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PERCEPTION OF LIVELIHOOD ASSET DEPRIVATION AMONG WOMEN IN ISOKO NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, DELTA STATE

[1]Ibelieve Isaac*, [2]Jerry Habila, [2]Opara Chibiko Increase, [2]Okoro Olivia Nneka and [2]Akpaka Ugwuadi Kalu

[1]Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Federal University of Technology, Minna
[2]Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Imo State
***Corresponding Author Email:**isaacagbunuhor@gmail.com, Tel. +2340998575008

ABSTRACT

Livelihood is strongly determined by the rate of access to assets. In most local communities in Nigeria, however, women's access to livelihood assets is grossly undermined, thus entrenching the women in a position that makes them vulnerable to poverty. This gender-based denial of access has led to the feminization or genderization of poverty. Against this background, the aim of this study is to assess the perception of livelihood deprivation among women, using Isoko North Local Government Area as a case study. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to evaluate the asset status of the women in the study area, appraise the perception of equity to livelihood assets and account for the factors that restrict women's access to livelihood assets in the study area. Cluster sampling was used to first sample 8 communities from the Local Government Area, after which systematic random sampling was used to sample 382 women for the study. The data were descriptively analyzed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), and it was discovered that although more than 70% of the women are farmers, over 80% of them stated that access to fertile and arable land is usually lopsided in favor of the men based on gender differences. The study, therefore, concludes that access to livelihood assets in the study area is gender-based, and therefore, gender-biased, thereby exposing the women in the study area to vulnerability to poverty. The study recommends equitable distribution of land and other resources, enlightenment of communal leaders on the values of equity and equality and empowerment of the women in the study area to diversify their livelihoods.

Keywords: Livelihood, Assets, Poverty, Inequality, Perception

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INTRODUCTION

Conventionally, poverty analysis has been based on income and consumption, ignoring the social factors shaping the diversity in and unequal distribution of poverty across/among different groups. Such factors as gender, age, ethnicity and social class were not adequately addressed in the conventional poverty measurement approaches. However, poverty cannot continue to be viewed from the spectrum of income and consumption, or Sen's (1981) narrow view which premised entitlements on food. Poverty, thus, must be viewed from the lens of the sustainability of livelihoods.

The sustainable livelihoods hypothesis attempts to address the relationship between poverty and the environment in which poverty exist; it looks at entitlements and socioeconomic security from the point of view of assets/capitals. In this case, it is believed that poor or weak livelihoods (Isaac, 2015) will result in environmental-poverty trap. Chambers (1989) stressed that participatory appraisal where the people are allowed to define their livelihood experiences may result in a range of sustainable livelihood outcome criteria, including diverse factors such as self-esteem, security, happiness, stress, vulnerability, power, exclusion, as well as more conventionally measured material concerns. Thus, this study approaches the issue of gender dimension of access to livelihood assets by adopting a participatory approach. Sociocultural context and intra-household allocation rules determine who within the household has access to a particular resource and for what purpose (Beall and Kanji, 1999; Meinzen-Dick *et al.*, 2013).

Statement of Problem

The issues of poverty and livelihoods have been approached from the Sustainable Livelihood Framework developed by DFID (1999). Carney (1998a, 1998b) observed that the sustainable livelihood approach aims to help poor people achieve lasting improvements against the indicators of poverty that they define. This gives rise to the rights-based livelihood approach as a complementary approach to the livelihoods approach. It has been observed by DFID (1999) that the rights-based approach and livelihood approach both provide perspectives that seek to achieve many of the same goals (for example, empowerment of the most vulnerable and a strengthened capacity of the poor to achieve secure livelihoods). FAO (2011) and Isaac (2015) submitted that women generally face a surprisingly similar set of constraints which limit their access to productive assets and inputs as well as employment opportunities across regions and contexts. FAO (2011) noted further that sex cannot be ruled out because sometimes, the reference is to inequalities between males and females; and at other times, reference is made to the differences between male-headed and female-headed households, or even to plots or farms managed by females and males. However, the issue of the perception of women on the level of access to livelihood access has received little research attention, especially in Isoko North Local Government Area where this study is carried out.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to assess women's perception of livelihood deprivation in Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State; and the objectives of the study are to:

i. assess the asset status of the women in Isoko North Local Government Area

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ii. appraise the women's perception of equity to livelihood assets in the study area

iii. account for the factors that restrict women's access to livelihood assets in the study area

