

Income-Generating Activities and Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in the Mion District, Ghana: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

The economic empowerment of rural women is pivotal to sustainable development, particularly in areas where traditional gender roles and limited access to resources impede their economic participation. This phenomenological study investigates the lived experiences of rural women in the Mion District of Ghana, focusing on their engagement in income-generating activities (IGAs) and the associated challenges and opportunities. Employing qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study reveals that these women predominantly engage in farming, trading shea butter and dawadawa, and charcoal production. Despite their significant contributions to household incomes and the local economy, these women face substantial barriers such as inadequate access to education and training, insufficient infrastructure, and restrictive cultural norms. The findings underscore the critical role of intergenerational knowledge transfer, with many participants learning their skills from their mothers. However, the lack of formal training and support from governmental and non-governmental organizations limits their ability to enhance productivity and profitability. The study emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to improve access to modern agricultural techniques, business management skills, and financial resources. Additionally, policy reforms promoting gender equality in economic activities are essential to creating an enabling environment for these women. This research contributes to the broader discourse on rural development and gender equity by highlighting the resilience and adaptability of rural women and the necessity for inclusive policies and support mechanisms. The insights gained from this study offer valuable implications for policymakers, development practitioners, and stakeholders committed to fostering the economic empowerment of rural women, ultimately contributing to sustainable development goals. Future research should continue to explore and address the unique challenges faced by rural women, ensuring their active participation in the economic landscape and enhancing their socio-economic well-being.

Keywords: rural women, income-generating activities, economic empowerment, gender equity, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

The economic empowerment of rural women is a critical component of sustainable development, particularly in regions where traditional gender roles and limited access to resources hinder their economic participation (Alkire et al., 2021). In the Mion District of Ghana, rural women engage in a variety of income-generating activities (IGAs) to support their households and communities. These activities, ranging from

farming to trading shea butter, reflect the resilience and adaptability of these women in navigating economic challenges (Baah-Boateng & Twum, 2020). This study aims to explore the lived experiences of rural women in the Mion District, focusing on their income-generating activities, the challenges they face, and the potential for economic development through these activities. Rural women's economic activities are essential for their households' survival and play a significant role in the local economy. Despite their contributions, these women often encounter numerous obstacles, including limited access to education and training, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural norms that restrict their economic opportunities (Yeboah, 2021; FAO, 2021). Understanding the dynamics of these income-generating activities and the socio-economic context in which they occur is crucial for developing effective policies and interventions that can enhance their economic empowerment.

Phenomenology, as a qualitative research approach, provides a valuable framework for examining the subjective experiences of rural women engaged in IGAs. This methodology allows for an in-depth exploration of how these women perceive and navigate their economic activities, capturing the complexities and nuances that quantitative methods might overlook (Creswell & Poth, 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2021). By focusing on the Mion District, this study offers insights into the specific challenges and opportunities faced by rural women in this region, contributing to the broader discourse on rural development and gender equity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2021). The selection of the Mion District as the study area is strategic due to its representation of rural economic dynamics in Ghana. The district's predominantly agricultural economy and the significant role of women in various IGAs make it an ideal context for this study (GSS, 2021). The findings are expected to provide valuable implications for policymakers, development practitioners, and stakeholders interested in promoting gender-inclusive economic development in rural areas. Previous research has highlighted the importance of supporting rural women's IGAs through improved access to resources, training, and market opportunities (World Bank, 2021; Quisumbing et al., 2020). This study builds on this body of literature by providing a detailed account of the specific IGAs undertaken by rural women in the Mion District and the socio-cultural and economic factors that influence these activities.

The economic empowerment of rural women through income-generating activities (IGAs) has been the focus of numerous studies, highlighting various aspects of their roles, challenges, and the socio-economic impacts of their engagement in these activities. A study by Alkire et al. (2021) examined the multidimensional poverty and COVID-19 risk factors, revealing that rural women often face compounded vulnerabilities due to limited access to resources and social protections, which impacts their ability to sustain IGAs during crises. This study underscores the need for targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by rural women to enhance their economic resilience. In Ghana, Baah-Boateng and Twum (2020) explored gender differences in labor market outcomes, emphasizing that rural women are disproportionately engaged in informal and low-paying jobs compared to their male counterparts. Their research highlights the persistent gender disparities in economic opportunities and the importance of promoting inclusive economic policies that support women's participation in higher-value economic activities.

