

## Evaluation of the Performance of Izon (Ijaw) Rural Women in Fish Production in Ondo State

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**Abstract:** This is an exploratory study of the performance of Izon (Ijaw), women in fishing occupation in Ondo State of Nigeria. The objectives of the study are: To evaluate the performance of the rural fisher women in the fishing occupation; to examine the socio-economic factors that affect the performance of the women in their fishing occupation, to determine the contributions of the fishing occupation to the socio-economic life of the Izon (Ijaw) women; to discover the factors that challenge the women in their occupation and to profer solution to problems enunciated. The study reviewed centered on the performance of women in economically productive activities. A social survey method which involved the use of questionnaire was employed to collect data from the randomly selected 250 respondents selected from the wards which the region has been divided. The data collected was appropriately analyzed. The findings revealed among other things that the performance of the women in the fishing was not significantly affected by the factors of age and marital status since the calculated values of chi-square statistic for both variables placed at 303.3 and 212.05, respectively were higher than the tabulated values placed at 18.46 and 16.27, respectively at 0.001 level of significance. Furthermore, the study confirmed that there was no significant relationship between the level of education of respondents and income from fishing occupation since the calculated chi-square statistic value was 212.05 as against the tabulated value of 16.27 at 0.001 level of significance. The study further identified such problems as, land (water) tenure system, poor or crude method of practice, preservation and propagation of fish as well as combination of domestic chores with fishing occupation as major problems facing the women. It was recommended that extension services, formation of cooperative societies in order to access financial and material bans, provision of large storage facilities are some of the ways by which the problems of the fisher women can be solved.

**Key words:** Evaluation, performance of Izon, rural women, fish production, financial and material bans

### INTRODUCTION

Women have traditionally engaged in 3 types of economically productive work. First they have produced goods and services for their family's consumption, second, they have engaged in household production for sales or exchange in the market place and third, they have worked for pay out side the home. The process of industrialization has brought about the rapid increase and the relative importance of the role of women in agricultural development. The issue of women's contribution to agricultural production has generated concerned focus both within and outside academic circle. Recognition is also being accorded this important issue of government at both federal, state and local government level.

Women can participate in the development of the rural economy as contributors, beneficiaries and planners

of the development process. As the contributors, they can participate by producing specific agricultural outputs. They can participate by producing specific agricultural outputs. They are beneficiaries from the fruit of development through better access to health, technology e.t.c women can likewise participate as planners in the planning of rural development programmes. This study examines the socio economic activities and the contributions of Ijaw fisherwomen in Ondo State to the economy of the State.

Modern reality shows that women do more than performing domestic chores and being subordinates to their male counterparts. The increase in the number of literature on sexual division of labour in agricultural that has appeared during the last few years has been useful in widening the knowledge about the extent of women's participation in agricultural labour force. A cursory

examination of the literatures on this issue reveals both sexes (men and women) are either responsible for separate fields as operators or engage in the cultivations of different crops.

While recognizing this fact, a few of these literatures have gone to explore whether it is possible to have a parallel division in the control of crop. Adesina (1993) has found the parallel division in the control of crop to be possible in some farming area such as Igbo in Nigeria, Liberia and western Cameroon where women are by custom the sole cultivators of food crops grown for consumption.

Papanek (1980) found the parallel division in the control of the crops to be possible in some communities where women have distinctly separate economic responsibilities for raising food for the family and are given land for the purpose. They often sell surplus produce for this land and decide how to use the income. Men on the other hand are expected to take care of the cash crops and their income from the crops is used for majorly family needs such as schooling for the children and housing.

In most agricultural communities, all tasks after the initial clearing were part of women's work. In spite of this rural women have much harder economic situations of land scarcity, lack of farm equipment, seedlings and others. She must work like the men, grow whatever food she can and on whatever land available, she is aware of the many improvement and better medical services (Fasoranti and Adesina, 1993).

In addition, many women in rural areas perform a variety of other functions of great economic significance on the farms. They are involved in physical activities mental activities and financial activities. Physical activities include planting, application of fertilizer and insecticide, harvesting, processing and marketing, mental activities consisting of participation in decision making process for farm operation e.g., participation in what crops to plant, what livestock to raise, observation on the farm as to whether anything is wrong with the growth of crops of livestock and decision on what to do, improve situation. Financial activities is the monetarily support given by women to their husbands for agricultural purposes (Osuntogun, 1977).

