



Research Article

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Addressing Time Poverty among Women in Nigeria Through Building of Infrastructures

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Abstract

Time is an asset available to every individual in equal measure. However, this finite resource is not used by men and women in equal measure. The expected roles of both gender as well as availability or lack of basic infrastructures determine how much time one spends in paid work, unpaid care work, domestic chores, rest or leisure. Paid work, the burden of unpaid care work and domestic chores which fall on women as a result of social norms, and poor access to basic time-saving infrastructures are strong factors that make women time-poor and deprive them of sufficient time for rest, leisure, personal care and full labour force participation. This qualitative research analyses from the voices of the poor, the roots and effects of time poverty on women in Nigeria. It concludes with some strategic measures to combat time poverty and promote women's quality economic productivity and general wellbeing.

Keywords: *Time poverty, Infrastructures, Women, Social norms, Sustainable Development Goals*

1. Introduction

Time poverty is one of the roots of poverty among women globally. Time is an asset one can invest in domestic chores, taking care of loved ones, earning money, developing oneself through education or skills acquisition, or used for leisure. Globally however, women are marginalised in their enjoyment of this free gift of nature. This is because women as primary caregivers spend more time in doing domestic chores and unpaid care works in their households more than men. Irrespective of region, income level or cultural characteristics, women spend more time than men on both unpaid domestic work and interpersonal care. (UN Women, 2018). The unpaid care and domestic works include cooking, cleaning the house, taking care of little children and the elderly, fetching water and firewood, etc. They are thus deprived of ample time to engage in paid employments or high-income business as their male counterparts due to the burden of household chores and unpaid care work. Even where women are participating in the labour force, it tends to be mostly in low paying and insecure informal sector where little or no skills are required; also, where the working hours are flexible enough for them to combine the job with meeting up with their domestic chores. (World Bank, 2011). If the time women spend on domestic and unpaid care work is combined with the time they spend on market activities, it means that women work more than men each day. The inequality in time use between men and women is further aggravated by lack of basic infrastructures especially in rural communities. The absence of basic infrastructure in many rural communities in Nigeria, as well as some socio-cultural factors as regards to the primary roles and responsibilities of men and women in the family all trap women in time poverty, which spills over to income poverty.

The aim of this qualitative research is to identify the factors that propel time poverty among women in Nigeria and to proffer measures which the Nigerian government, policy makers, and Anti-Poverty Organisations (APOs) can adopt to ameliorate it. It employs the Participatory Poverty Approach (PPA) to understand the roots of time poverty from the voice of the poor in rural areas, and to hear their opinions on how time poverty can be reduced in their communities. The Participatory Approaches is essential to this research because it increases the involvement of marginalized people in decision-making over their own lives. (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). This study is therefore built around the following research questions:

- a. What are the factors that lead to time poverty among women in Nigeria?
- b. What are the effects that time poverty has on women's wellbeing?
- c. How can the factors that drive this issue be addressed to free up women's time use?

These questions shall be answered through data gathered from Focus Group Discussions and individual interviews conducted in the six research communities.

The paper has six sections including this introduction. The second section gives an overview on the thought of existing scholars on time poverty among women. The

research methodology is also included in this section. The third section explores the opinions of the time poor on the causes and effects of time poverty. The fourth section presents the solutions to time poverty from the voices of the poor, while the two last sections discuss the findings of the research and concludes with recommendations.

1.1 Social norm and poor access to basic infrastructure equals time poverty.

Every individual irrespective of gender is allocated the same amount of time daily: 24hours. Time poverty is understood as how these 24hours equally allocated to every individual are used. Hyde et al (2020) defines time poverty as inequitable gender-based allocation of unpaid domestic work, representing “double-duty” for women who enter the workforce, often leaving women with little or no discretionary time. Across the world women allocate a larger proportion of their time to paid, unpaid care work and domestic chores, while men invest most of their time in participating fully in the labour force. According to the data from United Nations Department of Economic and Affairs (UNDESA 2019) in 88 countries and areas women on average spend 18 per cent of the day on unpaid care and domestic work, whereas men allocate 7 per cent of the day to the same activities. Also, in a recent estimate by Beegle and Christiaensen (2019) using a handful of countries in Africa (Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, South Africa, and Tanzania), suggests that women spend on average 15–22 percent of their time on unpaid work, compared with only 2–9 percent among men.

