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Effects of Male Labour Rural to Urban Migration on Women Farmers Left-behind in Imo State Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Migration from rural to urban areas is increasingly becoming an important livelihood strategy. People, including agricultural and farm workers move in search of better life or pay. This exodus is not without its challenges and associated problems on people and even food security. This study assesses a much neglected aspect of migration studies – that is on women farmers whose husbands leave home to look for more money and economic opportunities. The study seeks to find out the reasons for migration to urban areas; effects of such male movement on women left behind, the coping strategies used by these women to survive their husband's absence. The study interviewed 120 rural women farmers, whose husbands are not at home in search of better payment. Majority of the women met are in their early 50s and sixties (More than 50%). They have small land area for farming 0.25 – 1 hectare as indicted by 77.5% of the respondents. The reasons cited for migrating to urban areas or vice versa include rural poverty (100%), risky nature of crop production, rural unemployment, land shortages, poor infrastructure, low crop productivity and others. This exodus has effects on women farmers left behind as it has increased the workload or burden of the women, changes in traditional tasks, adjustments in family roles, declining agricultural productivity and over absence of proper child care. To cope, the women depend on remittances from their husbands, frequent communication, sending their children to live with relatives and many others. To improve the status of these women, education, training and access to production resources such as land be granted the women by governments at all levels.

Keywords: Migration, women, rural – urban, farm work, remittance.

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding poverty and poor people's livelihoods, sustainable or not, has become an important focus within international development literatures and policy debates. A livelihood approach understands poverty as more than just insufficient income. The Sustainable Livelihoods approach favored by DFID defines livelihoods as 'the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living'

(Carney, 1998). Meanwhile, broader understandings of livelihoods stress the active seeking of livelihoods as the tactical and strategic behavior of impoverished people' (Whitehead, 2002), such that livelihoods are the diverse ways in which people make a living and build their worlds' (Whitehead, 2002). In the absence of a fully developed cash economy or social contract, or where there is inadequate social protection provided by the state, this framework seeks above all to describe and analyze how groups of people pool their resources and diversify their activities in order to reduce risk, co-insure one another, and manage the investment and distribution of resources to ensure individual well-being in the present and foreseeable future. It refers to all productive activity undertaken by a social group or by individuals, their portfolio of activities, including (and perhaps especially) those that are non-formal in nature. Better management of households is likely to be associated with better well being of members (Whitehead 2002).

According to Seones (1998) a household located in a particular context and economy may choose between (or be constrained from choosing) three main clusters of livelihood options — agricultural intensification and extensification, income diversification, and migration. In turn, De Haan and Rogaly (2002) in an important collection on labour mobility and rural society, argue that migration is much more common as a livelihood strategy than is often suggested, including for the poor. This echoes the conclusion of Ellis (1998: 55) that 'migration is one of the most important methods of diversifying rural livelihoods', although as Kothari (2002) notes; it may not be an option for the poorest.

The United Nations (2004) reported that half of the global population lives in cities and estimated that this will rise to sixty percent by 2030. In Nigeria and other developing countries, population in cities and conurbations is projected to increase from 1.9 billion in 2000 to 3.9 billion in 2030. This is principally due to rural to urban migration which is consequent upon the dichotomous planning and development which many developing countries adopted especially after independence. This subsequently results in the ruralities and economic deprived and the urban endowed that translates into improved opportunities in these urban centers than the rural areas (Abdullahi, 2009).

In Africa, estimates have shown that between 1990 and 2020, half a billion people will be added to already overcrowded conurbations as against the less than 200 million people in north America and Europe (Abdullahi, 2009). Such rapid urban growth in these African countries including Nigeria started even before independence. The migration far outstrips services and infrastructural deployment resulting in deepening crisis in basic municipal services, a situation which was later further worsened by the Structural Adjustment Programmed of the 1980s to which Nigeria has hardly recovered from. Also in Nigeria, the rural populace moves out in large numbers temporarily or permanently to towns and cities to seek out new opportunities, improved livelihoods and better standard of living. Subsequently, however, they end up in city slums scratching out a living with limited capacity to adapt to socioeconomic changes in the new environments they find themselves. Predominantly, their livelihood patterns contribute significantly to climate change and the negative impacts of this change.

