

## Gender Disparity in the Informal Sector Employment Opportunities in a Nigerian State Economy

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**Abstract:** This study noted and reports on the unacceptable level and the wide gender gap participation in the informal sector of the Nigerian economy generally as against the global trends and presents primary and secondary sources of data to show the present status and the future trend in the informal sector in Ekiti state of Nigeria. It thereby argued for a wider gender participation spread if the expected growth and development in the state would be achieved. It also suggested some the expected roles that the government, counselors and educational managers may have to play in reorientating the youths towards the offerings of the informal sector especially in Ekiti state that is rural and agriculturally based.

**Key words:** Disparity, informal sector, employment, opportunities, economy, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

Youths are the mainstay of a nation's economy and are made up of citizens in the age bracket of 15-55 years of age (Orubuloye and Olorunfemi, 1995). Physiologically they are agile, mobile and supposedly skillful in the acts and activities that constitute managing and effecting the well-being and continuity of the society (Olutola, 1986). However, a major and recurring problem in the Nigerian nation remain the need to have her youth population (age 15-55) fully employed in activities and concerns that would manage and effect the needs of her estimated 150 million citizens (Obasanjo, 2005; Orubuloye and Olorunfemi, 1995). The global trend perhaps is to have the informal sector as well as private entrepreneurs take up the challenge of employing the ever growing population of the un/under employed. This is because the formal sector, as usually run by the government, is over bloated and ever threatening to lay off its employees.

According to Adegoroye *et al.* (2003), there are 46 identifiable and societal recognized sources of the informal employment in Ekiti state. These areas of possible and ready source of employment as well as wealth generation are poorly patronized or rarely engaged by the youths despite the declined governmental employments and threats of retrenchments in the ministries and their parastatals. They showed that the ready sources of these forms of employment in Ekiti state could be found in Hair dressing (mainly female), Barbing (mainly male), Teaching (private Nursery and Primary Schools), Tailoring (greater female than male), 'Okada'

commercial motor cycle riding (mainly males), Commercial transportation (Driving and being the passengers' Conductor, mainly males), Wares selling and Petty trading (greater female than male).

These jobs appear to be service and distribution oriented as against actual production from source oriented.

Further along the line of problems and difficulties in the realm of employment and in virtually all aspects of society management is the gender factor. This is so because in many of the Nigerian multi culture societal, traditions and myths appear to relegate women's participation in issues of societal maintenance, especially work and paid employment, to the background. Gender imbalance is therefore noticeable in all walks of life of the nation.

From the National Population Commission (NPC) data of 1993, a considerable percentage (33%) of the Nigerian population is young making it desirable that due consideration be given to the significance of the youth in socio-economic and political development, so that there will be a purposeful, focused, well articulated and well directed effort aimed at tapping the energy and resourcefulness of the youth and harnessing them for vitality, growth and development of the state well into the 21st century.

The fore going as it may be, Oyeyinka and Adeyinka (1998) presented data to show that as both issues of education and employment are related and closely tied did both reveal a disadvantaged skew towards the female gender in Nigeria. They posited that women in Nigeria

generally have limited access to education and in turn a limited access to formal employment. Further, they argued that although women make up about half the total population they form only 36% of the total labour force.

Okokie (2000) showed in a 1981 study of women in some parts of Nigeria that only 29.4% of them were in wage employment in the public sector and 8.1% in wage employment in the private sector. In the same study, he showed that only 16.8% of urban women (in 5 urban centers) were in wage employment and that most of them in wage employments are nurses, teachers and clerical officers.

Fapohunda (1985) noted a decline in female employment in the manufacturing industries where employment of women fell from 15% in 1974 to 1.4% in 1983 and an indication of a continual fall in the trend and pattern.

Invariably, women bring to the labor market, qualifications that are value as less than that of men. This has important repercussions for their future employment and financial well-being. The issue to gender inequality in employment in recent years had been turning up revealing and scandalous facts even in developed nations where the discrepancies were most flagrantly shown in the wages paid at British universities (Social Trends, 1998).

These as it may be it had been shown, through some modern econometric computations that gender in-equality have a negative link with economic growth (Galor and Weil, 1996; Lagerlof, 1999; Klasen, 2002). Gender inequality in especially employment had been shown to:

- Reduce the pool of talent from which employers can draw upon, thereby reducing the average ability of the work force.
- High female labor participation helped spur economic growth in some Asian countries.
- Women participation in labour force have been shown to increase their bargaining power which in turn leads to a greater investments in health and education of their children thus promoting human capital of the next generation and therefore economic growth (Thomas, 1997).

Encouraging female participation as against drawing women into the labour force as the later may reduce fertility, suggests that the former would reduce child mortality levels and promote the education of the next generation.

A growing literature appear to point to the fact that with more women participation in the labor force, there is less chances of corruption and nepotism in business and government improving access to women

in the workforce are therefore likely to improve governance in business and government.

Seguino (2000) presented data to show that the use of female-intensive export oriented manufacturing industries by many East-Asian countries have made them to be competitive on world market. He further concluded that a failure to nip gender inequality in employment would reduce the ability of many of the other developing nations to capitalize on these opportunities.