United Nations (2020) identifies demographic factors, such as the presence of children and older people requiring care; and economic factors, which requires individuals to balance the financial and care needs of the family with paid work, subsistence production and unpaid work, as determinants of how individual allocate time within a household. Social norms about the roles and responsibilities of men and women in society also play a critical role in time allocation. (Kevane and Wydick, 2001; Kes and Swaminathan, 2006).

Time poverty afflicts both women residing in both urban and rural areas of Nigeria; however, its occurrence is more intense in rural and remote areas. International Labour Organisation (2018) states that living in rural areas tends to increase the time a woman allocates to unpaid care work and domestic chores. Bardasi and Wodon (2010) also argue that women in rural areas are 22 percentage points more likely to be time-poor than men. The reason behind this is that rural dwellers have poor access to basic infrastructure like water and electricity in their compounds, transportation, child/elder care facilities; and labour-saving technologies like electric cooking stoves and food processors which can reduce drudgery and free up their time.

Chatzitheochari an Aber (2012) argue that women and girls are time-poor when they spend excessive hours in paid and unpaid work, leaving little or no time for rest or leisure. In addition to lack of time for rest or leisure, time poverty constraints women from engaging in quality income-earning activities or human capital development

activities like education/skills. Ndimele (2022) opines that discriminatory social norms and women's disproportionate share of unpaid care work in Nigeria hamper their ability to earn high incomes, and encroaches on their time for education and training, political participation, self-care, rest and leisure. As a result, women are less likely than men to have an income of their own, rendering them financially dependent on their partners and increasing their vulnerability to poverty. Hyde et al (2020) summarises the effects of time poverty on women as follows: promotes self-neglect, prevents women from earning money, which can limit their ability to pay for health care; curtails women's educational opportunities and capabilities for engaging with health systems; and results in poorer food choices, less exercise, and more stress; limits women's engagement in the workforce due to unpaid responsibilities; funnels women in the paid workforce into lower-paid occupations with fewer protections; drives gender segregation in the workplace due to overt and subtle harassment and discrimination; and also results in women being paid less than men for similar work.

This research builds on the foundation of these existing studies, but offers fresh insights by exploring time poverty from the lived experiences of rural women in Nigeria.

2. Methodology

This research was conducted in 2021 in six rural communities located in three out of the 36 states of Nigeria. The three states are located in three of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The following communities were selected: Udi Town and Amansiodo (Enugu State, South East), Adatan and Araromi Oke-Odo (Ogun State, South West), Gidan Mangoro Angwa and Taburaze (Taraba State, North Central). The states were selected based on convenience and accessibility; availability of volunteers to assist the researchers in translating the local languages used in the discussions and interviews to English. In order to obtain high quality information that may help in decision making, this study employed Focus Group Discussion. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). A total of six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and six individual interviews were conducted to understand from the mouth of the rural women factors that make them time poor and the policies they desire to be implemented in their communities to free up their time and avail them the more opportunities for leisure, quality labour force participation, and self-development. Semi-structured interviews were also utilized on individual interviewees. This enabled the researchers to probe for more answers beyond the already prepared questions from the interviewees on the issue of time poverty The importance of Semi-structured interviews as explained by Lune and Berg (2017) is that its flexible nature enables researchers both to ask a series of regularly structured questions, permitting comparisons across interviews, and to pursue areas spontaneously initiated by the interviewee. This can realize a much more textured set of accounts from participants than would have resulted had only scheduled questions been asked. (Lune and Berg, 2017:70). Each FGD constituted an average of six participants which include

petty trader and farmers, and artisans. A total of 48 women participated in the FGDs and six women participated in the individual interviews and their responses are discussed in this article. To give voice to the marginalised, some direct quotes from the respondents are included. Each of the FGDs and interviews lasted for 50 to 60 minutes. The selection of the participants was strictly voluntary and not mandatory, neither was it influenced by anyone. Their anonymity is also protected. The FGDs and interviews were held in locations preferred by the participants including village meeting squares, native compounds and homes of the participants. The group discussions were tape-recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis. The thematic approach was adopted to link the causes and effects of time poverty among women in Nigeria, with the proposed solutions by the poor themselves, thus making the poor the centre of this study. The linking process helped in generation the findings of this research.