Famoriyo (1972) also mentioned that majority of rural women in Nigeria perform a variety of functions of great economic significance on the farm. Men on the other hand, are to do heavy work on the farm so as to be able to maintain their family. The rural women are involved in physical activities, mental activities and general observation and supervision on farm products.

Egbugara (1993) posits that rural women combine their traditional roles of child bearing, child rearing

housekeeping with economic roles. Ingrid (1985) mentions women's preference to cultivate their own individual plots which presumably refers land set aside for household provision of food for which women would be responsible by tradition. Brown (1976) explains this preference by contrasting the traditional law that the proceeds of any crop grown by both men and women should be divided between them with today's practice where by incomes are kept separate and controlled by the one who earns it.

Boserup (1970) indicated that in Gambia and central Africa Republic, rural women not only engage in such arduous tasks but, they also work longer hours than men. The same is reported of the Ekpeya community in South-Eastern Nigeria, where men do not engage in farming. They only clear the land for their wives and spend their time minting and producing palm-oil.

**Economic endeavours of the Ijaw women:** The Ijaw rural women of South Eastern Nigeria engage in such activities as fishing, trading, farm work and other economic activities just as other rural women in Nigeria; though the economic pursuits of the rural women in Nigeria differ particularly as a result of the environmental and ecological factors.

In Ijaw land, there seems to be division of labour in the traditional economy, such that men are usually tappers of raffia palm and carvers of canoes while women engage mostly in fishing and fish trading. Still other Ijaw women work on the farm i.e., cultivating land as a support to their fishing in some parts of Ondo, Edo, Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers States but the major occupation of the rural Ijaw women is fishing and petty trading.

**Theoretical framework:** Cultural determination is a theoretical position on the gender roles in society. Ann Oakely and Sherry (1984) who are British Sociologists contributed on this phenomenon. They posited that culture is the sum total of all that human societies have accumulated over the years of their existence. It includes material aspect like technology as well as non-material aspects like traditions, values, norms and prescription of behaviors etc. They are socially transmitted from generation and members of culture come to think of it as unchangeable and absolute.

Oakely believes that culture determines roles, pointing out that among the Mbutu Pygmies of Congo, rainforest hunting was joint activity of both parents. Father and mother share the responsibility for the care of children. Woman of Australia Aborigines and Tanzania were in charge of seal hunting and fishing. Oakely also points out that woman also play prominent role in the armed, forces in china, Russia, Cuba and Israel.

In India, about 12% of the laborer in the building industry are woman and in some Asian and Latin American countries, females form a quarter of the labor force in the mines.

According to Oakley, all these evidences are clear indications that biology does not determine gender roles and that culture prescribes the appropriate forms of behavior for both sexes and this differs from society to society. Oakley also stated in details the arguments by the biological determinists regarding the mother-child and expressive role of mother in the family. In the kibbutz system the children develop wholesome balanced personalities. Oakley shows that in Alor, an island in Indonesia, women are responsible for the cultivation and collection of vegetables and this keeps them away from home for considerably long period of time. The children are looked after by siblings, father or relatives.

Sherry Ortner also subscribed to the view that culture and society are the determinants of gender roles. The starting point of Ortner's analysis of the status of women is the observation of the Universal secondary status of women. Ortner refused the biological determinist position in allocation of gender roles.

According to Ortner, biological facts are not irrelevant, to the extent that men and women are not different but that these facts and differences only take on significance of superior or inferior within the framework of culturally defined systems. The thesis is that women are beings, identified with something that every culture devalues, that which every culture defines as a being of lower order of existence than itself. Now, it seems that there is only one thing that fits the description which is nature in the most generalized sense.

Ortner answers the question why women seem to be close to nature, she traces 3 levels.

Firstly, woman's body and its functions are more involved with the reproduction of species. Which places her closer to nature as opposed to man's physiology which offers him more opportunities to associate with culture. Secondly, woman's social role place her in an inferior position when compared to that of men.

Thirdly, women acquire a different psychic structure due to their traditional social roles dictated by biological factors. This is also seen as being close to nature. The Nigerian traditional pattern allowed women to work outside the home. Records shows that Nigerian women were prominent in economic spheres and they have even demonstrated military competence. But when the British colonialists came, a great deal of their cultural ethos were passed down to the people.

