

Decision making power of rural women for improving their status: Evidences from rural communities of Oyo State, Nigeria

Adeleke, O. A.

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Corresponding author: aladeoluwaseun@yahoo.com, +2348038079312

ABSTRACT

Rural women are often restricted in their ability to make decisions both at the household and community levels thereby reducing their status in the community. This study assessed the decision making power of rural women in Oyo State, Nigeria. Qualitative and Quantitative methods were used to collect data on respondents' socio-economic and enterprise characteristics, decisions on productive and domestic issues and inputs in community decisions. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation). The study reveals that 40.0% of respondents were within the age range of 31-35 years, 55.6% were crop farmers and they had relatively low level of education and income. The result also indicates that respondents had limited access to personal land. About forty percent of respondents' husbands had primary education and 37.8% with secondary education. Husbands of respondents dominated productive decisions; respondents made sole decisions on some of the domestic issues, joint decisions were also made on domestic issues while respondents had high (75.6%) inputs in right to vote as one of the community decisions. Also, respondents had low (61.1%) productive decision making power, high (65.6%) domestic decision making power, low (68.9%) community decision making power and a relatively high (54.4%) decision making power in the overall. Stakeholders at all levels should give opportunity to women so as to make their voices heard both at the household and community level, this will improve rural women's status and ensure their participation in community and national development.

Keywords: Community, Decision making, Domestic, Rural women

INTRODUCTION

Rural women play a vital role in most economies of the world contributing to about 43% of the agricultural sector and 50% of global labour force (Palacios-Lopez, Christianensen and Kilic, 2017). They engage in household activities and also take part in several livelihood activities with the responsibilities of taking care of the children and elderly. Despite their numerous roles in the household and communities, Dada (2011) affirmed that rural women are less able to participate effectively in decision making and are often deprived of their abilities to contribute their inputs in terms of decision making. Their status in the community remains more of ascribed than achieved as they are left often with household activities with little or nothing to contribute to the larger society. This state will not enable them to realise their potentials and make lives better for them and their community (Pal and Haldar, 2016).

Decision making is the process of reducing the number of available alternative courses of action in given situation (Ekong, 2003). Decision making power has been found to be an important element that will affect the well being of family and that of the community which will help to achieve gender equity and peace in the family (Sultan, 2011). It is established that when women participates in the decision making process at both the household and

community level, it will improve their status and position in their communities (Pal and Haldar, 2016).

In most African rural communities, there is a growing difficulty for women to speak or be heard in household decision making process and development matters relating to their communities. Women are often restricted to participate in decision making process because of the patriarchal nature of African set up where men dominates issues even matters that directly concerns women. If they will participate at all, it is directly or indirectly controlled by certain rules or conditions placed by their husbands. This has led to the inability of women to develop their leadership potentials.

Decision making is generally influenced by factors like level of knowledge, achievements, educational level, employment, income and resources available to an individual (Agbelemoge, 2010). Women decision making power may increase when her resources increase and when she is well employed as this will increase her income, giving her a financial power alongside the men folks. Furthermore, Routray, Torondel, Clasen and Schmidt (2017) asserted that societal and cultural barriers are also some of the factors that determine the participation of women in decision making at the household level. In rural areas of Oyo State,

ability of women to make decisions is believed to have been reduced over the years due to the existence of patriarchal ideology which still dominates most rural communities in this area. It is against this background that this study seeks to assess the decision making power of rural women in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

1. To determine the socio-economic characteristics of respondents in the study area.
2. To identify the enterprise characteristics of respondents in the study area.
3. To ascertain the extent to which respondents make decisions on productive issues in the study area.
4. To determine the extent to which respondents make decisions on domestic issues in the study area.
5. To ascertain the extent to which respondents make inputs on community decisions in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Oyo State. Oyo state is one of the six states in South-west Nigeria. It is located between latitudes 6°N and 9°N and between longitudes 3°E and 4°E. It covers a total landmass of 28, 454km². Its Capital is in the ancient city of Ibadan, the most populous city in Africa with a population of over 2.5million. It is bounded in the south by Ogun State, north by Kwara State, bounded by Benue state to the west and partly by the Republic of Benin, while in the east it is bounded by Osun state. It has an annual rainfall ranging from 1,000 to 1,400mm with two rainfall peaks in June and October. The relative humidity is high throughout the year with a mean of 90%. The mean temperature is about 25°C- 35°C. The climate favours agricultural activity in its diversity. Crops like maize, yam, cassava, millet, cocoa, palm produce, cashew and citrus are mostly grown in the State.

Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select respondents for this study. At the first stage, the rural LGAs from the 33 LGAs in the State were isolated, making 28 rural LGAs. At the second stage, Ten percent of the rural LGAs were randomly selected which are Orire, Saki east and Kajola LGAs. At the third stage, two communities were randomly selected from each LGA making a total of 6 rural communities which are Elewure and Isemi-ile from Kajola; Ago-amodu and Sepeteri from Saki east and Iluju and Adafila from Orire LGA. At the third stage, snowball sampling

technique was used to get the list of rural women farmers from each community: 60 from Elewure, 75 from Isemi-ile, 75 from Ago-amodu, 80 from Sepeteri, 100 from Iluju and 60 from Adafila. At the fourth stage, twenty percent of the list of respondents in each community were randomly selected which are 12, 15, 15, 16, 20 and 12, respectively making a total of 90 rural women farmers that formed the sample size for this study.

Qualitative and Quantitative methods were used to collect data on respondents' socio-economic and enterprise characteristics, decisions on productive and domestic issues and inputs in community decisions. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation).

Respondents were asked to indicate who makes decisions on some productive (7) and domestic (7) issues like use of land, improvement of land, labour to be used, inputs to be used, buying of livestock, school children will attend, food to be eaten in the house, use of money and so on, which was operationalised on a four point scale of husband's decision (1), sole decision (3), joint (2) decision and no decision (0). For the productive decisions, maximum score was 24.0 while the minimum score was 7.0, mean score obtained was 16.02. Mean and above mean score represent high productive decision-making power and below mean represent low productive decision-making power. Also, maximum and minimum score of 23.0 and 14.0, respectively was obtained for the domestic decisions and the mean score was 19.07. Mean and above mean score represent high domestic decision-making power and below mean represent low domestic decision-making power.

Respondents were asked to indicate the inputs they make as regards community decisions (7) for decisions such as: infrastructures to be built in the community, holding positions in the community, protesting against misbehaviours in the community, right to vote and so on. This was operationalised on a three point scale of No input (0), low input (1) and high input (2). The maximum score was 21.0 and the minimum score was 7.0 and a mean score of 12.9 was obtained. Mean and above mean score represent high community decision making power and below mean represent low community decision making power. The overall decision making power was obtained by pulling the scores of productive, domestic and community decision making power together. The maximum score was 36.0 and the maximum score was 67.0 while the mean is 48.0. Mean and above mean score represent high decision making power and below mean represent decision making power.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 shows that 40.0% of respondents were within the age range of 31-35 years and 26.7% were within 26-30 years which implies respondents are in their active and productive years which will enable them to give appropriate opinions on issues both at the household and community levels. This corroborates the findings of Olaolorun (2014) that having a say in household and community decisions is possible when women are matured and married, as they are being respected because they are married. Also, 44.4% of respondents had primary education, 12.2 % with secondary education and 35.5% with no formal education. This suggests that respondents level of education is relatively low which could have influenced their ability to make decisions on pertinent issues as supported by Sultana (2011) that educational level of an individual is a key factor in making decisions. Thirty percent of respondents had an annual income of ₦67,000, 52.2% with ₦67,001-₦134,000 and 16.7% earned ₦134,001-₦201,000. The income of respondents is relatively low and at the poverty margin which could have been a financial boost that will enable them to contribute