Research by Yeboah (2021) focused on gendered livelihoods in rural Africa, particularly in Ghana, and found that rural women's livelihoods are often constrained by limited access to education, training, and financial services. Yeboah's study suggests that improving access to these resources is crucial for enhancing the productivity and sustainability of women's IGAs, thereby contributing to their economic empowerment and overall well-being. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2021) reported on the state of food and agriculture, noting that rural women's contributions to agricultural production are significant yet often overlooked. The report highlights the importance of recognizing and supporting women's roles in agriculture through policies that provide access to land, inputs, and markets. This aligns with findings from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) (2021), which documented the demographic and economic characteristics of rural districts in Ghana, including Mion, and emphasized the critical role of women in

local economies.

Quisumbing et al. (2020) provided insights into gender and assets in sub-Saharan Africa, discussing how asset ownership and control are fundamental to women's economic empowerment. Their research showed that women with access to and control over productive assets are better able to engage in profitable IGAs and improve their socio-economic status. This study underscores the need for policies that ensure women's equal access to resources and decision-making power in both household and community contexts. Furthermore, the World Bank (2021) in its "Women, Business and the Law" report, discussed the legal and regulatory barriers that hinder women's economic participation globally. The report highlights the need for reforms that promote gender equality in business environments, ensuring that women have the same opportunities as men to start and grow businesses, access credit, and participate in the labor market.

METHODS

Study Design

A qualitative research design using phenomenology was adopted. This approach follows the research problem and its scope (Shimahara, 2013). Phenomenological studies seek to understand the essence of phenomena by exploring participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007). This design was chosen to investigate how rural women in the Mion District generate income, aligning with the naturalistic, interpretative perspective of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative design allows for an in-depth exploration of complex issues, capturing the nuanced realities of participants' lives. By focusing on the lived experiences of rural women, this approach provides rich, detailed insights that quantitative methods may overlook. Furthermore, the phenomenological paradigm emphasizes the subjective nature of reality, acknowledging that individuals' perceptions and interpretations shape their experiences. This methodological choice ensures that the study remains grounded in the participants' perspectives, enhancing the authenticity and relevance of the findings. Through this design, the study aims to uncover the multifaceted challenges and opportunities faced by rural women in their income-generating activities.

Study Area

The study was conducted in the Mion District, located in the Northeastern part of Ghana. The district, established in 2012, has a population of 94,930, predominantly rural, with the Dagomba ethnic group being the largest. The study focused on the Buarido community, the economic hub of the district, where many income-generating activities (IGAs) take place. The district's geography, characterized by its rural setting and agricultural base, significantly influences the livelihoods of its residents. The choice of Mion District as the study area is strategic, given its representation of rural economic dynamics in Ghana. The district's demographic composition, with a nearly equal gender distribution, provides a balanced context for examining gender-specific economic activities. Moreover, the selection of Buarido community, known for its vibrant economic activities, ensures that the study captures a wide range of income-generating practices. This geographical focus not only highlights the unique challenges faced by rural women but also underscores the potential for economic development within such communities.

