

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF LOCALLY PRODUCED WEANING FOODS
MARKETERS AND THE DOMINANT LOCAL WEANING FOODS MARKETED IN BENUE
STATE, NIGERIA**

*¹Olisakwe, I. O and Alufohai, G.O.

Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension Services, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Benin,
Benin city, Nigeria.

*Corresponding Author: ifyjane14@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

*The study profiled the socio-economic characteristics of locally produced weaning foods marketers and identified the dominant local weaning foods marketed in Benue State, Nigeria. Data used for the study were collected from a cross-sectional survey of 18 markets through the use of a structured questionnaire. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select 184 respondents for the study. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, mean values and percentages. Results of the study showed that women were more (69.6%) involved in local weaning foods marketing; most (91.9%) of the respondents were married with a mean age of 47 years. Most (85.9%) of the respondents attained primary level of education and have been in the business for more than 5 years. The dominant locally produced weaning foods identified in the study area in descending order were akamu okiri (guinea corn thin gruel), soyabean gruel, akamu joro (millet thin gruel). **Keywords:** Marketing, Locally, Weaning foods, Dominant, Benue State, Marketers.*

INTRODUCTION

Weaning foods are the main sources of daily food to majority of infants growing up in Nigeria and it is introduced to infants in order to meet up with their growing nutritional requirements. In Nigeria, exclusive breast feeding is usually adequate up to six months of age, but after this period, it may become inadequate to support the nutritional demands of a growing infant. Weaning, more scientifically known as complementary feeding is the first major pro active step in the infant's life towards growing up. The need to introduce weaning foods to infants cannot be over-emphasized as every child needs to be weaned either with indigenous or foreign weaning foods or both provided it is affordable to the target market (Awogbenja and Peter, 2021). The locally produced weaning foods are composites gruel made from either fermented maize (*zea mays*), millet (*pennisetum americanum*), guinea corn (*sorghum spp.*) or a combination of any (Okoye *et al.*, 2021).

Marketing is the performance of all business activities involved in the flow of goods and services from the point of production until they are in the hands of the ultimate consumers (Panda, 2011). Marketing involves all those physical, legal and economic services (processing, packaging, storage, transportation, pricing, financing, risk bearing and

even product design), which are necessary to make products from the farm available to the consumers, thus creating form, place, time and possession utilities (Olukosi *et al.*, 2005; Akanni, 2012). These marketing activities or functions are performed by marketing institutions, popularly referred to as marketers. The specific objectives of this paper were to profile the socio-economic characteristics of the marketers and identify the dominant locally produced weaning foods marketed in Benue State.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Benue State, Nigeria. Benue State lies within the geographical coordinates of Longitudes 06° 35' East and 08° 10' East and Latitudes 06° 30' North and 08° 10' North. It has a land mass of approximately 30,783km² with a total projected population of 6,141,300 (National Population Commission, NPC, 2022) spread across the 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the State with the capital city in Makurdi. The State is divided into three agricultural zones namely: zone A (eastern zone), comprises of Vandeikya, Konshisha, Kwande, Ushongo, Kastina-Ala, Logo and Ukum LGA's; zone B (northern zone), comprises of Gboko, Buruku, Tarka, Makurdi, Gwer-East, Gwer-West and Guma LGA's and zone C (central zone), comprises of Otukpo, Obi, Oju, Okpokwu, Apa, Ado, Agatu, Ogbadigbo and Ohimiri LGA's (Benue State Agricultural and Rural Development Authority, BNARDA, 1998).

Economically, the State is based around agriculture along with trading and services. They are mainly agrarian, producing crops such as soyabean, rice, millet, guinea corn, yam, sweet potatoes, cassava and groundnuts some of which are raw materials for the weaning foods. A large proportion of the population also engage in agricultural marketing. The study covered the three agricultural zones in Benue State.

Primary data used for the study were collected from a cross-sectional survey of selected markets in the study area through the use of a structured questionnaire. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used in selecting the respondents for the study. The first stage was a random selection of three blocks (LGAs) from the three agricultural zones in Benue State according to ADP delineation which gave a total of nine LGA's. The selected blocks (LGAs) in Benue State were Kastina-Ala, Ushongo and Kwande LGAs from the

Eastern Zone (A), Makurdi, Gboko and Guma LGAs from the Northern Zone (B), and Otukpo, Agatu and Apa LGAs from the Central Zone (C).

The second stage was the purposive selection of two major markets from each block which gave a total of eighteen markets. This was based on the level of marketing activities of local weaning foods in the markets. The selected markets were Lessel market, Akerior market, Adikpo market, Chigba market, Katsina Ala town market, Abaji market, Modern market, North Bank market, Gboko market, Mbatyav market, Daudu market, Gbajimgba market, Otukpo main market, Ella market, Obagaji market, Aila market, Ugbokpo market, Iga-okpaya market. The third stage was a proportionate random selection of 75% of marketers of local weaning foods from the

selected markets from the sampling frame obtained from the preliminary survey given a total sample size of 200 marketers. This is based on rule of thumb and central limit theorem which states that sample sizes greater than or equal to 30%, should provide enough information to make a statistically sound conclusion about a population. However, only 184 copies of the questionnaire were found useful for analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

