

# **Educational Level of Rural Women and Forest Resource Exploitation in Cross River State, Nigeria: Implication for Poverty Reduction, Education and Forest Policies**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Efforts to address gender inequality emphasises several measures to achieve women's empowerment and involvement in all spheres of national lives. Education has been observed as a means of achieving women empowerment. Advocates view education as a springboard to employment and economic independence. It also provides the critical foundation from which further empowerment takes off. While women have experienced significant gains in literacy and educational attainment, the inequality in public sphere is still very pronounced and the opportunities for economic enhancement in terms of access to resources especially within the urban existence is still slim. The problem is; could education condition the economic behaviour of the woman at the rural area? What role does the level of education of women at the rural locales play in the rate of resource exploitation? The objective of this study therefore, is to examine the extent to which the educational levels of the rural woman accentuate her rate of resource exploitation. By resource exploitation we mean the extent to which the rural women make a living by utilizing the natural resources around them. This study argues that the higher the level of education of the woman at the rural area, the greater their involvement in resource exploitation. I offer the social capabilities based approach as a theoretical foundation of the study. Data were collected through interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The choice of interview and FGD was to guarantee effective participation since greater percentage of the respondents was of little or no formal education. Data collected were analysed with simple percentage and polemics as well as tabular and graphic expressions. The analysis revealed that women with basic and intermediate education exploited forest resources more for commercial purposes with the aim of generating adequate revenue for economic empowerment while women with limited or no formal education exploited forest resources more for subsistence. The study recommends among others the reintroduction of adult and non formal education at the rural areas of Nigeria.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Efforts to address gender inequality emphasize several measures to achieve women's empowerment and improvement in national activities. Education has been one of such measures considered to be a driving factor to women's empowerment and stability. Investment in women education has been considered a viable project to ensure the emancipation of women from the shackles of poverty and vulnerability.

The advantages of education in the improvement of man are diverse and its strength in ensuring poverty reduction is sterner (IjimAgbor, 2006:67). Advocates view education as a spring board to employment and economic independence. It also provides the critical foundation from which further empowerment takes off. Haralambos and Heald (1980:179) argue that "Education fosters personal development and self-fulfillment. It encourages the individual to develop his mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual talents to the full. Being able to read and write allows people to assert their individual rights and participate in society". Eid (2004) holds the view that education enables people to improve their social, cultural and economic situation.

While women have experienced significant gain in literacy and educational attainment, the inequality in public sphere is still pronounced and the opportunities for economic enhancement in terms of access to resources are till slim. The economy of the rural woman is largely considered precarious when compared with those of the urban dwellers. The argument is that the educated urban women have better access to economic resources than that of the rural woman. Resource exploitation therefore, among women shows an imbalance situation of some category of women getting more involved in resource exploitation than others. Within the rural locales women involvement in resource exploitation is often seen as being very minimal with certain limiting factors considered to be major problems. Among the rural women what role does education play in their involvement in resource exploitation? In other words, how does educational level of the rural women condition her economic behavior? Resource exploitation is considered here to mean the extent to which the woman at the rural locality makes a living by utilizing the natural resources around her. This paper examines the phenomenon of women education

and forest resource exploitation and hypothesizes that there is an extricable link between the level of education of the rural woman and her rate and dimension of involvement in forest resource exploitation.

### **OBJECTIVE OF STUDY**

The broad objective of the study is to examine the extent to which education conditions the economic exploitation of forest resources by the women at the rural areas.

Specifically, the study seeks to examine the difference in the nature of forest resource exploitation between the educated and non-educated rural woman and the implications of that on public policy formulation in Nigeria.

### **METHOD AND MATERIALS**

In explaining the role of education in women's forest resource exploitation at the rural areas, I analyze data from primary sources because of the novelty surrounding the study. The available primary data on education and resource exploitation by rural women were mainly those drawn from a set of carefully crafted education and women resource exploitation interview and Focus Group questions. The choice of primary interview as well as Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was to guarantee effective participation since greater percentage of the respondents was of little or no formal education. Data generated were expressed in tables and simple percentages for clarity purposes and easy understanding by readers of all persuasions. Substantial use of secondary data such as relevant literature on forest resource exploitation was also made.