Population

The study population comprised rural women aged 18 to 60 years in the Mion District engaged in IGAs such as farming, petty trading, hairdressing, food vending, and dressmaking. These activities are prevalent in the Buarido community, which serves as the district's economic center. The selected age range ensures that the study encompasses women at different stages of their economic lives, from young adults to those nearing retirement. This demographic focus is critical, as it captures the diverse experiences and strategies

employed by women across different age groups. Additionally, the inclusion of various IGAs reflects the economic versatility of rural women, who often engage in multiple activities to sustain their livelihoods. The study's population is representative of the broader economic landscape in rural Ghana, where women play a pivotal role in both household and community economies. By focusing on this population, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the economic contributions and challenges of rural women.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

A purposive and snowball sampling strategy was employed to select participants. Purposive sampling targeted women engaged in IGAs, while snowball sampling helped locate additional participants through networking and recommendations (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019). Data saturation determined the sample size, with 20 women interviewed and an additional 20 participating in focus group discussions (FGDs). Data saturation was achieved after 18 interviews, but two more were conducted for confirmation. This dual sampling approach ensured a comprehensive and representative sample of the study population. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to intentionally select participants with relevant experiences, while snowball sampling extended the reach to more participants through referrals. This method is particularly effective in qualitative research, where the depth and richness of data are paramount. The combination of individual interviews and FGDs provided a robust data set, capturing both personal and group dynamics in the economic activities of rural women. This sampling strategy also facilitated the identification of key informants who provided valuable insights into the study's research questions.

Data Collection Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect in-depth data. This method allows for probing responses to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness (Archibald et al., 2019; Vidgen et al., 2017). The interview guide covered demographic information, income-generating resources, exploitation of these resources, and factors limiting access to them. The semi-structured format provided flexibility, enabling the researcher to explore emergent themes while maintaining a focus on the study's objectives. This approach is ideal for qualitative research, as it facilitates detailed and nuanced data collection. The interview guide was developed based on a thorough literature review and the study's conceptual framework, ensuring that it addressed all relevant aspects of the research topic. Additionally, the use of open-ended questions encouraged participants to share their experiences and perspectives freely, enriching the data with their personal narratives. This method also allowed for iterative probing, where the researcher could delve deeper into specific responses to uncover underlying meanings and implications.

Pre-testing of the Instruments

The interview guide was pre-tested in Yendi, a neighboring community, to ensure clarity and accuracy. Five women engaged in IGAs were interviewed, and their feedback helped refine the instrument. The pre-test interviews lasted 25 to 30 minutes each. This pre-testing phase was crucial for identifying and rectifying any ambiguities or issues in the interview guide. It allowed the researcher to assess the feasibility of the questions and the overall flow of the interview. The feedback from the pre-test participants provided valuable insights into the appropriateness of the language used, the relevance of the questions, and the duration of the interviews. Adjustments were made based on this feedback to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of the interview guide. Pre-testing also helped in building the researcher's interviewing skills, ensuring that they could conduct the main study smoothly and effectively. This step was vital for enhancing the reliability and validity of the data collection process.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and FGDs. Introduction letters from the Department of Vocational and Technical Education, University of Cape Coast, facilitated cooperation from community leaders. Interviews were conducted in the Konkomba language and recorded with participants' consent. Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes, and FGDs were conducted to gather additional data. The interviews were held at participants' homes or workplaces, providing a comfortable and familiar environment that encouraged open and honest communication. The FGDs, each consisting of five participants, allowed for dynamic discussions and the emergence of diverse perspectives on the research topic. The use of audio recording ensured that all responses were captured accurately, while note-taking provided additional context and observations. The data collection period spanned two weeks, allowing the researcher to immerse in the community and build rapport with the participants. This approach ensured the richness and depth of the data collected, providing a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) thematic analysis method. This involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Nvivo 11 Plus software was used for coding and categorizing the data into themes. The initial phase involved transcribing the interviews and reading the transcripts multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the content. Coding was done line-by-line to identify significant statements and patterns in the data. These codes were then grouped into themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences. The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data. Defining and naming the themes involved creating clear definitions and labels that conveyed the core meaning of each theme. The final report was produced by integrating these themes into a coherent narrative that addressed the research questions. This systematic approach to data analysis ensured that the findings were grounded in the data and reflected the participants' perspectives accurately.

