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COPING WITH STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT  
IN NIGERIA: PROFESSIONAL WOMEN  
AND CONTINGENT WORK IN  
PORT HARCOURT

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PROFESSIONAL WOMEN AND CONTINGENT WORK IN PORT HARCOURT

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## 1 Background to the Study

Since 1960, when Nigeria gained political independence from the British colonial administration, she has witnessed three distinct economic cycles. The first cycle from 1960 to about 1967. It was not one of rapid growth but what economic growth occurred was sustained during the period. During this period, the nation depended on the exportation of primary produce comprising agriculture, forestry and mineral products to finance its development programmes. The second cycle covers the late 1960s to 1981 when the exportation of crude oil became the dominant source of developmental resources. The period witnessed hitherto unprecedented levels of financial resources at the disposal of the national government. Referred to as the "oil boom" period (Pinto, 1987), it was marked by increased per capita income and increased public expenditure, accompanied by many grandiose projects aimed at rapid modernization. It is now generally acknowledged that the bulk of these projects did not achieve any realistic development objectives (Fair, 1984; Schatz, 1984). The oil boom period benefited all classes of workers.<sup>1</sup> Salary increases followed the Udoji Review of salaries in 1973/74. There were increased employment opportunities in both the public and private sectors of the economy.

During the third economic cycle which has continued from the early 1980s to the present, the nation has witnessed an economic down turn resulting from a combination of factors (Hussain, 1987). Most significant among these was a heavy external debt burden and inflation. Several panic measures were introduced to stem the decline but it was only in 1985 that

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1 Income classes are delineated in Nigeria in terms of individual and household annual incomes. The National Housing Policy (1982) defines low income as those earning below N3,000.00 per annum. Middle income as those earning between N3,000.00 and N8,000.00 and high income as being above N8,000.00 per annum. The Naira (N) is the national currency of Nigeria. Presently 10 Naira are equivalent to about 1 United States dollar.

the ruling military regime, backed by the advisers from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), instituted a package of economic reforms referred to as the structural adjustment programme (SAP).

Policies deriving from SAP are directly responsible for the substantial devaluation of the national currency. This has led to a marked decline in real incomes. The direct impact of this was a further polarization between income groups, particularly the nearly complete elimination of the middle income group. Even the lower high income group suffered a substantial erosion in living standards. For households in these categories - where the bulk of professional women can be found - the need to maintain an acceptable standard of living has become an overriding motive. It has therefore necessitated contingent work by the women. Contingent work as defined in our context refers to any additional work taken on by persons in regular salaried employment and normally to work in informal sector activities. It is important to point out that the Nigerian woman of whatever income class has always demonstrated a high sense of enterprise that has led to her involvement in work outside of paid employment that serves both to generate income or as a hobby. In the post-SAP period, however, this work has become a necessary household survival strategy. Most Nigerian professional women hitherto were satisfied to depend on the wages received from their chosen careers and that in which they were trained. With the introduction of SAP, and the attendant erosion of personal income at the same time, individual and household needs did not diminish. There was increased demand on the new devalued income following cuts in public expenditure and removal of subsidies in key sectors in the economy.

The study therefore focuses on professional women in middle and high income households who are presently engaged in contingent work. The objectives of the study are as follows:-

- (i) to determine the amount of income generated from contingent work by the woman and the proportion of household needs catered for by income from this;
- (ii) to determine the number of hours dedicated to contingent work and the work burden this generates;
- (iii) to examine the value attached by men and by society in general to women's contingent work; and
- (iv) to examine the effect that contingent work has on the woman's chosen career.

## 2 Research Setting

The study is based on a random sample of fifty women in different professions who are in regular paid employment within Port Harcourt, the capital city of the Rivers State of Nigeria. The survey was carried out between January and February 1991. The study covered three middle and high income neighbourhoods. These were: the Shell Petroleum Development Company Residential Area, the Rivers State University of Science and Technology and the Trans-Amadi Industrial Layout Residential Areas. According to the socio-economic survey of Port Harcourt, (Ogionwo, 1973) about 19% of the city's population are middle income and just 0.26% are high income.

Data was collected by use of questionnaires and interview schedules.

## 3 Literature Review

A number of studies have addressed the issue of women's work in Nigeria (Pittin, 1984; Igben 1980; Oruwari 1990). Concern has been expressed about the sexual division of labour in agricultural communities, especially about the heavy work burden of the woman who has to combine her share of farm work with her domestic tasks of food preparation, child care and general household maintenance.

