Global integration, household survival, and economic empowerment of women in Osun State, Nigeria.

R. I. AKO-NAI, Mrs. A. O. OLOGUNDE, and Mr. O. G. ADEKOLA

Abstract

The global integration of the world economies, popularly referred to as globalization has favoured many countries of the North. In contrast, the majority of countries in the South are economically marginalized. They continue to lag behind in many areas and are left in dire poverty. Both the internal and national strategies for alleviating poverty have failed the under trodden and the developing countries. The ‘human-centered’ strategies advocated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for Sustainable Human Development (SHD) has not benefited the poor and the disadvantaged of the South of which women constitute the majority. The data for this article was derived from primary sources namely, personal interviews, questionnaire responses; and were complemented by secondary data extracted from relevant books and journals. The study showed that 77 percent of the women surveyed, have joined one form of informal trading network or the other for the purpose of survival; the remaining 23 percent are involved in multiple modes of livelihood, that is, they are engaged in more than one informal economic activities to supplement their income from formal government employment. The study revealed that women who took to multiple modes of livelihood strategy did so because of the failure of male-dominated households and their vulnerability to the insecurity of government employment. The study showed women’s economic earnings have indeed increased because of their involvement in informal economic trading activities. Using Osun State in Southwestern Nigeria as our region of focus, this study will show how involvement in informal trading activities has resulted in the empowerment of women. It will examine how these women have recorded relative measure of success by competently combining household responsibilities with the challenges of social employment.

1 Correspondence on this article should be directed to Dr. R.I. Ako-Nai at riakonai@yahoo.com; Tel: +2348035047372
I. Introduction

The plight of woman is a despicable one as it is evidently acknowledged and incorporated in the United Nation’s Millennium Goals (MDGs) (UN 23rd Governing Council, 2005). Out of the 8 MDGs, the document expressly stated as its Third goal that by the year 2015, all 191 United Nations Member States have pledged to promote gender equality and empower women; (and) eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all levels by 2015. To this end, this study examines the livelihood survival strategies employed by women in some selected communities in Osun State South Western Nigeria. In Nigeria, sustainable human development (SHD), implies that development is only meaningful if it eliminates poverty, provides people with jobs, options and opportunities that empowers citizens, especially women, the poor and the disadvantaged, and ensures their mobilization, is a development that is supposed to empower people rather than marginalize them. Given the relative precarious economic position of most women in the south West, they have taken up various kinds of informal livelihood and survival strategies to make ends meet. This development has brought into focus the increasing role of women hitherto have been burdened with heavy household responsibilities in informal economic activities in order to augment and alleviate poverty in their homes. This scenario, which is one of necessity as against convenience, has been a veritable empowerment drive for women in the genderised and polarized world.

Moreover, the study considered the viability of informal economic trading associations in facilitating household survival and empowerment of women in Nigeria, employing the women in the South West as a model. The consequences of shifting the burden of responsibilities of domestic welfare to women in male-headed-households also constitute a major focus of this study. Generally, the discourse of
gender imbalance transcends cultural sentiments and has acquired global dimension such that the countries are not gender sensitized can be integrated within the MDGs.

The objectives of the study are to:

- examine the survival strategies employed by women to empower themselves in some selected communities in Osun State, South Western Nigeria;
- assess the viability of informal economic trading associations in facilitating household survival and empowerment of women, and
- identify the consequences of shifting the burden of responsibilities of domestic welfare to women in male-headed households.
II. Conceptual Clarifications

**Family/House Survival Strategy:** refers to those devices resorted to by families or households to ensure the family welfare particularly during periods of socio-economic stress and hardship.

**Multiple Mode of Livelihood:** Refers to the combination of additional informal economic activities presumably with an existing formal employment.

**Informal Economy:** Refers to the whole lot of economic transactions that go unnoticed by the state or, that are done outside the framework of the formal economy. They are activities embedded in localized sets of understandings, practices and relationships. Traditionally, Nigerian women have been engaged in the informal sector of the economy.

The informal sector is characterized by small-scale businesses like production and service activities such as hairdressing, bakery, hawking, food vending and a host of service-oriented activities. They are usually the result of unemployment in the formal sector, which is more stable and rewarding. Todaro and Smith (2003) are of the view that, ‘The usually self-employed workers in this sector have little formal education, are generally unskilled, and lack access to financial capital. As a result, a worker productivity and income tend to be lower in the informal sector than in the formal sector’. In addition, these workers do not enjoy basic and essential benefits such as pension that are enjoyed by those in the formal sector.