Exploited resources considered in this study included animal products as a form of bush meat exploitation, wood exploitation which involves timber and firewood exploitation for fuel. Bush mango exploitation, Medicinal plants and mushroom. I used these to show out of several resources exploited mainly because these are natural resources within common reach of many rural dwellers in the study area. The communities included in the sample were; Ikun, Ugbem, Urugbam, Igbovia, Agwagune, Akpet 1 and Abredang all in Biase local government area of Nigeria.

### **EXEGESIS ON FOREST RESOURCE EXPLOITATION**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a rapacious exploitation of natural resources to cater for the rapidly increasing energy consumption which also became high in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. About 80 percent of the world's energy consumption today is sustained by the extraction of fossil fuels, which consists of oil, coal and gas (Planes, 2012). Agricultural activities as well as economic considerations are also veritable sources of the devastation of the natural environment. Deforestation, water pollution and man-induced erosion pathways are some of the aftermaths of unabated natural resources exploitation.

The rising trend in natural resource exploitation stems also from increase in population and economic needs. As Geoffrey (2007) points out, the depletion of natural resources influenced by the unsustainable extraction of raw materials should be of dire concern the world over more so, given the rising world population and economic growth.

Natural resources are conceived to be "any property of the physical environment, such as minerals, or natural vegetation, which humans can use to satisfy their needs. They may be classified as renewable and non-renewable. Non-renewable resources are resources that vanish in their original form when exploited and do not reproduce themselves, neither naturally nor artificially" (Mathew, 2004, Aubell & Mensah, 2007).

Forest natural resources constitute a substantial part of the income and source of livelihood for the rural dweller. Their exploitation becomes therefore, very imminent given its relevance in the economic lives of the rural people.

Inioni (2009) described natural resources as a common property resource which constitutes "an important component of community assets in developing countries. They offer employment and income generation opportunities to rural households, in addition to providing broader social and ecological benefits" (Jodha, 1995).

Exploitation of natural resources by rural people is small compared to the quantum of resources exploited by advanced organizations and multi-industrial complexes. The type and nature of natural resources also exploited do not require complex technology and may not involve large scale exploitation for external markets as is typical with multinational corporations. Though the forest natural resources exploited by the rural person is small Pinto and Da Silva (2002) argue that "these products make important contribution to the well-being of rural households by the income generated from their sale".

The level of poverty at the rural locales also explains the reliance of the rural poor on forest natural resources for subsistence. The condition of the rural poor is such that he hardly has an alternative source of income other than relying on forest resources for survival. A number of studies expound this argument. Lopez (1998), Durraipappah (1998) and Baland, Bardhan, Das, Mookherjee and Rinki (2004) argue “that poor households with little income earning alternatives tend to spend more time and effort collecting forest products”. The migration from this condition in most Third World countries especially Nigeria has been either too slow or non-existing. For variety of reasons as argued by Cronin (2009), “the poorest countries have done little to reduce their dependence on natural resource exports, whether legal or illegal, and instead have traded forests for oil palm, rubber and acacia plantations that provide comparatively little employment. In general, the poorest and the most politically marginalized citizens are the primary victims”.

Statistics on the specific number of people who depend on the forests for survival is difficult to establish (Byron and Arnold, 1999). However, hundreds of millions of people depend on forests resources as immediate source of survival. It serves as often as an employer of last resort for economically marginalized people (Sunderlin, Angelsen & Wunder, 2004). In societies where land distribution is unfavourable, substantial reliance is on forest resources for survival. This is common in rural localities where viable economic opportunities are slim and the level of exposure is limited.

The forest serves as un-repudiated support system for a substantial chunk of the world population. Nearly everybody tends to survive directly or indirectly from forest resources. Bryon and Arnold (1997) attempt a categorization of those who depend on forest resources. They identified three categories to include; “forest dwellers, including hunter-gatherers and swidden cultivators; farmers living adjacent to forest including small holders and the landless; and commercial users including artisans, traders, small entrepreneurs, and employees in forest industries as well as consumers of forest products among the urban poor” ([www-wds.worldbank.org](http://www-wds.worldbank.org)).

