

## An Assessment of Rural Women Participation and Efforts Towards Sustainable Agricultural Development in Ikenne Local Government (2016 – 2020)

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### Abstract

This paper highlighted that rural women play pivotal roles in agricultural and rural development, even much more than their male counterparts. Although not denying the supportive roles of the men in attaining their production goals, the work explores rural women's participation in agricultural productive activities such as planting the seedlings, weeding, and interval intercultural operation of the crops. The objective of these studies was to assess the extent to which rural women in the Ikenne Local Government were involved in the productive efforts of two major agricultural produce – Ugu vegetable (pumpkin vegetables) and the corn seedlings in various farms locations. This study focused on the role of women working with full passion in the production of these crops right from the soil preparation through tillage, local manur styles till it is harvested and further into the marketing and storage of these crops for the next planting season; a chain of productive forces just to make ends meet and to sustain their families. For this study, two villages/towns Ilishan-Remo and Ikenne-Remo were selected according to their experiences on these crops and for their proximity to the university and convenience of the research. Results accessed showed formal training on the production of these crops and management. From the overall studies, it was assumed that the maximum percentage of the farmers of these regions adopted indigenous knowledge for the cultivation of these crops including all cultural practices for raising the crops as well as in the post-harvest marketing activities also. The paper through its findings stressed that the public, private sectors, and NGOs in both local governments need to introduce diversity management programs in order to reduce the poverty levels of these rural women in agricultural production. The concluding section of the work recommends some policies that would stimulate these determined producers to such levels that could enable them to grow into big-time farmers and be able to contribute meaningfully to their communities and beyond.

**Keywords:** Empowerment; Rural women; Crop production; Sustainable development, and Decision-making.

### 1. Introduction

Although, a lot has been written about women participation in rural agriculture and production, not just in Nigeria but in Africa as a whole, little attention has been paid to the Economic History and development of sustainable agricultural production of the Ugu seedling and vegetable plantation in Ikenne and Ilishan towns and the corn production which to a large extent have led to a large farm settlement sustained by both indigenous and non-indigenous women (Igbos) who are not of the Ijebu-Remo ethnic origin who migrated from the eastern part of Nigeria to settle for farming particularly for the Ugu (pumpkin) vegetables business. Thus, the focus on these two crops, Ugu (pumpkin) and corn has been chosen to highlight not just the survivability and capability of these women in rural development but to show the extent to which these efforts have grown into large business concerns which have sustained households for over five decades in this community. The choice of the Ugu (pumpkin) and corn production has been chosen to highlight the complementarity of the engagements since Ugu (pumpkin) is known to be the major investment of the Igbo women in this local government, while maize-corn production is mainly engaged by the rural Ijebu women in their agricultural pursuits. This is not to say that the Igbo women do not get involved in corn planting and production as the Yoruba women does in Ugu business which often is the case, but indeed portraying the extent to which women are involved in rural economic development in the local government. However, it should be clearly discerned that only few Yoruba (Ijebu) women will definitely want to get into the problems of intricacies involved in Ugu production which is more tedious than the corn production whose end products is the corn flour and ogi (pap) which is sold as roasted/cooked corn hawked by the women in the rural area.

In its findings, the study has been able to discover the extent of neglect shown to rural women and endeavors by not just the local governments but the state and federal governments to transform the lives of rural women in Nigeria. The study also portrayed the extent of the efforts and initiatives put together by women to sustain their

families and to a large extent transform their welfare and living conditions. The study also proved that certain factors such as lack of finance, unsteady power supply and lack of processing and storage facilities constrain and hinder these rural women from achieving optimal economic productivity. The study concluded that even though these women have shown their perseverance, and tenacity for survival, governments at the three tiers should come to their aid financially and through provision of farm instrumentality, aids and seedlings to enhance their efforts. The study also recommends that they should also be exposed to other sources of economic platforms for sourcing funds to carry out their economic activities.

Women are responsible for an estimated 60-80 percent of all agricultural labour in Africa and particularly in Nigeria [1]. In Nigeria, rural women in the Northern part of the country are involved in picking cotton, harvesting groundnuts, winnowing and pounding of grains. The Igbo women of Eastern Nigeria are predominantly farmers, engaging in arduous farm tasks such as land preparation making heaps for planting, weeding, harvesting and transport to destinations for the sales and marketing of such produce [2]. Although, Yoruba women are more active in their participation in trade and entrepreneurship, yet they continue to perform important roles in agriculture, such as planting, applying fertilizers, harvesting, processing and marketing of farm produce and keeping of livestock.<sup>1</sup> It is in the light of all these attributes of the hardworking women of the rural areas of Ikenne Local Government that this work takes off earnestly to determine the extent of their involvement in productive agriculture just to ensure they live a fair life that is worthy of sustaining their livelihoods.