The Study Area

Isoko North Local Government Area is the second Local Government area in Isoko Region, the other being Isoko South. The Headquarters of the Local Government Area is in Ozoro town in Delta State. The Local Government houses the Delta State Polytechnic, Ozoro; and consequently, the 14,000 seater capacity stadium in Delta State Polytechnic. The major religions in the area are Christianity and traditional religion. The Local Government is one of the oil producing regions in Delta State. The major towns in Isoko North Local Government Area are Ozoro, Oyede, Emevor, Oghara-Iyede, Owhelogbo, Otor-Owhe. Some others, usually seen as villages, are Ofagbe, Ellu and Okpe-Isoko. The population of the study area, according to NBS (2011) was 111,919 in 1991 (out of which 57,746 were female); this grew to 143,559 in 2006 (out of which 71,611 were females), a growth trend indicating a close population size between men and women in the study area. The study area is bounded to the north by Ndokwa West, while to the east, it is bounded by Ndokwa East. At the southern part, the study area is bounded by Isoko South, while it is bounded to the west by Ughelli North. The location of the study area in Delta State is presented in Figure 1.

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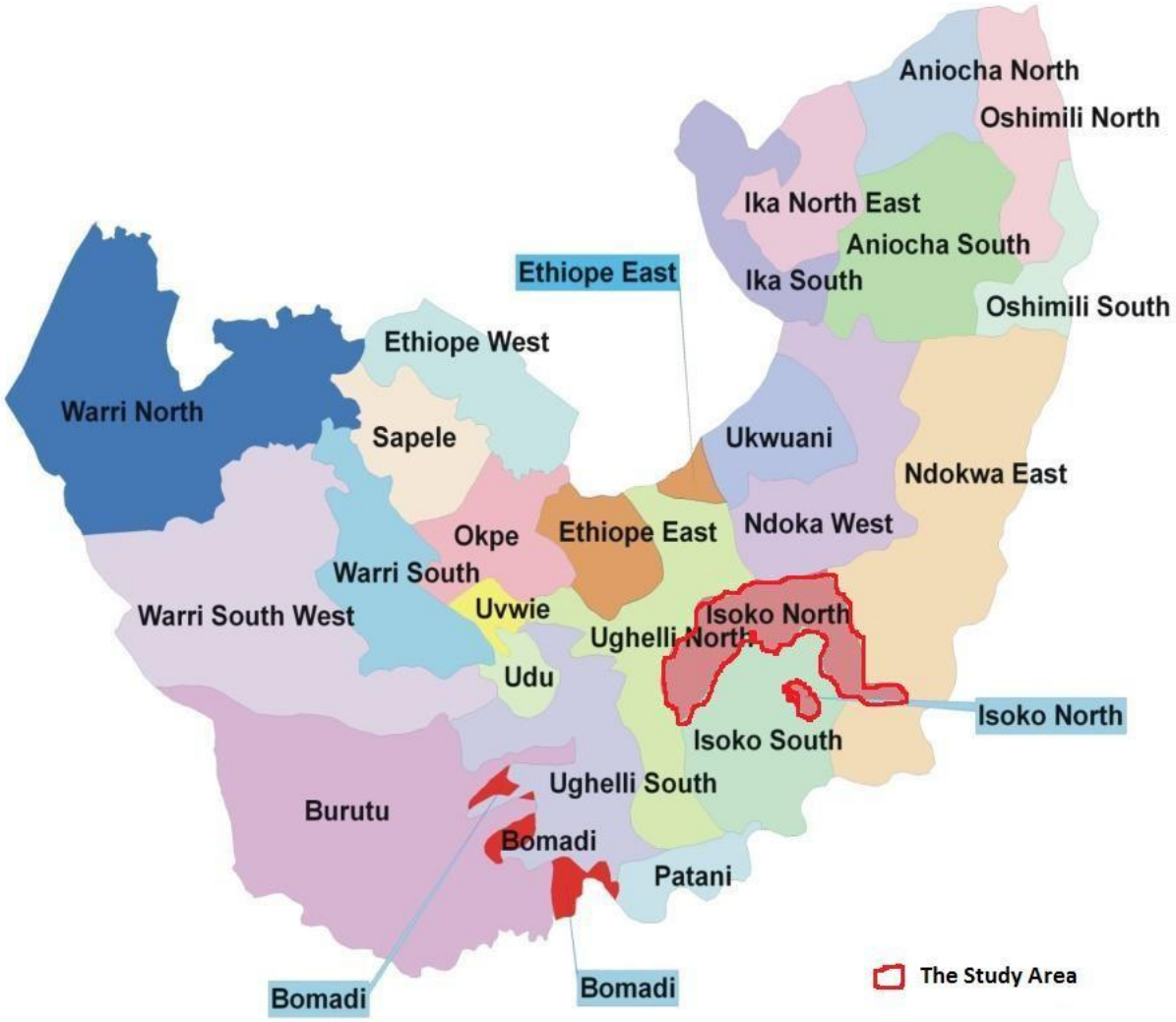


