



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## The socio-economic space of Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon

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### Abstract

This study delves into the lives of Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon, examining the socioeconomic experiences of Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon. Despite their significant contributions to the local economy and society, Nigerian women in Tiko face numerous challenges, including cultural and language barrier, discrimination and stereotypes, gender-based violence, discrimination, and high cost of resident permit and police brutality, This research investigates the ways in which Nigerian women navigate and negotiate their socioeconomic space, highlighting their agency, resilience, and strategies for survival. The findings reveal a complex web of structural barriers, cultural norms, and individual experiences that shape the lives of Nigerian women in Tiko. By amplifying their voices and stories, this study aims to promote greater understanding, empathy, and empowerment for Nigerian women in Cameroon and beyond, and has implications for policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders working to promote gender equality and empowerment.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic space; Nigerian women; Migration; Remittance; Resident permit; Gender-based violence

### 1. Introduction

Africans throughout the continent have a long history of migration in search for better economic future (Findley, 1989). International migration in Africa is on the rise with Sub-Saharan African countries accounting for almost half of the worlds estimated 80 million international migrants. Population movement on a grand scale have become a prominent feature of contemporary society, but there have been as yet relatively few attempts to look beneath the surface of mass movement and to disentangle the specific experiences of women. Morokvasic (1983) and others note that until the mid 1970s women were invisible in the studies of migration and when they did emerge tended to do so within the category of dependents. In Africa, migration has traditionally been viewed as a male phenomenon. Men moved while women stayed behind and indeed migration surveys simply did not ask women about their experiences. When women did move, it assumed that this was only for marriage or to join members (Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1990). In the early 1960s and 1970s, the phrase “migrant and their families” was a code for male migrants, their wives and children.

Although there have been high rates of female migration throughout Africa, these have merely been viewed as associational and therefore discounted in discussions of migration, urbanization and development. In the 1980s studies from Western Africa showed rising number of women moving to cities and questioned whether women moved merely as dependents (Chants and Radcliff, 1992). Research in the 1980s began to include women, but did cause a dramatic shift in the thinking about who migrated, how migration was explained, or the likely consequences. One of the central questions about women during this period was whether migration modernized women, emancipating them from their assumed values and behaviors (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). However, more recent surveys on migration confirm that economic concerns play an important role in women’s migration decision, even when joining spouse (Findley, 1989, Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1990). However, migrants itineraries are becoming more complex as entry status is more likely

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to handicap female migrants than male, as women than men are often denied residency or citizenship and may face immigration harassment as immigration policies place women in a family role rather than a market role. This can in turn reinforce some of the factors responsible for the economic and social vulnerability of migrant women.

The socioeconomic space of Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has received scant attention in research. As a growing number of Nigerian women migrate to Tiko in search of better economic opportunities, they encounter a unique set of challenges and opportunities that shape their experiences. Despite their growing presence in Tiko, Nigerian women's experiences remain largely understudied, particularly in relation to their socioeconomic empowerment. Research has highlighted the gendered dynamics of migration, but little is known about the specific challenges and opportunities faced by Nigerian women in Tiko. This knowledge gap hinders effective policy interventions and support mechanisms for this vulnerable population. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the socioeconomic space of Nigerian women in Tiko, with a focus on their migration experiences, income-generating activities, social relationships, and coping strategies.

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## 2. Methods

This study is mostly descriptive in nature and based on field work with an attempt to examine and describe in a dialectical way the Nigerian women's socio-economic activities, their challenges and coping strategies. Therefore, the research employed a qualitative research approach to explore the socioeconomic space of Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon. The study also utilized both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of data were obtained through in-depth interviews of 52 Nigerian women in Tiko using a semi-structured interview guide. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour; 4 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with groups of 8-10 Nigerian women in Tiko which were facilitated using a moderator guide and lasted approximately 1.5 hours; and observations of participant were conducted in various settings in Tiko, including markets, shops, and community gatherings. Secondary data were obtained from published documents on the internet and the library. Participant for this study were selected through a Snow Ball sampling techniques. The interviews and FGDs were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Codes and themes were identified and categorized while observational data was analyzed using content analysis. Participants provided informed consent before participating in the study and their identities were anonymous to maintain confidentiality.

By using a combination of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, this study aimed to gather a rich and nuanced understanding of the socioeconomic space of Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon.

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## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Reasons for Nigerian Women's Migration to Tiko, Cameroon

Man by nature always wandered and drifted across the globe for various and multiple motives as with other social causation, there are major and minor causes, predisposing and proximate causes comprised in two major categories; push and pull factors.