Data Management

Data collected from the participants were stored in a device that only the researcher had access to the passcode. This is to ensure that the confidentiality of the participants is not brought into the public domain. This data was transcribed personally by the researcher and coded with participants' pseudonyms. After data was transcribed, the researcher uploaded the tape-recorded interviews into a Dropbox account encoded with a password generated for the purpose of this study, while the memory card used for the tape-recorded interviews and FGDs was locked in a secure location. The analysis was protected on the researcher's laptop, which was always password-protected until the results were finalized and submitted. Additionally, a soft copy was uploaded to the researcher's Dropbox and Google Drive accounts for backup purposes. The audio interviews were deleted from Dropbox, Google Drive, and the memory card after the final thesis submission and successful graduation. This stringent data management protocol ensured that the data remained secure and confidential throughout the research process. The relevant data gathered was kept for a minimum of six months to ensure all aspects of the research were completed and the work was submitted successfully.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The demographic characteristics of the study participants highlight a diverse sample in terms of age, marital status, and educational background. The participants' ages range from 23 to 65 years, providing a wide representation of different life stages. The majority of the participants are middle-aged adults, with a significant number also in the older adult category, reflecting a mature group predominantly engaged in long-term marital relationships. In terms of marital status, the sample is largely comprised of married

individuals, with a few participants identified as widowed or single, indicating a potential influence of family dynamics on the study variables. Educational attainment among the participants varies, with a substantial proportion having no formal education. This lack of formal education is particularly prevalent among the older participants, suggesting generational disparities in educational access. Conversely, younger participants tend to have achieved at least basic or secondary education, indicating improvements in educational opportunities over time. This variation in educational levels among the participants is crucial for understanding their perspectives and behaviors in the context of the study. The educational background also highlights potential gaps in knowledge and awareness that could impact the study’s outcomes, especially when examining factors related to health, socioeconomic status, and access to resources. The demographic data provide essential context for interpreting the study’s findings, emphasizing the need to consider age, marital status, and educational background when analyzing the participants’ responses and behaviors. This diverse demographic profile enhances the study’s relevance and applicability, offering insights into different segments of the population and their unique experiences.

Table1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonym of Participants	Age	Marital Status	Level of Education
Participant 1	45	Married	No formal Education
Participant 2	59	Widowed	No formal Education
Participant 3	43	Married	Basic Education
Participant 4	39	Married	Basic Education
Participant 5	50	Married	No formal Education
Participant 6	35	Married	Basic Education
Participant 7	24	Single	Secondary Education
Participant 8	55	Married	No formal Education
Participant 9	65	Married	No formal Education
Participant 10	26	Married	Basic Education
Participant 11	45	Married	No formal Education
Participant 12	63	Widowed	No formal Education
Participant 13	45	Married	No formal Education
Participant 14	46	Widowed	No formal Education
Participant 15	39	Married	Basic Education
Participant 16	35	Married	No formal Education
Participant 17	40	Married	No formal Education
Participant 18	23	Single	Secondary Education
Participant 19	29	Married	Basic Education
Participant 20	59	Married	No formal Education

Demographic Characteristics of FGD participants

The demographic characteristics of the focus group discussion (FGD) participants provide critical insights into the composition of the study group, which predominantly consists of married individuals with varied educational backgrounds and age ranges. The ages of participants range from 29 to 61 years, highlighting a mature demographic likely to offer extensive life and marital experiences relevant to the discussion topics. The significant representation of middle-aged adults suggests that the participants are at stages in their lives where they might be dealing with complex social and familial dynamics, which could influence their

perspectives. Marital status shows that most participants are married, with only a few being widowed. This marital status distribution emphasizes a collective familial experience that may shape the participants' viewpoints, adding depth to the discussion. The inclusion of widowed participants introduces additional perspectives on family and social support systems, enriching the overall discourse. Educational attainment among the participants is notably low, with many having no formal education and a few achieving basic education. Only one participant has secondary education. This educational profile indicates potential limitations in literacy and access to information among the participants, which are crucial factors to consider when analyzing their responses and understanding their viewpoints. The predominance of low educational levels among the participants suggests that their experiences and opinions may be significantly influenced by limited educational opportunities and resources.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of FGD participants