Fig. 1: Map of Delta State showing the Study Area

LITERATURE REVIEW

The meaning of livelihood in particular, and sustainable livelihood in general is still strongly contested. Despite this lack of generally acceptable definition, however, some definitions of livelihoods and sustainable livelihood are offered in this paper. This is based on the assertion of Carswell *et al.* (1997) as cited in Scoones (1998) that the "definitions of [sustainable] livelihoods are often unclear, inconsistent and relatively narrow; but without clarification, there is a risk of simply adding to a conceptual muddle". It has been argued by Chambers and Conway (1992), Carney (1998b), Carney *et al.* (1999), DFID (1999), Ellis (2000), DFID (2002) and Morse and McNamara (2013) that a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material

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and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. Similar viewpoint has been expressed on the idea of livelihoods by Putnam (1993), Stuart (1996), Narayan and Pritchett (1999), Throsby (1999) and Prasetyo (2018). A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base. DFID (1999) and Ashley and Carney (1999) opined that sustainable livelihoods approaches are based upon evolving thinking about poverty reduction, the way the poor live their lives, and the importance of structural and institutional issues; stressing that this approach to measuring development is a way of thinking about the objectives, scope and priorities for development, in order to enhance progress in poverty elimination. Furthermore, the spectrum of the definition of livelihood has been broadened with the emergence of Sen's (1987) capabilities approach and Chambers' (1995) well-being approach. As Sen (1987) proposes, capabilities are what people can do or be with their entitlements. Consequently, it was suggested by Chambers (1995) that a well-being approach to poverty and livelihood analysis allows people themselves to define the criteria which are important.

Gender Differences in Assets Ownership

Care should be taken to understand the difference between sex and gender when analyzing gender relations and the impact of gender on access to livelihood assets. The concepts of *sex* and *gender* have been used by analysts and policymakers synonymously, albeit incorrectly. As Oakley (1972) rightly observed, sex differences are due to innate biological differences between men and women. Gender differences, on the other hand, arise from the socially constructed relationship between men and women. The conceptual differences between sex and gender as posited by FAO (2011) are briefly summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Differences Between Sex and Gender

SEX	**GENDER**
A biological concept	A social concept
Describes the innate biological condition of being male or female	Describes the social roles and identities associated with being a man or a woman and deals with relationships between men and women
It is fixed	It can change

Source: Summarized by the Authors' from FAO (2011)

These differences affect the distribution of resources and responsibilities between men and women, and are shaped by ideological, religious, ethnic, economic, and cultural determinants (Bebbington, 1999; Ellis, 2000). Being socially constructed and determined, this distribution can thus be changed through conscious social action including public policy (Meinzen-Dick *et al.*, 2013). Gender, therefore, has a significant impact on access to livelihood assets.

The traditional income measure of poverty has constituted tremendous setback in measuring poverty. Therefore, a livelihood approach to measuring poverty and wellbeing has been suggested (Farrington *et al.*, 1999; Rakodi, 2002; Scoones, 2009; Daskson and McGregor, 2012). The current wave of argument is that poverty consists of multiple and interacting economic,

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social, infrastructural and environmental factors and is embedded in complex local realities (Bebbington, 1999; Ellis, 2000; World Bank, 2000a, 2000b; Helmore and Singh, 2001; Rakodi and Lloyd-Jones, 2002; de Haan 2000; DFID, 2002; World Bank, 2004; de Haan and Zoomers, 2005).