Ikenne Local Government area is in South Western part of Nigeria with its headquarters in the town of Ikenne Remo. The Local Government comprises of five towns namely, Ikenne, Ilishan, Ogere, Irolu and Iperu. In 2016, the population of the Local Government was recorded at 202,980 inhabitants with the predominant dwellers of the area being members of the ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup> However, there are other members of Nigeria's ethnic composition who live in the towns for the purpose of agriculture and trade. These include the Igbo people whose rural women are important in this study as their farming expertise is brought to focus. The Igbo population in the two towns, Ikenne and Ilishan Remo is no doubt quite appreciable in population not just because of the attractive location of the two towns which are at equidistance with two major cities of Nigeria, Lagos and Ibadan, but also because of the arable land prevalent in these two towns and the human disposition of the indigenes to visitors and non-indigenous inhabitants. Thus, apart from the Igbo people, there are other ethnic group members such as Hausa and Fulani people who apart from engaging in menial jobs in the farms, crafts and building hands, also specialize in tending of their cows and selling meat and suya in the Sabo quarters of these two towns. In the same manner as the Hausa men and women, there are also the Agatu men who are from Okenne, Benue who are equally seasoned farmers, in fact boasting of the food basket producers of Nigeria. Their men, particularly serve as good support laborers for the farming ventures of both the Yoruba and Igbo rural women farmers in the two towns under this study. In the same manner, there are farmers who travelled all the way from Akwa-Ibom and Calabar, Cross Rivers State who equally bring their expertise to the farming enterprise that goes on in these two towns under consideration. Enough could also be said about the seasoned Edo women and their Delta counterparts who compete for domination of the vast lands made available to them by the Ijebu - Yoruba landlords for their farming enterprise. Given this picture, it would therefore be an understatement to suppose that the study focused on the Yoruba indigenous farmers alone, as the facts are that in the two major crops that this work focused on its produce in the Local Government, that is Ugu (pumpkin leaves) and corn (maize plantations), only the latter is given more attention by the Ijebu women who engage in its farming. In fact, it must be asserted that because of the profit margin realized from the Ugu business, a lot of the indigenous women have ventured into its plantation, not minding that its humble beginnings arose out of the survival instincts of the early Igbo people who arrived the town since the 1969s and at the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War after 1970. Women play multiple and overlapping roles which have increasingly put pressure on their health, food security, productivity and potential contribution to improved human welfare and economic development. The major portion of women's labour forces invested in production system include weeding, harvesting, household management, animal husbandry, harvest handling and the marketing of their produce eventually [3].

On the other hand, the planting of corn seem to be less involving in the farming processes, yet any attempt to oversimplify its production could lead to disastrous harvests, even before it is transformed into the end products for sales as roasted or cooked corn or the hawking of the ogi (pap) made from it. These efforts as they are the problematic which confronts this research endeavor.

Apart from the introduction, the work is divided into five other sections. Section two delves into a Historical background into the plantation of Ugu (pumpkin) business and corn production in Ikenne and Ilishan towns, the third part of the work highlights rural women efforts participation in farming and production of the Ugu and Corn business in Ikenne-Ilishan Local Government, section four of the work discusses the Harvesting, sales and marketing production of seedlings for the next planting seasons, section five is the summary of findings while section six is the conclusion and recommendations of the work.

## **2. A Historical Background into UGU (Pumpkin) and Corn Plantation by Rural Women Farming Settlement in Ikenne/Ilishan Remo**

Most farmers in Nigeria engage in the production of crops which in the main can be divided into food crops and cash crops. Agriculture, despite Nigeria's modernity and advancement since the pre-colonial through the colonial

<sup>1</sup> Culled from Memoirs of The Giant Farmers Marketers Association. Ilishan, Oyingbo, Lagos Market.

<sup>2</sup> Culled from Program of Events of the occasion marking the visit of the Ogun State Governor, Gbenga Daniel at the one-year in office of Otunba Tiwalade Sobo, Ikenne Local Government Chairman, 2007-2011.

administrations is still the mainstay of the country. Apart from crop production (farming), rearing of animals (husbandry), forestry and fishing are other important aspects of agricultural activities in the country. Cash crop production has received much more attention in agricultural and Economic History literature than is often given the food crops which in the main, though at subsistence level is not given adequate consideration. The reason for this attention is not far-fetched given that cash crops such as cocoa, rubber, cotton, groundnut, palm oil and palm kernels during the colonial period and subsequently provided much of Nigeria's export goods and produce and much money to farmers who engaged in these enterprises. Cash crops were produce of external trade and provided industrial raw materials to Britain, West Germany and even France who were the colonists of West African countries.

Indeed, such food crops as yam, cassava, millet, corn, vegetables, etc. which obviously were the most important subsistence produce for the survivability of the people remained in the background as they were cultivated to provide for the families, the little excess of which were traded in the markets, daily, fortnightly or monthly at the local markets. This research is aimed at correcting this impression and as such has given vent to important food crops, corn and vegetables which equally has grown into commercial importance but most times are cultivated by the rural women of Ikenne and Ilishan Remo, Ogun State.

The planting of Ugu (Pumpkin) vegetable in Ilishan Remo cannot but be associated with the establishment of Adventist College of West Africa (ACWA) in September 17, 1959 by the Seventh-day Adventist Church [4]. Given that the early students of the institution were married men who were supposed to receive training for seminary and missionary work eventually. Therefore, married women of the pastors-in-training required something to keep them up which led to some engaging in farming in their new destinations of Ikenne and Ilishan Remo. Employment opportunities available at the newly established college then were not restricted to farming alone. While some were duly engaged as workers in ACWA foods, which eventually consisted of a bakery for ACWA bread, granola and peanut butter, others found service related jobs, working in the school farms and the garment and tie making enterprises managed by Mrs. Smith, a white missionary whose husband was a devoted scientist of note in the college then. Some women worked as housekeepers for the tutors, then in ACWA. Such women still found time at the weekends, especially on Sundays or after close of their work to engage in peasant farming with plots allocated to them by their landlords or other well-meaning Ikenne-Ilishan indigenes who had enough fallowing farmlands to lend to them for particular farming seasons [5]. It was from these humble beginnings that the foundation of Ugu planting and commercialization could be attributed.

