. Similarly, the decision and choice of activity and/or combination of activities is complex with variations across households.

While some depend on farming, others depend on non-farming but some depend on a combination of farming and non-farming livelihood activities. However, the benefits accruing from the dependency on farm and non-farm livelihood strategies by a particular household cannot be over-emphasized. Working in different activities has helped to spread risks and manage uncertainty especially when such activities engaged in do not rely on the same resources. To many other households, diverse livelihood strategies serve as a measure to cope with insufficiency arising from shortcomings and failures in a major livelihood means.

The foregoing arguments therefore called for a research to identify livelihood strategies of rural households and analyze the political factors affecting livelihood strategies of rural households in Southeast Nigeria

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in southeast Nigeria, situated east of River Niger. The population of the study was composed of all rural household heads in the study area. The sample size of 180 respondents was selected from the population using a 5-stage random sampling procedure. The stages involved a random selection of 3 States out of the 5 States in southeast Nigeria; 3 zones; 6 local government areas; 18 communities and 10 household heads from each of the selected communities. Data were collected with the aid of a structured questionnaire. The responses were measured using on a 4-point likert-type rating scale, where: strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2 and strongly disagree = 1. The values of the scale (4, 3, 2 and 1) were summed up to obtain 10 with a mean value of 2.50 used as a decision rule for accepting any item as livelihood strategy in the study area. Data analysis was done with the use of frequency, mean and varimax rotated factor analysis. The extracted variables with co-efficient of 0.50 and above were used to rename the major factors according to Ikurekong (2005).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rural Household Livelihoods in the study area:

Entries on Table 1 revealed crop farming (mean = 3.47) as rural livelihood strategy in the study area. This result agrees with previous findings, which identified crop farming as the most important livelihood strategy among rural households (Amao *et. al*, 2003; Sinkaiye *et. al*, 2008). It is further held in evidence in view of small-scale backyard and outskirt farms in various rural communities in the study area with a combination of roots and tuber crops, fruit and vegetable crops, grain and cereal crops, tree and plantation crops. Rural households may have adopted crop farming as a livelihood strategy because the crops serve as common staples, propagules are easily sourced locally, cultural and agronomic practices have been developed and mastered over the years and the crops concerned appear to have adapted to local soil and environmental conditions. Above all, these crops are grown under various farming systems in practice in the study area such as mixed cropping, mono-cropping, inter-cropping, inter-planting and crop-rotations. This is in line with the view of Ikwelle *et al* (2003) that food crops in Nigeria are variously grown by resource-poor farmers who inter-crop cocoyam with yam, maize, plantain, banana, vegetables and rice: The result also showed livestock rearing (mean = 3.13) as selected agricultural livelihood strategy in the study area. This finding is in line with Agumagu *et. al* (2006). The finding could be justifiable in view of the fact that animals are kept under local conditions without improved husbandry practices, which could impose serious demand on the household. For instance no demand for improved pens, except if necessary locally

improvised enclosures for animals to retire at night, animals are on free- range, fending for themselves and serve various livelihood needs for the household. No wonder the sight of local breeds of poultry and other domesticated animals (ruminants and non-ruminants) roaming the villages in the study area. Furthermore, the result revealed farm labour (mean = 2.84) as a livelihood strategy among rural resource-poor households. This finding is consistent with report that indicated casual labour in the farms as livelihood strategy of the poorest household group in rural communities (Ashley et al, 2005). Substantively, farm labours do not require any special training or skill, but just a physical ability and willingness to work. It serves as safety nets and easiest source of income to meet immediate survival needs of the household. Indeed, since the onset of rural- urban migration of the last century in Nigeria, rural labour in the farms appear to be scarce, costly and a lucrative means of livelihood for poorer households in rural communities. The result also indicated that farm product processing (mean = 2.81) is a livelihood strategy among rural resource-poor households in the study area. This finding is in accordance with Olaleye (2003). The finding becomes remarkable in view of the fact that a whole range of agricultural products undergo processing to attract better market, prevent spoilage and wastage, especially at the peak of harvests. No wonder cassava processing, palm fruit processing, etc with wide range of marketable products, are becoming lucrative livelihood base among many rural resource-poor households. According to the result, marketing of agricultural products (mean = 2.81) is an agricultural livelihood strategy among rural households covered in the study. The abundance of fruit and vegetable tree species as well as increased processing of agricultural products has helped to flourish this means of livelihood especially among women in rural communities covered in the study.