This includes mode of dressing, languages, norms and values and prescribed roles for the women.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study covered the Arogbo-Ijaw speaking area of Ondo state. It is an exploratory study of the role of the Ijaw rural women in fishing occupation. The Arogbo-Ijawland, the most extreme of the Ijaw speaking group lies between longitude 4° 47' and 5° 03' East of the Greenwich meridian and latitude 6° 05' and 6° 27' North of the equator. It has an area of 2, 400 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of over 63,000 inhabitants (1991 Census estimates). It is bounded in the east by the Ovia Local Government Area of Edo State, in the West and North by the Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas in Ondo State; and in the South by the Egbema-Ijaw in Warri Local Government area of Delta State.

**Sources of data:** Data used for this study were sourced from primary sources through the use of questionnaire administered by trained enumerators. A total of 250 respondents were involved in this study as it is apparently impracticable to involve the universal set of the totality of the women in the study area.

The sampling frame was the Ijaw rural women in Ondo State which is the focus of the study in the area. In order to elicit the needed responses for the data the study, purposive sampling was first used in selecting the sex. The study was restricted to women only in the study area. The basic assumption of purposive sampling is that with good judgment and appropriate strategy one can choose the subject to be included in the sample with least bias and high level of relevance. Following this, probability random sampling was used to determine the household and specific respondents involved in the study.

The Arogbo-Ijaw is divided into five political wards which include:

Arogbo ward I with 6 political units. Arogbo ward II comprises of villages such as Bekewe village, Ebiaye, Ewerebugogho and others etc. It has 12 political units. Arogbo ward III also comprise Jeribeni, Adoloseimo, Biagbini and others. It has 14 political units. Ukparama ward 1 comprises Asere, Ukpe, Bolowou and others. It has 11 political units while Ukparama ward 11 has 14 political units. It comprises of villages and towns.

Data was sourced from the five political wards mentioned above in this study as shown in the Table 1.

The data collected from the five political wards were used for this study. The analysis of the data collected was done using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Table 1: The data collected from the five political wards

Wards	Ward no	Villages	No of selected respondents
Arogbo	i	6	70
Arogbo	ii	5	57
Arogbo	iii	4	45
Ukparama	i	3	33
Ukparama	ii	4	45
Total	5	22	250

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As earlier stated, 250 copies of the questionnaire designed for the study were administered to the Ijaw (Ijaw) rural women Ondo State. Out of this, majority of the women are married. Sixty to sixty four years constitute the large population of the married women. Fifteen of the respondents were widowed. Further analysis also reveals that married women constitute the largest population in the area of study. Furthermore 55.6% of the respondents have no formal education followed by those with primary education constituting 38.8%. Respondents with secondary education are 4.8% while 0.8% of the respondents further to tertiary institution. This means that people without formal education constitute the largest population in the study area. This may be due to their traditional belief that educating the female child is a waste because they are going outside the family to marry and stay with their husbands. Majority of the women respondents (96.4%) practice Christian religion of differing denominations. Traditional religion follows with a negligible 2.8% of the while Islam takes the remaining 0.8% of the population. The study also reveals that majority of the women's (respondent's) husbands got married to 1-2 wives (39.6%) while 28.4% of the respondent's husbands married 3-4 wives, 24% women husbands has 5.6 wives while 8% got married to above 7 wives. The Ijaws are obviously polygynous.

The Table 2 shows that 98.8% of the respondents engage in fishing as their major occupation obviously in response to ecological and terrainian factors. A small proportion of them engage both in fishing and trading which constitute 0.8% of the population while 0.4% of the respondents engage in trading. They engage in trading as a supplement to their major occupation which is fishing. None of the respondents engage in farming that is, cultivation of crops as her occupation.

The Table 3 is also presented in a pie chart.

Table 3 and pie charts show income of the respondents between 1999 and 2003 (Fig. 1). The median income is N34,000 which falls below the average minimum wage in Nigeria.