Pumpkin (Ugu) vegetable seedlings were brought by these early women who had settled in Ikenne-Ilishan from their homelands in Igbo states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo, Enugu and importantly, Ibibio women from Cross Rivers and Akwa Ibom who eventually migrated to these two towns Ikenne and Ilishan Remo. It is not certain whether; the vegetable existed in Ilishan before these women brought their spine of fluted pumpkin into this vicinity. However, it is not without that the Ijebu farmers call Pumpkin (Ugu) 'Eweroko' which suggests that this vegetable truly exist in the local government prior to the arrival of the Igbo/Ibibio women to dominate the planting of the vegetable. Some Ijebu, Yoruba women have eventually joined the cream of these planters because of its relative commercial importance over the years.

With time, women who worked in the cottage industries of the college in those days, some of whom were often sent to Lagos and Ibadan to sell ACWA ties and women garments soon found out that Lagos was indeed the commercial hub of Nigeria. They discovered there were a lot of other Igbo people who craved for farm products from Igboland who could not get its support direct supply except when they travelled home to their villages in the East. It was the inquisitiveness of some customers of these women who ventured to sell certain ACWA products that gave birth to the idea of supplying not just Ugu, okro, Ugboro, waterleaf (monmoikon) and even garri with oil that eventually led to the establishment and expansion of the farm settlement that exist in Ikenne-Ilishan today. Ngwa women were strong farmers, but that eventually extended to other Ebonyi, Anambra, Enugu and the Cross Riverians and Akwa Ibom women as well. With a study steady source established in Lagos, Ibadan and Ikorodu, women who required more farmlands for labour purposes, often resorted to inform their relatives at home to come and engage in farm work in Ogun State. The rest is history. The farmlands are in Ikenne-Ilishan, while transporters are involved in getting the vegetables to different markets in Lagos, Oyingbo, Iddo, Mushin, Oshodi, Agege; supplies to hotels in Ikoyi and Victoria Island and other important networks.

The pumpkin vegetable called Ugu, Ikong-Ubong, Eweroko transformed into a typical Nigerian vegetable and not restricted to Igbo people because of its many natural nutrients and benefit. The vegetable possess a large amount of iron content and serves as immune booster and possess blood sugar reducing effects and can be a specialty of diabetes.

The cultivation of corn or maize on the other hand is one of the traditional food crops of not just the Ijebu farmers alone but of all Nigerians and people the world over. Unlike the Ugu vegetable which is an indigenous West African native plant, corn is not typically a Nigerian food crop despite its popularity. Maize is a cereal grain first domesticated by indigenous peoples in Southern Mexico and was introduced into West Africa during the era of the Atlantic slave trade. Together with bananas, rice and other foreign brands have become like Nigeria's stable food crops. Most historians believe maize was first cultivated in the Tehuacan valley of Mexico. However, recent research in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century has modified this view somewhat, scholars now indicate that the adjacent Balsas River Valley of South Central Mexico as the centre of domestication. All these directions of origination point to South America. In Nigeria, corn has equally attained a commercial status as rural women who genuinely go into its cultivation can make a living out of it.

The rural womenfolk in Ikenne-Ilishan engaged in the farming enterprise in productive quantity sell it off to other buyers who use it to make popcorn, corn bread and for export as well. However, at the level of this paper, rural

women in Ikenne-Ilishan Local Government use the flour to make ogi (corn flour) and for roasted/cooked corn for selling at their markets/hawking it for profit.

## 2.1. Rural Women Efforts/Participation in UGU and Corn Business in Ikenne-Ilishan Towns

In both of the crops, the maize/corn and Ugu (pumpkin) vegetable farming, the population of the study consisted of rural women of mixed backgrounds, but mostly married with children. Only a few were not up to the task to make a living out of their efforts in planting and harvesting the crops in its due seasons. Specifically, ten farms and farmers of Ugu and 10 farms/farmers of corn in Ikenne and Ilishan were selected for the study respectively. For Ugu, the planting season always started from February through to April, just before the rainy season started. Although, it must be noted that some farmers engaged in planting three times in the year-rainy, dry and harmattan seasons.

According to Madam Nnejika Uzoije, a lot of preparation is required for the planting of Ugu vegetable, if one is to reap a good harvest from it. However, the major stages include, land preparation, to planting, early tending and safeguarding from pests after germination, weeding, organic fertilizers application, harvesting and transportation to the various market destinations [6]. Each of these stages require different manpower input and expertise and experience in order to be able to coordinate the activities.

Since Ugu planting has become a full time business, there is hardly anyway, one single season can be enough. If it is not too hot in dry season, within 10-12 days, the Ugu vegetables should have started sprouting and creeping on the ground by means of extending stems in its developments. Compost manures from poultries are usually helpful if the organic type is expected, or even through the use of the chemical fertilizer as well. Chemical fertilizer has its defects as well as it cannot be compared with the naturally grown Ugu vegetables. According to Sister Nnebuike Omelihu, [6]. The planting materials include buying of the seeds of the vegetables for farmers who specialize in seedlings or harvesting from one's previous farm ventures. The pods bearing the seeds are usually harvested at the end of a cycle, while some keep it for storage, those with excess sell off the excess of the seedlings, while a lot of person can cope with the hardship of the farming processes. So, the rural women actually involve the hired labour which includes women and men (at times Hausa or Benue men) are stronger for bush clearing for the farm lands. After the clearing of the land, depending on the farm size, a strong family of five to seven, (that is father, mother, and 5 children) could cultivate ridges (where needed) and dig the holes for the planting of Ugu (Pumpkins). Usually, a hole is dug to about 4-6cm into the soil, planting the seed with the tip facing down and ensuring that it is well-covered with soil. Yet, it should not be too deep as this may lead to low germination and the risk of being destroyed by termites in the soil. To retain these seedlings for the next planting season, women store the pods and keep them in a cool but dry storage room, which at times could be observed to have started sprouting even before the planting period. Before planting, the seeds are extracted from the pods and dried in the sun but not over-dried.

