

AN ANALYSIS OF AGRICULTURAL LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES PREVALENT AMONG RURAL FARMERS IN ITU L.G.A. AKWA IBOM STATE.

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ABSTRACT

The study used 100 respondents to analyse the agricultural livelihood activities existing among rural farmers in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Data were collected for the study through personal interviews and structured questionnaires. The study revealed that farming activities (90%), animal husbandry (80%), fishing activities (70%) and food processing (60%) among others, were the most important agricultural livelihood activities existing in the study area. The study concludes by suggesting ways of improving rural agricultural livelihood activities for sustainable development in the Local Government Area in particular and Akwa Ibom State in general.

keywords: Agricultural livelihood, activities, rural farmers, Itu Local Government Area.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is largely an agrarian society, with at least 70% (about 103 million) of the estimated population of 148 million in 2008 living in rural and sub-urban areas and constitute the major food producers for the country (Ibe 2011). Before independence, agriculture was the main stay of the economy and Nigeria was self-sufficient in terms of food. Palm products, cocoa, peanuts and hides/skins were the major export commodities which earned foreign exchange for the country. According to Akpabio (2005), Nigeria has a total cultivable area of about 71 million hectares (ha), about 31 million of which is under rainfed cultivation, of this proportion, 54%, 17% and 29% are under cereal grains, roots/tubers and pulses/industrial crops respectively. He further stated that agriculture is the single largest contributor to the well-being of the rural poor in Nigeria, sustaining 90% and 70% of the rural and total labour force respectively. For many years now Nigeria has remained predominantly rural. The founding fathers were strong agrarians and the peasant farmers are considered the most desirable environment for sustaining the food and fibre needs of the nation at present day. It is evident that over 60 percent of our population rely on agriculture and farming for livelihood Udoh (2001). To supply the world's food and fibre needs is the science, the art, and the business of the agricultural industry. Obasi (2010) stated that agriculture is not only the main occupation of the rural people, but it is also the major and more enduring source of food for the people and raw materials for industrial development.

Boserup (1990) noted that through the development theory, the rural people have long been associated with agrarian mode of livelihood and an underlying assumption that its abundance of land and relative shortage of labour provides it with a comparative advantage in agricultural production.

It is commonly known that the greater proportion of economic activities in the Nigerian rural areas depend directly on the exploitation of the land. Rural dwellers are mainly occupied in farming, animal husbandry, fishing, hunting, food processing and some cottage industries, Ekong (2010)

Purpose of the Study;

1. To assess the socio economic characteristics of farmers in the study area.
2. To identify the various agricultural livelihood activities in the study area.
3. Make appropriate conclusion and recommendations concerning agricultural livelihood activities in the study area.

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METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Itu Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. It shares common boundaries with Uyo, Ibiono, Ikono Local Government Areas and Cross River State. The area has a total landmass of 606.10 square kilometers. The people are predominantly Ibibio speaking group with pockets of Efik speaking people and the Ijaws. The 2006 population census puts its population figure at 127,033 people. Forest resources consist of timber, wildlife, palm trees, raffia trees, gmelina plantations and firewood. Marine resources include fish, crayfish, oysters, lobster, shrimps shells, periwinkle among others. The main economic activities of the people are farming, fishing and trading. A total of 100 respondents from the rural communities of Itu Local Government Area were used for the study. Information in the questionnaires were analysed using codes, tables, percentages, illustrations and charts to address the purpose of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents:

Table 1: Gender Distribution of the Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Male	44	44.0
Female	56	56.0
Total	100	100.00

Source: Field survey 2011

Table I shows that the female respondents have the highest percentage of (56%). This is because in most rural settings, women are engaged in agricultural livelihood activities such as cassava, maize, rice, yam and vegetable cultivation among others. These crops are often regarded as women productive ventures.

Table 2: Marital status of respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	18	18.0
Married	30	30.0
Separated	12	12.0
Divorced	13	13.0
Widows	27	27.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Field survey 2011

Table 2: shows that (30.0%) of the respondents were married, an indication of the high respect given to marriage in the area Ekong (2010). However, (27.0%) were widows, (18.0%) of the respondents were single, (13.0%) of them were divorced while (12.0%) were separated from their spouses, but the good thing there was that they were all willing to give vital views about agricultural livelihood activities in the area.