Gender determines the roles of individuals in the society and their access to certain assets (Sen, 1981, 1985, 1987,1999). Gender plays a significant role in defining entitlements and capabilities. In this case, gender can either make or mar the access of the poor to assets. There are certain livelihoods that have been traditionally genderised. Restriction in access to assets on the basis of gender can lead to genderisation of poverty and ill-being/well-being. It recognizes the phenomena of gender-based inequalities and roles. Ecological, social, economic and political conditions affect men and women differently (de Soto, 2000; Meinzen-Dick et al, 2013). Access to assets also differs between men and women. However, access alone is not enough to secure a meaningful livelihood; control over assets is also a significant factor. Since control over livelihood assets also differ between men and women, gender is an asset in its own right. Men tend to own more assets (and by extension, own assets of higher value) than women (Farrington, 2001; Deere and Doss, 2006; FAO, 2011; Isaac, 2015). Gender is different from sex, in that while sex is a biological nature, gender is a socially determined role (FAO, 2011). Men and women also experience shocks and stress differently (Folbre, 2001; Meinzen-Dick et al, 2013). Being a socially determined factor, gender is an asset that can contribute significantly to livelihood.

As Meinzen-Dick *et al* (2013) argued, access to, control over, and ownership of assets are critical components of well-being because assets can be used to generate income, serve as collateral for access to credit, represents stores of wealth and can also be used to cope with shocks such as natural disasters or family health crises, thus significantly contributing to social status. However, it has been observed that assets are unequally distributed, both between rich and poor and between men and women (Deere and Doss 2006; FAO, 2011). Meinzen-Dick *et al.*(2013) also stressed that asset distribution within the household influences individuals' bargaining power in the household, which in turn affects household and individual well-being, as reflected in food security, nutrition, and education.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were collected from primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources include data obtained from books, journals, conference proceedings and reports. Secondary data was used to present the phenomenon of gender-based deprivation and inequality in assets access, ownership, consumption and control. The primary data, on the other hand, were collected directly from the field through a well-structured questionnaire. The primary data collected for the study borders on access to assets, ownership of assets, control of assets, and satisfaction with livelihood assets available to women in Isoko North Local Government Area. Systematic random sampling technique was used to sample 382 women in the study area. Descriptive statistical technique was used to analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire survey and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data collected for the study. The results are presented in the form of tables, charts and graphs. Because

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this study focuses on (perception of livelihood) deprivation among women, they form the study population out of whom the study sample was drawn.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Age Distribution of the Respondents

The result presented in Table 2 points out that 45.55% of the women in the study area fall within the age bracket of 39-48yrs. This is closely followed by those within the age bracket of 29-38yrs which account for 31.15% of the women. Those within the age groups of 49-58yrs and 18-28yrs account for 12.83% and 6.02% of the population of study respectively. The age group with the lowest population is those above 58yrs, representing 4.45% of the study population. The implication of this is that majority of the women of study falls within the active age group; and thus, are considered as active population (or working age population).

Table 2: Age Distribution of the Respondents

Age	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
18-28yrs	23	6.02
29-38yrs	119	31.15
39-48yrs	174	45.55
49-58yrs	49	12.83
Above 58yrs	17	4.45
Total	**382**	**100**

Source: Authors' Field Survey

Educational Qualification

As shown in Fig. 2, the highest educational attainment of 68% of the respondents is primary education. This is followed by 21% whose highest educational attainment is secondary education. Fig. 2 also shows that about 6% of the women in the study area have attained tertiary education. However, 5% of the women have no form of formal education whatsoever. The low level of education of the majority of the women under study might be responsible for their poor access to livelihood assets. Since education is an important aspect of human capital and human development, this indicates a low level of human capital and human development among women in the study area.