**The problem and purpose of the study:** It is in the poorer sections and nations that instances of gender biases and inequality are more evident. Women and girls are at the bottom of the social, economic and political ladder in these societies. However, the Ekiti state government in Nigeria had been making notable efforts at economic growth backed by physical and infrastructure developments. The government of the day had been onto correcting the gender imbalance by appointing a female deputy governor in a recent political maneuver and change of baton in the state and have had to appoint a female chief justice for the state, but in all, there are relatively few women in top-level administrative or management positions, meaning that women still form a low proportion of total civil servants and that women are in the lower level and lower paying jobs. Further ambivalence and uncertainties surround the extent to which the informal sector had been able to absorb the growing population of the unemployed and the underemployed as well as balance the gender issue in the employment status in such an important sector of the state's economy and existence.

According to McLaughlin (1990) and Mundobodh (2001), the kinds of employment in the informal sector where the individuals or their groups so engaged operate as mini and micro enterprises as means to subsistence through the production of goods and services on a small scale with lower quality and prices are vehicle repair, radio repair, watch repair, refrigerator repair, manufacture of bricks and aggregate building construction, money changing and in recent times computer operations and repairs. The most common activities identified in the rural areas relate to subsistent farming, blacksmithing, leather-crafts and herbal medicines and Ekiti state is not only rural but agriculturally based.

In large measure, this may be due to the lack of systematic evidence and solid understanding of the types of informal employment structures that exist, the reasons and rationales underlying their operations, the nature of their activities and the self as well as their communities' perceptions of their roles, effectiveness and contributions to the society. The roles to play and issue that need be

made of the importance of these in the present and future of the society by educational managers and vocational counselors may better be of a conference or summit theme of in a short while. But of pressing need is an empirical data so as to both sensitize and make room for correctional purposes among professionals and other concerned bodies, e.g. the government and private investors is the issue of gender representations in the informal sector of the economy.

The female gender appear to get lesser opportunities to have a command over productive resources such as land or credit. Access to the means to influence the development process is a rare and difficult possibility for them also.

From personal observations occurrences of full employment and resourcefulness are exceptionally low in Ekiti state. Ekiti state is grossly underdeveloped as the cities and towns are small and lacked the presence of appropriate industries, the roads are narrow and full of pot holes and are just receiving attention for repairs in recent times. These being issues that negatively affects the functioning of the private/informal employment opportunities. These as they are, this study therefore wishes to give a measure of the female gender participation in the informal sector of Ekiti state economy.

#### **Research questions:**

- What is the status of employment in the informal sector of the Ekiti state economy generally?
- What pattern of distribution has these sources of employment in the rural and urban centers as Ekiti state is basically rural and agriculturally based (Ekong, 2003)?
- What is the status of women's participation in Ekiti state informal sector labour force?

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study is a descriptive aspect of the status of gender disparity in employment in the informal sector of Ekiti State economy.

**Population of the study:** Based on Nigeria Population Data Sheet 2003 Projection, Ekiti State has 2,147,980 citizens. According to the World Youth Data (2000), in sub-saharan West-Africa and especially Nigeria, 33% of most communities are made up of youths in the age range of 15-55years. Based on these claims and projections, this study is considering the experiences of a population made up of 708,833 citizens who are working and represent the main stay of the economy. They, therefore, can best express opinions about the

issue of interest (National Population Commission (NPC) Ekiti-State, Nigeria).

**Sample and sampling technique:** Six Local Government areas were randomly selected from the 16 in the State. These 6 LGAs are from the three senatorial districts in the state, that is, two Local Government areas were randomly chosen per senatorial district, namely:

North Senatorial District Oye, Ilejemeje, Central Senatorial District, Ado-Ekiti, Ijero-Ekiti, South Senatorial District, Ikere, Ilawe.

Using multistage random sampling technique, a total of 3535 individuals, were the drawn sample from the population, representing about 45% the population.

**The instrument:** As this is a survey of the descriptive type where information would not be manipulated, data were collected through the instrument of a set of questionnaires

#### **Validation of the instrument**

**Validity:** Relevant questions as to the female gender participation as well as its spread in the 46 sources of informal employment possible in Ekiti state were the content of the 22-item questionnaire used for the study. The instrument was adjudged to be valid because the criteria of construct, face and content validities were ensured.

**Reliability:** In a test-re-test exercise with 30 selected youths in Ado-Ekiti, the state capital ( but not part of the final sample for the study), a correlation coefficient of 0.46 was derived and found significant at 0.05 level of significance.

**Method of data collection:** The instrument therefore targeted the community members especially: Opinion leaders, traditional leaders, market women, religious leaders, school principal/headmaster. The 5 basic categories are: Unemployed artisans, secondary school leavers, graduate unemployed, youth-in-street and unemployed.

**Method of data analysis:** This involves the use of simple frequencies with tabulations and content analysis.

**Data analysis:** Three thousand four hundred and ninety six of the questionnaires were properly completed and used for the data analysis (Table 1).