The Ugu business is actually a sustainability effort for not just subsistence but a lot of women have used it to train their children, build houses in their villages and invest it to some other viable ventures. For example, Mr. Okechukwu arrived Ilishan as a driver and soon supported his wife, Nkechi to start the Ugu business. In few years, he had turned their investment of N100,000 (Hundred thousand Naira) into a yielding investment which eventually necessitated him to buy another taxi with which he plied Ikenne-Ilishan-Shagamu. However, in six years, he has left driving a taxi into a full time planter but with extra investment in buying the big buses with which he loads the Ugu to Lagos as many farmers come soliciting for his bus to make the early morning transportation of the vegetables bundles to Lagos. According to him, it is tedious, as he wakes up around 3a.m. to warm up his big bus, yet before 9a.m, he is already in Lagos in the distribution channel of the business. He waits for the women to finish their sales, some of whom had not paid him in full. But soon as their customers buy the bundles of Ugu from them, they are immediately capable of paying off their debts. And by afternoon, he is already rich with enough to cater for the entire family. His wife too is one of the rural women farmer marketers as well. The entire family is involved, his son a strong teenager helps in making the early morning rounds of loading the vegetables into the bus and the other female children help the wife (Nkechi) in cutting the leaf after they return from school. After sitting for his school certificate, Madam Nkechi noted, he has gained admission to read Economics at Babcock University and will be going for his lectures from home so as to help in the sustainability effort for the family. Women are equally involved in the weeding of the vegetable farms. As farmers, the women are also involved in other crops cultivation, especially cassava, pepper and corn as earlier noted. When cassavas are due, they are harvested to make garri which often is not for sale but for the family menu to supplement other food items. Indeed, it is still the business of the women folk to combine all of these into their itinerary of the farming business.

For those who venture into the Dry Season planting of Ugu that starts from around November to December, it is a different ball game. This is because, these women must go look for riverine farms in some vicinities of Ikenne-Ilishan where there are streams or even as far as Epe, Ikorodu, where there are ready farmlands at the river edges/basins. Others involve irrigation especially, when the farms they got are not at all season filled with water, so as not to loose their financial investments. Such efforts must be accompanied by the men of the household who must always be there to guide and protect their wives and children from unexpected challenges. The challenges extend also to pest control, which may at times be tedious for the women alone. May be there, the maxim comes in that behind every successful Ugu planter or business women are one strong determined man. Pumpkin is one of the most consumed vegetables in Nigeria today. That is where the economics and marketing strategy of every planter comes in. Some women prefer to sell in bulk to those who venture further into Lagos to sell in bulk. Others supply to hotels and restaurants, while yet others prefer to supply to educational institutions. The amount of money invested with careful planning brought a turnover of high profit in thousands or even some women trade into the millions,

especially those who plant 2-3 times in the year. Some women have equally ventured into the exportation of Ugu to some West African countries or even to Europe and USA.

For the rural women of Ikenne and Ilishan Remo who venture into the planting of maize also run a promising business, even though their profit margin may not compare with that of the big time Ugu investor. However, Mrs. Ekeinde of Ago-Ilara disagrees that the Ugu business women cannot surpass her earnings. Her reason is that she has developed her corn plantation into a viable business where buyers come from far and near to buy from her specially designed corn barn warehouse. Apart from those patronizing her during the harvest time for local manufacture of corn flour, and for cooked and roasted corn, it is always a field day for her at the peak periods. However, the research was not restricted to big time farmers like Mrs. Ekeinde who actually pointed out that she got her initial capital for investment from a Micro-finance Bank around. However, for the other rural women folk in Ikenne-Ilishan Remo, the main business of the women in years gone by used to be kolanut businesses, which are actually planted by the men. That is not the focus of this work; particularly that aspect has been covered in the economic activities of Ijebu women in historical literature. Maize cultivation command premium prices as they are used for some local foods such as ogi, corn bread, corn meal as well as for snacking by the roasted or cooked corn. Some sell in quantity for popcorn. Others sell to cornflakes makers as well as uses to which corn is put into by the rural women folk in these two towns. Then it was that corn loaf bread used to be popular in those two towns of the same locality, then produced by Babcock University.

As with food crops, cultivation of farms starts with preparing the land in order to make more conducive for production. For early planting, corn seeds are actually planted -into dug holes which are about 1inch deep during the rainy season but could be about 2inches deep in some cases for certain soil terrain. Some of the women farmers normally plant their corn along other vegetables in order to properly utilize their farmlands. Such include pepper, vegetables, okro, and so on. The corn grows fast in that about 7-10 days clearly produces germinated leafy corns, which is a highly patronized cereal in not only in Ilishan Ikenne towns but all over the country; with a high fertility soil with beneficial organisms. After sprouting from the soil, the next task is the weeding of the crops because corn growth competes with weeds. Also, it is pestered by birds, caterpillar and rats or other rodents. Yet with careful monitoring, inorganic fertilizers made from goat or livestock marshes help corn to grow very well. When the stalks grow up to six inches tall, the husk of the maize gets thicker and stronger leading to its maturity. Three to four weeks after the planting, one starts checking out the ears for peak ripeness. In two months, the corn harvest time is almost ripe for the women folk. After the maturity of the husks, the next is to determine the level of its ripeness. When the corn plants, they are harvested almost at the same period. Unlike the Ugu vegetable that keeps growing after it is cut out for sales or for personally making the Ugu soup.