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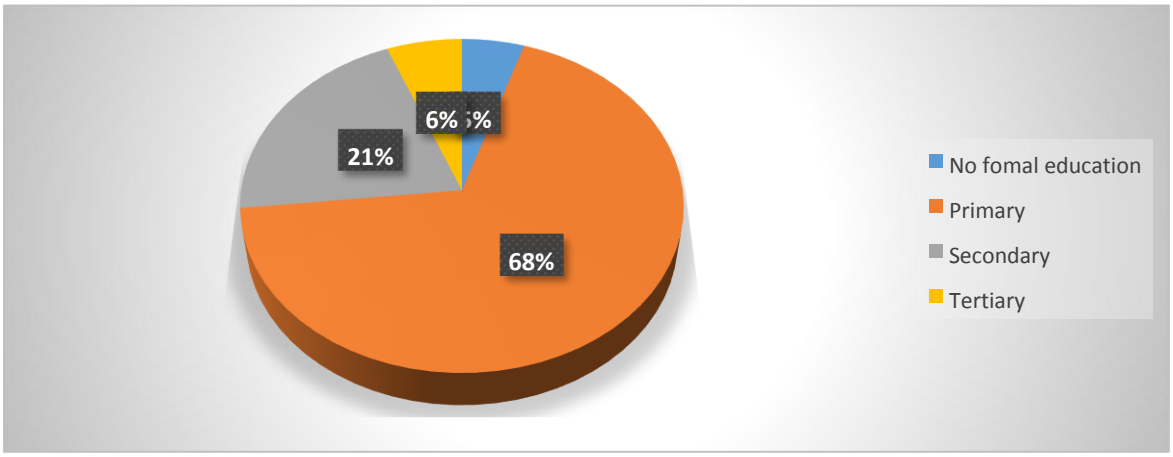


Fig. 2: Educational Qualification

Source: Authors' Field Survey

Occupation of the Respondents

Farming is the livelihood of the majority of women (78.02%) in the study area as shown in Fig. 3. However, as indicated in Table 4, they have limited and unequal access to land for farming as a result of their gender. Similarly, as Table 3 indicates, majority of the women (73.56%) earn below the national minimum wage of ₦18,000 monthly. Therefore, the poor status of the women farmers in the study area, as well as their low financial resources to improve their production increases their vulnerability to poverty.

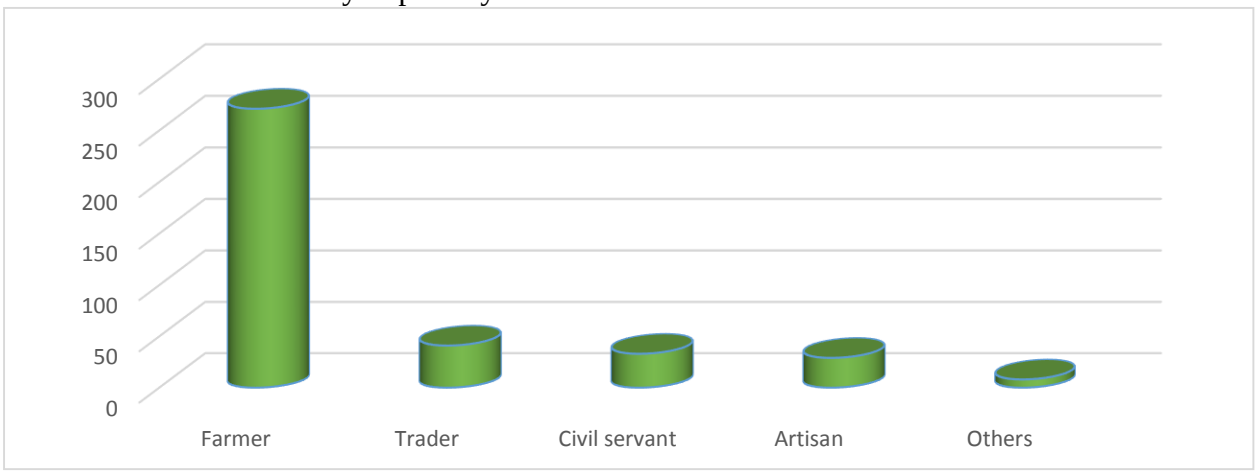


Fig. 3: Occupation of the Respondents

Source: Authors' Field Survey

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Average Monthly Income

As can be observed from Table 3, majority (73.56%) of the women in the study area earn below ₦18,000. This is followed by those who earn between ₦18,000-28,000, representing 15.18% of the population under study. Those whose monthly income falls between ₦28,005-38,000 represents 5.50% and 4.97% of the study population respectively; while only about 0.79% of the population earn above ₦48,000. The international poverty line is $1.9 per person per day. The current exchange rate for $1 dollar is ₦365. This means that a Nigerian is expected to spend at least ₦693:50 daily and consequently, ₦20,805 monthly to be considered non-poor. Since 75.56% of the women under study earn less than ₦18,000 monthly, the implication is that majority of the women in the study area are poor. This indicates that the women in the study area experience weak financial capital, and as a result, there is the prevalence of genderisation of poverty in Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State.