The informal sector is a very common phenomenon in the developing countries of the world, a situation aggravated by globalization, which continues to favor the developed countries at the expense of the poor countries of the South that are still mainly primary producers of goods and services. As a result of the nature of the economy, the informal sector continues to play important role in the Nigerian
economy, and for the purpose of this study, that of Osun State. Women, because of lack of or poor education and the discrimination they continue to face in employment, in access to credit facilities, land ownership and ownership of other productive resources, often resort to informal businesses. However, this study reveals that as a result of harsh economic conditions, even women with white collar jobs are engaging in informal trading activities to make ends meet.

**Trading Networks:** refers to the intricate web of economic relationships that traders enter into across State borders.

**Global Integration:** is presented here as the rapid increase in the movement of people, capital, information, technology, skills and commodities across national borders. It also involves reduction of the barriers to this global flow. This concept is popularly referred to as globalization. Although the world has gone through various stages of integration, this phase is characterized by increasing integration of production by powerful multinational corporations. Globalization ensures a closer integration of the countries and people of the world. It was brought about by the economy of the costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flow of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and people across borders (Stiglitz, 2003).

**Poverty:** poverty is the opposite of well-being. There are two broad groups of thought or approach to the question of poverty: the welfarist and the non-welfarist. The former considers poverty from the level of one’s well-being, which includes intangible items such as liberty or rights, capabilities, and other indicators of human development. This is where the gender question goes beyond and is influenced by the accessibility to opportunities. On the other hand, the non-welfarist approach considers tangible items or commodities. The approach relies on what planners consider desirable from a
social point of view. It uses selective indicators to distinguish certain goods and services that are considered to be socially useful. Examples of such are: food, access to education, health care and adequate housing are typical and good examples. The welfarist approach defines well-being in terms of the level of utility attained by an individual. It attaches importance to the individual’s perception of what is useful to the individual.

According to Aigbokhan (1999:5), poverty is defined today as a state of long-term deprivation of well-being, a situation considered inadequate for a decent life. Poverty is then associated with lack and living standards. Poverty exists when a person falls below a level of economic well-being considered to constitute a reasonable minimum. The World Bank (1990) noted that poverty alleviation is what economic development is all about. Poverty involves malnutrition, illiteracy, social exclusion, and vulnerability, all of which are central to the feminization of poverty.

III. Literature Review

Globalization is a process in the international system that is driving the world economically, socially and politically towards greater integration and interdependence. Unfortunately, there are unequal partners, with the developing Countries playing the second fiddle in the international system. The international financial institutions controlled by the North, direct the course of economic globalization as an ideology. The countries of the South are marginalized to the advantage of countries of the North. Unfortunately, the developing countries of the South have no control over the negative impact of this integration, which is skewed against them. The economies of these countries continue to worsen.

Although globalization is not a new concept, it has however gained prominence since the late 1990s. It has been argued that globalization has indeed
increased the dependency of the developing economies of the South on the developed economies of the North. The developing countries, including Nigeria have remained mainly producers of raw materials and consumers of the finished products coming in from the industrialized nations. With the intensity of this new stage of global interaction and relationship, the African countries have remained poor, with many of them on the World’s poorest list. Foreign Direct Investment should augment domestic capital, transfer of technology among others, but it has brought no respite.

The call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) of the 1970s and the North-South Dialogue of the 1980s that were meant to improve the lots of the masses in the poor nations have failed. Nigeria, like many developing countries have been adversely affected internally as well as in its engagement with the global capital market. Incidentally, Nigeria, a country which is considered to be the giant of Africa in terms of its economy and population, and with its current GNP of $290 per person, is on this list. The human development index (HDI) of Nigeria as of 2007 was 0.511, which gives the country a ranking of 158th out of 182 countries (UNDP, 2009 Human Development Report). Poverty and inequality problems have become major concerns commanding considerable attention internally and externally. Unfortunately for Nigeria, the ongoing global recession, endemic corruption and mismanagement have wiped out any perceived gain of the debt relief of the World Bank. Nigeria has committed substantial resources (human and materials) to poverty reduction, at the Federal, State and Local Government levels. The Federal government’s poverty alleviation programs have been adopted by all State governments local government authorities, irrespective of their political party leadership, but this has done little to alleviate the worsening economic conditions of the the majority of the population.
The connectedness of the states in the international system has brought some countries wealth, but for some, like Nigeria, it has brought myriad of problems. Badly managed trade and capital market liberalization stripped away the regulations intended to control the flow of hot money in and out of the country (Stiglitz, 2003). In view of the accumulation of huge debt and the economic crisis that engulfed the nation, various solutions were put up, but they failed to solve the economic problems.

