

# The Role of Household Women in Sustainable Development: A Case Study of Lafia Local Government, Nassarawa State- Nigeria

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## Abstract

*The thrust of the study is to examine the activities of household women generally, identifying some of the structural challenges with a view to identify the multiplicity of their circumstances as social actors. It explores the dynamic roles of household in development with particular reference to Lafia metropolis of Nassarawa State in the middle belt of Nigeria. The study was conducted at the background of reports of the numerous socio-economic challenges of women in Nigeria in particular in the context of political challenges in comprehensive state building. The research designed employed was a survey of 400 questionnaires administered on 400 respondents gathered using clusters and purposive sampling technique. Contrary to some expectations, the findings of this research revealed that household women in Lafia metropolis actively engage in some form of active economic functions to better the lives of families amidst acute infrastructural and socio-economic challenges. This study has many implications, primarily generating a data base for a nuanced understanding of household women's role that will serve as basis for gender equity and subsequently achieving sustainable development. It also contributes to the current debate on the role of household women in the informal sector and in the economy. More so, it gives a clear picture of how some African household women make meaning in their daily lives. The study recommends that the state government should appreciate the role of household women through providing them with microeconomic support and various empowerment policies and schemes.*

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**Key words:** Household, Women, Role, Development, Nassarawa, Nigeria, Africa

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study

The nature of every existing human society determines how its people collaborate to sustain their social and economic lives. In this regards what each individual does, in the sociological parlance known as role and how s/he does, could enhance or strain the outlooks of the society in question. As a developing country, Nigeria is considered rich while its

people are poor (Oshewolo, 2010). Several reports on social and economic indicators regarding the country are seriously disturbing, with some indicating the country's human development indicators as worse than those of comparable lower middle-income countries. For instance, Okonjo-Iweala and Sanusi (2012) argue that up to 42% of Nigerian children are malnourished and women and girls are the hardest hit. Also, nearly six million young women and men enter the labour market each year but only 10% are able to secure a job in the formal sector, and just one third of these are women. No doubt these indicators and their implications on the quality and expectations of life differ according to regions, states and localities in the nation, but the general picture describes the crucial development challenges of developing nations.

Development is interesting to understand. According to Szirmai (2005) the concept of development includes more than mere changes in economic indicators. It is seen as the progressive transformation of people, institutions and societies (Rodney, 1973). One feature significant to the considering of development in this line of thought is as encapsulated, the *fight against poverty* approach, which focuses the problems of widespread poverty, hunger and misery in developing countries. More importantly, it raises the question of what can be done in order to realize improvements of the situation of poverty (Myint, 1980 in Szirmai 2005). The most intriguing challenge of understanding development in the global South remains the questions of who is doing what to propel it, since it affects the generality of the population and at what cost?

In Nigeria there are significant attempts to address the challenges of women, which could be peculiar relatively to regions, states and localities. Considering the significant role of women in sustainable development, the Nassarawa State Economic Empowerment and Development NASEED (2005) policy emphasizes sustainable human development and enhanced service delivery. It prioritizes projects that satisfy the criteria of ability to create wealth, generate employment and reduce poverty. Several years have passed when the initiatives of NASEED have been implemented. While Women in Nassarawa state depict rare picture of drudgery, exhaustion, burdened with signs of clear serious socio-economic stagnation. This is evident as they are seen as engaging in most tedious task in the home front and other ventures in agriculture, crafts and in mineral explorations.

According to Adepelumi (2012) nowadays in Nigeria, women are generally considered to be at the lowest rung of poverty ladder the reason why is women's access to credit is blocked usually through practices that are justified as 'cultural Discriminatory customary laws concerning women's right that impedes their rights to own property. Marchand and Parpart assert that modernization had marginalized women and their contributions in the Third World. Along with demands from feminist development groups that women be integrated into the development process (soon known as WID). More importantly is the need for change of approach on women care and development concern. In buttressing Marchand, and Parpart (1995) whom arguably negate the anti-poverty approach emerged in the mid-1970s, and the welfare approach of the a 1960s and 70s', to the efficiency approach that emerged in the early 1980s, which hinges on belies women constitute more than fifty percent of the world's human resources, the efficiency approach urged development efforts to recognize the contributions of women and to integrate them into the sustainable development