Table 3: Average Monthly Income

Income	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Less than N18,000	281	73.56
N18,000-28,000	58	15.18
N28,005-38,000	21	5.50
N38,005-48,000	19	4.97
Above N48,000	3	0.79
Total	**382**	**100**

Source: Authors' Field Survey

Ease in access to land for farming

In the study area, access to land for farming (arable land) among women in the study area is relatively difficult. Fig. 4 indicates that 79% and 11% of the women in the study area strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that they experience easy access to land for farming. Cumulatively, only about 5% of the women in the study area confirmed to have experienced ease of access to arable land. Therefore, about 95% of the women in Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State face difficulty in securing land for practicing their livelihood activity which is farming. This is a symptom of natural capital deprivation among women in the study area, and it signifies gender-based deprivation which intensifies women's vulnerability to poverty in the study area.

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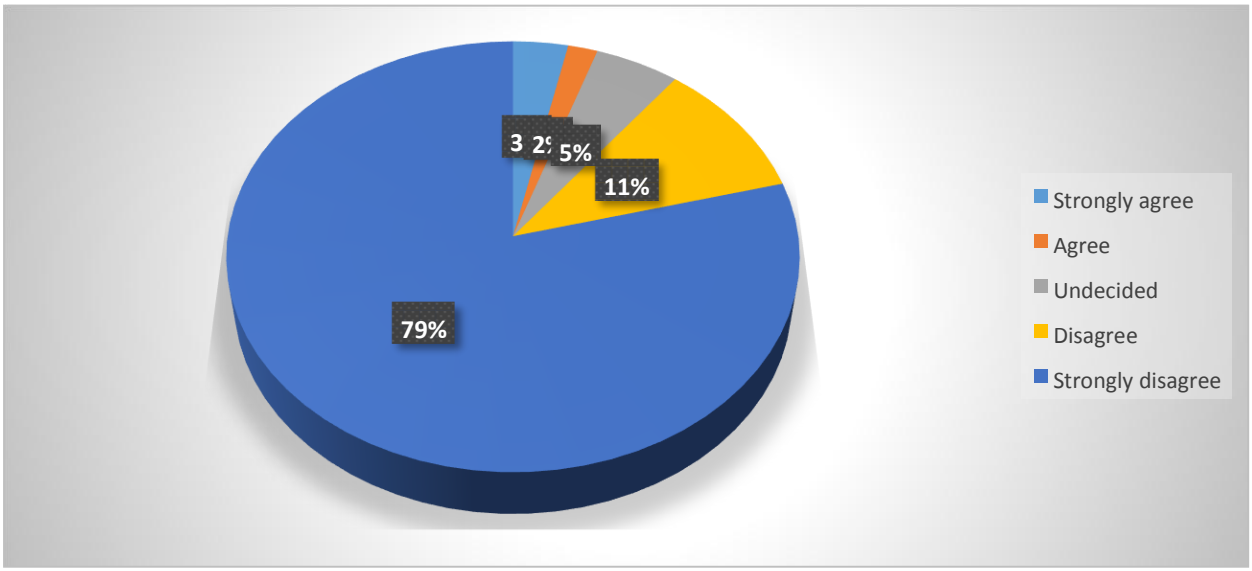


Fig. 4: Ease in access to land for farming

Source: Authors' Field Survey

Reason for unequal access to farm lands

Several reasons are offered among the women on the reason for unequal access to arable lands in Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State. In relation to the perceived reason for unequal access to arable lands among men and women in the study area, Fig. 5 reveals that 81.3% of the women attribute inequality in access to land for farming to gender differences. Overall, the women in the study area considered inability of women to farm as the least reason for unequal access to arable land. This gender-based inequality tremendously affects their access to farm lands. This symbolizes the intensity of gender-based bias in access to livelihood assets in the area.