Pittin (1984) examined how various censuses in Nigeria documented and analysed women's work focusing on Muslim Hausa women in Katsina, Northern Nigeria - an urban setting. The women whose primary income earning activities were examined were of four categories:-

married women living with their husbands; married women not living with their husbands; widows and divorcees. Pittin showed that in spite of seclusion which restricted their physical mobility to the compound, women in all four categories were engaged in income earning activities such as selling cooked food and doing embroidery (see Appendix I). In one of the wards a total of 8.2% of women interviewed were engaged in salaried employment. Pittin explained that the latter required good contacts and education and was only available to the few women who were not in full seclusion. Official documentation in Nigeria's census had, however, not covered the full range of income earning activities; neither has there been a realistic assessment of the proportion of women in the labour force. These deficiencies were attributed to the following factors:-

- i) the collection of information on female occupations was either not collected or done unsatisfactorily;
- ii) the multiple and occasional character of women's occupation made categorisation difficult
- iii) the categorisation of women's work was derived from the categorisation of men's work, with omission of key occupational groupings like that of craftwork.
- iv) there were problems of classifying the duties of housewives and
- v) the definition of the concept of labour force in the 1963 and 1973 censuses and its relation to the classification of housework was inappropriate.

The net effect was a devaluation of women's work in official documents. Many of the women excluded, such as housewives who worked for a few hours a day during the reference week for the census as traders or in their own shops, would be included in the informal sector of the economy. Oruwari's study showed that the bulk of women within the urban setting are employed in this sector. The women are responsible for the maintenance of the household particularly as they were mostly in polygamous marriages (See Table 1).

TABLE 1

Share of Essential Household Expenditure contributed by Men/Women in % (in the informal sector)

Item	Wife	Husband	Total
Food	73	27	100
Clothes for Children	76	24	100
Health Care	68	32	100
House Rent	-	100	100
House help	82	18	100
Entertainment	35	65	100
Children's Education	50	50	100
Total	384	316	700
% Total	55	45	100

Source: Oruwari, 1990 page 12

This study questions the concept of male-headed households if headship is taken in relation to upkeep. The study also showed that the man does not know how much the wife earns or how much she contributes to household maintenance. This leads to a lack of appreciation of her role in the household, a situation that is not helped by societal attitudes which regard women's work as subordinate to that of men in the household. The man is regarded as the chief source of household income no matter the actual proportion of expenditure for which he is responsible. Pittin (1985) expresses this issue succinctly when, in examining the household as

an analytical construct, she suggests that "the household will not be treated as a single unit of production, as this analytical construct fails to recognise the specific ownership and utilisation of individual production within the domestic unit, the diverging purposes of that production, and socio-economic relationships around which such production is built". (Pittin, 1985:3).

Oruwari's findings on the impact of SAP on household income and expenditure pattern show the burden on the woman's income. The work burden on the rural woman has been proved in a number of studies (Igben, 1980; ECA, 1976). The same level of attention has not been given to urban woman, particularly not to middle and high income women.

Our study is thus part of the attempts being made to evaluate and put in proper perspective the work of women under SAP. By focusing on contingent work, we show yet another facet of the problems associated with this evaluation; revealing the work burden, that gender hierarchy devalues women's work no matter how critical this may be to household survival, and that even middle and high income professional women are not exempt from the subordination of women to men.

#### 4 Data Analysis

The majority of the women interviewed were between the ages of 30 to 40 years. This group was chosen because the researchers felt that these women have worked professionally for some time and have established a family.

A comparison of this age group of women in the developed countries with Nigerian women shows that the former are the women that concentrate on their chosen careers to a greater degree than Nigerian women, or at least who have smaller families than Nigerian women.



#### 4.1 Marital Status and Household Size

Out of the fifty women interviewed forty-five of the women were married with at least three children. The household is usually larger than this nuclear family, however, including the woman, her three children, her domestic help, and her other dependents which in most cases includes at least two people. These two are regarded by society as her 'children'. Table 2 indicates the sizes of households among the sample population.

TABLE 2  
Size of Household of Women in Nigeria

	2 - 5 persons		6 - 9 Persons		10 or more	
	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%
Household size	5	10	30	60	15	30
Total No	50		50		50	
%	100		100		100	

Even in the sample the women who are not married, but are professionals (10% of the women interviewed) had at least two extra people living in their household.