The movement of people from one environmental region or area to another is called migration. It is a global phenomenon which could either be on a temporary or permanent basis. To some, it occur as a response to social factors while, some others move as a result of quest for further education, search for employment, higher wages, etc. The need to escape conflicts or adverse physical condition such as flood, hurricanes, draught, earthquakes landslides etc. necessitate the migration of some other group of people. There are different categories of migration, some of which include: Traditional migration, rural-rural migration, emergency or forced migration, country-country migration, urban-rural migration, as well as rural-urban migration. Traditional migration entails the movement of people such as fishermen, pastoralists etc. from one place to another, in search of resources such as water bodies. Pasture field for their livestock etc. to aid their businesses: Rural- rural migration

refers to the movement of people from one rural area to another. Emergency or forced migration refers to an unplanned movement from one place to another either due to war, famine, draught etc. Country-country migration refers to the movement of people from one country to another which could either be on an intercontinental or intracontinental basis. Urban-rural migration-refers to the movement of people from the urban centers (Babatunde *et al.*, 2013).

Rural-urban migration is probably the most distinctive pattern of migration in West Africa and indeed throughout most developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. It is no doubt a distinguishing feature of development. Although, rural-urban migration might be regarded as a desirable and essential result of industrialization, it has led to the upsurge of the problem of food insecurity in developing nations, as able bodied people are leaving the rural areas which are the domain of agricultural practices for the urban centers (base of industrialization). As a result of rural-urban migration, the problem of urban unemployment has been made worse. This has led to an increase in the rate of criminal acts such as armed robbery, fraud, prostitution among others in the urban centers. For instance cases of murder in Karachi, the largest urban centre in Pakistan is said to have increased from 734 per annum in 2006 to 1,142 in 2008 (Singh Police Department, 2010). Besides, cases whereby the masses find it difficult to appropriate employment and or educational opportunities, they can easily be trapped by politicians and terrorists to promote their selfish, evil agenda (Canter and Lard, 1985; Farrington, 1986). The problems of environmental pollution, inadequate shelters etc. are on the increase as well.

Migration from rural areas is increasingly becoming an important livelihood strategy. Though, a moving to another area of the country on short or long terms, migration often occurs because of lack of economic opportunities. There are some available studies that have analyzed the effect of rural-urban migration on agricultural production in Nigeria (Angba, 2003; Babatunde *et al.*, 2013; Abdullahi *et al.*, 2009).

There is need to examine the effects of male rural to urban migration on women and children left behind. Of all the studies on rural-urban migration, none has given attention to those individuals left behind by the men. This gap in knowledge is what this paper seeks to close and enlighten readers on how women suffer when the men leave home.

This paper therefore has the following specific objectives:

- a. to describe the socio economic characteristics of respondents
- b. to identify reasons for male labour migration
- c. to identify effects of male migration on women left behind
- d. to examine the coping strategies of the household during the husbands absence.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in AhiazuMbaise (LGA) of Imo state with a total population of about 185, 751 in 2013 projected from 2006 census figure. It has a land area of about 87.179 square kilometer. The people of AhiazuMbaise are predominantly small scale farming and traders but a high proportion of vegetable farmers come from Otulu, Ogbe and Oru. The grown vegetables such as general (amaranthus spinach) waterleaf (tahunum training area) fluted pumpkin (teleferiaosidentalis), pepper among others, the people also keep animals like goat, pigs and poultry. Ten communities were purposely selected from the study area. The reason for the selection of these communities is because they are well known as farmers and immigrants in the area in each of the ten sample communities, twelve women were also selected by the same techniques from each of the selected communities in all a sample of one hundred and twenty respondent were selected which among them were (120) women which constituted sample of the study. Data were analysed using percentage, frequency distribution and mean. Both primary and secondary data were collected primary data was collected with both structured and open closed questionnaire to house heads and interview schedule