Pseudonym of Participants	Age	Marital Status	Level of Education
Participant 1	39	Married	No formal Education
Participant 2	58	Married	No Formal Education
Participant 3	38	Married	Basic Education
Participant 4	47	Married	Basic Education
Participant 5	55	Married	No formal Education
Participant 6	45	Married	Basic Education
Participant 7	33	Married	Basic Education
Participant 8	43	Married	No formal Education
Participant 9	61	Married	No formal Education
Participant 10	49	Married	No formal Education
Participant 11	32	Married	No formal Education
Participant 12	55	Widowed	No formal Education
Participant 13	40	Married	No formal Education
Participant 14	41	Widowed	No formal Education
Participant 15	40	Married	No Formal Education
Participant 16	43	Married	No formal Education
Participant 17	42	Married	No formal Education
Participant 18	49	Married	Basic Education
Participant 19	39	Married	No Formal Education
Participant 20	29	Married	Secondary Education

Sources of Income Generating Activities

This objective seeks to find the income generating activities (IGAs) that the women at Mion district engage in. Seven subthemes emerged from the major theme, sources of income generating activities. These subthemes are farming, trading shea, trading dawadawa, Charcoal production, inheritance from mother, profit and training. These subthemes are explained in the following sections.

Farming

Farming emerged as the main sources of IGAs for women in the Mion district. According to the participants, they cultivate cash crops and sell to make a living. They added that due to the weather pattern in the Northern Ghana, they do farm on part time basis and add other IGAs as sources of livelihood. The views of the participants are expressed below:

“The livelihood activities I do for survival are cultivation of groundnuts, neri, okro, pepper, dawadawa. I equally burn charcoal which is helpful to me in terms of income generation for my livelihood, I do these livelihood activities part-time due to weather patterns in the Northern Region” (Participant 1)

Other participants added,

“Naturally tree crops such as share nut trees and dawadawa trees bear fruits which are useful and through which we generate income for our livelihood. Through farming, I cultivate crops such as groundnuts, maize, neri, agushie, etc. also helps in income generation for the livelihood, however, some of these tree crops such as dawadawa fruits, share nut fruits, that I am engaged in for my livelihood are seasonal crops and with this reason I am engaged in these activities for part-time.” (Participant 3)

“For me I farm cash crops such groundnuts, neri, okro, pepper, bambara beans when harvest time is due, I harvest them and sell in the market. I also produce share butter from for sale. That is what other women in our community do. Rainfall patterns in the Northern Region is based on seasons and for that matter, I am engaged in these activities for a part-time. For instance, cultivation of crops such as groundnuts, maize, agushie, etc. is done from April to October” (Participant 6).

A discussant from one of the FGD added that she also does farming as a source of her livelihood.

“Farming is essentially what I do for a living to survive. This includes the growing of beans, pepper, neri, okro, and groundnuts. This farming work has greatly aided me in taking care of my family” (Discussant, FGD 1).

Trading Shea

Aside farming, participants recounted that they are engaged in shea butter production. They make oil and cream from shea butter which they use as a source of income. Some views of participants are captured below,

“I process shea nuts and make, local soaps, cooking oil and creams from the nuts. This is the work I do for a living” (Participants 14)

“I do farm some cash crops like groundnuts but because this seasonal, I do shea butter business too. I process the nut into cooking oil, local soaps and cream and sell in the market” (Participants 8)

A discussant from one of the FGD added trading shea is a big source of income generating activity for them. This was captured in the quote below;

“The shea tree is a tree of great economic importance for us women in this village. We use the shea nuts to make shea butter cream which gives us money to take care of our families” (A discussant, FGD 3)

Trading Dawadawa

It also emerged that trading in dawadawa is another IGAs for women in the district. From the views of the participants, they process the dawadawa fruits into flours and seeds by milling them. The views some participants are expressed below:

“I have been in this dawadawa business since I was a young girl. I process the dawadawa fruits into flours and sell them. I use the mill in the community” (Participant 7).