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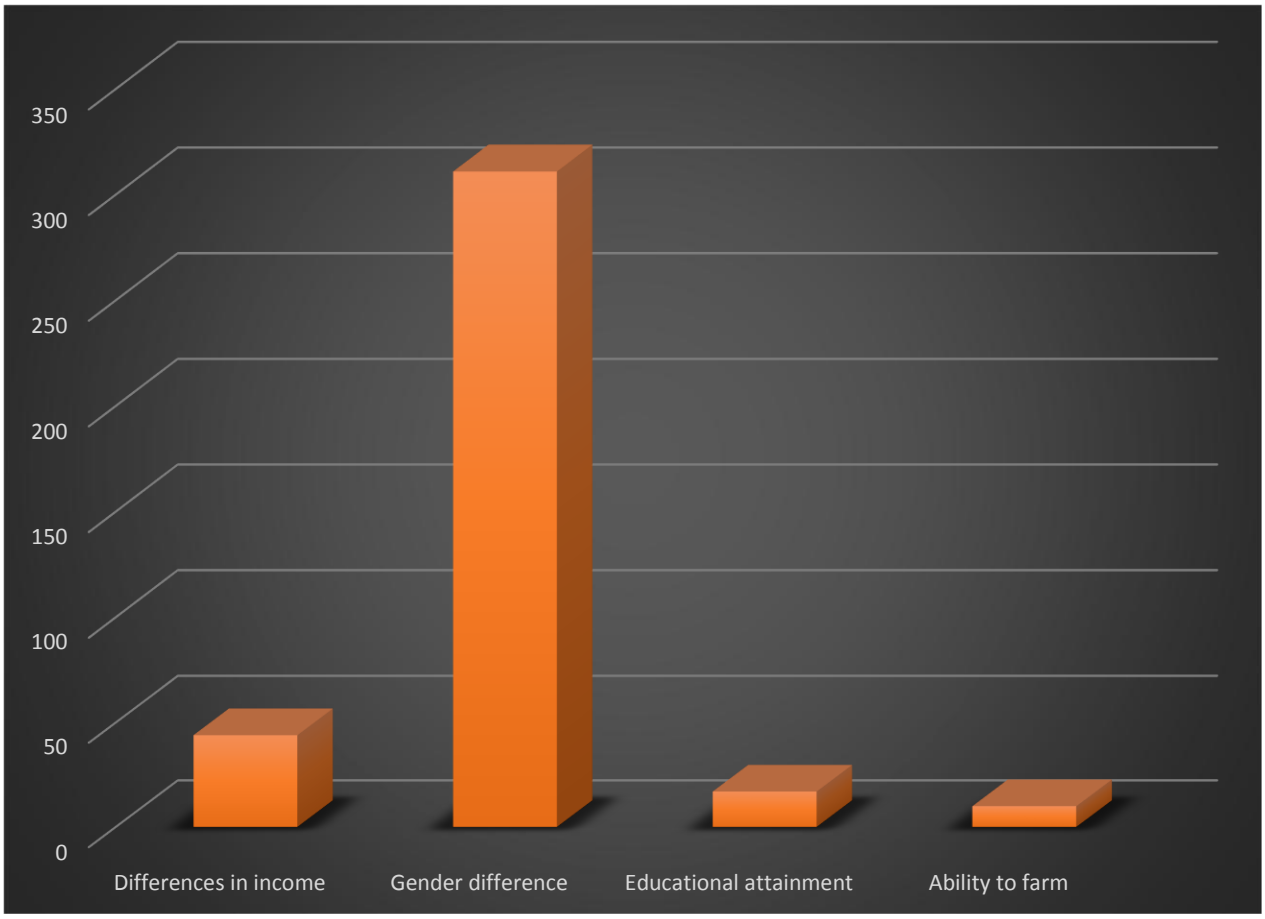


Fig. 5: Reason for unequal access to farm lands

Source: Authors' Field Survey

Women's Perception of Equity in Access to Livelihood Opportunities

Access to livelihood assets in Isoko North Local Government Area is a herculean task for the women in the area. From the information summarized in Table 4, 53.66% of the women disagreed that there is easy access to land for building; while 21.73% strongly disagreed with the same assertion. On the average, only 5.76% and 3.66% strongly agree and agree respectively that there is a relative ease of access to land for building. This indicates that majority of the women suffer a physical capital deprivation. Similarly, 54.19% and 17.28% of the women disagreed or strongly disagreed that there is equality in sponsorship between men and women, indicating a human capital deprivation.