### 3.2. Economic Instability in Nigeria

Findings indicated that economic instability in Nigeria is a significant push factor driving migration to Tiko, Cameroon. For the last decade, the Nigerian government has battled with economic shambles, fall in the value of the naira and negative economic growth leading to high rate of unemployment, particularly among youths and women, rising costs of living and declining purchasing power, widespread poverty, with many Nigerians living below the poverty line and rampant corruption, which hinders economic growth and development.

### 3.3. Conflict and Disaster in Nigeria

Some respondents noted that the conflict and disaster in Nigeria were also push factors driving Nigerian women to migrate to Tiko, Cameroon. Some specific conflicts and disasters included the Boko Haram attacks and violence in Northeastern Nigeria and rising incidents of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria, particularly in the north, have created a sense of insecurity and driven women to seek safer environments. Also, the effects of climate change, such as flooding, drought, and desertification, have impacted agricultural productivity and livelihoods, pushing women to migrate to Tiko. These conflicts and disasters have created a hostile environment, forcing Nigerian women to seek refuge and better opportunities in Tiko, Cameroon. The migration is often driven by the desire to escape violence, persecution, or environmental degradation and to find safety, stability, and economic security.

### **3.4. Economic opportunities in Tiko, Cameroon**

Economic opportunities in Tiko are the most significant pull factor attracting Nigerian women to migrate as noted by the research participants. Some specific economic opportunities that draw Nigerian women to Tiko include availability of jobs in industries like Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) banana and rubber plantations. Furthermore, Tiko has a cosmopolitan status with the construction of the wharf by the Germans in the 1840s which made Tiko a gateway to traders and other tourists. Tiko has a very favorable entrepreneurship environment and presents easy access to markets for Nigerian women to start their own businesses. Many people are aware of the popular Tiko market where buyers come from all over Cameroon. Also, Tiko's strategic location and opportunities offers the opportunity for Nigerian women to start small-scale entrepreneurship businesses, like food processing, crafts, and services. Moreover, Tiko's markets offer a range of goods and services, providing Nigerian women with access to new customers and revenue streams. Besides, the better living standards in Tiko with relatively stable economy and infrastructure offer a higher standard of living compared to some parts of Nigeria. So, some Nigerian women migrated to Tiko, Cameroon to join their spouses and family members already living in Tiko, but also had a business inclination and sought to pursue economic opportunities. This is a common phenomenon where women migrate for family reunification but also have economic aspirations. They were motivated to pursue business opportunities to improve their financial situation.

### **3.5. Remittances**

Also, Nigerian women play a crucial role in upgrading the living standard of the families. These women have joined the migration stream like men with economic motive as a predominant factor for migration, even when they are joining husbands or families. Remittance is a significant reason for migration among Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon. Many women migrate to Tiko to work and earn money to send back to their families in Nigeria. Remittances are a vital source of income for many households in Nigeria, and women play a crucial role in sending money back home. Nigerian women migrate to Tiko to support their families financially, especially in cases where husbands or other family members are unable to provide. Remittances help improve living standards for families in Nigeria, enabling them to access basic needs like food, education, and healthcare. Some women migrate to pay off debts incurred by their families or to support family businesses. Remittances are also used for investment purposes, such as buying land, building houses, or starting businesses in Nigeria. Majority of Nigerian women who migrate to Tiko and send remittances back home often gain social status and respect within their communities. Remittances help maintain family ties and connections across borders, support education expenses for children and other family members, cover healthcare costs for family members in Nigeria, serve as emergency funding during times of crisis or unexpected expenses and help families in Nigeria build savings and secure their financial future. This can be reflected in the story of a 55 year old Nigerian widow in Tiko, who hails from Imo State Nigeria:

“I came to Tiko in 1990 to join my husband who was a businessman in order to assist him in his business and unite as a family. I have stayed in Cameroon doing business for the past 30years even after my husband died 10years ago. Business has been very good and I send money monthly to my family in Nigeria to take care of them. Before coming to Cameroon, my family owed huge debts but I have worked and paid them all. I also built a house for my mother in Nigeria and built a borehole in my community in Owerri, Nigeria. These made the chiefs in my community crown me with a title of respect ‘Ada Eze 1 of Njaba’. People in my community in Nigeria give me a lot of respect and this makes me feel fulfilled.”

### **3.6. Economic Activities of Nigerian Women in Tiko, Cameroon**

Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon engage in various economic activities for survival.