secondary data were gathered from text books journals, old project and other relevant publication as well as internet. The questionnaire revolved around the socio economic characteristics, and the effect of male out migration on women and food security.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 at a glance shows the socio economic characteristics of the respondents. It reveals that 50% of the respondents are within the age bracket of 51-60 years. They are followed by 37.5% whose age falls within 41-50 years. This implies that they are not old or aging individuals who cannot work on the farm. They are farm people and this informs that movement of their husbands who reasoned that the women who are energetic and can fend for themselves pending their return. This findings is in line with Mgbada (2010) who posited that the mean age of Nigerian farmers presently is between 45-50 years with a skewedness of the mean to the right, meaning that they can do farm work. Continuing, all the respondents are married as indicated by 79.2%, 40% have more than 10 dependents. This large number helps the women in farm work and hawk to support the family income.

Table 1: Socio Economic Characteristic of Respondents

Attribute	Frequency	Percentage
31-40	7	5.8
41-50	45	37.5
51-60	60	50.0
61 and above	8	6.7
Marital status		
Married	95	79.2
Separated	25	79.8
Household size		
1-5	39	32.5
6-10	48	40.0
11-above	42	35.0
Education		
No formal education	28	23.0
Primary school	73	60.8
Secondary	19	15.8
Occupation		
Farming (major)	94	78.3
Trading	26	21.7
Farm size		
0.25-1	9.3	77.5
1.5-2	2.0	16.7
2.5-3	7	5.8

Again 79.3% have farming as their major occupation as shown by 78.3%, while 21.7 engage in petty trading. On farm size, we could see the inequality. Majority (77.5%) of the respondents cultivate between 0.25-1 hecter of land, 16.7% have 1.5-2 hecters, while 5.8% have 2.5-3 hecters of land. This finding is in line with BMZ (2013) who posited that women have access to only about 20% of all lands worldwide, with their allocations generally of small size and lower quality. Women worldwide need to use and own land and other productive resources in other to secure livelihoods and food security for their families.

Table 2 shows the reasons why men migrate to urban areas, the major reason for male labour rural-urban migrate are rural poverty with 100% response. The risks involved in crop production with 95.8% is the second reason for leaving home, searching for greener pasture so to say. Rural unemployment is another reason with 85.8% for leaving family and city. Other reasons for male-labour out-migration are poor infrastructure with 69.2, low crop productivity (65%), land shortages (79.2%), the feeling of numerous job opportunities waiting in town for them with 84.2%. low wages and low profitability with 56.7% and 53.3% respectively are among the reasons cited by the respondents for their husbands leaving home.

Table 2: Reasons for Male Labour Rural-Urban Migration

Reasons for migration	Frequency+	Percentage
Higher risk in crop production	115	95.8
Rural unemployment	105	85.8
Low crop production	78	65.0
Poor rural infrastructure	83	69.2
Low wages	68	56.7
Low profitability	64	53.3
Land shortages	95	79.2
Rural poverty	120	100
Numerous job opportunities	101	84.2

+ Multiple responses

The above findings are in line with the findings of Asis (2006) who posited that in north east Thailand, riskiness in farming due to unreliable rainfall distribution, drought, unemployment and poverty are factors which push their members of farming population to the cities and other areas. He also said, in the Philippines, education and social networks are the two pull factors, while unemployment, low wages, low poverty, and lack of profitability in farming and lack of basic amenities are some of the reasons why people leave their villages for greener pastures. Continuing, Ogdon (1984) says rural unemployment resulting from rapid population growth and the mechanization of agricultural processes has been identified as the leading cause of rural-to-urban migration in Latin America (Ogdon, 1984). Another major push factor out of rural areas is the growing shortage of fertile arable land in the content of high population growth, landholding inequality, environmental degradation, rural poverty, and lack of infrastructure and social services in rural areas. Adverse environmental conditions, unfavorable macroeconomic policies and declining markets for certain types of produce are also important push factors for male out-migration in Africa (Ogden, 1984).