2.1 Discriminatory social norm a propeller of time poverty among women

In Nigeria as well as in many regions of the world, there exist a discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes about care and domestic work being women's and girls' work, while providing for the family is seen as men's work. This forces the burden of caregiving and domestic chores on women right from childhood, because it is deemed necessary to groom them as future homemakers. This engrafted norm leaves women and girls with little or no choice than to fulfil the expected role, even when it forestalls their wellbeing.

Take the responsibility of fetching water and firewood for example; Taburaze, Gidan Mangoro Angwa, Adatan, Araromi Oke-Odo, and Amansiodo communities all opined that it is the responsibility of the women and children to fetch water and firewood in their communities. An interviewee from Taburaze informed the researchers that in her community:

"The women fetch firewood while coming from the farm, after resting they will go and fetch water."

The participants see the children helping their mothers to do domestic chores as necessary because it is a form of training for them as future homemakers. Even though both the male and female children assist their mothers in doing these domestic chores in these communities, the participants of the six FGDs and individual interviews reported that their female children assist them more in doing domestic chores than their male counterparts. They all believe that the women are responsible for the general upkeep of the house even from childhood. Women from Araromi Oke-Odo comments:

"The mother and children fetch water and firewood in my community. This is because women are in charge of the home and the children have to help so that they can know how to take care of their own families when they get married too."

The above supports the findings of the study conducted by Chopra and Zambelli

(2017) on time use and time poverty across four countries that, in addition to women shouldering the responsibility for unpaid care work, children were also responsible for such work as collecting water and fuel. Girls performed such tasks more often than boys, at 32 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively. The result of this is discriminatory practice is the intergenerational transfer of time poverty among women and girl children and an increased risk of poverty among future generations. (United Nations, 2020).

From the responses of the respondents, the researchers could detect uneven distribution of domestic chores and unpaid care work among men and women compels the participants to spend long hours daily in taking care of the home. All the women from the six communities confessed to spending from six to twelve hours in household chores and care work every day. Participants of the FGDs from Taburaze and Gidan Mangoro Angwa communities spend as much as six hours per day on domestic chores. Women from Amansiodo and Udi Town communities spend as much as twelve hours per day, while in Adatan and Araromi Oke-Odo communities; women spend from two to twelve hours on unpaid care and domestic chores. Some of the participants of individual interviews confessed to working round the clock to take care of their house. An interviewee from Adatan community laments:

"...almost round the clock because there are so much works to be done in the house. Except you decide to rest or you are ill, house chores take the whole day."

A woman from Gidan Mangoro Angwa community opines:

"I can't calculate the time I spend on domestic chores because the work doesn't end..."

A woman from Udi Town community says:

"I work from morning till night in the house because the work does not finish."

Most of the women from the six research communities confessed to not getting any form of help from their husbands in the care and domestic chores. Their spouses only help them when they are ill. Participants of the FGD in Adatan community confessed that their husbands can only help out with domestic chores when they are pushed. This is because they believe cleaning the house is a woman's responsibility. An interviewee from the above community also laments:

"I am the only one that does house work in my household. I do not get any help from my husband because he believes house chores are the woman's responsibility."

The women in Araromi Oke-Odo opines that only the children help them with domestic works

"...because most of the men don't assist in doing house chores, they either go to work or go out with their friends."

For the women in Taburaze community, their husbands can only help them with

domestic chores “...especially when they know the wife is the one earning money”

Thus, we see social and cultural norms strongly at play in making women time poor.