The forest is a source of energy as well as source of medicine especially for the rural man. The rural person depends heavily on the resources found in it to make a living. Many build their residential houses from forests products and serves as refuge for some distressed persons. In the course of history, “forests have served as a refuge for less powerful people fleeing oppression, conflict and war” ([www.cifor.org](http://www.cifor.org)). The forest and its resources could also serve as a source of poverty alleviation for the rural women, but the extent to which forest can alleviate poverty especially in the developing country is not well known (Sunderlin, Angelsen and Wunder, 2004).

Women involvement in forest resource exploitation in rural locales serves a number of purposes. It helps them to avoid poverty or assist those who are poor to mitigate their precarious conditions. In other words, the forest and its resources serve a safety net function. Secondly this activity keeps them in constant subsistence practices or commercial businesses. The question is to what extent does the rural woman effectively exploit forest resources in the rural locales? What role does the educational level of the rural woman play in the degree and direction of forests resource exploitation? This study attempts to assess the contributions of the educational status of rural women to their degree of involvement in forests resource exploitation in rural locales of Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **INEQUITY AND WOMEN ACCESS TO FOREST RESOURCES**

The economy of the rural women is heavily dependent on the forests resources. Exploiting them, therefore, becomes necessary for the survival of the family. Women exploit certain forest species for medicinal reasons; a duty that is very important in health administration at the rural areas where orthodox medical practice is very limited. The forest is therefore, a source of thriving business for the sustenance of families, especially those headed by widows.

Diverse studies on women and forest resources show a significant benefit of forest resources to the wellbeing of rural woman. Adebayo, Oyun and Kadeba (2010) who studied the access of rural women to forest resources and its impact on rural household welfare in North Central Nigeria concluded that women access to forest resources in the study area improves their income, medicinal materials as well as the money spent on their children’s education, healthcare and household feeding. The income the women earn from forest resources is greater than all the income earned from other sources. Women in general and rural women in particular, in Central Africa region are traditionally the main actors in forest resource exploitation (Ngong and Arvey, 2003).

“Access to forestland and land tenure for small-scale farms is most often gender biased. Women and men have different access and tenure rights which in turn impacts women’s ability to participate in sustainable management of natural resources” (Bose, 2013). Case studies on the role of women in community forest reveal that unequal power relations between men and women are widespread (Takang, 2012). Women suffer serious degree of discrimination in the use and management of the forest in many developing countries. In other words, the idea of gender equality is often strange and non-existent. Weah (2013) had argued in the case of Liberia that gender differences or the different roles and rights of men and women, is an issue at the heart of Liberia community-based forestry and one that affects policy decisions on the national level. The author’s observation is that gender-based inequality is one example of social marginalization that has historically characterized Liberian policy and citizen’s participation. The attempts by Liberal civil society to address this marginalization has been strong, but regrettably ignores in its campaign, questions of gender equity and women’s right.

Takang (2012) who studied women and forests in Cameroon presents a finding that suggests a national policy that encourages women in the management and utilization of forest resources. The gender discrimination in the case of Cameroon is located within the nature and dimension of forests resources exploited. Takang submits that women in Cameroon depend on non-timber forest products (NTFPs), food crop production and energy provision from the agro-forestry and forests resources they collectively manage for the survival of their families, a role directly linked to their reproductive roles. On the other hand, the men enjoy a special reservation of timber/fuel wood exploitation, a role that is lucrative enough to keep the men in a more economic advantage than the women. It could be gleaned from this submission that women exploitation of forests resources in Cameroon is largely for subsistence. This is a common phenomenon across underdeveloped countries. This repudiation is explained by the limited awareness of women especially in terms of level of education, as well as obnoxious cultural practices that limit women from certain responsibilities.

In the case of Mali, the most valuable forest resources (in terms of monetary value) are reserved almost exclusively for men, such as the baobab (*Andsonia digitata*). Women are also forbidden to own baobab plantation especially in locations such as Segou. Even when they are allowed to own baobab nurseries, the plants are later recovered by the men who control the exploitation of the product. Women are relegated to gathering fuel wood; an exercise that requires them to trek 2 to 7km to collect. They also produce charcoal and are involved in cutting wood. This is a very tedious economic responsibility whose proceeds are used to purchase food for the family, as well as pay for social activities such as marriages and baptisms (Takang, 2012).