The respondents were further asked what they are engaged in at off season periods.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to major occupation

Occupation	Frequency	(%)
Farming	-	
Fishing	247	98.8%
Trading	1	0.4%
1 and 2 above	-	00
1 and 3 above	-	00
2 and 3 above	2	0.8%
Total	250	100%

Table 3: Revenue distribution from fishing produce for a period of 5 years 1999-2003

Fishing	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Between 10,000-14,000	44	76	45	76	30
15,000-19,000	48	18	44	29	62
20,000-24,000	40	32	68	50	30
25,000-29,000	28	48	20	30	18
30,000-34,000	20	40	23	154	32
35,000-39,000	20	20	15	11	24
40,000-44,000	16	8	12	14	14
45,000-49,000	17	4	17	20	20
50,000 and above	17	4	6	5	20
Total	250	250	250	250	250

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to other occupations other than fishing

Response	Frequency	(%)
Palm wine distillation	32	12.8
Selling of canoes	3	1.2
Petty trading	215	86
Total	250	100

The responses as presented in the Table 4 show that, majority of the respondents (86%) engage in petty trading, 12.8% of them engage in palm wine distillation while 1.2% also are into selling of canoes. At the off-season periods. However, all these occupation serve as supplement or support to their major occupation which was fishing in the study area.

Seventy two percent of the women use their income on children's school fees, feeding and clothing. Twenty percent spend their income on household feeding while 8% spend their money on their money on their personal needs. Field observation particularly revealed how women love and care for their children and would not be restrained in expending their income on them.

Majority of the respondents use smoking as revealed in the table in preserving their fishes from decaying, and this constitutes the largest proportion of 94% of the population of the study area while 15% of the women use both method in preserving their fishes and 4% of them use sun drying. It was generally observed from the field that majority of the Ijaw rural women cherish and value smoking their fish on fire as against sun-drying.

The respondents' source of labour is their children and themselves which constitutes the largest proportion of 92% of the population under study while 7.2% of them hired labour (Table 6). None of the respondents get their