agenda and process.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Nassarawa state in the middle belt region of Nigeria is among the less developed states in Nigeria. The State economy is monoculture with about 80% of the people as peasant farmers. Added to this, is that fact it is one of the infrastructural backward state in Nigeria. The Infant Mortality rate (MR) in the State is about 103/1000 live births (NASEEDS, 2005). The outlook of the state adequately manifested in the capital as agrarian, mineral rich, agricultural, commercial, and suburb to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. Women have been active in all trends of social and economic life in Nassarawa state and Lafia local government in particular. How crucial and critical the roles of women in Nassarawa state is could be mirrored in the volume of agricultural output of the state (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). How stable are families, how effective are household management and sustainability, how active are women in social and political life, how these determining the nature of the state and how does the government appreciate and respond to these issues, are sociologically relevant questions. This is because they affect progress and statehood remains germane. This becomes significance vis-à-vis the vital role of women in developing countries like Nigeria. Additionally, considering the fact that the state has suffered a great deal of inept leadership, which is occasion by corruption and resources mismanagement, which significantly affected infrastructure provision and quality of life in general, understanding aspects of women's life become apparent. The consequences of political and economic actions and inactions in the course of development in state affect citizens in general.

In most societies over the years, many women have faced daunting challenges of joblessness, no source of livelihood, widowhood, and single parenthood. These challenges notwithstanding, the roles played by women in national development and in all facets of human endeavors have been quite notable (Fapohunda, 2012). Otite and Ongionwo (2006) aptly provided a contrast summation of the societal suppressions and negation of the impacts of women's socio-economic and political roles as he asserts that, in most Nigerian societies and cultures, women who once functioned as girls, are not only mothers and wives, and thus also produce and nurse children. They are cook and house-workers. They do laundry works and general sanitation of residential quarters. They generally take control of the domestic domain but since there may not be "two captains in one ship," women become marginalized.

Despite the richness of such claims, it did include the nature of the environments especially the impacts of culture. As women in developing countries are submerged under the impact of gender and patriarchal dominance, as governments is beginning to take the women issues seriously as evidence of counter-productivity to that effects loom high. Infrastructural deficiency is a major constraint to role performance and enhancement in developing countries. The extent such development affects women is more telling. Nassarawa State Primary Health Care Development Agency [NSPHCDA] (2009) noted in length women predicament as follows:

Due to their biological vulnerability, women, children and the elderly in Nassarawa State like their counterparts elsewhere also require specific health services that are necessary for the promotion of their health and well-being. Nonetheless, the 2008

Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) report showed that in Nassarawa State, 72.6 % of pregnant women received antenatal care from a health professional; only 33.8 % were delivered by a health professional. These figures no doubt have strong implications for the observed high probability of children dying between birth and their fifth birthday (under five mortality) as well as the high probability of women dying during child birth (maternal mortality) in Nassarawa State.

The above information is critical considering women's role in the society. Fapohunda (2012) argued that in Nigeria women head about 31 per cent of households in urban and rural areas. Where they contribute unpaid labour to the household's agricultural production and spend up to 50 hours a week on domestic labour and subsistence food production, with little sharing of tasks by spouses or sons in the household. It has been expressed that most people in the State are farmers, they are at risk of certain occupation-related health problems such as snake bite and physical injuries that may require emergency medical attention or hernias resulting from the tedious manual labour that may need surgical operation. But the health services of Nassarawa State did not seem to be organized around all these needs and expectations of the people despite huge investments that have been committed to this sector (NSPHCDA, 2009).

A more disturbing feature of the constraint on the role of women is the spate of HIV in the state. It observed that: one out of every ten persons in Nassarawa State is infected with HIV. The HIV prevalence rate in Nassarawa State currently stands at 10%, the 2nd highest in the country as revealed by the 2008 Sentinel survey. In the state capital, the prevalence is as high as 19.5% which means that for every 100 persons, 20 are infected. Contrary to the earlier assumptions that HIV infections occur mostly among high risk groups (such as the commercial sex workers, transport workers, uniformed personnel etc.), new research findings from the Modes of Transmission Study and Epidemiology Response and Policy 2009 revealed that 70% of new HIV infections will occur among cohabiting or married partners who are not engaging in "high risk" sexual behavior (Source: <http://www.enrnigeria.org>). This highlight may further be gloomy taken into consideration the view women continue to be largely concentrated in informal employment, as unprotected and sub-contracted labour, with a persistent wage gaps between men and them, as bear total responsibility for care and nurture (Parimala, 2008).