to meeting household needs, thus, avenue to make decisions on household issues. This is in tandem with the findings of Campbell, Prata and Potts (2012) that income is germane to ability of women to make decisions especially at the household level. Furthermore, results of the study from table 1 indicate that respondents were engaged in farming activities like food crop farming (55.6%), livestock farming (32.2%) and processing of agricultural produce (12.2%). The implication of this is that when women are employed or earn income through productive activities, they become active participants in household and communities matters which is in line with the result of Amugsi, Lartey, Kimani-murage and Mberu (2016) that women become financially autonomous when they are able to earn income. Eighty percent of respondents' husbands were engaged in food crop farming with 3.3 % as artisans and 8.9% into trading. About forty percent of respondents' husbands had primary education and 37.8% had secondary education with 16.7% having no formal education. This implies that men should be able to give their wives opportunity to make family decisions based on their level of education.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by socioeconomic characteristics

Socioeconomic characteristics	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Age (years)			
16-20	0	0.0	
21-25	10	11.1	
26-30	24	26.7	31±4.5
31-35	36	40.0	
36-40	20	22.2	
Religion			
Christianity	46	51.1	
Islam	40	44.4	
Traditional	4	4.4	
Educational Attainment			
Adult literacy	7	7.8	
Primary	40	44.4	
Secondary	11	12.2	
No formal	32	35.5	
Annual Income (₦)			
0-67000	27	30.0	
67001-134000	47	52.2	
134001-201000	15	16.7	
201001-601008	1	1.1	
Household size			
1-4	17	18.9	
5-8	73	81.1	6 ±1.8
9-12	0	0	
Primary occupation			
Food crop farming	50	55.6	
Livestock farming	29	32.2	
Processing	11	12.2	

Socioeconomic characteristics	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Husband's occupation			
Food crop farming	72	80.0	
Cash crop farming	7	7.8	
Artisans	3	3.3	
Trading	8	8.9	
Husband's educational attainment			
No formal education	15	16.7	
Primary education	37	41.2	
Secondary education	34	37.8	
Adult literacy education	4	4.4	
Total	90	100.0	

Source: Field survey, 2016

Enterprise characteristics

The result on Table 2 shows the enterprise characteristics of respondents. Respondents were into cultivation of different crops like maize, cassava, cowpea, yam and vegetables. Also, 42.2% of the respondents cultivated their crops on less than one acre which implies that respondents do not have access to large area of land for their farming activities. This is in line with the study of Ajadi, Oladele, Ikegami and Tsuruta (2015) that women have limited access to land for agricultural purposes. The result also shows that 7.8% had access to personal land, 38.9% to family land and 31.1% to rented land. This implies that most women in rural areas do not have access to personal land which would have enable them to have permanent structures on their farm and be able to engage in their farm activities without restrictions. This supports the findings of Ajala (2017) that women do not have access to personal land for their agricultural activity which is likely to

affect their level of production and income thereby reducing their contribution to household needs and subsequently their decision making power. Fifty percent of the respondents used family labour and 41.1% used hired labour for their farming activities, this suggests that some of the respondents used their children as source of labour on the farm which supports the findings of Alao, Olasore and Aremu (2013) that most children in farming households are used to meet farming labour needs. Also, 41.1% of the respondents still used hired labour on their farm probably because they have extra income that could be used to hire labourers on their farm. Over thirty percent of the respondents had been in their various farming activities for 1-6years and few (7.8%) had experience of about 11-15 years. This implies that respondents have been involved in farming for a while which would have increased their ability to contribute to family needs and also take part in family issues.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by enterprise characteristics

Type of crops cultivated	Frequency	Percent
Maize	48	53.3
Cassava	42	46.7
Cowpea	11	12.2
Yam	41	45.6
Vegetables	13	14.4
Area of land		
Less than 1	58	64.4
1-3	11	12.2
4-6	3	3.3
7-9	5	5.6
No response	13	14.5
Source of labour		
Family	45	50.0
Hired	37	41.1
Communal	8	8.9
Source of land		
Personal	7	7.8
Rent	28	31.1
Inheritance	15	16.7

Type of crops cultivated	Frequency	Percent
Family	35	38.9
Communal	5	5.6
Years of experience		
1-5	21	23.3
6-10	29	32.2
11-15	7	7.8
16-20	3	3.3
No response	30	33.3
Total	90	