“I do dawadawa business. It is a business the women in my household do. We process the nuts into flour and seeds. The flour is used for dishes and the seeds are sold or process and later sold in the markets” (Participant 3).

“We prepare and sell the dawadawa that are made from dawadawa tree seed. In addition to their economic advantages, dawadawa seeds are also beneficial for treating diseases related to the heart” (Discussant FGD 4).

Charcoal Production

Trading charcoal was revealed as another IGAs for women in the Mion District. The women noted that they burn charcoal as source of livelihood. Their views are shared in the following narratives:

“During the dry seasons, there is no much to do with farming so we resort to cutting trees in the surrounding bushes and burn them to produce charcoal” (Participant 11)

“We burn woodlot and trees for charcoal production especially in the raining seasons, this is what we do for survival” (Participant 4)

“Charcoal is used for cooking in most homes in Ghana, so there is money in the charcoal business. There some tress that we burn and produce charcoal out. Aside farming, most women in our community do charcoal production” (Discussant, FGD 2)

Inheritance from Mother

The women were asked, some said they were introduced to these IGAs. It emerged from their responses that, these IGAs are inheritance from their mothers. From the responses of the women, it appears that mothers play important role in the kind of IGA their children engage in the Mion district. Their views are articulated below:

“My mother taught me how to generate income through livelihood activities such as harvesting natural crops and farming” (Participant 3)

“I also learned how to burn charcoal from my mother which I sell to generate income for my livelihood” (Participant 9).

“When I was a child, I was always with my mother through whom I learned so much about these livelihood activities. Picking share nuts and harvesting dawadawa fruits were some of the activities that my mother never played a joke with” (Participant 4).

“I started these livelihood activities when I was young through my mother. I learned how to process these income generating trees such as dawadawa fruits, share nut fruits, baoba leaves, etc. for my livelihood through my mother” (Participant 5).

“My mother does this before she died. My mother taught me some of these livelihood skills when I was a child. She showed me how to cultivate crops, burn charcoal for most women here mothers play important role in the kind income generating activities they do they” (A discussant, FGD 4)

Profit

The researcher further probed participants to find out if they are making profits from the IGAs they were

engaged in. They expressed satisfaction with the IGAs they are doing and rated it as profitable because they are able to meet their basic needs with the income they make from the IGAs. The following quotes captured their narrations.

“oh I will say the farming is highly beneficial to me, because I am able to take care of my needs and that of my children from the income I make from the farming” (Participant 4)

“The crops I cultivate are groundnuts, maize, bambara beans and neri sesame which I sell and use the money to meet my basic needs. Although I wish I could make more money from what I am doing, for now this is able to sustain my household needs so I am ok” (Participant 5).

“I used these income generating activities to support in paying my children’s school fees and buy other needs we need in the house in addition to what my husband also provides, I cultivate of crops such as groundnuts, maize, bambara beans, neri, sesame which are profitable when you get a good yield” (Participants 13).

“Some of these business are profitable especially when get markets for it. For most of us it is through these crop production and shea butter making that we get money to carter for our households. So I will for profit we are not making as much we want but it is good” (Discussant, FGD 2).

Training

Participants were asked if they had any training for the IGAs they engaging in for their livelihood. Their responses show that, they had no education or training aside what they learnt from their mothers. They added that no training from the government was given us to improve on our income generating activities. Their responses were captured as written below:

“No training aside what I learnt from my mother. In growing up my mother taught me how to process these income generating resources for survival. I learned how to cultivate crops such maize, groundnuts, beans, pepper, okro, etc. These crops have helped me so much in terms of meeting my basic needs” (Participant 4)

“There has not been any formal training for us to adopt the modern ways of farming which will help improve on our yields. We cultivate crops like cowpea, and groundnuts. For instance, crops like soya beans, beans and okro are profitable to us” (Participant 15).

“We do not get any training from the government or Non-Governmental Organisations as to how to improve on our income generating activities. At least, training should be given on how to apply fertilizer to maize and some other crops in appropriate way” (Participant 8)

“We really need training but we don’t get. Sometimes the district assembly will say they are organising training for farmers but you will go there and it is only men that are there. They don’t pay much attention to us the women when it comes to training” (Discussant, FGD 1).