2.2 Poor access to basic infrastructure drives time poverty among women in Nigeria

In addition to social discriminatory social norms, poor access to basic infrastructures like clean water, constant electricity, efficient transportation system, and child/elder care facilities exacerbates the incidence of time poverty among women in Nigeria. The poorer access rural dwellers have to these basic amenities makes them feel the sting of time poverty more, as they spend larger amount of time on paid work, unpaid care work, and domestic chores. Participants of the FGDs and individual interviews from the six research communities reported that they do not have clean water or constant electricity in their homes. They have to travel some distance to fetch water. Respondents from Adatan and Araromi Oke-Odo communities opined that they buy sachet water for drinking. The ones that have no money to buy sachet water buy kegs of water from water supply workers. Participants in Taburaze community in Taraba state opine:

“We fetch water from the nearby river early in the morning; but if you fetch it from the stream in the afternoon, you add alum to the water before drinking it.”

Women from Gidan Mangoro Angwa community lament:

“We don't have safe drinking water here; we preserve our rain water for drinking.”

For residents of Amansiodo community:

“Water is a problem here. If the water supply people don't come to our compounds, then we have to travel a long distance to buy a gallon of water for 150naira.”

When asked about the availability of transportation in their communities, women from Udi Town and Amansiodo communities who are mostly farmers reported that they trek to their farms because the cost of transportation is high. Participants from Araromi Oke-Odo and Adatan communities reported that they trek to their business places because they are close to their homes. Women from Gidan Mangoro Angwa and informed the researcher that they trek to their work places or go by commercial tricycle popularly known in Nigeria as ‘Keke’.

Also, the lack of constant electricity supply in these rural research communities compels women to use unhealthy cooking fuels for household energy. All the participants of the six research communities reported that they mainly use firewood, charcoal, kerosene and agricultural residue like sawdust to cook. Participants from Udi Town community added that, if possible, they can use the sun to cook. Using healthier cooking mediums like the electric stove is impossible in these communities due to epileptic electricity supply; and because Liquefied Petroleum Gas which is also a cleaner

and faster fuel is expensive, only a few of the women reported to be using it. This phenomenon however is not restricted to Nigeria alone. According to data from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA 2017) across the world, 1.1 billion people worldwide lack access to electricity and more than 3 billion rely on combustible fuels such as coal, kerosene and biomass (wood, charcoal, agricultural residues and animal dung) as their primary source for cooking, lighting and other household energy needs. Unclean fuels have adverse impact on the health of women and children as it exposes them to household air pollution which can lead to non-communicable diseases like stroke, ischaemic heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and lung cancer. (WHO, 2022).

Unclean fuels not only pose a lot of health risks to women and have some adverse environmental impact; it is time consuming as well. Women and girls who bear the major burden of fetching these fuels allocate a significant amount of time they should spend in other gainful activities like education or paid work in collecting fuels or water. UN Women (2018) posit that girls in households that use solid fuels for cooking spend 18 hours a week on average gathering fuel, compared to 5 hours a week in households using clean fuels. Also, a study of 22 African countries by Kammila et al (2014) estimates that women and girls spend an average of two hours each day just collecting fuel. This arduous task puts them at risk of injury, animal attacks and physical and sexual violence. These all impinge on girls' education and leisure time. (Kammila et al 2014).

2.3 Effect of time poverty on women in Nigeria

The responses of the participants in this study reveal that time poverty deprives women of adequate time for rest, leisure and health care. Most of the participants of the FGDs and individual interviews who are engaged in petty trading or farming reported that they spend as much as ten hours in their work places. The nature of the businesses the women are into is also a factor that contributes in depleting their time. The petty traders commented that they make money depending on the length of time they spend in their shops. Some of the women who are food vendors reported that they stay in their shops up till 11pm because they sell more food at night. An interviewee from Adatan community comments:

"I stay in my shop from morning till evening so that I can sell food to people coming back from work."

An interviewee from Araromi Oke-Odo community reports:

"I stay from morning till about 11pm in my shop. This is because I have different types of customers; if I leave early, I won't sell a lot and I won't make enough money for that day."