Furthermore, on the aspect of political capital deprivation, 30.10% strongly disagreed that there is equality in voice during communal meetings, while 23.04% just disagreed with the same. More so, 77.49% and 18.06% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively on the notion that there is equality in the application of traditional rules and laws. Also, 68.59% and 28.27% of the women strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that there is equal representation between men and

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women in their communal leadership. This gives governance in the study area a gendered identity. In the same vein, 62.30% of the women disagreed that they have equal participation in community matters with the men. Weak participation is tantamount to weak capacity, and consequently, high incidence of poverty. Natural capital deprivation is also common in the study area as 81.41% and 63.61% of the women disagreed that they have free choice of farm land location and size respectively.

The result of social capital assessment shows a mixed reaction. While 26.96% and 23.82% strongly agreed and agreed that the choices they make are respected by other members of their households, they also revealed that the respect they get is unequal to that accorded to the men as 79.58% strongly disagreed that they have equal respect with the men. One major manifestation of poverty is in the area of choicelessness. This shows that the social capital of women is Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State is adversely affected. Summarily, the livelihood security of women in the study is severely threatened; as a result, they are vulnerable to poverty.

Table 4: Women's Perception of Equity in Access to Livelihood Opportunities

Perception of Equity in Access	**SA**	**A**	**U**	**D**	**SD**
Ease of access to land for building	22 (5.76%)	14 (3.66%)	58 (15.18%)	205 (53.66%)	83 (21.73%)
Equality in treatment and sponsorship from parents	19 (4.97%)	31 (8.12%)	59 (15.18%)	207 (54.19%)	66 (17.28%)
Equality in the share of asset inheritance	61 (15.97%)	94 (24.61%)	155 (40.58%)	63 (16.49%)	9 (2.36%)
Equality in voice during communal meetings	46 (12.04%)	35 (9.16%)	98 (25.65%)	88 (23.04%)	115 (30.10%)
Equality in the application of traditional laws	4 (1.05%0	3 (0.79%)	10 (2.62%)	69 (18.06%)	296 (77.49%)
Free choice of farm location	0 (0.00%	1 (0.26%)	54 (14.14%)	311 (81.41%)	16 (4.19%)
Free choice of farm size	25 (6.54%)	18 (4.71%)	31 (8.12%)	243 (63.61%)	65 (17.02%)
Equal control over family assets	11 (2.88%)	34 (8.90%)	15 (3.93%)	97 (25.39%)	235 (61.52%)
My choice is respected by household members	103 (26.96%)	91 (23.82%)	88 (23.04%)	50 (13.09%)	50 (13.09%)
Equal respect for men and women by communal heads	3 (0.79%)	2 (0.52%)	21 (5.50%)	53 (13.87%)	304 (79.58%)
Equal representation between men and women in leadership	0 (0.00%	0 (0.00%	18 (4.71%)	108 (28.27%)	262 (68.59%)

Source: Authors' Field Survey

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CONLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Deprivation of access to livelihood assets constitutes a significant problem to the livelihood security of women. This is especially so in Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State where access to livelihood assets among women is grossly limited as a result of gender bias in the allocation, ownership and control of livelihood assets. In Isoko North Local Government Area, gender is the major determinant of access to (as well as ownership, usage and control of) livelihood asset/capitals (that is, resources), thereby denying women considerable level of access to enhance/improve their livelihoods and make it sustainable. This study has unveiled the internal recesses that women in the study area grapple with while trying to make a living. It can be concluded from the findings of this study that the livelihood of the women is unsustainable; while poverty denies them the opportunity to diversify their livelihoods effectively. Their low level of assets exposes them to vulnerabilities, and consequently, poverty. The deprivations that women suffer in terms of access to livelihood assets give room for 'genderisation of poverty' in the study area as the poor livelihoods of the women leads to income, human and other forms of poverty among women. Based on the findings of this study, therefore, the study recommends empowerment of the women in Isoko North Local Government Area to allow for diversification of their livelihoods. Furthermore, there is a need for continuous enlightenment of the general populace in the study area on the virtues and values of gender equality. Equal (or at least equitable) representation between men and women in the leadership of the people should be ensured in the study area by the appropriate bodies. There is also a need for equitable distribution of land and other resources in order to avail the women in the study area the opportunity to enhance their livelihood activities.

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