#### *3.6.1. Trading*

The most engaged economic activity of Nigerian women in Tiko is trading, the buying and selling goods in markets or shops. The activities include procuring goods from suppliers or wholesalers, displaying and marketing goods in a market stall or shop, negotiating prices and closing sales with customers and managing inventory and restocking as needed. Some examples of goods that Nigerian women in Tiko buy and sell include: provisions (e.g., biscuits, groundnut oil, savon, omo, toothbrush, books, pens, magi etc.) food items (e.g., fruits, vegetables, spices, etc.), household essentials (e.g., cleaning supplies, kitchenware, etc.), shoes, personal care products (e.g., cosmetics, skincare, hair care, etc.), clothing and accessories (e.g., African fabrics, readymade clothes, jewelry, etc.), building material (e.g. cement, rods, tarpaulin etc.) and electronic goods (e.g., phones, laptops, home appliances, etc). Some Nigerian women are involved in wholesales, (buying and selling of goods in bulk to other traders or retailers) while a few are importers and exporters (trading goods between Nigeria and Cameroon or other countries. Some of these women are very rich while many of them are still struggling to make a living.

### *3.6.2. Small-Scale Entrepreneurship*

Small-scale entrepreneurship is the next significant economic activity among Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon. Some examples of small-scale entrepreneurial ventures are food processing like producing and selling local snacks like plantain chips, puff-puff, or meat pies, making and marketing spices, sauces, or condiments and processing and packaging local crops like cassava, maize, or rice. Another example is crafts, that is, creating and selling handmade jewelry, hair fascinator, beads, or accessories and weaving, sewing, or embroidering traditional clothing or textiles. Nigerian women are also involved in small scale services like hairdressing, braiding, or beauty services, providing event planning, catering, or decoration services, running a small-scale bakery, restaurant, or selling cooked food or snacks in markets or on the streets and tailoring and fashion designing.

It was equally noted 83.3% of Nigerian women do partnership and joint ventures with other Nigerians while only 16.7% work in partnership with Cameroonians despite the fact that majority of their customers are Cameroonians. They believe that Cameroonians cannot be as trusted as their fellow Nigerians and also that building partnership amongst themselves give them the opportunity to identify with people of common interest and give them security in the midst of the many challenges they encounter.

### *3.6.3. Agriculture*

Agriculture is an essential economic activity in the CDC (Cameroon Development Corporation) Tiko area, where Nigerian women are actively involved. They are involved in planting, nurturing, and harvesting of crops like cocoa, rubber, palm oil, and vegetables. These women provide cheap labor to CDC usually at their own detriment, as they are constantly being taken advantage of. Some Nigerian women in Tiko are also involved in animal husbandry; rearing livestock like poultry, pigs, goats, and cattle for meat, dairy, and eggs. More still, some of the women especially those from Akwa Ibom and Lagos states in Nigeria are engaged in freshwater or marine fishing to produce smoked fish for sale.

## **3.7. The social Activities of Nigeria Women in Tiko, Cameroon**

Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon engage in various social activities. These activities include:

### *3.7.1. The Nigerian Union*

Participating in the Nigerian union in Tiko is one of the major ways Nigerian women in Tiko engage with their community and maintain connections with their Nigerian heritage. The Nigerian union in Tiko provides a platform for women to connect with fellow Nigerians, build relationships, network, and socialize with other Nigerian women and families. The Nigerian Union promotes and preserves Nigerian culture, traditions, and values and enable Nigerian women access support systems, advice, and resources from fellow union members. The women participate in social events, such as cultural festivals, parties, funerals and other gatherings. The Nigerian Union offers a platform for Nigerian women in Tiko to collaborate with other Nigerian organizations and communities in Cameroon. By participating in the Nigerian union in Tiko, women can maintain their cultural identity, support one another, and contribute to the well-being of their community.

### *3.7.2. Family Meetings or Groups*

Joining family groups is another way Nigerian women in Tiko connect with their loved ones and maintain family ties. Family groups include extended family members: (aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives), nuclear family (husband, children, and immediate family), family associations (organizations for people with shared ancestry or clan affiliations), community-based groups (groups for people from the same village, town, or region), and cultural groups (organizations promoting specific cultural practices, traditions, or customs). By joining family groups, Nigerian women in Tiko strengthen family bonds, preserve cultural heritage, access support systems, participate in family decision-making, contribute to family well-being, connect with their roots, pass on traditions to younger generations, find a sense of belonging, collaborate on family projects and celebrate family milestones and events. Joining family groups helps Nigerian women in Tiko maintain their family connections, cultural identity, and support networks, which are essential for their well-being and success.