The above view is reinforced by Chukueze's (2010) argument that despite the fact that women in Nigeria produce most of the nation's food (60-80% of the labour input in Africa), and are responsible for the survival of their families, they are inadequately recognized or rewarded for their efforts. In Nassarawa state and Lafia in particular, the level of inequality and the antecedent women suppression and oppressions remains cynosure, with claims such as widows, divorcees and heads of single-parents families subjected to dehumanizing experiences, facing psychological degradations, health risks and economic insecurity (NASEEDS, 2005). In line with the above, it is argued that the full development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women as well as men in all fields (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discriminations Against Women CEDAW).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Despite the presence of urban centres such as Lafia – the state capital, Keffi, Akwanga and areas adjoining the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nassarawa State is largely rural – and this is where majority of the population also live (NSPHCDA, 2009). UNDP (2010) have observed that “People are the real wealth of a nation”. By implication what people does or their roles defines the progress of a nation. In this regards how men and women fared remains crucial. Rahman (2004) observed that women in Nigeria form an active and reserve labour force but they rarely own the means of productions (in Ibrahim and Ibrahim, 2009). In line with the above challenges, the following research questions were formulated: What are the contributions of household women to their communities in Lafia metropolis of Nassarawa state? How adequate are the state infrastructure in sustaining the role of women in Lafia metropolis? How can the roles of these household women be enhanced?

To provide nuanced answers to these questions, the study examines the role of household women in household in Lafia metropolis. It also seeks to explore the challenges and strains that impede on the women’s attainment of economic empowerment. It also examines the significance of the infrastructure to alleviating the challenges of women in the study area. Lastly, the study facilitates a broad-based action at enhancing the role of household women in the discharge of their duties and in actualizing sustainable development. This study is useful in reevaluating the attitudes of household women in improving their socio-economic and political conditions. State and its agencies such as the ministry of women affairs and state orientation agencies will find the information herein useful in policy design and implementation towards a balanced gender mainstreaming and parity.

## THEORETICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

Social life and its various aspects have being variously interpreted and explained. Recently, Feminist sociological thoughts have displayed aspects of Women’s life with a more touching tone. Within Sociological tradition, these theoretical strands were made popular by Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s (1998) assertion that labor of women in the house, certainly enables men to produce more than otherwise could; and in this way women are economic factors in our society. “But so are horses” (Appelrouth and Desfor Edless 2008). This illustration echoed the significance of this discussion with addition background presumably of how are the ‘horses’ treated in our own type of societies. There are variations in feminist sociological and theorizing. Ritzer (2011) enumerated the *Gender Difference, Gender Inequality, Gender Oppression, Structural Oppression and Feminism Postmodernism*, among which are found suitable the *gender inequality theory* and *stand point theory* as a reference point of this discussion.

“Men and women are situated in society not only differently but also unequally” (Ritzer (2011:462). This is common among most developing societies and states. More so, women get less of the material resources, social status, power, and opportunities for self-actualization than do men who share their social location- be it a location based on class, occupation, ethnicity, religion, or education. Ritzer further traces the source of this deprivation, arguing, “This inequality results from the organization of society, not from any significant biological or personality differences between women and men” where it is

observed in the area of study especially in the area of agriculture women work hand in hand with men in all areas (ibid). By implication therefore, all human beings are characterized by a deep need for freedom to seek self-actualization and by a fundamental malleability that lead them to adapt to the constraints or opportunities of the situations in which they find themselves. This portrays the life of household women in Lafia majority whom are constrained by educational, cultural among other in enduring unfavorable situations at home and missing out opportunities put forward by education and democratically governance. By Ritzer's (2011) rendition, gender inequality implies that women are situation ally less empowered than men to realize the need they share with men for self-actualization.

On the other hand, Dorothy Smith was a leading Feminist Sociologist was among the protagonist of Stand Point Theory (Appelrouth and Desfor Edless, 2008). The main emphasis of the theory is that what "one knows is affected by where one stands (one's subjective position) in society. By implication, one can't have a complete and objective knowledge". This view buttresses the concern in this study, of the motives and viewpoint of household women. Furthermore, it is perceived from the point of view of the theory, that "no two people have exactly the same standpoint," as we must not "take the standpoint from which we speak for granted", instead, "we must recognize it, be reflective about it, and problematize it" (ibid). This demonstrates the particular differences of the needs and contributions of women in formal and informal sectors of the economy in the study area. Also, emphasis on the bifurcation of consciousness is important for this study because it illustrates the dilemma of household women in the informal sector.