As soon as the maize is harvested, those for immediate consumption are sold to rural women who roasts along the roads for patronage. However, the stock that is used for making flour or pap has to be dried. And this is given little more time to dry up as distinct from hose to be cooked or roasted. Some rural women combine all the sales together, the ogi is grinded to make ogi (that is hawked from early morning to around mid-day), while the roasted corn continues afternoon, while the night is used to grind and soak the ogi, which is prepared in large containers and filtered in the morning to be sold again to households where men actually patronize for their morning meals. That is the burden and occupation of the rural women who venture into corn planting and has to be very tactful in saving her profit to ensure that it can be used effectively to cater for the family well-being and sustainability. One of the experiences (case studies) of successful maize trader clearly stated for reference purpose.

## **2.2. An Assessment of Women in Rural Economic Development in Ikenne Local Government**

### **2.2.1. Crop Production**

Ikenne Local Government Area is endowed with vast expanse of arable land which makes cultivation, harvesting and sale of food crops a profitable business in Ikenne, just like in Ilishan. Some rural women in Ikenne Local Government Area also engage in crop production as a means of livelihood. Some examples of food crops produced in the area are cassava, maize, vegetables, and cocoyam.

Maize is an important viable area of crop production which rural women in Ikenne Local Government Area engage in. Maize is processed into different forms for consumption, some of which are flour, cereal meals and pap (ogi). It is also added to animal feeds because of the carbohydrate content it has, which is good for animals. It should be noted that maize features as a yearly cultivation by the rural women farmers. It is harvested to for both family consumption and for sale in either grain, boiled or roasted form in and outside the area. According to an interview with Mrs. Comfort Risikat, a successful maize farmer and trader, "I have no regret venturing into this business over the years, since 2015, that I made it a full-time business concern. From securing farmlands from the benefactors through buying of the seedlings and nurturing the maize plants to harvesting, it is, essentially, a full-time pre-occupation for me. Apart from the fact that there is a ready-made market for me, maize flour is an important breakfast for Ijebu men. I have been able to turn over the profits of what I have gained"[7].

From the above testimony, one can infer that Madam Comfort represents a higher number of women who engage in this business in Ikenne Local Government Area. The outcome of the field study clearly shows that farming ventures and trading have led to a significant improvement of the standard of living of the people of Ikenne.

**Table-1.** Maize Trading and Profit Margin Made by Mrs. Comfort

Year	Unit Price	Quantity (Per Annum)	Amount (Per annum) ₦	Expenditure (Per annum) ₦	Total Sales (Per annum) ₦	Profit ₦
2015	1000	5	60,000	12,000	14,400	48,000
2016	1200	6	96,400	18,000	16,800	68,400
2017	1400	8	134,400	19,200	19,200	115,200
2018	1500	10	180,000	21,600	20,400	158,400
2019	1600	12	230,400	24,000	24,000	206,400

**Source:** This table was compiled by the researchers from interviews conducted with Mrs. Comfort Risikat Oduyale, a maize seller at Ilishan market who is an average, upward-moving farmer/trader in Ikenne Local Government Area.

From the table above, it can be inferred that Mrs. Comfort Risikat Oduyale, a maize trader at Ilishan market, made the following sales between 2015 and 2019. As at 2015, her total purchase of maize for the year was sixty thousand Naira (₦60,000). She bought each bag at the cost of one thousand Naira only (₦1,000). She made a purchase of five bags, which multiplied by total cost of purchases made amounted to total amount spent. She made a total sale of fourteen thousand Naira (₦14,000) per annum). However, due to cost of transportation she incurred an expenditure of twelve thousand Naira (₦12,000) per annum. This is because she spends One Thousand Naira only. Her profit realized, after her expenses were deducted from total purchases made for the year, amounted to forty-eight thousand Naira only (₦48,000).

In 2016, due to profit realized from sales of 2015 and a higher demand for maize, she purchased an additional one bag, making the total bags purchased six. The high demand of maize also resulted to increase in buying and price. She bought each bag this time at the rate of one thousand and two hundred Naira (₦1,200), which when multiplied by six amounted to seven thousand two hundred Naira only (₦7,200) and multiplied by twelve totaled eighty-six thousand, four hundred Naira (₦86,400). At the end of the year, she expended a total of eighteen thousand Naira (₦18,000) on transportation. Total sales made for the year was sixteen thousand, eight hundred Naira (₦16,800), with a total profit of sixty-eight thousand Naira (₦68,400), having deducted total expenditure for the year from total amount of purchases made.

In 2017, as a result of the rapid increase in demand, she decided to make a higher purchase, hence she purchased extra two bags making the total bags purchased to be eight. Each bag was purchased at the rate of one thousand four hundred Naira (₦1,400), with the total purchase for the year amounting to one hundred and thirty-four thousand, four hundred Naira only (₦134,400). Expenses incurred per annum totaled nineteen thousand and two hundred Naira (₦19,200). Total sales made per annum were nineteen thousand and two hundred Naira (₦19,200) only, and she made a profit of one hundred and fifteen thousand, two hundred Naira (₦115,200) only. This is having deducted expenditure from total purchases.