A breakdown of the participants reveal that 61%(2121) were males while 39%(1375) were females. More males participated than the females.

Table 1: Analysis of gender distribution of respondents

Sex	N	(%)
Male	2121	61
Female	1375	39

Table 2: Distribution of unemployment between male and female

Sex	Unemployed	(%)	Employed	(%)	Total
Male	1180	41	604	21	1784
Female	756	26	349	12	1105
	1936		953		
Total	2889				

Table 3: Employment status from the assumed population of youths in Ekiti State

Employment status	Male	Female	Total
Unemployed	235,404	149,280	384,684
Employed	120,573	68,899	189,472
Total			574,156

Table 4: Distributon of unemployment status between male and female

Sex	Unemployment	(%)
Male	342	64
Female	192	36
Total	534	100

With the above percentage, when compared with the total population of youths (708,833) in Ekiti State, this shows that 81% of the total population (574,155) appear to be employed while 19% of the total population (134,687) are unemployed.

Table 2 shows that 41% of male respondents are underemployed, 26% of female respondents are also underemployed while 21% of male respondents are fully employed and 12% of female respondents consider themselves employed.

With the projected population of youth, this shows that 41% of male respondent (235,404) are underemployed, 26% of female respondent (149,280) are underemployed, 21% of male respondents (120,573) consider themselves employed and 12% of female respondents (68,899) are employed (Table 3).

Table 4 shows that 64% of total number of respondents unemployed (534) are male while 36% of the total number of respondents who are unemployed are female. In relating the above with the projected population of unemployed youth (134,687) in Ekiti state, 64% of unemployed male are 86,200 and 34% of unemployed female are 48,487 (Table 5).

**Employment and unemployment status:** About 81% of the respondents reported having had some form of work to do within the preceding fortnight to the interview. These people are engaged in any kind of paid work that can make them sustain their life for a period of one day while 19% of the respondents are unemployed but relied on their friends to live. A good example of those people who are involved are the set of people found in the car

Table 5: Unemployment status of youths in Ekiti State

Sex	Unemployment
Male	86,200
Female	48,487
Total	134,687

Table 6: Projections of employment and unemployment status for 2008

Employed (81% of 817,751)	Unemployed (19% of 817,751)	Total
662,378	155,373	817,751

Table 7: Projections of underemployment and full employment status for 2008

Underemployment (67% of 662,372)	Fully employed (33% of 662,372)	Total
443,793	218,585	662,378

park waiting for their friends (touts), or people with skills but no instruments/tools to perform or work with.

**Projection for 2008:** The estimated population of Ekiti State by the 2.9% rate of estimation by the National Population Commission shows that Ekiti State population in the years 2008 will be 2,478,032. Also the 33% of the total population that are youth is estimated to be 817,751.

With this estimated figure, the rate of youth employment, unemployment and underemployment (if the situation is not brought under control by the government) is estimated (Table 6 and 7).

## DISCUSSION

Data and evidences reveal a sorry case of the employment status of the female gender in Ekiti state despite the opportunities to engage them (Oyeyinka and Adeyinka, 1998). For example, in the area of agriculture that the people are known for, livestock keeping, bee-keeping for honey production and green farm practice for vegetable production are not given much attention by the female.

However, the traditional culture of the males being the bread winner who must go out to look for food for the family appears to still hold and directs the attitudes of the Ekiti people. In virtually all the trades identified, male dominance is apparent (Fapohunda, 1985).

When responding to the item suggesting making the female learn a trade, majority of the participants declined based on the fact that when they complete the training, they wouldn't find the initial capital to buy the necessary tools and ingredients to take off their practice. They further explained that in most informal sources of employment, not less than a year of constant patronage is needed to really stabilize the people so engaged.

The research findings show that the same principal concern and experiences underpin the participants' views on and reactions to poor employment status and level of

poverty. Despite their strong character, they (the Ekiti citizens are poorly fed, clothe and cannot pay for sustaining their health).

### **IMPLICATION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The implication of these for the economy and well-being of the citizens and the state in general lay in missing out on the advantages of having female gender participate in the economic activities that are the environment specified, in this instance, agriculture (Lagerlof, 1999; Klasen, 2002). Further, the state may have to continue to loose her youths through migration to greener pastures of employment, making her becoming less capable of expressing itself as the food supply base of the nation as Ekiti state is rural and agrarian. Our suggestions and recommendations would therefore be along the lines of having counselors and educational managers in the secondary schools come up with a program to challenge and encourage the youths to look for and develop interest in the several employment opportunities in the informal sector of the economy of the state. To make this meaningful and attractive, the government of the state need formulating a youth employment policy that would make micro-credit scheme assume a more lively form and dimension in the society as the respondents in this study harmer on their lack of funds to embark on self employment in areas of their competence. We believe in involving and making the Cooperative societies that are now popular among the citizens of the state to develop schemes, policies and programs that would assure the citizens of a sure support and carefully absolving itself of gender bias.

Evidences show that most of the informally employed scarcely have dealings to make with banks and insurance companies that should have shown them ways of supporting themselves in their old age. These should be taken care of in the policy development too.

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