DISCUSSION

The economic empowerment of rural women through income-generating activities (IGAs) is essential for sustainable development, particularly in regions where traditional gender roles and limited access to resources hinder their economic participation (Alkire et al., 2021). This study explores the lived experiences of rural women in the Mion District of Ghana, focusing on their engagement in various IGAs, the challenges they face, and the potential for economic development through these activities. Farming emerged as the primary IGA for women in the Mion District, with many participants engaged in cultivating cash crops such

as groundnuts, okro, and pepper. The reliance on agriculture is consistent with Baah-Boateng and Twum's (2020) findings that rural women are predominantly involved in agricultural activities due to their accessibility and potential for generating income. The participants in this study noted the seasonal nature of farming due to weather patterns, necessitating part-time engagement in other IGAs such as charcoal production and trading of shea butter and dawadawa. This seasonal farming practice reflects the adaptability of rural women who diversify their economic activities to ensure year-round income. The use of traditional crops and the reliance on natural resources such as shea and dawadawa highlight the integration of local knowledge and environmental stewardship in their economic practices.

The study highlights several challenges faced by rural women in their IGAs, including limited access to education and training, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural norms that restrict economic opportunities. Yeboah (2021) emphasizes that improving access to education, training, and financial services is crucial for enhancing the productivity and sustainability of women's IGAs. The lack of formal training was evident among participants, who relied heavily on skills inherited from their mothers. This intergenerational transfer of knowledge underscores the importance of targeted interventions to provide modern agricultural techniques and business skills. Additionally, participants mentioned the lack of support from governmental and non-governmental organizations, which further limits their ability to improve and scale their economic activities. The challenges related to infrastructure, such as inadequate transportation and market access, also hinder the profitability and sustainability of their IGAs. Despite the challenges, many participants expressed satisfaction with their IGAs, noting that they provide essential income to meet basic needs and support their families. This sentiment reflects the resilience and adaptability of these women in navigating economic challenges. The profitability of these activities, although modest, is significant for household survival. This finding supports the FAO's (2021) report that recognizes the substantial yet often overlooked contributions of rural women to agricultural production and local economies. The study's participants indicated that while the income generated from their IGAs may not be substantial, it is crucial for their daily subsistence and the well-being of their families. The ability to provide for their children's education and household needs through these activities demonstrates the critical role IGAs play in improving the quality of life for rural women and their families.

The absence of formal training for rural women in the Mion District underscores a critical gap in support systems. As noted by Quisumbing et al. (2020), access to and control over productive assets are fundamental to women's economic empowerment. The participants' reliance on traditional knowledge highlights the need for comprehensive training programs that incorporate modern agricultural practices and entrepreneurial skills to enhance productivity and income. Training in areas such as improved farming techniques, value addition, and marketing could significantly enhance the profitability of their IGAs. Moreover, education and training can empower women to better manage their businesses, access new markets, and adopt innovative practices that increase their competitiveness. The participants' desire for training and their recognition of its potential benefits underscore the importance of integrating educational initiatives into development programs aimed at rural women. The findings from this study have significant implications for policymakers and development practitioners. Enhancing the economic empowerment of rural women requires a multifaceted approach that includes improving access to education and training, providing adequate infrastructure, and addressing cultural barriers. Policies should focus on creating inclusive economic opportunities that support women's participation in higher-value activities. The World Bank (2021) emphasizes the importance of legal and regulatory reforms to promote gender equality in business environments, ensuring that women have equal opportunities to start and grow businesses, access credit, and participate in the labor market. Additionally, the study suggests that targeted interventions, such as microfinance programs and market access initiatives, could help rural women overcome financial and logistical barriers. By addressing the systemic issues that limit women's economic participation, policymakers can create an enabling environment that fosters the growth and sustainability of IGAs among rural women.