Table 3: Age of the respondents

Age (years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
0 – 20	0	-
21 – 30	30	30.0
31 – 40	40	40.0
41 – 50	15	15.0
51 – 60	10	10.0
60 and above	5	5.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Field survey 2011

The result of the survey presented in table 3 revealed that most (40%) of the respondents sampled in Itu Local Government Area were within the age range of 31 – 40. This shows that majority of the farm-families were made up of adult farmers. This is in agreement with Adesope (2007) that critical examination shows that 40 years is a

stage of reasonable maturity and cannot adequately justify the characteristics of the youths. Meaning the farmers in these range 31 -40 years can adequately take livelihood decisions.

Table 4: Educational level of respondents

Educational level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No formal education	16	16.0
Primary education	44	44.0
Secondary education	36	36.0
Tertiary	4	4.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Field survey 2011

The table above shows that most (44%) of the respondents in Itu L.G.A. had completed primary education, (36%) of the respondents completed secondary education. The least were respondents who attained tertiary level of education (4.0%). Sixteen percent of the respondents had no formal education. The analysis above shows that majority of the respondents had one form of education or the other. Education therefore influenced their choice of livelihood activities and programmes.

Table 5: Farm income of respondents

Income per annum	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<₦2,500	35	35.0
₦2,600 – ₦5,000	40	40.0
₦5,500 – ₦10,000	20	20.0
₦10,500 & above	5	5.0
TOTAL	100	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2011

Since most respondents could not give exact figures of what they made out of farm livelihood activities on yearly basis, an estimated yearly sales of produce was used. This was the basis on which income data as shown in table 5 were generated. About (35%) of the respondents had income equal to or less than ₦2,500, (40%) had between ₦2,500 to ₦5,000, (20%) made sales income between ₦5,500 to ₦10,000 while only 5% had an income greater than or equal to ₦10,500 per annum. This indicated low income earnings associated with rural livelihood and low standard of living in the area. These may be attributed to inadequate incentives and extension services in the study area

Table 6: Classification of Respondents according to Livelihood activity

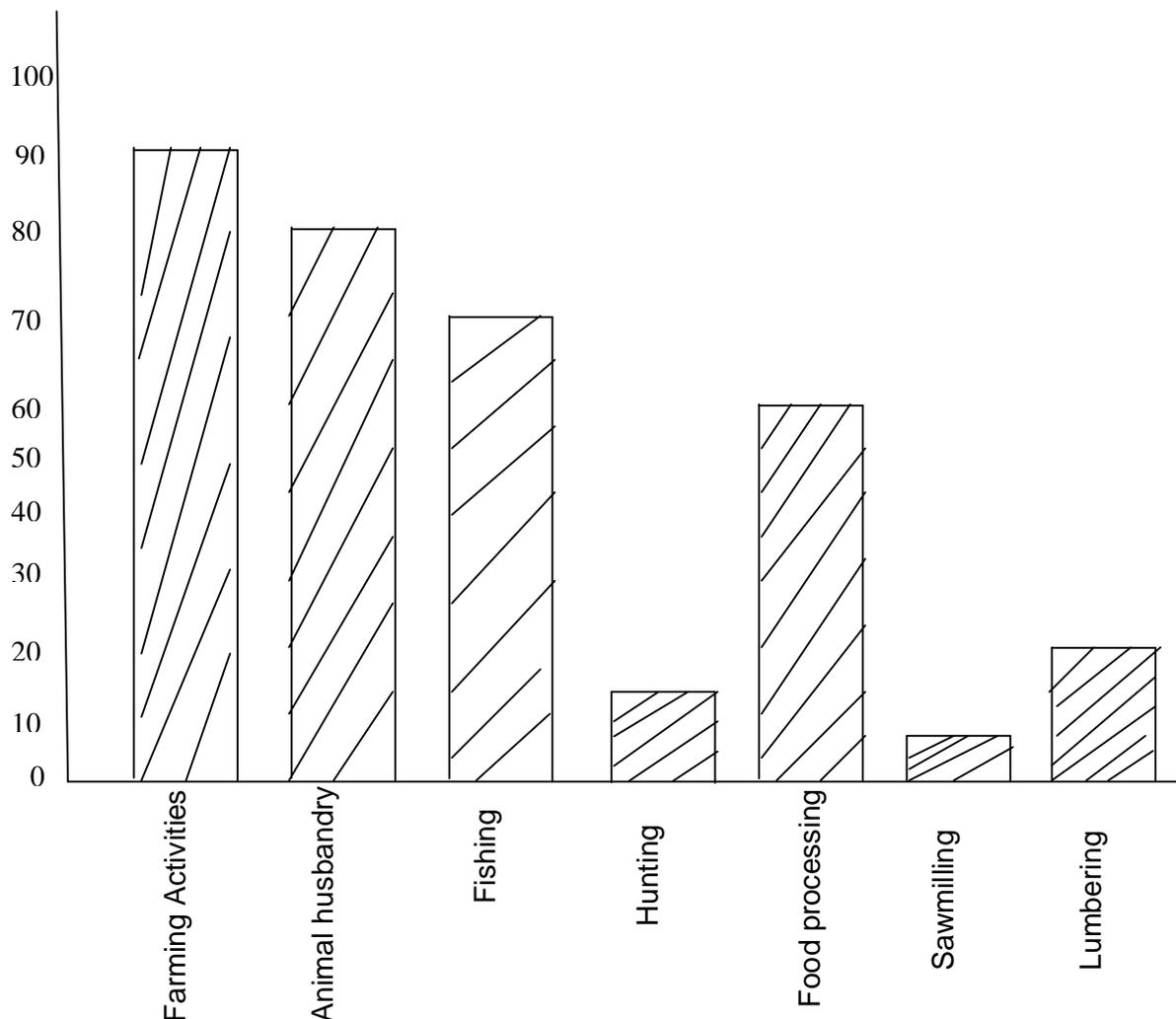
Livelihood activities	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agricultural livelihood activity	70	70.0
Non Agricultural livelihood activity	30	30.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2011