Table 3: Effects of male labour migration on women farmers

Effects of male migration	Frequency+	Percentage
Loss of land title	7.8	65.0
Declining agricultural output	109	90.8
Adjustment in family roles	94	78.3
Pauperization	67	55.8
Increase work land on women	110	91.7
Increase labour hire for farm work	107	89.2
Changes in traditional tasks	63	52.5
Absence of proper child care	80	66.7

+ Multiple response

Table 3 reveals the numerous effects of male labour rural to urban migration on women left – behind. The major effect is that work load of women increases with the absence of the male who owns the family, as shown by 91.7% response. Declining agricultural output with 90.8% is another effect. This is true as women left behind do their best based on their strength. Increase labour for hire (89.2%), adjustment in family roles (78.3%) changes in traditional tasks (52.5%), absence of proper child care (66.7%), and pauperization (55.8%) are all effects of male out-migration on the women left – behind. The above findings imply that when men leave home, females are left to manage on their own and to provide for both the elderly and the young. This results not only in changes in family structure, but usually leads to adjustments in family roles, and more importantly, in the division of labour as well as in the way, labour is utilized in the community. This often leads to quick aging of the labour force for agriculture. As a result, women assume major responsibilities for farm work and become the backbone for food production

When men migrate, the household members left behind must either hire labour or substitute for male labour. Scattered evidence from sub-Saharan Africa suggests that male out-migration may intensify women’s workload in agriculture and contribute to women taking

up traditionally male farming tasks. In South Africa, for example, when men migrate, women must also clear the land for planting (Mtshali, 2002), and in Malawi 45 percent of the women interviewed were performing tasks once handled by men (Deshingkar, 2004). These women were already over-burdened and remittances were too low to hire labour.

A comparative study of Southeast Asia (Paris *et al.*, 2009) shows that, in Northeast Thailand, as a result of male migration, a higher proportion of family members contributed to rice production, but more labour was also hired. In the Philippines, the proportion of hired labour was higher than family labour, and hired female labourers substituted for wives' labour. In North Vietnam, rice farming was dominated by female family labour, particularly in households with migrants. In all such cases, remittances were used to pay for farm inputs and/or hiring of labour, thus maintaining productivity. In the Philippines and Thailand, the absence of principal males and sons did not increase women's workload because female household members used remittances for hiring labour for land preparation, spraying of chemicals and other heavy tasks. In Vietnam, wives appear to have taken on additional responsibilities such as fertilizer and pesticide application and land preparation, which are typically male tasks. Some of the female farmers shifted their roles from unpaid family labourers to managers.

In rural China, as agriculture becomes less important than non-farming activities as a source of income and men increasingly migrate to urban areas, women undertake most of the farming activities, including management. However, they still have less decision-making power than men within households and their community (Song *et al.*, 2009).

In areas where socio-cultural gender norms are very rigid, women withdraw from agricultural work or other types of rural employment as a result of male migration. Reinforcing the gender division of labour between productive and reproductive spheres. Evidence of this is found in rural Armenia and in Guatemala (Menjivar and Agadjanian, 2007) and in parts of South Asia (Kerala, India and Muslim communities in eastern Sri Lanka, (Jackson and Rao, 2004).

In rural Mexico, male international migration, and hence higher remittances, appears to have been associated with gender-differentiated labour supply behaviour among those who stay behind. Women in families receiving remittances withdraw from paid work—mostly from poorly paid occupations in the informal sector, whereas men who remain in rural areas appear to shift from formal-sector jobs to the informal sector (Amnuedo-Donmtes and Pozo, 2006). A reason for this behaviour is hard to find. A more recent-study (Appendini, 2009) finds that women who stay behind appear to have ambiguous feelings about their situation, enjoying greater independence in decision making in some instances, but also feeling further overburdened with family responsibilities.

The effects of female migration on subsistence production and food security as well as on rural labour markets are documented even less than the effects of male migration. As for the Impact of women's migration on subsistence production, a recent study (Pfeiffer and Taylor, 2007) finds that neither female nor male migration has any effect on the propensity to produce staple crops in rural Mexico, but that non-staple crop production responds negatively only to male migration.