The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was proposed by the donors (IMF and the World Bank) to solve the economic crisis that was engulfing the world. Like many African nations, SAP conditionalities were implemented with the hope that the economic and social crises would be resolved. These donor proposed and supported programme were supported by the IMF and the World Bank, which at the same time failed to support any of the African initiatives.

Unfortunately for Nigeria, this donor driven initiative, which was taken from narrow ideological perspective, did not bring the much-expected promise. M’Baya (1995:72) says that SAP further impoverished the people as it facilitated capital flow to donor countries. The growing and high level of poverty amongst women gave birth to the concept of ‘feminization of poverty’.

Poverty, which is a situation of deprivation, is more acute among women because of structural inequalities between genders, both within and outside the home. As a result of the poverty being experienced by these women, they have resorted into various strategies for survival (Garba, 1999), including having multiple mode of livelihood. Women are usually in the frontline of the crisis in developing world. They are also the most severely affected by economic downturn, most especially in the light of the heavy domestic and conomic responsibilities that they shoulder. Survival for them, has meant considerable adjustment in all areas of their lives. In Osun State,
Nigeria, with the deepening economic crisis, and the failure of many government policies aimed at reducing poverty and improving the economy, the women like their counterparts in other parts of Nigeria have developed informal means of survival as the principal caregivers of the family.

With a labor force growth of almost 3% and little job creation in the formal sector, most jobs are necessarily created in the informal sector, and in low-productivity agriculture.

In addition, with a predicted annual growth rate of 2.9% in the economically active population between 1997-2010 (compared with 1.9% for South-East Asia and 1.8% for Latin America), an estimated 8.7% new job-seekers will enter the African labor market every year (ILO: 1997-99).

“Unable to work in the formal sector (government salaried jobs), where productivity is high and wages relatively good, many workers have to engage in a number of activities that sometimes just allow them to survive”, the report says citing self-employment, domestic service and employment in micro-enterprises (informal sector).

The ILO warns that these stubbornly persisting high levels of unemployment and underemployment in the face of economic growth have triggered growing concerns over the social exclusion that follows from limited employment activities for the young and old, the less skilled, the disabled and ethnic minority groups- and with a bias against women in all these categories. Women in Nigeria therefore have to device means of boosting the family’s income by engaging in petty trading and the likes.
Economic Empowerment of Women

Empowerment is a concept that has been extensively discussed in the literature. Some of the earlier definitions include one by Morgan and Bookman (1988) which sees empowerment as a process aimed at consolidating, maintaining or changing the nature and distribution of power in particular cultural context. Jane Smith (1996) considers empowerment to be a process that can only begin in a climate in which there are high expectations and where everyone feels respected and valued and where people will offer their best at all times.

The concept of empowerment ranges from encouraging people to play a more active role in their work. This could be through involvement in taking active roles and responsibility, to enabling them to make more and bigger decisions without having to refer to someone more senior. (Ako-Nai, 2005) On its part, the World Bank sees empowerment as an expansion of freedom of choice and action which means an increase in one’s authority and control over the resources and decisions that affect one’s life (World Bank, 2003). It is obvious from the above definitions that empowerment involves individuals and that the overall goal of women’s empowerment (be it political, or economic) should be seen not only as a goal in itself but also as a means towards women’s increased welfare, self-reliance, efficiency, and equality.

Women need to be empowered for them to be able to cope with the day-to-day problems associated with household welfare. It is estimated that women head one – third of the world’s household, and 50 percent or more households in urban areas. In some parts of Africa and most especially in rural areas, where men usually migrate to urban areas for greener pastures, the figure has always been quite high (Moser, 1993:17). Furthermore, women need to be empowered because they constitute about
50% of the African population and account for about 60 – 80% of the agricultural labor force. They produce up to 80% of essential food stuffs, which they process and sell in large quantities (UN, 1991). Above all, women shoulder more than 90% of the domestic production task. Indeed, they have the biological and social tasks of bearing, nurturing, and providing initial education for children and ensuring the well-being of the family and that of the entire society.
IV. Methodology

The study employed both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data was collected through the administration of questionnaire on 500 women from two cities (Osogbo and Ile-Ife) in Osun State, Nigeria. Osogbo was selected being the State Capital and Ile-Ife was selected being a University-town, and both cities have a relatively large concentration of government-employed women who at the same time engage in trading activities to augment the family’s income. 250 women were randomly selected from the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Teaching Hospital, the Osun State Secretariat, and secondary schools teachers in Osogbo, while 250 women were also randomly selected from the Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospitals Complex, the Obafemi Awolowo University, secondary schools. Of the 500 questionnaire distributed, 450 were successfully retrieved. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, simple percentages and tables.