When you combine the time women spend in their businesses and the time they spend on domestic and care work, you will discover that the women work more than men and have little or no time for leisure or personal care. They are always physically

and emotionally depleted at the end of each day. Most of the respondents from the six research communities in Middle Belt, South West and South East reported that they do not have time for leisure or to hang out with friends. Very few women who reported having time for leisure do that once in a year or once in a month, and it is mostly to attend funerals, traditional weddings or community meetings. It is stark clear that the reason for the lack of time for leisure is because they are busy with their business and by the time, they get back home they will be exhausted or they have other domestic works to do at home. These domestic chores are always tedious and done in drudgeries due to lack of electricity and time saving technologies. An interviewee from Gidan Mangoro Angwa opines:

"No time for leisure; as I am coming come from work, house chores are waiting at home."

Women from the FGD in Taburaze community comment:

"We have no time for leisure; we are chasing money"

Participants from Araromi Oke-Odo community lament:

"We don't have time to visit friends because of our business, we spend all day at work and we're tired when we get back home."

To an individual interviewee from Adatan community:

"I don't have friends because I spend all day at my business so I don't have time to make friends or hang out with them."

When asked how often they visit the hospital for routine medical check-up, only three women out of the 48 FGDs participants and six individual interviewees reported to go for routine medical check-ups. One of the three women says she gets health check-up done for free, which is why she could access it. The rest reported that they do not visit the hospital until they are sick or they are pregnant. The women from Araromi Oke-Odo do not go for medical check-ups because they believe God protects them and keeps them in good health. Participants from Amansiodo and Udi Town reported that they do not go to the hospital for a routine check-up, but when they have health emergencies, they buy Over the Counter medication (OTC) from a drugstore. The primary reason they all cited for the poor health care is lack of money and time to visit the hospital.

All these responses reveal that time poverty makes women face deprivations in income, and health. Having heard from the poor on how time poverty affects them, the next section discusses what the poor advocates can be done by the government and Anti-Poverty Organisations in alleviating time poverty among them.

3. Way Forward from the Voice of the Poor

To tackle time poverty which is one of the causes of income poverty among women

Nigeria, the participants of the FGDs and individual interviews from the six research communities advocated that some basic times saving infrastructures which they lack in their communities be made available to them. The infrastructures they mentioned include clean water running in their homes, constant electricity, efficient transportation system, and child/elder care facilities. Udi Town community pleads:

“Government should provide means of transportation and reduce cost of transportation. They should construct good roads and provide electricity and water.”

Amansiodo community, they would like the government and Anti-Poverty Organisations to:

“Provide us with good roads and electricity; free education for our children, vocational training for the women, provide loans, create jobs, provide Day Care Centres which will help some of us get jobs or do business; and provide farmers with modern tools.”

The respondents were probed further with some questions to know how the provision of these infrastructures can improve their lives and reduce poverty in their communities. When asked how the provision of clean water and constant electricity can help them save time and improve their wellbeing, participants of the FGD in Gidan Mangoro Angwa community comment:

“Safe drinking water will keep us healthy and free from typhoid fever; while constant electricity will bring business ideas and make life better. Life is fun with electricity.”

An interviewee from Taburaze community opines:

“Safe drinking water will make us not to fall sick, and constant electricity will reduce the cost of cooking; we can preserve food in the refrigerator.”

Women from Araromi Oke-Odo comment: “It will improve our health and make us more comfortable and improve our lives generally because too much heat and dirty water can make you sick. Also, constant electricity can help us see clearly when cooking at night.”

Amansiodo community also believe that the clean water will reduce cough (some of them reported to be suffering from it) and the stress of their travelling a long distance to fetch drinkable water. Provision of constant electricity according to them will reduce all round stress in their lives.

All the six research communities in the three geopolitical zones reported not having Day Care centres of elder care facilities in their communities. Lack of this important infrastructure makes women and girls to spend a significant amount of their time in care giving to children and the elderly. They are thus robbed of the time to invest in education, take up a paid employment or leisure. The communities were probed further with questions on how the provision of this essential infrastructure can accelerate their leaving poverty. All the participants of the six FGDs and individual interviewees commented that a free child/elder care facility in their communities will avail them of

the time to take up a paid job or go for a vocational training. A woman from Amansiodo communities lamented on how she started training as a nursing assistant in a hospital in her community; but had to stop halfway due of lack of funds and childbirth. A participant from Araromi Oke-Odo opines:

"When there's free elder care facility, I will have enough time to get a new job. For me, I take care of my mother so the provision of a free facility will ease the burden off me and give me time to get a paid job."