Source: Field survey, 2016

Productive decisions of respondents

Table 3 shows that respondents do not make decisions on most of the productive issues. Decisions on use of productive resources (48.9%), labour to be used and buying of livestock (40.0%) were jointly made by respondents and their husbands. Decisions on use of land (40.0%) and improvement on land (74.4%) were solely made by the husband, suggesting that husbands still make decisions on most productive issues despite the fact that women are also farmers, This corroborates the

findings of Ajadi *et al* (2015) that despite the involvement of rural women in most agricultural production, they still do not have control over most productive decisions. This implies that the patriarchal nature of African culture still dominates in the study area. This is in line with the findings of Kassa (2015) that men still make decisions on major productive issues except selling off of small livestock and other non-relevant issues. Kinoshita (2003) also affirms women’s low status and predominance of men’s decision-making power on productive issues.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to decisions made on productive issues

Productive issues	Sole decision	Joint decision	Husband decision	No decision
Use of land	4 (4.4)	30 (33.3)	40 (74.4)	16 (17.8)
Improvement on land	4 (4.4)	33 (36.7)	36 (40.0)	17 (18.9)
Labour to be used	4 (4.4)	36 (40.0)	33 (36.7)	17 (18.9)
Inputs to be used	4 (4.4)	35 (38.9)	33 (36.7)	18 (20.0)
To buy livestock	7 (7.8)	36 (40.0)	20 (22.2)	27 (30.0)
To sell livestock	7 (7.8)	39 (43.3)	12 (20.0)	27 (30.0)
Use of productive resources	3 (3.3)	44 (48.9)	28 (31.1)	15 (16.7)

Source: Field survey, 2016

Table 4 shows that respondents had low productive decision making power in the study area. This suggests that on issues pertaining to production, women do not make decision which is due to the fact that they hardly own resources and assets that could give them opportunity to contribute on issues. One of the respondents affirmed this finding during the FGD in Ago-amodu community:

‘.....My husband is the owner of the land that we use for farming, i only help on the farm, i don’t decide what we do on the farm except for selling of some of my livestock and I will still inform my husband before selling them.....’

Table 4: Categorisation of respondents' productive decision making power

Category	Score	Percentage	Mean
Low	7.0-15.9	61.1	16.02
High	16.0-24.0	38.9	

Domestic decisions of respondents

The study reveals from Table 5 that decisions on most domestic issues were jointly made, like school the children would attend (61.1%), number of children to be born in the family (72.2%) and purchase of new items in the family (63.3%). This implies that most couples see these family issues as

very crucial and calls for joint decisions as ideas from individuals will aid better actualisation of those decisions rather than personal decisions. Campbell, Prata and Potts (2012) affirmed that for women to make sole or joint decisions on family matters, it could be as a result of exposure, education and income. About fifty percent and 32.2% of respondents made joint and sole decision,

respectively on food to be eaten in the house despite the fact that women still prepares the food. Also, 62.2% and 53.3% of respondents made sole decisions on visiting clinics when necessary and using family planning, respectively. This may be because these issues are women issues and some men do not partake in issues like family planning. This corroborates the findings of Akinyemi, Adedini and Odimegwu (2017) that women sometimes make decisions on personal and health

related matters which are function of empowerment and education. A discussant during the FGD gave the report in Adafila community that:

‘.....Most decisions that concern the house or my children are taken together with my husband but i don’t decide alone in some of these issues because my husband is the head of the family except few ones that concerns me personally.....’