### **REVIEWED LITERATURE**

Nigeria has the largest population of any African country, with over 163 million people. Of this, 49% are female; some 80.2 million girls and women. So any discussion about Nigeria's future must necessarily entail consideration of girls and women, the role they play and the barriers they face in making the future (Okonjo-Iweala and Sanusi, 2012). The implications of these developments as reiterated are still being pebble stages of policies initiations while the actions required seems to mountainous in nature. In this regards Fapohunda (2012) observed that the continuing poverty and deprivation in the country, declining terms of trade and the burden of external debt create an unfavorable environment for development. Of the limited resources available, little is directly allocated to women. This is as Mamman (1996) in Awugonun (2009) argued that "this discrimination exacerbates poverty in Nigeria by preventing the majority of women from obtaining the credit, education, training, health services, child care and legal status needed to improve their prospects. The term woman has several meaning and interpretations. A sample definition of the term women reveals it to imply human being, feminine qualities of feeling, domestic employee, wife or girlfriend (Encarta, 2007).

The term woman and women for plural is a most common everyday parlance which fairly usage as represents in places and culture the sex which is associated with the feminine side, with the major features as compassionate, weak, caring, loving, reproductive and mostly in need of care. No doubt some of these explanations of women reflects long history of social, cultural and economic realities overtime, but times and social changes

specifically education, urbanization, industrialization, have for long challenges those assertions and sometimes cultural believes. This is in congruence with the observations of Dionco-Adetayo, Makinde, and Adetayo, (2008) that “in Africa, women constitute about 50 percent of the population and account for about 60 to 80 percent of the agricultural production”. While Oguonu (2007) cited (Huizer, 1983:104) to argued that Women “form half of the world’s population and one third of the official labour force, fulfill almost two thirds of all hours worked, and they receive one tenth of the world’s income”. According to Eweama (2009) the 2006 Population disparity of men and women is 51% and 49% respectively with the growth rates 4.07% and 3.57% accordingly. Whereas these demographic situations seem normal considering expected the sex ratio 105,103:100 male/female, it will speaks volume if socio-economic and political sceneries in developing nations like Nigeria and the northern states are juxtaposed. Recently the implications were aptly described thus:

It is not out of place to say that the physical and psychological wound inflicted on the north as a result of the recurrent religious, ethnic and political conflicts that ravages, including socio-economic depression in the recent years that run deep and inflicted untold hardship to many, have not only traumatised the inhabitant, but have slowed down developmental efforts. Yet, to adders these cries, there is a tendency on the part of many people to go for easy answers (Sambo, 2011).

The above position is the clear situations of the Northern states, though it scratches the surface of the realities as usual in those types of situations (Peace and Unity for Development Conference, Organized by Arewa Consultative Forum Kaduna, 2011). The central thrust and focus in such gathering are masculine centered. Because at the receiving end of most socio-economic and political impasses in most societies are women, as the widower, orphans custodians ,care providers and nurturers, rehabilitators and general sustainers of the all types of end products of the fallouts. Therefore, poor power supply, transportation system, health delivery, assess to financing and entrenchment of good governance, anchored on transparency, equity, accountability and the rule of law identified by Sambo (2011), as the endemic factors militating against the economic growth specifically of the north, are more an adversary to women than men in Nigeria.

Such intricacies of socio-political and economic realities of men’s and women’s life, over the years, and the actions and reactions they produced and popularized the concept of Gender and Patriarchy. According to Greg, Kimmel and Lang (2000) patriarchy refers to the institutionalization of men’s power over women within the economy, polity, household and heterosexual relations. As they, maintained that, in patriarchal relations men gains dividend in terms of honor, prestige and the right to command. They also gain material dividends. This view expressed most of the sceneries women in most societies found themselves as they ‘wail and toil’ in enhancing their communities without adequate recognition. In a similar vein Okafor, Akinwale and Doyin-Hassan (2007) argued that patriarchy is a way of life in which men are believed to be superior to women. The belief has adverse effects on women.

Gender also implies the process by which individuals who are born into biological

categories of male or female become the social categories of men and women through the acquisition of locally-defined attributes of masculinity and femininity” (Kabeer 1991:11) cited in (Oguonu, 2007). These views on gender adequately captures its essence, but there are more to it as it impacts on women and development. This is the stance of World Health Organization (2001) in Esplin and Jolly (2006) as it asserts that “Gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female at a particular point in time”. This assertion really mirrored the state of women in our societies, as Folurunsho (2010) argued that either as a “westernized” or an African Woman with all the traditional circumscription, women since the inception of humanity have been contributing immensely to the political as well as socio-economic growth of their families, communities, groups and nations. Even though most of these contributions, due to various overt and covert reasons, were often not acknowledged nor rewarded, they were however valued.