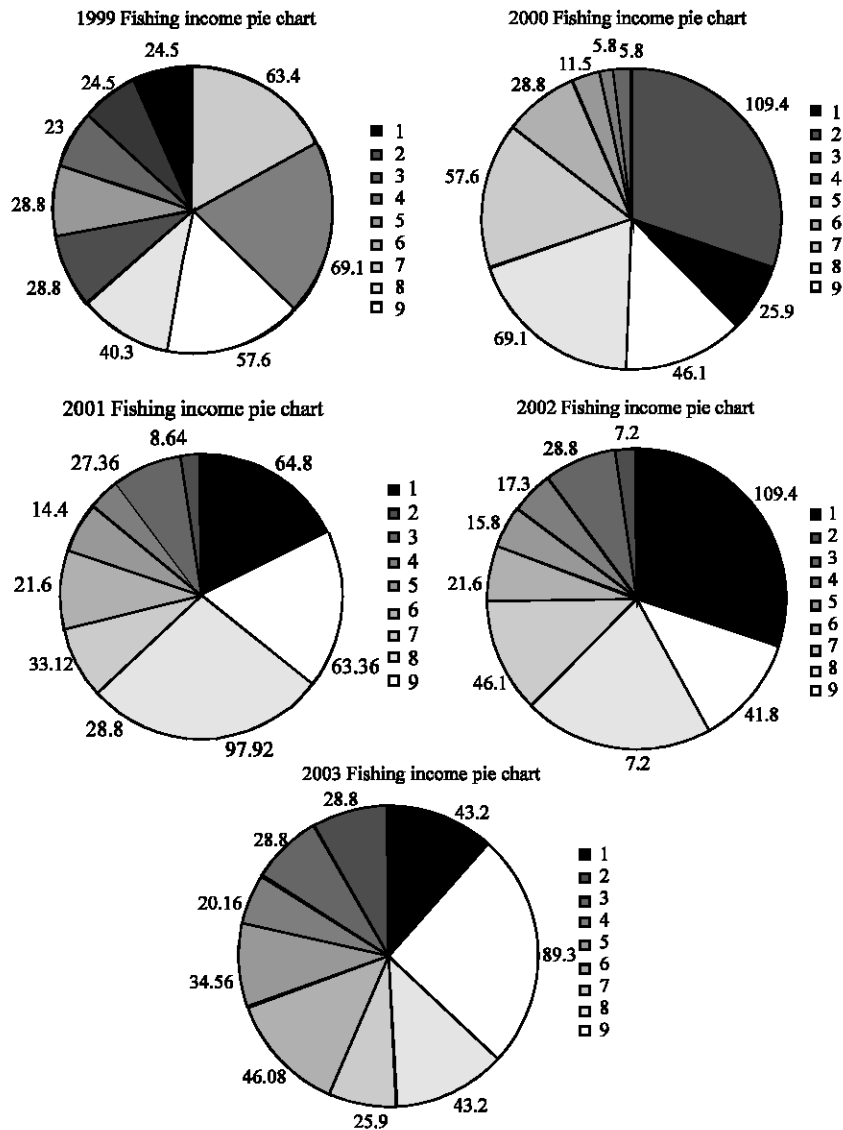


Fig. 1: Income of the respondents between 1999 and 2003

Table 5: Storage/preservation facilities used

Response	Frequency	(%)
Sun-drying	10	4
Smoking of fish	235	94
All of the above	15	6
Total	250	100

Table 6: Principal sources of labour

Source	Frequency	(%)
Children and self	232	92.8%
Hired labour	18	7.2%
Exchange labour	-	00
Mechanized means	-	00
Communal labour	-	00
Total	250	100

source of labour form exchange labour, mechanized and communal as reported in the table by the respondents.

This is not unconnected with the fact that fishing is a household or cottage occupation among the people practiced with the use of ones immediate family members as labour source.

Table 7 shows that 60% of the respondents' mode of land acquisition was by inheritance. Thirty six percent of them acquired land and water space from household. This may be due to the fact that fisher-women operate within the household units and since these units have no fixed resources endowment, resources of women are determined by inter-household transfers. While 4% of the women acquired land, water space or bush for fishing through marriage. None of the respondents have access to land and water space by purchase, by rentage or any

**Table 7: Access to land and water space for practising occupation**

Source	Frequency	(%)
By inheritance	150	60%
From house hold	90	36%
By marriage	10	4%
By purchase	-	-
By rentage	-	-
Others	-	-
Total	250	100

**Table 8: Respondents access to government facilities (“do you obtain any facilities from the government?”)**

Responses	Frequency	(%)
Yes	-	-
No	250	100%
Total	250	100%

other means. As Ingrid Palmer (1985) has mentioned, “if women are to enjoy equity with man in life long access to land, their land right must be secured, as land rights may affect women’s decision-making role in the family and their access to enabling services (like credit facilities) to raise the productivity of any own-account farming”. The majority of the respondents have access to land by marriage relation which constitute the largest proportion of 60%. This finding is in consonance with the Ijaw tradition that a woman’s access to at least a portion of land depends on her father. Although she may acquire some parcel from husband, it will still cause some problems because her husband family people do not most a times see her as a blood relation. This is further compounded by the practice of exogamy and patrilocal resistances which place most women in the position of strangers.

Table 8 shows that the women do not have any access to government facilities in their fishing occupation. All the women also indicated that they have not participated in any extension programme to enhance their practice.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In the course of the research, it was discovered that the women do not have access to facilities like hooks, fishing nets, canoes, paddles cutlass etc and also to credit facilities and there is no agricultural training programmes delivered by extension agencies in this rural area under study.

The government should take cognizance of the rural population because they are the people that provide the foods/fish in which they used to feed the urban dwellers there by providing fishing, equipments, such as the ones

mentioned above, the government should endeavour to go to those areas and find out their needs on the type of agricultural production in order to enhance their productivity.

The government should also make provision for women’s credit facilities so that they can be able to get loan or even to render selfless services to the women in the rural areas.

The government should organize training programmes; motivate them so that they will have the enthusiasm to participate in programmes like extension (agencies programmes); By educating them on the importance of agricultural training programmes.

Lastly, development of drudgery-reducing-technologies should be pursued with a view of improving the quality of life of rural women. It was noted that a great deal of the rural women’s time is spent in fetching water, fetching firewood and cooking and these activities often lead to physical exhaustion of the women. If technologies are developed that make the performance of these roles less tasking and/or time consuming, rural women will definitely have time for fishing larger plots and improve their earnings.

It is ironical that drinkable water constitutes a big problem for people in river-rine area. The government would be solving a major problem by providing portable drinkable water in the various communities.

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