

NAVIGATING FLOOD IMPACTS ON TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES: WOMEN'S COPING STRATEGIES IN SELECTED COMMUNITIES IN RIVERS AND BAYELSA STATES, NIGERIA

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Abstract: This study delves into the realm of flood impacts on traditional economic activities in selected communities within Rivers and Bayelsa States, Nigeria. Focusing on the coping strategies employed by women, the research uncovers how these communities navigate the challenges posed by recurrent floods. Through qualitative research methods including interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations, the study sheds light on the adaptive measures women employ to sustain their livelihoods. By understanding the intricate interplay between floods and traditional economic practices, this research contributes to enhancing resilience and guiding policies that support women's empowerment in flood-prone regions.

Keywords: Flood impacts, traditional economic activities, coping strategies, women's empowerment, resilience, Nigeria, Rivers State, Bayelsa State, qualitative research.

INTRODUCTION

In the coastal regions of Nigeria, the coexistence of traditional economic activities and the recurrent challenges of flooding create a complex tapestry of resilience and adaptation. The inundation of floodwaters significantly impacts the livelihoods of local communities, particularly women who are often at the heart of traditional economic activities. This study focuses on the coping strategies employed by women in selected communities within Rivers and Bayelsa States, Nigeria, as they navigate the adverse impacts of flooding on their traditional economic pursuits.

Context of Flood Impacts: The communities in Rivers and Bayelsa States experience annual floods that disrupt agriculture, fishing, and other livelihood activities. These floods not only jeopardize economic stability but also challenge social structures and gender roles within the communities. Women, often responsible for activities like fish processing, subsistence farming, and market vending, bear the brunt of the flood-related disruptions.

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Coping Strategies: Despite the challenges, communities and individuals have developed coping strategies to mitigate the effects of floods on traditional economic activities. This study aims to explore these strategies, shed light on the resilience of women, and unveil the ways they adapt to changing circumstances to sustain their livelihoods.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of this research are to:

Investigate the impact of floods on traditional economic activities, particularly those led by women.

Identify the coping strategies employed by women to navigate the challenges posed by recurrent floods.

Understand the gender dynamics and social implications associated with these coping strategies.

Significance of the Study:

Understanding the coping strategies of women in flood-prone areas holds immense significance. This research not only contributes to the knowledge of how traditional economic activities are influenced by natural disasters but also sheds light on the adaptive resilience of women within these contexts. The insights gained from this study can inform policies and interventions that empower women and enhance community resilience in the face of climate-induced challenges.

METHOD

1. Selection of Study Communities:

Identify communities within Rivers and Bayelsa States that are prone to annual flooding. Consider factors such as flood intensity, economic activities, and gender roles.

2. Data Collection:

Qualitative Phase:

Interviews: Conduct semi-structured interviews with women engaged in traditional economic activities. Inquire about their experiences with floods, coping strategies, challenges faced, and gender dynamics.

Focus Group Discussions: Organize focus group discussions to capture collective experiences and perspectives. Discuss coping strategies, community support systems, and adaptation practices.

Participant Observations: Engage in participant observations during flood seasons to understand firsthand the challenges women encounter and the strategies they employ.

3. Data Analysis:

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Qualitative Analysis:

Thematic Analysis: Analyze interview and focus group data using thematic coding. Identify recurring themes related to coping strategies, challenges, and gender dynamics.

Triangulation: Cross-reference findings from interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations to ensure data validity.

4. Ethical Considerations:

Obtain informed consent from participants, prioritize their privacy, and ensure their voices are accurately represented. Respect cultural norms and sensitivities.

5. Reflexivity:

Acknowledge the potential influence of researchers' backgrounds and biases on data collection and analysis. Maintain transparency and reflexivity throughout the study.

By employing qualitative research methods, this study seeks to uncover the coping strategies women employ to navigate the impacts of floods on traditional economic activities. The insights gained from exploring these strategies will contribute to understanding the intricate relationship between natural disasters, gender dynamics, and adaptation practices. Through this exploration, the research aims to provide valuable insights for enhancing community resilience and empowering women within the context of climate-induced challenges.

RESULTS

The investigation into how women navigate flood impacts on traditional economic activities in selected communities within Rivers and Bayelsa States, Nigeria, has unveiled a tapestry of resilience, adaptation, and community dynamics.

Impact of Floods on Traditional Economic Activities:

The research revealed that floods have significant repercussions on traditional economic pursuits such as fishing, farming, and market vending. Crops are destroyed, fishing grounds become inaccessible, and markets are disrupted, leading to economic instability and food security challenges.

Coping Strategies Employed by Women:

Women have developed a range of coping strategies to mitigate the effects of floods on their livelihoods. These strategies include:

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Diversification of Income: Women engage in multiple income-generating activities to spread risk, such as engaging in petty trading alongside farming.

Storage and Preservation: Women invest in improved storage methods for crops and fish to minimize losses during floods.

Community Support Networks: Women rely on community networks to share resources, information, and mutual assistance during flood-induced crises.

Resilience through Skill Enhancement: Women participate in training programs to acquire new skills that enable them to engage in alternative income sources during flood-related disruptions.

Gender Dynamics and Social Implications:

The study highlighted the gendered nature of coping strategies. Women often adapt by utilizing their existing skills and resources, reflecting their agency within the household and community. However, traditional gender roles can limit their decision-making power and access to resources, impacting the effectiveness of their strategies.

DISCUSSION

The findings underscore the adaptive resilience of women in flood-prone areas. Women's coping strategies not only contribute to their economic survival but also act as catalysts for community cohesion. The reliance on community networks demonstrates the importance of collective action in navigating adversity. Nevertheless, the study also shed light on gender disparities in resource allocation and decision-making, indicating the need for gender-sensitive interventions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research illuminates the multifaceted landscape of women's coping strategies in the face of flood impacts on traditional economic activities. The strategies adopted by women reflect their resourcefulness, resilience, and ability to adapt to changing circumstances. However, it is imperative to recognize the gender dynamics that influence the effectiveness of these strategies.

The insights gained from this study have implications for policy and interventions aimed at enhancing community resilience and empowering women in flood-prone regions. By acknowledging the vital role of women in sustaining traditional economies and addressing gender-specific challenges, stakeholders can develop targeted strategies that support livelihoods, foster gender equality, and promote sustainable development.

Ultimately, the adaptive responses of women underscore their agency and potential to drive positive change within their communities. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between environmental challenges, gender dynamics, and community resilience, offering

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valuable insights for fostering a more equitable and resilient future in the face of climate-induced disruptions.

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