The same inequality is reflected in most communities in Nigeria. Adebayo, Oyun and Kadeba (2010) study of rural women access to forest resources in North Central Nigeria shows that rural women have restricted access to the exploitation of firewood and forest fruits on communal and family lands in the study area. The same was reported of Burkina Faso. In examining the determinants of access to forest products in Southern Burkina Faso, Coulibaly-Lingani, Tigabu, Savadogo, Oden and Ouadba (2009) discovered that “besides the formal forest law that precludes grazing in the forest, customary rules and regulations pertaining to land tenure, were reported to be serious constraints to forest access for women and migrant people”.

Women play important role in forest resource economy. The amount of time spent in the forest by women and the nature of their involvement in forest resource matters show how women have become extremely tied to forest environment in terms of collecting and processing forest resources for the maintenance of the family. Because the forest provides a veritable source of survival to the rural woman, discriminating against them in terms of access and direction of exploitation should be eliminated.

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

The social capability theory sets the theoretical foundation of this study. By definition according to Abramovitz (1986), social capability refers to “social elements or features that allow a country to take advantage of economic opportunities and use it to the fullest possibilities”. It could be described as “responsiveness of people to create economic opportunities” (Abramovitz, 1960) and the “interrelationship of the capabilities makes the creation of social opportunities for the people realizable” ([www.econ.net23.net](http://www.econ.net23.net)). Capabilities have been presented from diverse assessments. One basic component for assessing capabilities as argued by Sen (1985) is individual differences in the ability to transform resources into valuable activities. Nussbaum (2005) also looks at it from *Control over one’s Environment* which among others include *Material* control. In this case, it is “being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers”.

The basic premise of the theory is what an individual can or is capable of doing. The theory does not principally emphasise how individuals actually perform but also whether they have the capability to perform certain actions to achieve what they desire as of value to them. Nussbaum argues that certain factors condition the capabilities of individuals. As it affects women, she asserts without equivocation that culture is one of the greatest barriers to women capabilities. If the women must realise their capabilities, the barrier of culture must be dismantled. She believes firmly that this is possible across societies since culture was not a piece of museum monument that must remain intact at all cost. As it relates to our study, education remains one of those capabilities that provide the opportunity for women to alleviate their poverty and assert individual economic sustainability. Where culture limits or frowns at women education a barrier is created in using enhance knowledge to drive economic viability. This has remained a serious challenge in Africa and a common characteristic of rural locales of Nigeria.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The presentations in this section captures responses from respondents and also address fundamental issues as educational status of respondents, types of forest resources exploited and their distribution and the ratings of these resources in terms of degree of monetary value. Presented also is the rationale and value for forest resource exploitation, the revenue generated from the resources exploited and the uses of the forest resources by respondents other than economic and household consumption.

**TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS**

STATUS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
No education	140	33.33
Little education	140	33.33
More education	140	33.33
TOTAL	420	99.99 (App. 100)

**SOURCE:** *Fieldwork, 2015*

Table 1 above shows the distribution of respondents into educational status. All the categories had equal number of respondents of 140 persons in each group. This equal representation was considered to reduce very drastically the possibility of skewing results in a particular direction. The idea was to have a result that was representative enough of the diverse respondents. The status of no education involves those women without any form of formal education. Little education includes women with primary education status while more education is the category of women with secondary education and above.

**TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ON THE TYPE OF FOREST RESOURCES EXPLOITED**

FOREST VARIABLES	RESOURCES	RESPONDENTS			TOTAL
		NO EDUCATION %	LITTLE EDUCATION %	MORE EDUCATION %	
Timber		-	10	80	90
Firewood		140	140	140	420
Bush mango		100	80	75	255
Animal Products (bush meat)		30	50	85	165
Medicinal plants		130	80	20	230
Mushroom		84	20	5	109

**SOURCE:** *Fieldwork, 2015*

Those without education are not involved in timber exploitation; those with little education are minimally involved in timber exploitation (10 out of 140). Eighty (80) of the more educated respondents are involved in timber exploitation. Every respondent was involved in firewood exploitation. This uniformity could be explained from the perspective of firewood as fuel for every rural household. In other words, every rural woman makes use of firewood. A hundred (100) no education respondents were involved in bush mango exploitation, 80 little education and 75 more education exploited bush mango. In terms of animal products especially bush meat, 30 respondents without education, 50 respondents with little education and 85 respondents with more education were involved in animal products exploitation. Two hundred and thirty (230) respondents exploited medicinal plants. Out of this 130 were those without education, 80 were with little education and 20 were with more education. Mushroom exploitation attracted 109 respondents with 84 respondents from the category of no education registering the highest followed by 20 respondents with little education and 5 respondents with more education.