(a) Socio-Economic Characteristics of Locally Produced Weaning Foods Marketers in the Study Area

The socio-economic characteristics of marketers of locally produced weaning foods in the study area are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of Local Weaning Food Marketers

Characteristics	Frequency	%
Sex		
Male	56	30.4
Female	128	69.6
Total	184	100
Marital Status		
Single	12	6.5
Married	169	91.9
Divorced	3	1.6
Widowed	0	0
Total	184	100
Major Occupation		
Trading	145	78.8
Farming	22	12
Civil Service	5	2.7
Teaching	12	6.5
Total	184	100
Age (Years)		
≤ 30	8	4.3
31 – 40	36	19.6
41 – 50	70	38
> 50	70	38
Total	184	100
Mean		47
Educational Level		
No formal Education	26	14.1
Primary School	62	33.7
Secondary School	72	39.1
Tertiary Education	8	4.4

Vocational Education	16	8.7
Total	184	100
Marketing Experience(years)		
1 – 5	49	26.6
6 – 10	70	38
11 – 15	34	18.5
16 – 20	23	12.5
21 – 25	8	4.3
Total	184	100
Mean		10

Source: Computed from Survey Data, 2022.

Sex and Marital Status: The results showed that locally produced weaning foods marketing was dominated (69.6%) by females and this confirms the assertion of Adetunji and Adesiyani (2008), that women play active roles in the marketing of agricultural produce. The high participation of women also corroborated with the findings of Alufohai *et al.*, (2017) that women were the highest participants in livestock processing and marketing system in Onitsha South Local area of Anambra State. The result also showed that most (91.9%) of the marketers were married as shown in Table 1. The high percentage of married respondents may imply that the business of locally produced weaning foods marketing can serve as a reliable source of income and livelihood for the family. The result is consistent with the findings of Ani *et al.*, (2016), that majority (82.6%) of the soyabean marketers in Benue State were married.

Level of Education and Major Occupation: The results showed that 85.9% of the marketers attained one form of formal education or the other, while only 14.1% had no formal education. This result corroborates with the findings of Onu and Iliyasu (2008), in their analysis of food grain marketing in Adamawa State which showed that more than half (56%) of the surveyed traders attended formal educational institution. The level of education had positive implication on gathering information on marketing activities as well as assisting them on the area of adoption of new technologies, innovations and in making decisions that will enhance their marketing activities (Emokaro and Egbodion, 2014). Also,

78.8% of the respondents had trading as their major occupation, 12.0% had farming, 6.5% had teaching while 2.7% were engaged in civil service as their main occupation. This showed that majority (78.8%) of the locally produced weaning foods marketers were traders.

Age and Marketing Experience: The result also showed that most (58%) of the marketers were within the age brackets of 31-50 years across the State with a mean age of 47 years. This showed that the marketers were in their youthful and productive age with the relatively younger ones (20–25 years) and older ones (60years) being less involved in the business. This is in line with the findings of Asogwa and Okwoche (2012), who found that the marketers of sorghum in Benue State were within the age range of 31-50 years. This group are quite active and vibrant and are able to cope with the energy requirement of marketing activities. The result also indicated that about 56.5% of the marketers had been on locally produced weaning food marketing business for about 6-15 years with an average experience of 10 years. This suggests that the marketers were experienced in their line of business. Marketing experience is believed to enhance one's decision making behaviour and performance on the business (Tynan and Mckechnie, 2009).

(b) Identified Dominant Locally Produced Weaning Foods Marketed in the Study Area

The identified dominant locally produced weaning foods marketed in the study area are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Locally Produced Weaning Foods Marketed in the Study Area

Weaning foods	n= (184)	
	Frequency	%
<i>Akamu okiri</i> (guinea corn gruel)	24	13.0
<i>Akamu oka</i> and <i>Akamu okiri</i>	75	40.7
<i>Akamu joro</i> (millet thin gruel)	27	14.7
<i>Akamu joro</i> and <i>Akamu okiri</i>	15	8.2
Soyabean gruel	39	21.2
Soyabean gruel and <i>Akamu joro</i>	4	2.2
Total	184	100

The dominant locally produced weaning foods identified in Benue State were soyabean gruel, *akamu joro* (millet thin gruel) and *akamu okiri* (guinea corn thin gruel). The marketers that sell solely *akamu okiri* were 13.0%, solely *akamu joro* were 14.7% and solely soyabean gruel were 21.2% while those that sell *akamu okiri* and *akamu oka* together were 40.7%, *akamu okiri* and *akamu joro* together were 8.2%, *akamu joro* and soyabean gruel together were 2.2%.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established that there is female dominance in the marketing of locally produced weaning foods in the study area and majority of the locally produced weaning foods marketers were married and literate, who are still in their youthful age with mean marketing experience of about 10 years. The dominant locally produced weaning foods marketed in Benue State were *akamu okiri*, soyabean gruel and *akamu joro*. It is therefore recommended that male counter parts should be encouraged to engage in the marketing of local weaning foods since it can serve as a reliable source of income and livelihood for the family. Marketers should also be encouraged to embrace formal education as level of education has positive implication on gathering marketing information as well as assisting them in the area of adoption of new technologies, innovations and in making decisions that will enhance marketing activities.

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