In the context of the roles and efforts of Nigerian women, Folurunsho (2010) had provided an illustration which is worthy of recapitulation:

Evidence from studies shows that more women in the Eastern part of the country are involved in agriculture while the western states have more women participating in the informal sector and as for women in the Northern States their contributions are somehow hidden due to the widely practiced purdah system in that region which does not make them feasible like their male counterparts. Nevertheless, they are mostly engaged in the informal sector with their products hawked by their children and dependants.

It was equally noted that in Nigeria, women actively played a meaningful role in the industrialization process of the country. The role of women in social and economic development specifically in the small and micro enterprises was found to be primal in the economic development of their communities, Dionco-Adetayo, et al.(2008). Despite these positions, it is seen that women fared less in comparable ways on major indicators due to intricacies of Patriarchy and Gender. For example a recent report on several implications of Gender for women relative to poverty in Nigeria by Eweama (2009) reveals as follows: Access to Bank Loans 21.9% for women and 78.1% male, in Education female literacy is 56.8%, compared to male’s 74.66%. In Health, HIV prevalence is put at 54.37% for women and as male clock 45.63%. As employment, at Federal Civil Service level depicts men to have 68% as female obtained 31%, representation.

Despite the stark reality of these figures its implications are at the national level, where for example the mechanism for control, documentations, enforcement gender parity as so much sought by the government often evidently manifest themselves. The tendency for the percentages to fluctuate is higher in state and Local government areas of Nigeria, where the realities of women either in rural urban locations, in households as wives and mothers, farms, market, business or in offices. According to Boserup (2007) the vivid declined contributions of women in the national scene where based on the reasons that could be due to women’s high levels of pre-crisis poverty, secondary status in the labour force, extensive informal-economic work, reduced access to productive assets and to information, as well as extensive domestic responsibilities which all clearly make them economically vulnerable

long before crises occur. Moreover the difference feminist are particularly emphasizes the experience of women of different age, class backgrounds and ethnic groups. Equally important to the research is their view that oppression of women exists, but the women do not see it as affecting all women to the same extent and in the same way, (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008).

According to Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) development is critical and essential to the sustenance and growth of any nation. Nigeria in the last fifty years has been battling with the problems of development in spite of huge human, material and natural resources in her possession. The irony of Nigerian state as a rich entity with majority of its people mirrored the predicament of defining development According to United Nations Organization (UNO) development means “ an economic phenomenon in which rapids gains in overall (and per capita GNP) growth either ‘trickles down’ to the masses in the form of jobs and other economic opportunities, or creates the necessary conditions for the wider distribution of the economic and social benefits of growth” cited in Galadanchi (2009)where the this highlighted some basic features of development, gains of economy ,distribution especially to the masses ,it is salient on two crucial fronts to development the actors in the development drives and their biological, socio-political and economic characteristics within the interplay of power, the individual status and recognition attached.

An alternative view by Seers (1979) posits that “the purpose of development is to reduce poverty, inequality, and unemployment” (Quoted in Nafziger, 2005) and as Sen (1999) argued “development involves reducing deprivation or broadening choice. Deprivation represents a multidimensional view of poverty that includes hunger, illiteracy, illness and poor health, powerlessness, noiselessness, insecurity, humiliation, and a lack of access to basic infrastructure”. In this spotlight to the perspective of development no doubt most developing nations Nigeria inclusive are starters and grappling though there are serious abundance human and material resources due to international and external intricacies especially unfavorable international economic ties and issues of corruption and mismanagements. Therefore we subscribed to Bellu’s (2005) postulation that “development may occur due to some deliberate action carried out by single agents or by some authority pre-ordered to achieve improvement, to favourable circumstances in both”. As such the concession that “development” is a multi-dimensional concept in its nature of improvement in the complex systems such as in socio-economic systems different parts or ways, at different speeds and driven by different forces is perceived most appropriate in this regards.