Table 6 indicates that 70% of the rural dwellers in Itu L.G.A. were into various agricultural livelihood activities to earn a living, while only about 30% were into Non-agricultural livelihood activities. According to Robson (2010), about 2.5 billion people world wide live in agricultural based livelihood, most in the third world countries and nearly two-third of them live in extreme poverty. Agriculture is the mainstay of Nigerian economy. About 70-80% of Nigerian population depend on agriculture and its associated fields (Akpabio 2005).

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Table 7: Agricultural Livelihood Activities existing in Itu L.G.A.



Source: Field survey 2011

Table 7, shows the level of involvement of the rural people of Itu Local Government Area in agricultural livelihood activities. From the survey, (90%) of the rural people are into farming activities such as cassava, maize, vegetable, yam, plantain and banana production among others. The reason for this high percentage is that farming activity is the major source of livelihood in the area, since crops produced happened to be the major staple food for the people. Gifford et al (1998) mentioned that arable crops are important and major staple food in the third world nations. Consequently, farming activity is ranked first as the major livelihood activity in the study area. Animal husbandry (80%) is mentioned as second livelihood activity for the people. They are engaged in the raising of birds, poultry, goats, pigs, sheep, and rabbits among others. Some of these animals are less capital intensive and are operated under semi intensive and extensive systems. Fishing (70%) is another agricultural livelihood activity that has greatly involve the rural people in the study area. The reason for this is the availability of Rivers, Lakes and Streams, most young men in the area take to fishing as one of heir major sources of livelihood despite the risk involve. 60% of the population in Itu Local Government Area are engaged in the processing of various agricultural products. The reason for this involvement is for quality branding of products, ease of transportation, market enhancement and profit making. Other livelihood activities of the people are timber lumbering (20%), hunting for animals (15%) and sawmilling (10%), these activities though risky but has empowered the people greatly and put food on their tables.

According to Ekong (2010), it is commonly known that the greater proportion of economic activities in Nigerian rural areas depend directly on the exploitation of land. He stated that rural dwellers are principally occupied in farming, animal husbandry, fishing, hunting, food processing and some form of cottage industries.

CONCLUSION

Agricultural livelihood has been found to be the major source of living in the rural communities of Itu Local Government Area and Akwa Ibom in general. From the study agricultural livelihood activities such as farm work, animal husbandry, fishing activities, animal hunting, food processing, sawmilling and lumbering activities among others have been found to be the most important livelihood activities in the rural communities in Itu Local Government Area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following:

1. Development efforts should be directed towards rural agricultural activities in the local government areas of Akwa Ibom State.
2. Government should provide modern farm tools like tractors, fishing gears, processing equipments etc for rural farmers to hire at reasonable price to ease farming operations.
3. Rural farmers should be provided with credit facilities like loan by the government.
4. Meaningful rural empowerment strategies should be adopted to impact positively on the rural dwellers, especially in the agricultural sector.

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