#### 4.2 Salary

These professional women have a salary of N5,000 - N9,600 per annum. In Nigeria, those are the middle/upper income level<sup>1</sup> salary workers, women who under normal economic conditions would not be involved in any other type of work for income generation. They work as doctors, lawyers, university teachers, to name a few occupations. Though these professional women are salaried workers with high levels of responsibility at work in their various fields, and the married ones receive allowances for housekeeping from their households, in order to meet the demands of feeding their household and to maintain their expected standard of living, they are involved in extra work, in the house and outside, to generate income.

TABLE 3  
Percentage by which Housekeeping Allowances augmented by Women

% added to House keeping allowance	Number of Women
30 - 40	5
41 - 50	10
51 - 60	20
61 - 70	10
71 - 80	2
81 - 90	-
91 - 100	1
100 and above	2
Total	50

Table 3 shows that all the women interviewed add money to their household allowances, in most cases adding from 40% up to 200% the amount given by the husband.

#### 4.3 Contingent Work

The only way she can maintain her household and herself is to engage in contingent work, though it conflicts with her role as a mother and professional, must be done in order to survive the economic crunch. All the women agreed that the part time work conflicted with their social obligations and some even with their profession.

Twenty of the women interviewed are doctors, of whom fifteen sew clothes commercially when they get back from consulting and the other five, apart from sewing, also bake commercially. The teachers, by comparison, are more diversified in their contingent work. All the twenty-five interviewed admitted that they give private lessons for a fee in their homes and outside their homes to students who need extra attention and twenty of these teachers/lecturers, apart from giving extra lessons, also sew for commercial purposes and bake for weddings, birthdays and other ceremonies.

The two secretaries interviewed are involved in trading (sale of items like shoes, bags, belts and even food items) in their offices and at home. This leads to considerable conflict as this trading takes place in their places of work. The other interviewees (one lawyer and two nurses) are also involved in contingent work.

#### 4.4 Attitude to Part Time Working

The women were asked what their attitude was to taking money, sometimes from friends and colleagues who patronised them either for sewing clothes or in whatever contingent work they did. All agreed that at first they were reluctant to charge for services because the activity generally started as a hobby and their husbands were against the idea.

Though most of the men we interviewed argued that the women contributed little, if anything, to the housekeeping allowance, and that most of the women's supplementary income is spent on their personal clothing an in-depth discussion showed that the men know that money is added to the housekeeping allowance. They do not know however, where the additional money comes from - whether from contingent work or the woman's salary; nor do they know how much is added. The man's attitude is that as long as he is contributing a certain amount he is maintaining his household, giving him that secure feeling that the need of the house is always met by the man. This is clearly revealed in Oruwari's (1990) work on the urban informal sector. The women agree that they do spend on their clothes, but this money comes from her salary as she is expected to look well at her place of work as befits her status.

#### 4.5 Money Spent

Discussions with the women revealed that their extra work provides a substantial amount of money which they use to maintain their homes.

Analysis of their spending shows very clearly that very little of this income was to meet personal needs (Table 4).

TABLE 4

Item	% of women interviewed who spend money on
Food	100
Medical	2
Children's Education	6
House Rent	2
Clothing for Children	50
Mortgage Repayments	Nil
House Maintenance	6
Water/Electricity	4
Fuel	20
Dependents	60
Entertainment	20
Savings	Nil

Field Survey January/February 1991.

All the women spent about 50% of the money on food for the household: 15% on the children's clothes, 10% on maintenance of dependents, 10% on fuel for the car (for journey to and from work), and 5% on medical expenses, water and electricity.

#### 4.6 Savings

The study revealed that the women do not save from contingent work earnings. Though it may seem strange that a professional woman who earns a good salary from her career plus additional income from part time work does not save anything, it is the reality of the lot of the woman in Nigeria. The income generated goes on food and though she does not repay any

mortgage (see Appendix III), discussions with the women revealed that she contributes indirectly to housing because the husband is often building somewhere either in the village or in the city and the woman does not get enough allowance; as a result, she spends not only her salary but also her income generated from the contingent work to maintain and feed her household.

#### 4.7 Children

The burden on the woman not only involves generating income from contingent work; she is also expected to play the role of a mother to her children to whom she wants to be able to give the best.

All the women interviewed had some form of domestic help, but the bulk of the cooking, child care, and household chores still falls on her.