V. Outline of Discussion

1. Needs for women survival strategies

2. Assessment of the impact of the informal trading activities on household survival and economic empowerment.

3. Consequences of shifting the burden of responsibilities and domestic welfare in male-headed households.

Needs for women survival strategies

Women continue to bear the brunt of national and international economic policies that failed to lift the nation out of poverty. They suffer most with the imposition of Structural Adjustment, which had exacerbated the spate of poverty in most African States. Similarly, with the World Trade Organization (WTO), many
women are being forced to seek for alternative-cum-additional income generating activities for sustenance through multiple modes of livelihood.

Family strategies are those devices resorted to by household heads to promote the welfare of the family ‘whether of survival or social mobility’ (Moch et. al., 1987, Roberts, 1994:6). This does not imply that families are cohesive units whose strategies always concur. Women often represent the majority of people in the informal sector. They work for low wages and the jobs are unstable. As the economy worsens, even women in paid employment often resort to private commercial activities to supplement their income.

The background for the adoption of various family strategies is the ‘restricting’ of the world economy. This has drastically altered the old focus of economic activities and life chances. In the immediate post independence Nigeria, employment in the formal economy was fashionable. Until the introduction of Austerity Measure in the late ‘70s, this sector consistently absorbed a large intake of job seekers. But shortly afterwards, and coupled with the sting of SAP, economic activities became greatly crippled. Several families could no longer thrive on earnings from the formal economy. They had either to abandon formal employment for the informal sector or supplement it with non-standard form of employment. These were either part-time job, private practice (PP), casual, or menial jobs (Cordova, 1986).

It has been argued that family strategies and the informal economy have been depicted as the basis of economic survival during Rapid urbanization (Castells, . and. Portes, 1989, Portes and Schauffler, 1993). The concept of family strategy therefore simply implies that individuals are after all in the position to make crucial economic choices in the face of adverse adjustments in the formal economy that tend to make such choice impossible. Roberts (1994:7) states this lucidly:
Household strategies suggest that people can choose, and their choices make a difference despite the economic or social constraints they face. By pooling resources, by working in both formal and informal economies, by the self-construction of shelter, by self-provisioning, and by the skillful use of social networks, families, it is argued, avoid entrapment in a self-perpetuating culture of poverty. Both the informal economy and family strategies are related in concrete ways. The informal economy makes use of non-contractual but binding relationships, and kinship is the basis of many of these. The informal economy and family strategies are essentially territorial phenomena. Both classes of activities embedded in localized sets of understandings, practices, and relationships.

This study embraces the notion of the household. In the absence of state-provided welfare assistance, family members look up to family networks in times of adversity for support and assistance. Members assist one another in caring for their elderly ones; coming together during burial ceremonies; dealing with or coping with emergencies, employing or sponsoring dependants among them.

It is important to underscore that household survival strategies are generally localized and it is women who are mostly responsible for adopting them. However, the growing crisis and disintegration of male-headed household has led to a squeeze on the time and energy of women. This has in turn resulted in the decline in the quality of labor these women could supply. This is the scenario of “stressed families”. (McIntrye and Hillard, 1922:20-22). In Nigeria for instance, the informal sector has remained an accessible sector for job provisioning particularly for women from stressed and impoverished families. These activities of women ultimately led to their economic empowerment.

Assessment of the impact of informal trading activities on household survival and economic empowerment

The informal economy has constituted a veritable source of employment for a great number of women. Its impact on household survival is also enormous. Out of the 450 women traders questioned, 345 respondents which represents 77 percent of
the total population of study group hold the view that they took to informal trading to ensure their household survival. The remaining 105, representing 23 percent of the respondents, claim to be involved in informal trading activities for the intrinsic purpose of building a career. The table below clearly depicts the picture.

**Table 1: Purpose for Joining Informal trading Networks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Informal trading for the purpose of household survival</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Informal trading for building a career</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** field Survey conducted by the researchers in 2004 (The same source applies to all the tables seen in this report, unless otherwise stated).

From the table 2 below, we found that 103 persons were involved in multiple mode of livelihood. They gave reasons such as low income from government employment, insecurity of government job, restriction on development of initiatives for their adoption of multiple mode of livelihood. They further claimed that it was the consequence of economic default in male-dominated houses.