### *3.7.3. Women Meetings/Groups*

Furthermore, some Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon, organize and participate in women's meetings, which serve as a platform for: socialization, building relationships and networking with other women; empowerment, sharing knowledge, skills, and experiences to enhance personal growth; offering emotional support, advice, and resources; planning and executing community development projects; promoting and preserving Nigerian culture and traditions;

and supporting each other's businesses and entrepreneurial ventures. These women's meetings may be formal or informal, regular or occasional, and may be focused on specific themes or topics. By organizing and participating in these meetings, Nigerian women in Tiko foster a sense of community and belonging, enhance their personal and collective well-being, support each other's endeavors, develop leadership and entrepreneurial skills, address social and health issues and celebrate their identity and diversity. These meetings play a vital role in the lives of Nigerian women in Tiko, providing a safe space for connection, growth, and collective empowerment.

#### 3.7.4. *Njangi Groups*

Njangi groups are a traditional form of social organization among Cameroonians in Tiko and are also adopted among Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon. Thus, some Nigerian women belong to njangi groups of Nigerians and Cameroonians while others are members of njangi groups composed predominantly for Nigerians. Njangi groups are rotating savings clubs where members contribute a fixed amount regularly, and each member receives the total contribution once. Njangi offers a social support networks for providing emotional support, advice, resources, encouraging entrepreneurship, skill-sharing, financial independence and celebrations of social events like parties and other gatherings. Njangi groups play a vital role in the lives of Nigerian women in Tiko, providing a platform for financial inclusion, social connection, personal growth, community engagement and socialization. By participating in Njangi groups, Nigerian women in Tiko enhance their well-being, empower themselves and others, and preserve their cultural heritage.

#### 3.7.5. *Religious Groups and Churches*

Many Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon, engage in various religious groups and churches, including Christian churches (e.g., Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal), Islamic organizations, traditional religious groups, prayer groups, bible study groups, women's fellowships, church choirs, charismatic groups, evangelical organizations and interfaith dialogue groups. By participating in religious groups and churches, Nigerian women in Tiko acquire spiritual growth and development, community support and connection, emotional comfort and solace, opportunities for leadership and empowerment, platforms for socialization and networking, support for personal and family challenges, engagement in charitable and community service activities and have a sense of belonging and identity. Nigerian women in Tiko find fulfillment, support, and a sense of purpose through engagement in religious groups and churches, which enhance their overall well-being and quality of life. These can be seen in the story of 40 year old Nigerian women from Abia state Nigeria:

"I don't joke with my church activities because it is God that gives me the strength to work and only He has power to bless and protect me. When I came to Tiko, life was very difficult; it was not easy to meet up with the needs of my family. The church helped me with money to feed me and my children and also prayed for us. Last year, they gave me money to add to my business and now my business has progressed. Because of the love I have received from the church I am more committed than ever in my church activities because the Church is my family"

### **3.8. Challenges faced by Nigerian Women in Tiko**

Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon face a number of challenges which will be elaborated as below:

#### 3.8.1. *Cultural and Language Barrier*

The cultural and language barrier is a significant challenge faced by Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon. Many participants noted that they find it difficult to adjust to Cameroonian customs, norms, and values, which differ significantly from their own. Unfamiliarity with local social etiquette, such as greetings, communication styles, and dress codes, do lead to misunderstandings and unintended offense with their Cameroonian counterpart. Furthermore, adapting to new food habits and culinary practices is challenging. Moreover, language differences with Cameroonian languages is also a barrier as Nigerian women speak English, Igbo, Yoruba, or other Nigerian languages, while Cameroonian languages like French, English, and local dialects are spoken in Tiko. Therefore, limited proficiency in the local language in Tiko leads to difficulties in communicating with locals, accessing services, and navigating everyday situations. Language barriers lead to feelings of isolation and exclusion from social interactions, community events, and economic opportunities. Also, language barriers hinder economic opportunities, such as employment, entrepreneurship, and financial inclusion. These cultural and language barriers can have a profound impact on Nigerian women's daily lives, mental health, and overall well-being in Tiko, Cameroon. This challenge can better be understood from 35 year migrant from Anambra State Nigeria:

"I came to Cameroon in 2018 to live with my aunt who owns a cosmetic shop in Tiko main market. When I came I hated Cameroon people so much because they talk and eat anyhow, they lack good manner of approach and young

Cameroonian girls keep giving birth to children out of wedlock and they have a poor sense of dressing. Moreover, I really hated the Cameroon pidgin which is very different from the Nigerian pidgin. This made me stay home most of the time because every time I go to my aunt's shop I ended up quarreling with Cameroonian customers. However, I am changing my attitude with time."