#### 4.8 A Professional Woman's Day

A break down of a typical working day of an urban professional woman shows that she is engaged actively for seventeen hours. If she manages to rest for an hour she is only engaged for 16 hours (see Appendix II). A comparison of the professional working women's time budget with rural woman's time budget (see Appendix III) reveals that a woman, whether rural or urban, is still expected to fulfil her role as a mother, a wife and a cook at home and as a professional in the office/place of work as much as, if not more than, her male counterpart in the office. The irony of the situation is that at work she pays more tax than her male counterpart.

The pressure on the professional woman therefore is so much that she is expected to do a lot more and not get credit for it from the society who sees nothing wrong with the amount of burden placed on the women folk.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the need for urban professional women in Nigeria to engage in contingent work in order to ameliorate the effects of SAP on the household. It has shown that contingent work for the majority of the women was imperative for household survival, and that the women perform this role with minimal recognition of its significance by the men. The proportion of household budget met from income from contingent work questions the definition of head of household - a concept often defined in relation to contributions made for household upkeep. That the professional woman is aware of this definitional and attitudinal bias is clear. What is not clear is the rationale for her willing acceptance of this bias as a "traditional societal" value. This is an area for further investigations.

Another area highlighted by the study is the work burden on the woman who has full time employment with its requirements of specific working hours plus the time required for contingent work. Although the analysis did not probe the issue of truancy at her place of employment it is one possible effect of undertaking contingent work - one which is also directly observable from the work ethics of professional women who engage in informal sector activities. Thus, the woman to some extent risks her career opportunities in order to engage in contingent work. As income from contingent work is often not fully reported in tax returns, whatever the woman makes is at her complete disposal.

The positive aspects of contingent work include not just the income but the employment it generates. This is an area often neglected by planners of the urban economy. It is an area for further research. Thus while this paper has in the main highlighted the non-recognition of the importance of contingent work and also the increase in the work burden occasioned by it, one should not lose sight of the potentials it presents

in household subsistence and for the economic independence of women particularly in these times of economic crisis.

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APPENDIX I

WOMEN'S PRIMARY INCOME-EARNING ACTIVITIES IN KATSINA

Occupation	Yarinci ward		Marina Ward	
	No of Women	% of Total	No of Women	% of Total
Preparation and sale of snacks	58	47.5	47	26.7
Embroidery, knitting, sewing	3	2.5	48	27.3
Traditional crafts, eg spinning	7	5.7	11	6.2
Domestic services eg grinding and pounding	20	16.4	12	6.8
Petty trade	8	6.6	16	9.1
Large-scale trade of one or more items	4	3.3	12	6.8
Large-scale foodstuff processing	4	3.3	13	7.4
Preparation and sale of meals	-	-	7	4.0
Salaried employment	10	8.2	-	-
Other occupation	8	6.6	10	5.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Pittin (1984) pg.476



APPENDIX II

ALLOCATION OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S WORKING DAY

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Activity	No of Hours
Waking up in the mornings at 5.30 hours	.50
Getting breakfast ready and the children for school Feeding the household	1.00
Going to work (consulting teaching, working in the office etc)	4.00
Picking the children from school (snacks if possible in between as this is her break period)	1.00
Going back to work (consulting, teaching, working in the office etc)	3.00
Journey back home	.30
Resting	.30
Contingent work	5.00
Cooling, dishing out food and eating	1.00
Washing children, herself, clothes, tidying up and setting children to bed	1.00
Going to bed at about 22.30 hours	
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Total number of hours	17.1

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Source: Owei and Jev (1991) Women in the modern labour force and  
Contingent work.

APPENDIX III

ALLOCATION OF RURAL WOMEN'S WORKING DAY

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Activity	No of Hours
Waking up in the morning at 5.00 hours	
Walking to fields (1.2 km away) with baby on her back	0.50
Ploughing, planting, hoeing until about 15.00 hours (she eats her snack or a meal in the field)	9.50
Collecting firewood and carrying it home	1.00
Pounding or grinding of grains or legumes	1.50
Fetching water, 1-2 km each day with a 50 kg pot on her head	.75
Lighting fire and cooking meals for the family	1.00
Dishing out food and eating	1.00
Washing children, herself, clothes	.75
Going to bed at about 21.00 hours	
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Total work hours	16.00

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Source: Economic Commission for Africa 1976. Women in the Traditional and Modern Labour Force. Paper presented at the National Conference on Women and Development In Relation to Family Structure, Ibadan, April.

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