**TABLE 3: RATING OF FOREST PRODUCTS IN TERMS OF DEGREE OF MONETARY VALUE**

FOREST RESOURCE VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Timber	165	39.29
Firewood	80	19.48
Bush mango	50	11.90
Animal products	90	21.43
Medicinal plants	20	4.76
Mushroom	15	3.57
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>100</b>

**SOURCE: Fieldwork, 2015**

Table 3 above shows that 165 respondents representing 39.20 percent rated timber exploitation high in terms of monetary value. Ninety (90) respondents representing 21.43 percent rated animal products in terms of bush meat next in monetary value followed by firewood with 80 respondents measuring 19.48 percent. Bush mango exploitation was rated 11.90 percent in monetary value to the rural woman while exploitation of medicinal plants was rated 4.76 percent in terms of economic value. Mushroom exploitation was rated the lowest with 3.57

**TABLE 4: RATIONALE AND VALUE FOR FOREST RESOURCE EXPLOITATION**

RESPONDENTS	FOREST RESOURCES					
	TIMBER	FIREWOOD	BUSH MANGO	ANIMAL PRODUCT	MEDICINAL PLANTS	MUSHROOM
No education	-	Household use	Subsistence nutritional/ commercial	Household nutritional use	Household use	Nutritional/ Commercial
Little education	Economic/ commercial	Household use	Household / nutritional use/ commercial	Household, nutritional/ commercial	Household use	Nutritional use
More education	Economic/ commercial	Household use/ Commercial	Nutritional/ commercial	Nutritional/ commercial	Household use	Nutritional use

**SOURCE: Fieldwork, 2015**

The table above explains the various reasons why rural women exploit various forest resources. Timber was exploited by those with little and more education for commercial reasons. In other words, these categories of rural women are into timber business. In terms of firewood, every respondent exploited it for household use but those with little and more education also exploited it for commercial basis. It is therefore, a source of income for these categories of respondents. Bush mango was exploited by all respondents for household consumption. In addition, all categories of respondents also exploited it for commercial purpose. Animal products were exploited mainly for bush meat purpose. All respondents exploited it for household consumption but those with little and more education exploited also for commercial purpose. It is therefore a business avenue for this category of respondents. Medicinal plants were exploited by all respondents for household use. In other words exploitation of medicinal herbs and shrubs does not attract commercial intention. Mushroom exploitation for no education category of respondents was for both commercial and household purposes. Other categories of respondents exploited them mainly for household consumption.

**TABLE 5: REVENUE GENERATED FROM RESOURCE EXPLOITATION QUARTERLY**

RESPONDENTS	TIME FRAME				TOTAL
	JAN-MAR	APRIL-JUNE	JULY-SEPT	OCT-DEC	
No education	12,000	14,000	8,000	12,000	46,000
Little education	40,000	25,000	20,000	26,000	111,000
More education	98,000	120,000	60,000	102,000	380,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>150,000</b>	<b>159,000</b>	<b>88,000</b>	<b>140,000</b>	<b>537,000</b>

**SOURCE: Fieldwork, 2015**

The table above depicts that revenue generated by the sampled rural women amounted to ₦537,000 (about \$3,356) per annum. The distribution shows that respondents without education generated about ₦46,000 (\$288.00), those with little education generated ₦111,000 (\$694.00) and those with more education generated ₦380,000 (\$2,375.000). It could be deduced from this clearly that the level of income of rural women could largely be dependent on their level of education. This is explained from the point of education possessing the capacity to expose people to higher values and income competition. People with low level of education at the rural locales think largely along subsistence level rather than commercial. It should also be understood that the level of income is also to a very large extent dependent on the nature and value of the commercial commodity. People with enhanced level of education tend to be more inclined to income competition than those with little or no formal education.