In this light it can be stressed the eminence of National Developments which according to Longman dictionary of contemporary English, refers to a phenomenon that embraces a whole nation, which Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) described as “the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation”. As Julius Nyerere in Ekong (2008) asserted “a person does not walk very far or fast on one leg”, reiterated the socio-economic and political implications that the roles of women in the advancement of this country had depended on contributions of women and men at all level and at all time, the questions has always remains how adequate each group fared in the context of cultural and structural constrains and how such are conversely

reflected in national socio-economic parlance.

Accordingly, Anugwom (2009) the barrier placed against women's self-actualization especially in traditional Nigerian society was without recourse to the roles the women played in such society. Apart from the domestic tasks which may be seen as facts of socialization and convention, women were also very productive in the economic sphere of the Nigerian society. Fapohunda (2012) among the majority of rural and low-income urban dwellers, women perform all domestic tasks, while many also farm and trade. They are responsible for the care of children, the sick and the elderly, in addition to performing essential social functions within their communities. Yisehak (2008) in Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2009) noted that women generally contribute more labour inputs in areas of feeding, manage vulnerable animals (calves, small ruminant and sick, injured and pregnant animals) cleaning barns, dairy related activities, (milking, butter and cheese making) transportation of farm manure and sale of milk and its products than men and children as men own most of the livestock species and put up for sale animals and meat. Fapohunda (2012) maintained by improving their own positions, women enhance the country's broader development prospects. Nevertheless, women in Nigeria continue to face enormous obstacles.

### METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted through a survey design, where data were sought from representatives of household women in Lafia metropolis, Nassarawa state. The female population is put around 161,314 (Nigerian 2006 Census Report). The target population are household women with clear multiple roles or function in the study area. Cluster and Purposive, were adopted for the convenience of the study. To this end, the metropolis is group into cluster of at least 3 closely related features of either residential, economic/commercial, governmental/public services, etc which produce six clusters as follows: The state and local government secretariat, the *Emir's* palace and its environs/*store* (*Store* is a whole sales food stuff market in Lafia) and its Adjacent, the Wood processing Mill, the *Ambana/Rice* Mill in *Kilema/Tashan Biyade* Mini, and the Weekly market. Others include: *Bukan Sidi/Millionaires quarters*, and *Sabon gareji/Sabon fege*. Purposive sampling was used to locate 200 household women actively engaged in meaningful enterprise relative to the study. The Questionnaires provided the quantitative data, while 4 Key informants interviews (KIIs) were conducted to generate qualitative data. These KIIs were conducted one each on 4 clusters that made up the clusters. Up to 400 questionnaires were administered, out of which 325 (about 81%) were retrieved.

Description Nassarawa State was eventually carved out of Plateau State by the General Sani Abacha-led military government, on October 1st, 1996 with Lafia as its capital. Lafia local government area has a Population of about 330,712 people (NPC 2006). It is located between Latitude  $7^{\circ}$ - $9^{\circ}$ N, Longitudes  $7^{\circ}$ - $9^{\circ}$ E, and altitudes 181.5m above sea level (Nassarawa State Ministry of Information 2006). The town of Lafia houses all the important ministries, agencies and parastatals. The town has a rice milling industry, a wood processing and many markets. It has many cassava processing mills, three central and three *Weekdays* markets active on Thursdays and Sundays. There several primary and secondary schools in the town, and the State Polytechnic and Federal College of Agriculture are located just outskirts of the

town as well as the township stadium. There is one specialist hospital and general hospital, and a federal university was recently allocated to the state and was hosted in Lafia. The outskirts of Lafia on both ends Bukan-Sidi, Shabu, Kwandare, Angwan Mangu, Akurba/Shandam are hub for productions and processing of different Agricultural produces like cassava into flour (*Elubo*) and Cereal (*Garri*) for consumption and as Starch for Industrial usage. These areas, also produces large quantity of fruits like cashew, mango, and orange.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Demographic characteristics of the respondents:** Findings of the research that 63% of the respondents are married, 22% are divorced, as 11% are separated, while 4% is single. The common age at marriage of the respondents is 18years and most respondents' ages during the research are between 18-35years (57% of the sample). Level of schooling for the respondents shows 40% completed primary school; up to 25% has junior secondary certificates; and 15% passed high schools. As many as 5% completed tertiary schools, while 15% was primary school dropouts. By implication, this highlights a significant progress within primary and junior studies in the light of state policies and action in Nigeria from 1999. The percentage of women with tertiary education could be seen to be affected by the intricacies of culture, economic status, and the extent of poverty in the society. The data also significantly reveals that most of the respondents married more than once at the time of study. 36% of the respondents reported 2 times as 19% married more than 2 times, a combination of about 55%. The frequencies in the change of marriage as depicted by the sample is associated with the challenges managing the realities of married life in relation to extreme socio-economic difficulties observed in the society. This is with a view to meeting the right atmosphere of marriage to sustain the respondents' desire for life. The study also indicates that the respondents stay at homes with at least 5 people or a maximum of 12 people.