In 2018, she purchased ten bags, with each bag costing one thousand and five hundred Naira (₦1,500). Total purchases made per annum amounted to one hundred and eighty thousand Naira (₦180,000) only. Expenses incurred from transportation per annum was twenty-one thousand, six hundred naira (₦21,600). Total sales made for the year was twenty thousand, four hundred Naira (₦20,400) only,. Profit incurred for the year from total sales was one hundred and fifty-eight thousand, four hundred Naira (₦158,400) only.

In 2019, she purchased twelve (12) bags at one thousand and six hundred Naira per bag multiplied by twelve amounted to two hundred and thirty thousand, four hundred Naira (₦230,400) only. Expenses incurred per annum was twenty-four thousand Naira (₦24,000) only. Total sales per annum totaled twenty-four thousand Naira (₦24,000) only. Profit realized after expenditure was deducted from total purchase, amounted to two hundred and six thousand, four hundred naira (₦206,400) only.

### 2.2.2. Economic Programs in Ikenne Local Government Area and their Contribution to Rural Development

Another perspective of this assessment is hinged on the programs that rural women subscribe to in Ikenne Local Government Area. This section shall discuss some of the economic programs put in place in Ikenne Local Government Area specifically for the economic empowerment of rural women in the area. The first of such are the Cooperatives. Cooperative Societies are business organizations in which a group of individuals with common interests agree to come together to form the business so as to be able to promote their economic activities. Examples of such economic activities include production, distribution and marketing of goods and services, as well as provision of welfare schemes. Cooperative societies are known and recognized as one of the main institutional machineries for empowering the economically weak members of the society. Irrespective of the availability of such organizations, it is said that quite a number of rural women are either unaware of their existence or lack the basic socio-economic requisite characteristics for full participation in such activities [8].

Cooperatives are based on values like self-help, democracy, oneness and solidarity. These values, besides other concerns of cooperatives, are highly essential, especially in empowering women through membership.<sup>1</sup>

There are different forms of cooperative societies in Ikenne Local Government Area. One of such organizations are the Consumer Cooperative Societies. They are found by consumers who put their resources together in order to advance their interest in retail purchases. For instance, some shop owners under this arrangement buy consumer goods in large quantities from the manufacturers at factory prices and sell them at retail prices to members. Profits realized are then given to members as patronage rebates [9].

There are also the Producer Cooperative Societies. These are made up of farmers or other producers who organize themselves by pooling their resources with the aim of engaging in large scale production, as well as marketing of their products by themselves. Examples of Producer Cooperative Societies are the Kolanut Traders Association called 'Egbe Olobi' and the 'Moinmoin Leaves Farmers Association called 'Egbe Elewe' [10].

Credit and Thrift Cooperative Societies also exist. These are formed by traders, artisans and peasant farmers who contribute money into a common fund in order to enable them raise investment, finance, as well as give members soft loans. The main aims of these cooperative are to imbibe a saving culture among members, in addition to offering credit facilities to members such as will enable them engage in economic activities [11]. An example of a credit and thrift cooperative society is the Agakanowo Women Cooperative Society which was established between 2013 and 2016.

Similarly, there are Multipurpose Cooperative Societies. These are organised by people with different business activities who come together and pool their resources in order to combine the various activities such as marketing of consumer goods, credits and loans. An example of such cooperatives includes the Industrial Cooperative Society which is organised by individuals who engage in specialized, skilled activities such as tailoring and hairstyling. Rural women in Ikenne Local Government Area also run multipurpose cooperative societies. For instance, there is the Ansar-Ud-Deen Women Multi-purpose Cooperative Society Limited. It was established on 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2017. The cooperative started with thirty (30) members and started issuing loans to its members on 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2017. The total number of members as at 2018 was sixty (60). The cooperative helps members in purchasing household and business gadgets such as deep freezers, adding at least 10 percent to the items that benefit their society. The meeting day is last Friday of every month [12].

Below is the income and expenditure table of Ansar-Ud-Deen Women Multipurpose Cooperative Society in 2018, showing how they generate their income and give out loans to members.

Income and Expenditure Account of Ansar-Ud-Deen Women Multipurpose Cooperative Society, 2017

Income	Costs (₦)	Expenditure (₦)	Costs (₦)	Profit (₦)
Entrance Fee	120,000	Stationeries used	20,470	
Development levy	120,000	Entertainment	226,200	
Sales of stationery	10,500	Transport	102,000	
Loans from	500	Education expenses	96,000	
Lateness to meetings	200	Total income was	Sum Total –	3,386,830
		N3,831,500	N444,670	
Education Fund	30,000			
Monthly savings	3,000			

The table above shows the income and expenditure of the Ansar-Ud-Deen Women Cooperative in 2018. According to the report, there are different avenues through which the cooperative generated its income, expended funds and made profits out of which loans were disbursed to members. Entrance fee for each member was two thousand Naira (₦2,000) only, and since there were sixty (60) members, the total entrance fee was one hundred and twenty thousand Naira (₦120,000). Each member paid a development levy of two thousand Naira (₦2,000) per annum, totaling one million, four hundred and forty thousand Naira (₦1,440,000). Stationeries were sold monthly at the rate of ten thousand, five hundred Naira (₦10,500) only, and for the entire year, they sold stationeries worth a hundred and twenty-six thousand Naira (₦126,000). Loan forms were obtained twice by forty (40) members at the rate of Five Hundred Naira (₦500) only each. Five hundred Naira multiplied by forty amounts to twenty thousand Naira, then by 3 totals up to sixty thousand Naira (₦60,000). It was observed that more than half of the members turned up late to meetings, which made deliberations on matters slow as other members were drawn back. The perpetual habit necessitated the payment of lateness dues.