What happens to women's workload when men migrate? Palmer (1985) cited many issues for women left behind, one of which is the increase in the work burden of women. Depending on who is left behind? In Thailand, principal females had been engaged in their traditional tasks as unpaid workers and as managers with a limited budget, arranging for hired labourers and borrowing money from private lenders. Thus, migration did not change their participation in field activities. However, the principal Females revealed that their work burden and farm responsibilities increased. They had to manage the day-to-day farm activities and make crop management decisions aside from household management when their husbands worked outside the villages for extended periods.

In Vietnam, the labour contributions of principal females increased. In addition to managing all operations, they also look for labourers to hire during peak cropping operations. During peak cropping season, wage costs increase and hired labourers are difficult to find. 'To cope with this problem, women exchange labour with women from other households, The important activities that increase wives' workload when husbands leave are irrigating the fields, dredging field canals, applying fertilizer and spraying pesticides and transporting paddy sacks from the fields to their house and to the market. Thus, the farm managerial responsibilities of the principal women increased due to the migration (Pans *et al.*, 2009).

Long-term male rural-to-urban migration may fundamentally change the gender division of labour in a farm household. Men may not be available for ploughing and planting which are both time- and energy-intensive)5 For women, this translates into a marked increase in agricultural work, including a wider range of farm tasks, a heavier workload and less time for domestic tasks and childcare. For instance, in Myanmar, migration has been cited a one of the reasons why women have taken up ploughing and water collection by bullock-cart (Ware and Lucas, 1988).

With a diminishing supply of labour for male and shared farm tasks, women must either depend on hired labour (which many cannot afford) or resort to limiting agricultural operations. For example, if women have problems hiring and/or supervising labour, then ploughing may be undertaken less frequently, or on less land. Thus, labour shortages may lead to a reduction in total agricultural output and underutilized or idle productive land. This may, in turn, result in changes in cropping patterns with direct repercussions on dietary standards, family nutrition and welfare. It may also undermine food security and contribute to the adoption of unsustainable agricultural practices and to land degradation (Palmer, 1985).

Furthermore, out-migration of men and working-age youths - which is especially common in Latin America -- can have negative effects on rural households by transferring workloads from adults to the elderly and by increasing the labour burden of girl children, which may have important repercussions on their fertility behavior. Older daughters, who are usually responsible for caring for younger siblings and for helping with domestic chores, may have to take part in a variety of economically productive activities on the family farm instead. However, once younger sisters take over some of these tasks, older daughters are expected to marry or are encouraged to seek wage labour in cities (FAO, 1992).

Table 4: Coping strategies of women left-behind (N = 120)

Coping strategies	Used Often		Used Sometimes	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Dependent on remittances	110	91.7	-	-
Frequent communication	75	62.5	67	55.8
Employing of housemaids	63	52.5	47	39.2
Hope of a better life on return	90	75.0	83	69.2
Children live with relative	104	86.7	76	63.3
Children hawk to support family	108	90	93	77.5
Relatives invited to work	68	56.7	70	58.3
Engage in petty business	88	73.3	54	45.0

Table 4 shows the copying strategies used by women left-behind by their migrant males. Majority of the respondents (91.7%) depended on remittances sent by their husbands from where they traveled. They indicate using this strategy often. Again, frequent communication became a copying strategy among the women farmers as 62.5% response indicated using it 0/ and only 55.2% said they used it sometimes.

Again, 52.5% employed housemaids to help them cope. The households do certain household chores for them. Some of the women cope by sending their children to relatives (86.7%) to help care for them. Children also hawk items for their mothers (90%) in order to survive and add to the money remitted by their husbands.

To survive also, the women engage in petty trading and other sundry activities. These strategies were either employed often or sometimes as the case may be depending on the socio-economic condition arising before them.