**Socio-cultural characteristic of Respondent:** The study revealed the following ethnic groups in the area of study as follows: Kanuri *Barebari* 25%, Hausa women (21%), *Eggon* women (20%), Gwandara women (15%), Alaggo women (12%), Fulani (3%) and others (4%). This background information demonstrates a good picture of the heterogeneity distribution in the locality. The obtained percent of Hausa women illustrate the significance of migration/settlement of the enterprising Hausa men and their families in productive ventures (such as agriculture and trade) from their enclaves in the far northern region. **Religion:** the practicing faith among the respondents cuts across the two dominant religions- Islam with 53%; Christianity 39%; and 8% for others.

**Nature and Significance of Economic Roles of the respondents:** The study revealed that 73% of respondents are married women with some active economic activities supplement. In the 73% 55% are found to be engaged in agriculture related field, some 30% are into petty trading, 5% are into craft as only 5% of the that total responded to be idle. This information illustrates the nature of the state as Agricultural oriented as such most roles are directed or supplemented to that effect. On the use the respondents put their resources (proceeds), it was revealed that majority of the respondents use their economic roles to support their families and the community (husband, children, relatives, kith and kins, etc.). About 65% of the respondents are in this category, as 15% uses their benefits to strengthen their economic

endeavors, while 10% use theirs for personal benefits. Another crucial 10% of the respondents are dependent for inward supports. This demonstrates a sharp contrast with what is obtainable in most family relationships where women showed high level of dependency on their spouse for general upkeeps and welfare (Tsauni, 2011).

### **Sources of support for the roles of respondents**

With our background information, it becomes crucial to understand the source of support for the respondents as they discharge their roles. Our data showed that 40% of our respondents got supported by their children, as 30% got it from their relatives. Only 6% were supported by paid persons (employees), as 14% got supported by community (In what is referred to as *Gayya* or self-help groups), as only 10% of the respondents lacks any form of supports. These in formations on the source of support raised the critical significance of number of children in families in developing countries. In this regards children in developing countries and societies in particular are regarded as ‘collateral’ and ‘shock absorbed’ in terms of difficulties and circumstances such as Divorce, illness, helping with household roles, farm preparations, planting and harvest. In extreme cases the number of children a family possess signifies how it is to confront and meet it basic needs of survival, which results into the phenomenon of *Child Labour, Child Abuse and Neglects, Early Marriage* and consequences such herald. These implications become clearer as it is deserted the Sources of Motivation to the respondents Roles. It was revealed that the ability to better their family life constitutes motivation for 55% of the respondents, as reward obtained from the roles motivates on 25% as achievement from the roles made 5%,base on support from government 5%,whiel motivation from relatives obtained 10%.

By implication this data showed the distance of government concern from the plights of the household women in relation to the other economic importance they posses (as revealed that 73% of respondents are Household women with some active economic activities functions).Government awareness of intricateness of nature of Household women functions in cultural and economically tedious environment is seriously lacking. As further probe to Motivation, inform of specific source of Assistance, information revealed by the respondents. Only 8% of the respondents pointed to government as providing assistance (Empowerments etc) as Abimiku (2006) argued: The Nation's Poverty Alleviation Programmes depicts sceneries and in situations where stipends and Credit facilities were given to beneficiaries, it has been difficult to track them as up-to-date records on such beneficiaries are scarcely available. This is as NGO support are reportedly 10% of the respondent, this as Nwankwo (2011) reported of the dearth of Civil Societies and NGO in the North Central Zone of Nigeria, despite concentration. He claimed that:

The mapping in this zone yielded 38 civil society organizations working in the area of gender. However, 21 of them are based in Abuja alone. This excludes International NGOs, Development Partners and government agencies. The themes that are prominent among the self-reported areas of focus are: Health (8); Economic Empowerment (8); Education (6); Governance and participation (6) Violence/Conflict/Peace Building (4); Environment (3); Gender Budgeting (1).