Table 5: Distribution of respondents according to decisions made on domestic issues

Domestic issues	Sole decision	Joint decision	Husband decision	No decision
School children will attend	0 (0)	55 (61.1)	35 (38.9)	0 (0)
Number of children to be born in the family	3 (3.3)	65 (72.2)	22 (24.4)	0 (0)
Food to eat in the house	29 (32.2)	46 (51.1)	15 (16.7)	0 (0)
Visiting clinics when necessary	56 (62.2)	24 (26.7)	10 (11.1)	0 (0)
Use of family planning services	48 (53.3)	35 (38.9)	4 (4.4)	3 (3.3)
Use of money in the family	3 (3.3)	50 (55.6)	37 (41.1)	0 (0)
Purchase of new items in the family	6 (6.7)	57 (63.3)	27 (30.0)	0 (0)

Source: Field survey, 2016

From Table 6, it was found that 65.6% of respondents had high domestic decision making power. This is because respondents made sole decision on some domestic issues like visiting health centres when necessary and use of family planning. This contradicts the findings of Routray

et al (2017) that women do not make decisions on family issues except they consult their husbands. This finding suggests that rural women do make decisions on issues that are directly related to them either because of its urgency or being women issue.

Table 6: Categorisation of respondents' domestic decision making power

Category	Score	Percentage	Mean
Low	14.0- 18.9	34.4	19.07
High	19.0-23.0	65.6	

Level of inputs in community decision making

From Table 7, 32.2% of the respondents had high input in the involvement of political campaign, 75.6% also had high input in voting, 50.0% had low input to infrastructures to be built in the community, 57.8% had low input to both the use of social amenities and representing members on crucial issues. This implies that enlightenment on the importance of performing one’s civic right through voting and involvement in political campaign is being pronounced among rural women as against what we have in the past although most of these campaigns were not beneficial to most of these women on the long run. Also, 50.0% of the

respondents do not have any input as regards holding of position in the community which may be due to low status that has been accorded to women over the years as their contribution is not needed in any way. This corroborates the findings of Tanwir and Safdar (2013) that rural women’s role in decision-making and contributions to community and group issues remains very minimal. This also supports the statement of a woman during FGD in Isemi-ile community that:

‘.....Our leaders speak often in meetings, I hardly speak on any issue in my group not to talk of making decisions, I don’t have the boldness to do so.....’

Table 7: Distribution of respondents on level of inputs in community decisions

Community decisions	High input	Low input	No input
Infrastructures to be built in the community	5 (5.6)	36 (50.0)	49 (54.4)
Holding position in the community	5 (5.6)	40 (44.4)	45 (50.0)
Protesting against misbehaviours in the community	9 (10.0)	37 (41.1)	44 (48.9)
Use of social amenities in the community	7 (7.8)	52 (57.8)	31 (34.4)

Community decisions	High input	Low input	No input
Representing members of the community on crucial issues	6 (6.7)	52 (57.8)	32 (35.6)
Involvement in political campaign	29 (32.2)	45 (50.0)	16 (17.8)
Right to vote	68 (75.6)	15 (16.7)	7 (7.8)

Source: Field survey, 2016

From Table 8, there is low community decision making power among respondents. This implies that women do not get involved in issues pertaining to the community due to patriarchal ideology that dominates most culture in Africa. This is in line

with the findings of Ngara and Ayabam (2013) that women are still marginalised when it comes to participation and making decisions on community issues which may be due to low self confidence, cultural and religious barriers.

Table 8: Categorisation of respondents' community decision making power

Category	Score	Percentage	Mean
Low	7.0-12.93	68.9	12.94
High	12.94-21.0	31.1	

Table 9 shows that the overall decision making power of respondents is relatively high (54.4%). This may be due to the fact that respondents make sole decisions on some of the domestic issues; this

could have influenced the overall decision making power to be high. This result contradicts the findings of Sultana (20110) that rural women decision making power is low.

Table 9: Categorisation of respondents into overall high and low decision making power

Category	Score	Percentage	Mean
Low	36.0-47.9	45.6	48.03
High	48.0-67.0	54.4	

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that husbands’ of respondents made decisions on most productive issues. Respondents made sole decisions on some of the domestic issues. Also, domestic decisions were jointly made by respondents and their husbands. Respondents had high inputs in political campaign and voting but low inputs in holding of positions in the community and building of infrastructures in the community. The study revealed a low productive, high domestic and low community decision making power. In the overall, respondents in the study area had relatively high decision making power.

Stakeholders at all levels should give opportunity to women to make their voices heard both at the household and community level, this will improve rural women’s status and ensure their participation in community and national development.

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