### *3.8.2. Discrimination and Stereotypes*

Discrimination and stereotypes are significant challenges faced by Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon. They face gender bias limiting their access to education, employment, and healthcare. They also experience discrimination based on their Nigerian nationality, leading to social exclusion and marginalization. They equally face discrimination based on their socioeconomic status, education level, or occupation. Furthermore, Nigerian women in Tiko are viewed as strangers who have come to rob off the Cameroon nationals of their inheritance. They are stereotyped based on negative perceptions of Nigeria, such as being seen as "scammers" or "doubled face" or "too aggressive" or "hardworking". These discrimination and stereotypes lead to social exclusion, limited opportunities, mental health issues, low self-esteem, marginalization and stigma.

### *3.8.3. Gender-based Violence and harassment*

Gender-based violence (GBV) and harassment are serious challenges faced by Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon. The GBV they experience are physical violence (such as beating, slapping, or assault), sexual violence (including rape, sexual assault, or harassment), emotional violence (such as intimidation, humiliation, or constant criticism), economic violence (including denial of financial resources or access to education and employment) and psychological violence (manipulation, gas lighting or constant belittling). Nigerian women also face verbal harassment (e.g. catcalling, insults, or vulgar language), non-verbal harassment (such as unwanted touching, gestures, or leering) and public harassment in public spaces, including streets, markets, or public transportation. These gender-based violence and harassment have severe consequences, including: physical injuries, emotional trauma, mental health issues, social isolation, stigma and shame, fear and anxiety, and limited participation in social activities. Sister A (anonymous) a 23 year old Nigerian from Bayelsa state accounted ordeal of gender-based violence experiences:

"Every time I go to the shop to sell for my dad, there is this Cameroonian male neighbor who always comes around and touches me inappropriately on my breasts and butt. When I want to complain, he will insult and intimidate me that I can do nothing to him because I am a mere foreigner and that I can never win a case against him. He sometimes threatens to call the immigration police to arrest me since he knows I don't have residency documents to stay legally in Cameroon. Also, other male customers also do this same thing to me very often. One unfortunate day when I had closed from the market, going home alone at night, I was raped by two men and almost died. I was hospitalized for 2 months before being discharged. This was the most traumatic experience of my life and I don't know when I will ever get over it"

It's essential to address these gender-based violence and harassment through education, policy changes, and community engagement to create a safer and more equitable environment for Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon.

### *3.8.4. High Cost of Resident Permit and Police Brutality*

The high cost of resident permits and police brutality are the most significant challenges faced by Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon. Law No 97/12 of January 1997 and Decree No 2000/286 of 12 October specifying conditions for entry, stay and exit of foreigners in Cameroon requires that for foreigners to have a stay in Cameroon, they must obtain a resident permit which cost the sum of 120,000 FCFA. However, Nigerian women in Tiko are charged close to 200,000 FCFA before a resident permit is issued. Most of the Nigerian women cannot afford this high cost of resident permit, as they are struggling to provide the needs of their families here in Tiko and also cater for the needs of their families in Nigeria. As such many Nigerian women in Tiko evade residency compliance, exposing them to constant immigration police harassment and brutality. Some Nigerian women have sustained serious injuries and even died from such brutality. These women are arrested and requested to pay huge sums of money as fines which goes into the private pockets of the immigration officers that is never accounted for. Yet, the women will still be arrested in the days ahead if they still haven't complied with the residency law. The high cost limits access to resident permits, making it difficult for Nigerian women to move freely, live and work in Tiko. Sometimes, even when they pay for their residence permit, there is high uncertainty of it being issued because some immigration officers divert the money into their pockets. Furthermore, Nigerian women face intimidations from police officers, including demands for bribes or sexual favors. Police officers extort money or other forms of compensation from Nigerian women under the threat of arrest or deportation. The financial stress and uncertainty of obtaining a resident permit can cause significant stress and anxiety. See the story of 61 year old Nigerian woman from Delta State Nigeria:

“My right leg is handicapped today because I was home one night sleeping around 11pm when I heard some people broke into my house, only to be told they were immigration officers. I tried to run but I was dragged and severely beaten until my right leg was badly injured. The most painful part is that an immigration officer had collected money from me the previous week promising to issue me a residency card but failed to do so. When I went to their office, the officer completely denied receiving money from me to produce a residency card. It’s been 15 years since that brutality but my leg has not healed from the pains I incurred. This has negatively affected my life as I cannot do business to take care of myself and children. It is my children who are struggling to take care of me with the little they make.”