**TABLE 6: USES OF THE FOREST OTHER THAN ECONOMIC AND HOUSEHOLD CONSUMPTION**

RESPONDENTS	OTHER USES	
	PROTECTIVE COVER	SOCIAL AND CULTURAL
No education	93	47
Little education	110	30
More education	100	40
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>303 (72.14percent)</b>	<b>117 (27.86percent)</b>

**SOURCE: Fieldwork, 2015**

Apart from the commercial and nutritional reasons associated with the exploitation of forest resources, respondents were asked of other uses of the forest to them. Three hundred and three (303) respondents representing 72.14 percent used the forest for protective cover while 117 respondents representing 27.86 percent use it also for social and cultural practices. By protective cover I mean that the forest serves as a buffer to rural people especially women in times of inter communal crises such as war. The forest in this regards becomes a

temporary home for such displaced persons and a shield from their aggressors. Social and cultural uses suggest that the forest possesses a spiritual and recreational value. In other words, the forest hosts protective sites and landscapes for worships and annual traditional rituals.

### **IMPLICATION FOR POLICY**

**POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND FOREST POLICIES.** In terms of poverty reduction, a more responsible commercial use of forest resources would improve the revenue of rural women and lift them away from absolute poverty. There is an increasing understanding that forests and forestry section are key elements in poverty reduction strategies in Africa. It is established that the rural woman largely survives from forest resources. Restricting their use either by cultural practices or by state laws is inimical to the welfare and stability of the rural women. We recommend in this regard the encouragement of the formation of Rural Women Forest Plantation Cooperative Society (RWFPCS) to begin to develop forest for timber exploitation.

Bush mango plantation should also be encouraged. Women groups can develop these plantations with assistance from the forestry commission since the rural woman derives much income from it. Since most medicinal plants work for the rural woman, they should be encouraged to develop farms of such plants. The advantage would go beyond the immediate health benefit of the rural woman. It could serve as a research base for the pharmaceutical industry in the development of standard medicine for global use.

The need for the improvement of the level of education of the rural woman is imperative. The implication for forest policy is that enhanced education possesses the capacity to make the rural woman understand the danger of unsustainable exploitation of forest resources. They would be in a better place to contribute to forests maintenance and management. When assisted to develop some plantations for economic exploitation, such forest plantations will help to check climate change. By this, rural women should be contributing to sustainable environment and the fight against climate change. Government could come up with a policy of private development of forest for private economic exploitation.

**EDUCATION POLICY.** The study shows clearly that rural women with higher education have improved income from exploiting forest resources. I argue that such improvement in income is largely associated with their level of education. The implication is that the more they become enlightened the more they can put to better use the resources exploited from the forest and even the direction and nature of forest resources to be exploited. Improved education will tilt them away from exploiting mainly for subsistence and clearly set their minds on effective income competition in the society. With the level of enhancement of the economic benefit of forest exploitation by more educational rural women, government policy on adult education and female education at the rural level should be strengthened. Adult education is an aspect of the national policy on education that has been bastardized.

### **CONCLUSION**

The forest provides a veritable source of survival to millions of people all over the world. The resources found in them have been exploited variously to address the economic and subsistence needs of many. Women in the rural locales make substantial living out of the forest. Restriction placed on certain forest discriminates women against forest resources exploitation. It is obvious that such restrictions limit the amount of benefits women derive from the forest. Beyond this restriction is the issue of the educational status of the rural women. How does the educational status of the rural woman affect the way they exploit the forests resources? Are those with more education likely to exploit forest resources in a more economic direction than others with little or no education? I have argued in this study that the more the level of education of the rural woman the more likely their involvement in greater exploitation of the forests resources for economic reasons. This study confirms this assumption and concludes that education plays significant role in rural women's exploitation of forest resources.

This study has a wide range implication for poverty reduction, forest and education policies. With the level of enhancement of the economic benefit of forest exploitation by more educated rural women, government policy on adult education and female education at the rural level could be strengthened. Government can also initiate policies on private forest development for economic exploitation of the owners. This will reduce the pressure on the natural forest and the devastation it undergoes from its unsustainable exploitation by those who make a living from it as well as guarantee a source of income for the rural woman. Forestry education can be introduced into the curriculum of Nigeria's educational system as a general course from the kindergarten to the tertiary level. This is important given the changing nature of global climate and the role forest plays in its mitigation.

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