Each member paid the sum of five hundred Naira (₦500) as education fund monthly, so in a year a total of three hundred and sixty thousand Naira (₦360,000) was realized. Each member saved ₦3,000 monthly which multiplied by the total number of members, amounted to a hundred and eighty thousand Naira (₦180,000), and for the entire year, summed up to two million, one hundred and sixty thousand Naira (₦2,160,000). Total income realized for the year was three million, eight hundred and thirty-one thousand, five hundred Naira (₦3,830,500). Total expenses incurred for the year was four hundred and forty-four thousand, six hundred and seventy Naira (₦444,670). Profits made with three million, three hundred and eighty-six thousand; eight hundred and thirty Naira (₦3,386,830). It was from the profit realized that the cooperative was able to assist out loans to its members.

The Ansar-Ud-Deen Women Multipurpose Cooperative Society, through its loan disbursement scheme, generates income for its women members, thereby enhancing their dignity and raising their standard of living. The organization also helped to remove social satisfaction constraints among Ikenne Local Government Area's rural women by accepting membership of women from all tribes, class and religion. The interactions among the women in cooperative societies have helped to increase members' self-worth which, in turn, has helped them develop high self-esteem and confidence in their interactions with people of high socioeconomic standing.

Cooperative societies are also known to bring about low prices of goods. Cooperative buy goods directly from manufacturers at factory prices and sell to members at controlled prices, making their selling prices minimal compared to that of the open market. Such organizations are remarkably easy to form because they do not require much start-up capital. Another advantage of such arrangements is that the businesses do not die at the demise of a member [13].

Besides the above mentioned multipurpose cooperative society, there is also the Ogun Women in Co-operative which is comprised of Remo Branch 2. The branches include Ilishan, Iperu, Ogere and Irolu. Ogun Women in Cooperative was established in the year 2011 with Alhaja Akinlaja Sotikare as President, Mrs. Ogunsanya Oluremi as Vice President, Mrs. Otun Cinderella as Secretary, and Alhaja Razak Serifat as Treasurer. The Cooperative has an overall president in Ogun State in the person of Chief (Mrs.) Ogundeyi [14].

According to the Secretary, Mrs. Otun Cinderella, “the initiative of Cooperatives has been the backbone for our financial aids to develop our various commercial activities. Traders have benefitted immensely from the advantages of the Cooperatives as listed above. The aim and objective of the Cooperative is to train women to recognize their roles and responsibilities towards the growth and development of cooperative organizations in Ogun State and the country at large” [15].

Its name was changed in the year 2018 to Ogun Women League in Cooperative (O.W.L.C). The change of name was as a result of a controversy that arose among the executives of Ogun Women in Cooperative. The name was changed as a way of ending the controversy for peace to reign. The Cooperative’s executives meet every 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month at OGSCOFED headquarters in Abeokuta to deliberate on issues, and then return to disseminate the discussions to members of Ogun Women in Cooperative Remo Branch 2. The first seminar organized by Ogun Women in Cooperative was in 2014 with the theme ‘Change’. The focal idea was that women should change their attitudes towards cooperatives, as well as their perceptions and beliefs. The second seminar was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2015 with the theme ‘Sustaining Cooperative Women Participation and Obligation – Way Forward’ [16].

Another economic program in operation in Ikenne Local Government Area is microfinance banks. Ikenne Local Government Area has three (3) microfinance banks rendering financial services to residents. The three microfinance banks are Ikenne Microfinance Bank located at 58, Tai Solarin Street, Ikenne-Remo, Ogun State; Ilishan Microfinance Bank located at 74 Olofin Road, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, and Babcock Microfinance Bank in Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State.

### 3. Summary of Findings

#### 3.1. Problems and Achievements of Women in Rural Agricultural Development

Efforts has been made through this research to discern the efforts of rural women in agricultural production through the prism of the Ugu (Pumpkin) vegetable and corn planters in Ikenne-Ilishan towns [17]. From this micro study, a lot could be discovered about the entire problems and the kind of difficulties that rural women go through just to make ends meet and to raise their children in the face of a harsh economy. In order to clearly determine the problems that these rural women go through, a number of factors have been taken into consideration. These factors actually helped in arriving at outcomes and predictive trends in the occupation of these women, event though the whole scenario of Ugu business and maize planting is painted as simplistic and successful. These factors are; land rented from the indigenous land owners for the farming business; Amount of money/fund invested which most times have to be borrowed or from loans with interest rates; time invested in each of the farming seasons such as land preparation, their own time for sowing, weeding and hired labor for weeding and harvesting the crops/vegetables, purchases of farm implements even though, these are locally made as there are not much technical involvement, and the money paid to transporters to market their produce.