This study provides valuable insights into the economic activities and challenges faced by rural women in the Mion District of Ghana. By exploring their lived experiences, the research contributes to the broader discourse on rural development and gender equity. The findings underscore the resilience of rural women and the need for targeted interventions to enhance their economic empowerment. Future research should continue to explore the specific needs of rural women and the effectiveness of various support mechanisms in promoting sustainable economic development. The study's emphasis on the importance of education, training, and infrastructure highlights the key areas where interventions can make the most significant impact. By understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by rural women, stakeholders can develop strategies that not only improve their economic conditions but also contribute to broader goals of gender equality and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

The economic empowerment of rural women in the Mion District of Ghana through income-generating activities (IGAs) is a testament to their resilience and adaptability in the face of socio-economic challenges. This study has provided an in-depth exploration of the various IGAs undertaken by these women, including farming, trading shea butter and dawadawa, charcoal production, and other small-scale enterprises. These activities not only contribute significantly to their household incomes but also play a crucial role in the local economy. Despite their vital contributions, rural women in the Mion District face numerous obstacles that hinder the full realization of their economic potential. These challenges include limited access to formal education and training, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural norms that restrict their economic opportunities. The study highlights the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer, with many women relying on skills and practices passed down from their mothers. However, there is a clear need for modern training and support to enhance their productivity and profitability.

The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by rural women. Improving access to education and training, providing adequate infrastructure, and implementing policies that promote gender equality in economic activities are essential steps towards empowering these women. Additionally, support from governmental and non-governmental organizations in the form of microfinance programs and market access initiatives could significantly enhance their economic activities. This study contributes to the broader discourse on rural development and gender equity by highlighting the lived experiences of rural women in the Mion District. It underscores the critical role of rural women in sustainable development and the need for inclusive policies that support their economic empowerment. Future research should continue to explore the specific needs of rural women and evaluate the effectiveness of various support mechanisms in promoting sustainable economic development. By addressing the systemic issues that limit women's economic participation, stakeholders can create an enabling environment that fosters the growth and sustainability of IGAs among rural women, ultimately contributing to broader goals of gender equality and sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to enhance the economic empowerment of rural women in the Mion District of Ghana. Firstly, there is a need for the improvement of educational and training opportunities. Establishing formal training programs focused on modern agricultural techniques, business management, and entrepreneurship, tailored specifically to the needs of rural women, can significantly enhance their skills and productivity. Additionally, implementing adult education initiatives to improve literacy and numeracy skills will enable these women to better manage their income-generating activities (IGAs) and access more opportunities.

Improving infrastructure is also crucial. Enhancing transportation infrastructure will facilitate easier access

to markets, helping women sell their products more efficiently and at better prices. Developing storage facilities will help preserve agricultural products, reducing post-harvest losses and increasing profitability. Furthermore, expanding microfinance services to provide rural women with the necessary financial resources to start or expand their IGAs is essential. These services should offer low-interest loans and financial literacy training. Encouraging the formation of savings and loan groups among rural women can promote financial independence and mutual support.

Policy and legal reforms that promote gender equality in economic activities are also necessary. Advocating for policies that ensure women have equal access to land ownership, credit facilities, and market opportunities, along with implementing legal frameworks that protect the rights of women engaged in IGAs, will help create a supportive environment. Support from governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is vital. These entities should collaborate to provide capacity-building programs that enhance the skills and knowledge of rural women, focusing on areas such as value addition, marketing, and sustainable farming practices. Allocating resources specifically targeted at supporting rural women's IGAs will ensure they receive the necessary tools, inputs, and support to thrive.

Finally, community engagement and cultural sensitization are important. Conducting community awareness campaigns to challenge and change cultural norms that restrict women's economic participation will promote the value of their contributions to the local economy and encourage community support for women's IGAs. Engaging men in the community to support the economic activities of women will foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for gender equality. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can create a more enabling environment that supports the economic empowerment of rural women in the Mion District, improving their livelihoods and contributing to the overall development and sustainability of the local economy.

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