This is as 7% of the respondents got some support from women groups, 35% reported support from co-operatives, as relatives prove supportive in 25% cases, thrift group are active for 7%, as only 9% didn't have any form of assistances. The perceived challenges to Roles of the respondent are sought in this regards, which revealed data relating to some 37% of responses relating to strains associated with inadequacy in material things and wellbeing (Poverty), as difficulties experiences where observed in starting economic roles. 30% of the respondents sees family burden (effects of Patriarch) their challenges, as 18% blamed illiteracy (in their perception defines what one can conveniently do to bring succor and support to his family not only ability to read and write). some 15% blamed the level of infrastructure (electricity, water, milling and sewing machine, refrigerators, etc.) in the society as challenging to their effective role performance.

**The Significance of the respondents' Roles and Development:** From the forgoing trends of information, if women even those perceived to be restricted within the purviews of household, posses little amount of schooling, could withstood the numerous socio-economic situation they found themselves toward maintains themselves and families the assertion of Gilman (1860-1963), assertion "the labor of women in the house, certainly, enables men to produce more than otherwise could; and in this way women are economic factors in our society. But so are horses". As Slusser (2009) reiterated Women, do 2/3 of the worlds work, received 10% of the worlds income and owned 1% of the world means of production, and as Ban ki-Moon (2010) observed "social, political and economic equality for women is integral to the achievements of all Millennium Development Goals" (MDGS) and that until "Women and Girls are librated from Poverty and Injustice, all our Goals-Peace, Security, Sustainable development- stands in jeopardy" (UNIFEM,2011). Accordingly, noted that 25% of all private business are owned by women, there are 190million women entrepreneurs in 59 countries, as failure to achieve MDGs target 3 on the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women could reduce per capita income growth by 0.1-0.3 % (International Labor Organization, 2012).

So in Nigeria, contrary to Tsauni's (2011) contentions that women could alternatively engaged in some economic activities to render them employed, it is not often the case particularly among housewives in Nigeria which has increased their dependence and attendance consequences on households incomes but contrarily this study showed noted that most household women in the area of study (73% of respondent) actively engaged in substantial economic activities along initial family roles. Their efforts are crucial in not only ensuring marriage and families' stability, but smooth food chain supply for their locality, community and the nation at large. And considering the nature of the society they live in invariability their roles (economic roles) remain a pillar to agricultural prolific of the state and the antecedent economic contribution it has on the nation economy at large.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study concludes that household women's roles in Lafia metropolis Nassarawa state, remains a pivotal aspect in developing countries even as much attention are not paid to it. Contrary to some expectations, the findings of this research revealed that household

women in Lafia metropolis actively engage in some form of active economic functions to better the lives of families amidst acute infrastructural and socio-economic challenges. This study has many implications, primarily generating a data base for a nuanced understanding of household women's role that will serve as basis for gender equity and subsequently achieving sustainable development. It also contributes to the current debate on the role of household women in the informal sector and in the economy. More so, it gives a clear picture of how some African household women make meaning in their daily lives. The study's implications on the societies are manifold in relation to health, particularly the dangers that result from multiple births, which could be prevented through educating and empowering household women. The government should prioritize on providing educational opportunities and deal with lack of infrastructure and access to information, and a host of other problems that further reinforce the cycle of women's vulnerability. Additionally, the Nassarawa state government should:

1. Intermittently conduct Household Surveys with a focus on Poverty and Social needs in its metropolis and communities.
2. It most designed and maintains a Data base for Micro-economic activities in the state and specific needs of women active participation in this regards.
3. It must encourage on a larger scale sponsorship of Micro Credit Programs with a special focus for household women in the metropolis of the state.
4. The state government must address crucial infrastructural deficit, notably Power supply, Water supply, Health facilities and Transportation
5. Women must be specifically empowered to actively participate in macro-economic aspects especially Large Scale Agriculture in the state.
6. The state must recommitted itself to gender parity by initiating and passing vibrant legislations that will support and protect women and children from socio-economic and cultural exploitation and abuse.

Lastly, it is equally pertinent to note that sustainable development must be gender equitable, giving consideration to the very resourcefulness of the lowly placed Nigerians, most of who are women, identifying and appreciating their immense contributions in the informal sector. The informal sector in Nigeria needs value-based reforms that can be achieved through government's exploration of new ways of engaging the viability of the sector, and through public private partnership (PPP). By implication therefore, multi-national corporations (MNCs), philanthropists, politicians, as well as privileged members of the society, all need to give their own contributions to deal with the centuries-old tradition of exploiting household women.

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