An interviewee from the above community comments:

"Provision of a free child care facility would make me have the time and resources to take care of my family better. I won't have to worry about the money or my child's safety. It will give me time to take up other jobs."

An interviewee from Adatan community comments:

"A free Day Care centre will give me peace of mind knowing my children are in safe hands. This can allow me take up other jobs that can fetch me more money."

4. Findings

The findings of this study from the voice of poor in Nigeria emphasizes that social norms which depict the roles of women as default caregivers make women to spend long hours in caregiving and domestic chores, with little or no help from their husbands. Their low educational level, as well as their need to combine their businesses with domestic chores reflects in their choice of occupation and its location. When the long hours the participants spend on their businesses are added to the time they spend on household chores, it becomes overtly clear that these women are depleted, overlaboured and highly stressed much more than their spouses at the end of each day as they try to accommodate all their activities inside the same 24 hours allocated to every individual. This in turn can have huge effects on their general disposition both in their work places and households and can reduce their economic productivity. Also, the lack of clean water, clean cooking fuels, and electricity aggravates their drudgeries and adversely affects their health. Lack of child/elder care facilities in these research communities further hampers women from taking a decent paid job or train in some professional skills. Their lack of time and quality income also robs them of the ability to access quality healthcare or buy their way out of time poverty through acquiring some basic infrastructures or labour-saving home gadgets that can free up their time. This study thus brings to light that time poverty highly infringes on the rights of women to education, quality health care, quality income, and adequate rest and leisure.

5. Recommendation

To address time poverty among women in Nigeria, the existing social norms that expect women and girl children to bear the larger brunch of unpaid care and domestic chores

should be changed. Care work and domestic chores should be evenly distributed among women/girls and men/boys. Just as female children are groomed from childhood to be future homemakers, male children should partake of this grooming too. The cultural notion in Nigeria that men are the sole breadwinner in the family, while the women's roles are restricted to childbirth, cooking for the family, taking care of the children and the elderly, and doing other domestic chores, has changed in modern-day Nigeria; especially in the Southern geopolitical zones. Women are now income earners together with their husbands and are contributing largely in sustaining their households. All the participants of the FGDs and individual interviews are engaged in one business or the other bringing some income to their households. Some of them even lamented that they bear the major financial burdens of their households more than their husbands, thus they find it difficult to break the vicious cycle of poverty. If this social norm of men being the sole breadwinner of the family can be changed in Nigeria, the norm of men being equal partners with women in unpaid care work and domestic chores can be largely adopted also.

Another measure to tackle time poverty among women in Nigeria is for the government to provide safe, affordable, and basic infrastructures to rural areas. Piped borne water and reliable electricity should be made available at household levels. This will free up women's time and reduce the drudgery of their labour. The need for water and fuel collection will be eliminated because they will be enabled to use time-saving electrical appliances like food processors, electric stoves, electric ovens, and the likes. Investments in clean energy like solar, biogas, biomass, stoves and alcohol fuels should be initiated by the government as well. Access to clean water and clean energy will have a direct impact in reducing the prevalence of waterborne and respiratory diseases and improve overall household health in Nigeria. The public transportation system in rural areas should be improved and made, accessible and affordable so that the rural women will not spend long hours in waiting or trekking to their farms or market places. In addition, because the presence of children and the elderly needing care in households is an accelerator of time poverty among women; the government should make free or subsidized child/elder care facilities available in Nigeria, including in the rural areas. This will remove the constraints on women to engage in paid work and enhance their access to decent paid works. Finally, investments in high quality health services in rural and remote areas should be employed by the government to reduce the travel and waiting time women spend in accessing health services in big cities. All the above measures if implemented will liberate women from time and income poverty, and further hasten the achievement of eight out of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that are crucial to women's wellbeing: no poverty (1), zero hunger (2), good health and wellbeing (3), gender equality (5), clean water and sanitation (6), affordable and clean energy (7), decent work and growth (8), and reduced inequalities (10).

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