**Table 2: Categorization of Women’s Modes of Livelihood**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Women involved in multiple mode of livelihood</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Women involved solely in informal trading activities</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Reasons for Multiple Modes of Livelihood**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Low income from government employment</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Insecurity of government job</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: The restriction on development of initiatives</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: Consequence of economic default in male dominated household</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**N.B:** Multiple responses were given in this circumstance
Table 4: Table showing the responses of women on the use of child labor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Women that employ the use of child labor</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B The women that do not employ the use of child labor</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey conducted by the researchers in 2004 (The same source applies to all the tables seen in this report; otherwise, it will be stated)

In Table 3 we saw that insecurity of government employment ranks highest among the reasons why some government officials went into informal economic activities. The issue of economic empowerment came about as a by-product of the process of long-term informal trading activities of women. Over time, some of the women did accumulate enough capital to the extent that they were able to wield substantial influence and power in their homes, trading organizations, and the communities at large.

Some of the women traders were recognized by the traditional rulers of their towns and were subsequently given titles and positions, such as Iyalaje (Sales Icon), Iyaloja (Chief or Mother in charge of the market) or Iyalode (Chief in charge of women affairs in the town) because of their economic status. Other women traders who were not so honored, the served as matrons in their organizations or as formidable pillars for networking activities. They dictated terms and conditions for entry into and exit from the trade associations. These successful women traders also served as pillars for some politicians in terms of provision of funds assistance during electioneering period. In fact, they were cynosures in the eyes of politicians. This is because every politician strives to get connected with them in order to gain the support of their people. These women are indeed what Nigerians describe as “movers and shakers” in their organizations.
Generally, women that engage in informal trading have gained some form of economic empowerment or other forms of benefits from the exercise. All the women interviewed claimed to have derived economic empowerment from their involvement in the informal economy. They claimed to have been strengthened in their new responsibilities as household heads and providers through the exercise. Moreover, they affirmed that the exercise emancipated them generally from their hitherto servile status vis-à-vis their husbands and other male counterparts. It also gave them more influence and more freedom of action with regards to decision making in the family.

**Consequences of the shifting burdens of responsibilities on domestic welfare in male-headed households**

The study reveals that 103 women (Tables 1-4), took to informal training in order to augment livelihood and survival chances of their families. In other words, they consider informal economic activities as a family strategy towards survival. This group of women argued that the entire macro-economic environment positively altered the economic equation of household in their favor. Initially, it was difficult for women to shoulder the new responsibility, but in the end, their efforts led to a favorable turn of events with potential for socio-economic empowerment for the women. In the face of the recent global financial crisis and economic crunch, the seven hundred and seventy-four local government Chairmen in Nigeria pledged to spend 10% of their annual budgets on poverty eradication (The Punch, October:2008; 17:17). If conscientiously implemented such a policy should have positive effect on women, who, along with their children, usually bore the brunt of poverty of poverty in the community.

Regarding the issue of how women combine the role of childbearing and nurturing with the demand of the informal economic trade, it was argued that
alternative arrangements were made for taking care of such domestic responsibility. Such arrangements include taking their babies to day-care centers, resting and suspending trading activities during the early stage of pregnancy, making use of apprentices, relatives and children to assist in trading activities while the woman only served as supervisors.

Another consequence of the shifting burden of responsibilities on domestic welfare relates to truncated socialization for the children. It was observed that children from these default homes (situation where women assume leadership of their families in their husbands’ absence) acquire bad morals because of their lack of parental supervision. On this issue, the affected women traders claimed that their children stayed with them in their respective shops contrary to the notion that they were not taken care of.

Furthermore, it was also contended that the activities of women traders have exacerbated the spate of the abuse of child labor in the Nigerian society. On this issue, many of the traders claimed not to be involved in the practice. Nevertheless, a few confessed to have been involved and attributed the practice to the hard economic condition that they found themselves. They further argued that the government could not be serious in imputing any fault to them. After all, you can only make use of what you have for what you need. (See table 3 on page 14).

What the foregoing discussion implies is that the consequences of the shifting responsibilities in male-headed households are both positive and negative. First, it introduces a new economic history in the management of home affairs by elevating women to a status of responsibility over and above the traditional role of child caring and nursing. Second, it led to the economic empowerment of women such that they now become more relevant in the social and political life of their societies. The case
of empowerment can be related to the associations’ role or the impact of better financial standing because of involvement in the informal economy.