Although, it might be pictured that these rural women make reasonable profits from their participation in food production, yet the number of time invested is quite involving and leads to health implications. According to Mrs. Dorothy Ikonne, “I take paracetamol daily to keep myself strong, and at times, I also breakdown entirely by malaria and backache and lumbago”. The only free days are the weekends, where I take a little rest, yet it is not free. The body aches, result from weeding and cutting the vegetables and other crops planted along to sustain the family food supply. Also, a lot of money is invested into ensuring that a good yield is achieved. Although, laborers are not used daily, but imagine when a hired laborer charges from N1,500 – N2,000 per day, and you may need about 2 or 3 of them. During harvesting period, you also will need laborers and finally the transporters to take them to sales point, Lagos, Ibadan or other towns to sell off their Ugu or even the maize too, as the case may be.

Thus, the profit margin can be imagined, if a bundle is sold for (N5,000) five thousand Naira, the labour, the transporter, the landlord fees and the maintenance of the crops till harvest, all these goes into the amount left for each bundle or bag or corn tied for sales. Although, some invest in inorganic fertilizers, yet a great deal of the rural women farmers also get involved in the purchasing of the chemical fertilizers to boost their yields and fast growth. Rural women are hardworking women and have no option as their saying goes, “No food for lazy men and women”. And when they breakdown, they also expend a lot of money to receive treatment. Without much support from any quarters, it has got to be some hard savings to ensure their children are trained in schools.

#### 3.2. Achievements of the Rural Women in Planting of UGU and Corn

In the course of this work, a lot of findings point to challenges and achievements as well. Some of the challenges enunciated above eventuality lead these women to achievements on the long run. As one of them noted, little raindrops make a mighty river or ocean. From their sweat-ridden efforts, these women save their little earnings with the cooperative societies they engage in to ensure they can get money for the next planting season. The women through their savings have ensured that they run their families’ welfare in clothing, shelter and food – which are the major essentiality of survival of the masses. Out of their efforts, they have continuously contributed other quotas to the provision of essentially needed foods for the Nigerian masses. However, it must be pointed out that they could



have done a lot better, if only they received support from local government, states governments and the federal government on the long run. These could come in the provision of adequate funding and incentives to these rural women.

Thus upon reflection, a summary of the findings of the constraints against these rural women participation and engagement in the production of these two crops examined include; inadequate land to plant or grow their crops, evidenced by the fact that throughout the farming season, you find out some are still searching for more land. Also, only a few are educated, while others are just fairly literate, with a greater number uneducated. The impact this factor has on them is that they lack exposure to modern technological equipment and infrastructure which can enhance their knowledge of greater agricultural production. As earlier noted, lack of access to funds or credit facilities is another bane of those rural farmers, thus leading to poor extension services to engage in good practices in agricultural development. Their lack of education or agricultural development is also responsible for poor yield and adequate scarcity measures that should be taken when pests invade their crops, leading at times to loss of their capital invested into the farms in the due course. It must also be noted that these rural women in a particular year of such loss may go poverty-stricken, even though, the prospects of planting the vegetable and the corn has earlier been highlighted as a business venture worth the while. It is as a result of the ups and downs nature of the business which at times makes them engage in alternative farming ventures and not being able to focus only on one item of farming produce.

On the positive aspects of their achievements, it may be argued that some have excelled in their involvement in the business and have been able to stabilize and eventually stand their feet on the business to achieve enviable level of attainments. On the whole, it can still be argued that these women could do better in a number of ways, if and only they were properly guided and assisted.

#### 4. Conclusion

An attempt has been made by this research to assess the efforts of rural women of Ikenne and Ilishan Remo, Ogun State to attain sustainable agricultural production. The work took a cursory look at the specialization of those women in two major crops – Pumpkin and Maize considered to be in high demand for potential buyers both in the local government and externally outside the locality to places like Lagos, Ibadan and at times packaged to be sold outside the shores of Nigeria. The work embarked on a historical analysis of the advent of the Igbo, Ibibio, Edo and Benue women into the Ikenne Local Government for the purpose of farming to make ends meet and to support their husbands who were either students or missionaries. The work went further to capture the transformation that arose as a result of the intergroup relations in which all the ethnic groups involved had one thing or the other to gain from the farming experience that transpired in the locality. While the Igbo women mastered their art of farming, they could not do it alone as they sought extra hands in laborers from the Agatu (Benue) seasoned farmers and more importantly could not displace the indigenes of the town when the business of transporting their vegetables and corn produce outside their domains arose, for this aspect was handled in the main by indigenous Ikenne-Ilishan drivers and transporters with a few Igbo men who now want to rise to the occasion.

In as much, sustainability is the aim, the research has revealed clearly that these Nigerians have risen to the task before them to conquer laziness, fend for their survival and welfare to isolate the issue of poverty which is fast gaining momentum in the Nigerian nation. This is as a result of a few at the top echelon, politicians, bourgeoisie and poorly managed economy despite the fact that the country's natural resources in petroleum should ensure equitable distribution in such a manner that there should be no such wide gap which has constrained the rural women into tilling the ground's surface for their survival. Notwithstanding, the research recommends that these women should be given some form of assistance as they struggle to make ends meet. Apart from the fact some of them have already opted to become members of cooperative societies, the government should give them more affordable low interest loans to invest into good seedlings and qualitative produce. These women should occasionally be given proper agricultural education by experts in these crops to ensure they master good farming practices. They should be involved in international exposure that inculcates good farming practices extended to Nigeria by international organizations such as the Food and Agricultural Organizations (FAO) and United Nations when such opportunities that come directly from the United Nations and other international governmental and non-governmental organizations are able to access the rural women, they gain more exposure and also be able to see themselves as not entirely downtrodden and restrained to the vicious circle of merry-go-round of survival of the fittest which only but conform them to endemic poverty which has so much become the fate of the third world countries.

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