However, the above livelihood strategies associated with agriculture and farming appears seasonal and may not be sustainable for the households. No wonder, rural resource-poor households seek for alternative sources of income in non-farm livelihood base to complement. This practice corresponds with Reardon et al (1998) that about 36 percent of total rural incomes in West Africa come from non-farm activities. In view of this, results presented on Table 4.10 indicated non-agricultural livelihood strategies among rural resource-poor households in southeastern Nigeria. The result showed civil service (mean = 2.58) as a non- agricultural livelihood strategy among rural- resource-poor household. Previous study by Agumagu et al (2006) agrees with this finding. It may be validated in view of the increasing employment opportunities created in various local government areas, rural cottage industries and other service centres in the study areas. Besides, a good number of government and non-governmental agencies have in recent years targeted rural households in their skill acquisition and training programmes for capacity building of many rural beneficiaries. These efforts may have been responsible in improving their chances for civil service employments as shown in the result. Furthermore, petty trading (mean = 3.13) is shown in the result as a non-agricultural livelihood strategy in the study area. Previous studies with similar findings corroborate this present result (Ellis, 2000; Olawoye, 2000; Matthews- Njoku and Adesope, 2007). In fact, petty and small-scale articles of trade ranging from candies and beverages to other food items as well as non consumables in the study area are common sights among rural households. While these items of trade are easily available to meet the household needs, sales from such items also provide ready income to meet other household requirements, Petty trading appear lucrative because of small initial investible capital required for a start, which households could afford through their menial savings. Also tailoring and weaving (mean = 2.53) was indicated as a livelihood strategy in the result. This appears to be one of the age-long livelihood bases that have persisted in rural economies despite transformations in modern times. Tailoring and weaving seem to sustain the interest of men and women from resource-poor households and makes minimal and affordable demand in the course of its skill training. Above all, the service it renders in rural areas has made it an indispensable livelihood base. In another result, remittances from relatives (mean = 2.70) were shown as a veritable non-agricultural livelihood strategy in the study area. Previous survey by Bryceson (2000) supports this present finding. This further underscores the place of extended family relationship in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Indeed, many rural household members are sustained through incomes remitted to them from migrated and non-resident relations. This livelihood base is characteristic of locations where populations are extremely mobile at specific stages of their lifecycle. In line with this view, Bryceson (2000) stated that rural dwellers place serious importance on the frequency of visits from their urban based relations. This might be because such visits often translate to financial and other gifts from such visitors which enhance their livelihoods.

Table 1: Livelihood Strategies adopted by Rural Households in Southeast Nigeria

Items	Mean	Remark
Crop farming.	3.47	Accept
Livestock rearing.	3.13	Accept
Farm labour.	2.84	Accept

Fish farming.	1.75	Reject
Bee keeping.	1.42	Reject
Hunting of wild animals.	2.27	Reject
Gathering and selling of forest products e.g. fuel wood.	2.32	Reject
Farm product processing.	2.82	Accept
Marketing of agricultural products.	2.81	Accept
Palm-wine tapping and palm-fruit harvesting.	2.31	Reject
Civil service	2.58	Accept
Salon operators	2.48	Reject
Carpentry and furniture making	2.06	Reject
Building/ masonry	2.24	Reject
Petty trading	3.13	Accept
Tailoring and weaving	2.53	Accept
Transport services	2.33	Reject
Food vending	2.26	Reject
Music/ entertainment	2.07	Reject
Remittances from relatives	2.70	Accept

Note: Any mean score <2.50 imply disagreement with any of the items; any mean score \geq 2.50 imply agreement with any of the items.

Political Factors Affecting Livelihood strategies of Rural Households:

Results on the political factors affecting livelihood strategies of rural households in the study area are presented on Table 2. Lack of continuity in government development programmes in the community (mean = 3.42) was indicated as a political factor. This finding could be attributed to political instability and sudden changes that occur in all tiers of government that characterize the Nigerian nation. Besides, every successive government in Nigeria wants to be associated with a new programme initiative. Consequently, new project designs are developed to the detriment of the old ones. This attitude does not encourage continuity and cumulative developmental effect on rural communities and livelihood prospects. Also lack of government presence and attention in some communities in terms of development projects was indicated by the respondents (mean = 3.40). This situation appears worse in marginalized communities who either have no representative in government or whose representatives do not belong to the ruling party. In various states, electoral promises appear abandoned soon after officials are elected into political office. And so the rural people who constitute the electorate are forgotten, alienated and estranged. This finding is further expressed in the view of Ashley et al (2005) that the elite capture of political power may undermine the interests of the poorest class and strongly affects poor households' access to livelihood opportunities, especially to high return opportunities. Furthermore, irresponsible lifestyle of most elected representatives in government (mean = 3.42) was highly expressed by the respondents as a major political factor. This finding is reflects the flamboyant lifestyle of political office holders at various governmental levels in Nigeria. Politics has become a lucrative field of human endeavour and the easiest means of acquiring and amassing wealth for individuals and their families at the expense of rural development and livelihood survival of the poorer segment of Nigerian society. Also, poor targeting and miscarriage of government development programmes and policies (mean = 3.39) was identified as a political factor by the respondents. It is either that programmes are miscarried or the projects do not meet the livelihood interests of the rural people. It further finds explanation at the rate at which present development projects are concentrated in urban communes at the expense of rural areas involved in primary productions. In line with this finding Ogwumike (2001) noted the misallocation of resources in form of faulty distribution of available resources among sectors in Nigeria. Result showed that exploitative government policies such as unfavourable taxes, subsidy removal on farm inputs; land reforms (mean = 3.36) is a political factor. The result confirms the protest on the removal of subsidy on fertilizer and other agricultural inputs, taxes on some agricultural products and lack of adherence to the Land use Act in many rural communities till date. These policies still upholds in utter disregard of the feelings of the people. It is an aspect of the capitalist ideology that polarizes the society into "the rich and the poor" with far-reaching livelihood implications for the latter. The result finds basis on the Marxist theory, which argued that resource-poor system is largely a problem arising from the exploitative relationship between the workers and the owners of the means of production. Also, marginalization of rural communities in government affairs (mean = 3.24) was indicated as a political factor. This is because government decides where to channel the state resources. Some rural communities may be marginalized if they have poor representation in government, especially to mediate for favourable policies to boost their livelihoods. The outcry of marginalization and the attendant social actions going on in many communities in the south eastern Nigeria