In Thailand and Vietnam remittances are 38 percent and 36 percent respectively, where rural-to-urban migration is more prevalent (brought about by rapid industrialization and transportation facilities). Remittance earnings compensate for lower income from rice in the Philippines and Thailand. On the other hand, in Vietnam remittances compensate for lower income from other crops and lack of other non-farm income opportunities within the villages. It is interesting that households without migrants have much larger sources of non-farm income than migrant households in all three (Paris *et al.*, 2009).

The contributions of remittances to household welfare depend on the amount of remittances sent by migrants to their families. Migrants allocate their earnings for their personal expenditures in their place of destination and send the rest to their families. Migrants from the Philippines send the highest amount (about US \$200 per month) while Thai migrants send less than US\$100 per month. Vietnamese migrants send the lowest remittances, at less than US \$50 per month. As mentioned earlier, international migration is prevalent in the Philippines, rural-urban in Thailand and Vietnam. Thus, we expect remittances to have greater positive outcomes on family welfare in the Philippines than in Thailand and Vietnam.

In the Philippines, next to food expenditures, families spend the remittances on children's education and farm inputs. For migrant parents, providing an education for their own children is a priority. Because of strong family ties, unmarried female migrants are expected to pay for the education of other close relatives, including nephews and nieces. Migrants also take care of the health care needs of ageing parents, since public health in the Philippines, particularly in the rural areas, is considered to be quite poor and the costs of medicines too high. A study on Filipino migrants in Italy (INSTRAW, 2008) revealed that it is the investment of remittances in agricultural production that has offered greater food security to remittance-receiving household. This is due in part to the fact that remittances allow farmers to purchase the necessary inputs (e.g. fertilizers pesticides), pay for irrigation expenses, pay for hired/contractual labourers or purchase livestock. This permits farmers to stock the rice requirements for a year, particularly farmers with rainfed plots who harvest only once in a year.

In Thailand, remittances are also used for repaying debts, purchasing farm inputs and paying for children's education. A study in KhonRaen province (Aimimthan *et al.*, 2002) reveals that migrants had to pay high interest rates in paying off debts to recruitment companies. More children or dependents in migrant families were enrolled in school than before due to remittance earnings.

In Vietnam, families in the South spend their remittances on food and farm inputs while those from the North keep much of the remittances as savings for future investments and less so for food expenses. In general, once the basic needs of the households with migrants are met, construction or renovation of a house is generally a common investment, as is the purchase of consumer durable goods.

Remittances can be of great significance to a rural family and comprise considerable portion of the household income. The complexity and wide range of impact of remittances in rural areas has been well illustrated in a study in the Philippines which showed that:

- a) For some families, remittances are a survival strategy than ensures subsistence but does not necessarily lead to significant improvement in living standards;
- b) For other families, remittances are a means with which to invest in agriculture or in their children's education; and
- c) Relatively better off families use remittances to invest in productive activities through purchasing agricultural land and growing cash crop (Trager, 1984).

Remittances sometimes help to alleviate rural poverty and relieve women from physical burden by withdrawing them from arduous farm labour. For example, in the Near East--

where remittances have raised rural living standards significantly in a number of areas - many families are able to subsist without increasing female farm labour. In other cases, however, women continue to produce most of the food for the family, while remittances are used for other purposes (FAO, 1990)

However, male migration does not always lead to more income for the farm household. In Lesotho, where nearly half of rural households are headed by women, one survey found that fewer than half of those women received any remittances from their absent men. Research in Pakistan and India shows that migrant men send remittances to their father's today debts or buy land rather than to their wives who are running the households. In Malaysia, most of the remittances are used to maintain rural families or repay social debt and only a small portion of the remittances are used directly as investment for rural development (Roca, 1993).

CONCLUSION

Migration carrier's significant implications for women left behind in rural areas. Women remain at home to perform domestic and or gene-ale functions alone which the men would have help perform. This increases the work load and burdens to be borne by women. They make family decisions, and become household heads by sudden due to the absence of their husbands. They are faced with challenges which the man would ordinarily handle without problems. These women should be trained, educated (adult learning) and given access to land for secure livelihood and food security.

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