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Small Ruminants as a Source of Financial Security: A CaseStudy of Rural Women in Southwest Nigeria (Synopsis of Research Results)

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Project Description

This study will focus on the importance of the role of livestock in the lives of households residing in rural areas of Nigeria. Livestock (especially small ruminants) provide the easiest and most readily accessible source of credit available to meet immediate household obligations. In southwest Nigeria, rural women are involved in the raising or rearing of small ruminants – sheep and goats especially around homes. This study examines the extent to which these small ruminants have assisted in meeting financial obligations of these women with a view to ensuring sustainability and possibly improving on the status quo.

Researcher(s)

Isaac B. Oluwatayo, Titilayo B. Oluwatayo

About the Researcher(s)



Isaac Busayo Oluwatayo is a Lecturer in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension Services, University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. He is an agricultural/development economist with extensive experience in rural welfare analysis, development policy, gender studies and social protection issues. He obtained his PhD in Agricultural Economics from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Isaac has been awarded a number of grants and fellowships (academic and research) both locally and internationally. He has conducted research and published extensively on poverty studies, food security,

vulnerability and risk. His current research interest spans climate change, rural livelihood, child and youth studies and food policy analysis.



Mrs. Titilayo B. Oluwatayo holds a BSc and MSc in Animal Science from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. She likes raising poultry and small ruminants and has worked as a research assistant in a number of poultry units within the Ibadan metropolis. As a teacher and researcher, she enjoys practical demonstration in poultry enterprises and formulation of low-cost feed. Mrs.



Titilayo Oluwatayo is currently an employee of the Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM), Oyo State Government, Nigeria.

Synopsis of Research Results

Poverty in Nigeria is widespread and multi-dimensional. It is much higher in the rural areas where a greater proportion of the population lives. Women and young girls are the most vulnerable to poverty and this is not unconnected with their inability to exercise control over the use of productive resources like land and other valuable assets. Often times, they disproportionately find it difficult to access credit facilities especially from the formal financial institutions due largely to their low income base and the stringent conditions attached to it. African women farmers face enormous constraints toward increasing their productivity. They lack the means of production, have little or no access to those inputs that enhance productivity, are severely constrained in time and labor, and have almost no outlet to improve their human capital.



However, small ruminants (sheep and goats) form an important economic and ecological niche in the agricultural systems of rural communities across developing countries. This is because small ruminants make a very valuable contribution to household income, especially to the poor in the rural areas. The small size of sheep and goats has distinct economic, managerial, and biological advantages.

Economically, low individual values mean a small initial investment and correspondingly small risk of loss by individual deaths. Managerially, they are

conveniently cared for by women and children, occupy little housing space, have lower feed requirements, and supply both meat and milk in quantities suitable for immediate family consumption. Small ruminants are biologically more advantageous than larger animals. For example, sheep and goats appear to withstand drought better than cattle. Their short reproductive cycle allows them to quickly recover from rapid resumption of breeding following a drought or devastating disease infestation. Thus, rearing of small ruminants provide the easiest and a readily accessible source of credit available to women in order to meet immediate social and financial obligations. In rural southwest Nigeria for instance, women are involved in the rearing of these animals especially around homes by feeding them kitchen wastes or at times allow them to graze on surrounding herbs and shrubs.

The study was conducted in Southwest Nigeria. Southwest Nigeria is one of the six geopolitical zones of the country. The region is composed of six states – Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo. Primary data were collected through administration of structured questionnaire on women selected from three out of the six states using a multistage random sampling method. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, ordinary least squares regression model, and the coping strategies use index. Descriptive analysis of respondents' socioeconomic characteristics revealed their average age to be 48 years, implying that they are young and still very active. Distribution of respondents by educational status showed that only about one-third are educated up to tertiary level, while a sizeable number had no formal education. Also, respondents' average household size was found to be seven, and this fairly large household size decreases respondents' per capita income, further lowering their poverty status. Again, respondents' distribution by membership of social group/association (especially cooperative societies) indicates that over three-quarter belong to one association or another. These associations are very important in creating a platform to showcase what they have to sell thereby enhancing the ease of converting small ruminants into credit or readymade cash.



Occupational distribution of respondents shows the relatively high importance of farming when compared with other occupations available in the study area. Thus, while more than half of the respondents indicate agriculture as their main source of livelihood, over two-third indicates farming as an alternative source of income. In other words, farming remains the highest employer of labor among women in rural southwest Nigeria. Moreover, analysis of respondents based on the types of livestock raised reveals goats as the most preferred. This is largely due to its wide

acceptability and ease of domestication in terms of adaptability to the prevailing environmental conditions. Again, goat meat is consumed by all households in the study area, and it has no religious or cultural restrictions, which make it to be better placed among residents. Also, in terms of marketability, goats are more attractable since it has higher rate of survival when compared with other small ruminants/livestock. The second highest is poultry and this is closely followed by sheep. Meanwhile, on the role that small ruminants play among these women, respondents were given the freedom to express their minds and the responses were summarised. Over two-third of respondents indicated that income realised from small ruminants rearing helped them significantly in attending to welfare needs of their members since income generated from other sources are not enough to cope with increasing demands in the home front. A sizeable number reported that they rely on income from small ruminants' sales to pay children's school fees and to smooth consumption especially when there is scarcity of food resulting from lean harvest.



It is however important to know that a notable enabler of small ruminants' monetization include being a member of social groups and associations (cooperatives in particular) since this provides an avenue to showcase ones prowess and skills through participation in regular meetings and getting to know the financial needs and positions of members. Also, the issue of social capital in the form of trust and family ties confers some degree of confidence in those ready to shoulder the financial needs of these women. Some important constraints faced by these women include increased

mortality of the animals especially during the raining season, diseases and pest infestation, exorbitant price charged by veterinary doctors which invariably add to production costs, inaccessible credit facilities resulting from lack of collaterals, poor managerial skills and unstable government policies.

Thus, the role of small ruminants helping women of rural southwest Nigeria meet social and economic needs cannot be overemphasised. It is a well known fact that these animals are the easiest and readily accessible means of coping with shocks (especially the idiosyncratic type), and this underscores the need for governments to provide enabling environment that will better enhance and encourage investment in small ruminants' husbandry. It is therefore suggested that effort should be intensified at building capacity of women in rural southwest Nigeria through education which can enhance their productivity. The few women with tertiary education were well able to manage the livestock-financial needs interface better than those without formal education. Education is empowerment which can also translate to better adoption of technology that will invariably enhance output and increase revenue. Cooperative activities should be further encouraged among these women and government can do this by providing the initial take-off capital needed and fostering an enabling environment for cooperative activities to thrive. Improvement in the existing state of infrastructural facilities will help promote expansion of the present scale of operation through better marketing and networking.

Link to their working paper: [Small Ruminants as a Source of Financial Security: A Case Study of Women in Rural Southwest Nigeria](#)

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