corroborates this finding. Further result indicated lack of social welfare policies (mean = 3.28) as a political factor. The Nigerian state has weak welfare policies and social programmes properly tailored to take care of the poor, the sick, the aged, the orphan, the destitute and the unemployed. The foregoing group of people whose population is increasing alarmingly in Nigeria has been aptly categorized as resource-poor in previous studies (Olawoye, 2000; Akinlo, 2001; World Bank 2006). Respondents indicated the insensitivity of government to the plight of people in their communities (mean = 3.42) as a political factor. This finding has helped to highlight the antithetical democratic culture in Nigeria. This explains why government and its agencies in Nigeria are not moved positively in response to protests, strikes and social actions and demands for improved livelihoods. In line with this finding, Ekong (2003) noted that selfish and insensitive political leaders who lack will-power and vision have marked political leadership in Nigeria since independence. Also, strongly indicated are political upheavals (mean = 3.36). Nigeria has had cases of political instability, chaotic change of government and election violence since independence. These negative political tendencies do not foster peace, a necessary ingredient in development and stable livelihoods. This finding is further buttressed in the view of Aluko (2001) that successive governments in Nigeria have been largely concerned with security (maintenance of law and order) than policies aimed at alleviating poverty among its populace.

Table 2: Political Factors Affecting Livelihood Strategies of Rural Households

Items	Mean	Remark
Lack of continuity in government development programmes in the community.	3.42	Accept
Lack of government presence and attention in your community in terms of development projects.	3.40	Accept
Irresponsible lifestyle of your elected representatives in government.	3.42	Accept
Poor targeting and miscarriage of government development programmes and policies.	3.39	Accept
Exploitative government policies such as unfavourable taxes, subsidy removal on farm inputs, land reforms, etc.	3.36	Accept
Marginalization of you community in government affairs.	3.24	Accept
Lack of social welfare policies.	3.28	Accept
Insensitivity of government to the plight of people in this community.	3.42	Accept
Political upheavals.	3.36	Accept

Note: Any mean score <2.50 imply disagreement with any of the items; any grand mean score ≥ 2.50 imply agreement with any of the items.

Results of the varimax rotated factor matrix of political factors affecting livelihood strategies of rural households are presented on Table 3. Factor 1 is renamed ineffective rural development implementation policy. Ineffective rural development implementation policy breeds uneven spread of development projects, lack of continuity and abandonment of rural development projects in Nigeria. Several rural development projects in Nigeria make little impact on the livelihoods of the rural populace because of faulty implementation policies which do not allow for consolidation of such projects. Also factor 2 was named inadequate social security policy. Livelihood pursuits of rural households can be enhanced if adequate policies are in place to make relief provision to them. But government policies have failed to make provisions for full employment, adequate remuneration of workers, adequate income for small-scale farmers, unemployment benefits, good shelter, old-age benefits and public health services.

Table 3: Varimax Rotated factor Matrix of Political Factors Affecting Livelihood Strategies of Rural Households.

Items	Factor 1: Ineffective Rural Development Implementation Policy	Factor 2: Inadequate Social Security Policy
Lack of continuity of government development programmes in the community.	0.844	0.122
Lack of government presence and attention in the community in terms of development projects.	0.805	0.264
Irresponsible lifestyle of elected representatives in government.	0.757	0.294
Poor targeting and miscarriage of government	0.718	0.213

development programmes and policies.		
Exploitative government policies such as unfavourable taxes, subsidy removal on-farm inputs, land reforms, etc.	0.642	0.299
Marginalization of community in government affairs.	0.585	0.401
Lack of social welfare services.	0.208	0.807
Insensitivity of government to the plight of people in this community.	0.213	0.782
Political upheavals.	0.324	0.758

Note: Coefficients on the Table above represents regression weights.

4. CONCLUSION

It is concluded that livelihood strategies among rural households in the study area cut across agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Several political factors, which centre on ineffective rural development implementation policy and inadequate social security policy undermine rural household livelihood pursuits with serious implication for rural development in Nigeria.

5. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, it is therefore recommended that sustainable programmes on political reforms and value re-orientation should be carried out in Nigeria.

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