As earlier noted the associations’ members enjoy distinct identity and because of their influence on price, are economically powerful and relevant in their own way. Out of the new set of 30 market women interviewed, none of them is politically insensitive. They are all poised for action in the next political dispensation. They all promised to mobilize their members to vie, at least for councillorship and supervisory positions in the coming local government election in their respective areas. They expressed boredom with the way election is being conducted in their respective areas. They detest the modus operandi of previous politicians who have always used them as springboards only to later dump them.

At the household front, the findings can be divided into two groups. It was generally acknowledged that their earnings have increased. Even though many cannot be said to be rich nevertheless, they are able to cope with the requirement of basic household needs. In other words, most of the women claimed that they have now become real helpmates for their husbands.

The second side of the findings shows that the trade is too time-consuming. All the young women complained about their spouses’ displeasure at their long journeys on trading activities and their long period of stay at work. However, they claimed that over time, their spouses tended to adjust. On the question that “do you observe any change in your contribution to decision making unlike when you were not into the informal trading?”, the common response was that they have become more visibly relevant and involved. At this point, it is important to mention that the women trading associations do not impact directly on household relationship between spouses. They only come in when invited and this is rare. The popular roles of
association that could affect household in a direct way relates to supports during hazards and ceremonies. These supports come in terms of pecuniary or material gifts or assistance. It is also important to note that some of these associations form credit societies where the members can obtain low-interest loans for their businesses.

VI. Concluding Remarks

This study posits that as a result of globalization, which has increased the intensity of poverty, women, who are usually the disadvantaged in the society, were compelled to look for survival strategies that could change their lives for the better. Globalization has been a threat to the growth of developing countries. It introduced them to changes that were sudden, drastic and disruptive, making the struggle for survival inevitable. Nigerian women responded to this challenge of globalization by joining trading association to ensure survival for their household. The study revealed that, either by default or design, the involvement of women has greatly and positively enhanced household welfare and survival. Empirical evidence confirms that through the increased earnings of these women, they were able to augment their household upkeep vote; they became pillars of support for husbands hit by the never-ending spate of retrenchment exercise in the country. The study also revealed that while some women joined the associations out of intrinsic interest in trading, a good number joined out of extrinsic cum instrumental interests. This justifies why some women employ multiple mode of livelihood, whereby they are neither “full time” government’s workers nor full time traders. It is remarkable that the number of people in this category has continued to increase. This is because earnings from formal employment will rarely suffice to assure basic needs and minimum comfort.
The case of economic empowerment has been the consequence of the relentless and diligent effort of the Yoruba women in their various spheres, of trade. Contrary to the contentious notion being held by several people in the past that women are home-keepers, baby-makers, men-helpers and so on, their involvement in informal trading networks has opened the way for women to actualize in the economic sphere. It is nevertheless important to ask – how have the women been able to achieve this? First, large proportions of women traders, and in fact, women’s associations are now involved in local level’s decision-making at both the associations and family-household levels. Second, the participation of women traders at this level is a novel development. Third, these associations served as the platform for mobilizing and encouraging these women traders particularly in the area of political sensitization and empowerment. Furthermore, women traders have become exposed to higher levels of authority relations with the State through their associations: thus, they have the opportunity of making input into decision making at both their immediate community level and the State. Through the associations also, they have always been in constant interaction with the traditional rulers of their communities as well as with local government officials. It is important to note also that some of these women associations have bye-laws and operate essentially like autonomous institutions. At the home front, many of these women have become so courageous that they actively participate in decision making with their husbands unlike before. Besides, they supplement the household income and serve as ready assistants to their husbands.

Instead of just sitting down at home, most women are now actively involved in large-scale trades. Through this process, several women have become economically empowered. From the foregoing therefore, even though women’s involvement in
informal trading network is agelong, it involved only a smaller percentage of women. Nevertheless, it has received a boost in recent times (about two decades ago), and this development appears to be only just beginning.

Women in Nigeria, and for this study, those in Osun State, are living the saying of former U.S.A. President, Benjamin Franklin who formulated the creed that we would be better off personally and economically, if an attitude of tolerance is embraced and developed. This is a vehicle for a society or group on a journey to an all-round development: socially, politically, and economically. In the face of hardship and deprivation, women in Osun State, have demonstrated that the key to entrepreneurship and development in a continuously integrated market, forced on them by globalization, is to develop and adopt strategies for survival and emancipation. In this endeavor, as this study shows, they have been remarkably successful.
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