Police harassment creates a climate of fear and mistrust, making Nigerian women reluctant to seek help or report crimes. This situation is very deplorable to Nigerian women in Tiko as these women are being exploited and violated. Addressing these challenges requires policy changes, education, and community engagement to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon.

### **3.9. Coping Strategies of Nigerian Women in Tiko, Cameroon**

Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon, have developed various coping strategies to deal with the challenges they face. Here are some of these strategies:

#### *3.9.1. Social support networks*

Nigerian women in Tiko cope by building social support networks. A social support network refers to the relationships and connections that provide emotional, practical, and informational support to an individual. For Nigerian women in Tiko, a social support network include: family members (such as spouses, children, siblings, and extended family who offer emotional support and practical help), close friends who provide emotional support, companionship, and a sense of belonging, community members (like neighbors and colleagues who offer practical help, advice, and emotional support), informal women's groups who share experiences, provide support, and empower each other, and religious communities comprised of religious leaders, congregations, and fellow worshippers who offer spiritual support, guidance, and a sense of community. Having a strong social support network help Nigerian women in Tiko build resilience, manage stress and trauma, access resources and information, develop a sense of belonging, improve mental and physical health, enhance economic empowerment, increase confidence and self-esteem, navigate cultural and social challenges, find emotional support and validation and develop a sense of purpose and identity.

#### *3.9.2. Engaging in Economic Empowerment*

Economic empowerment is a vital coping strategy for Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon. It involves acquiring the skills, resources, and confidence to manage one's financial affairs effectively, make informed decisions, and improve one's economic status. Here are some ways noted by participants that economic empowerment serves as a coping strategy: earning an income or generating wealth enables Nigeria women to make choices and decisions without being dependent on others. Economic empowerment allows the women to afford basic needs, such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education, for themselves and their families. Financial stability reduces women's vulnerability to exploitation, abuse, and poverty, boosts self-esteem and confidence, enabling women to assert themselves and make their voices heard. Economic empowerment also provides access to resources, such as credit, savings, and investments, which help Nigerian women weather financial storms. Moreover, economic empowerment fosters resilience, enabling Nigerian women to better cope with challenges, such as poverty, discrimination, and gender-based violence. By achieving economic empowerment, Nigerian women in Tiko can transform their lives, break cycles of poverty, and create a brighter future for themselves and their communities.

#### *3.9.3. Taking Legal Actions*

Taking legal action is the least coping strategy for few Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon, who are bold enough in the face of challenges. Some Nigerian women have taken legal actions against perpetrators of gender-based violence, discrimination, property disputes, divorce and child custody, sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse. Legal action provides a sense of control, justice, and empowerment. It can also serve as a deterrent to others who may be perpetuating harm. However, it's important to note that taking legal action also have its challenges, such as: cost and accessibility, time-consuming and complex processes, emotional toll and trauma, potential backlash or retaliation, corruption or bias in the legal system, fear of being ostracized or isolated by the Nigerian community and limited support systems. Despite these challenges, taking legal action has been a powerful coping strategy for few courageous Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon, and help them access justice, assert their rights, and reclaim their power.

### *3.9.4. Taking a holiday to their Families in Nigeria*

Going on holiday in Nigeria is a coping strategy for many Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon, as it allows them to take a break from stress and trauma, reconnect with family and friends, enjoy cultural and social activities, relax and rejuvenate, feel a sense of freedom and independence, escape from difficult situations or environments, reflect and recharge, pursue hobbies and interests and create happy memories. Christmas and Easter periods are the best seasons in which most Nigerian women travel to their home towns in Nigeria like Lagos, Owerri, Abuja, Calabar, Port Harcourt, Benin City, Ibadan, Uyo and Osogbo. By taking a holiday in Nigeria, Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon, return feeling refreshed, revitalized, and better equipped to cope with challenges. However, taking such holidays can be very costly and usually take a negative toll on their businesses, reducing their capital and affecting turn over.

### *3.9.5. Getting Married to Cameroonian Men*

Although getting married to a Cameroonian man does not guarantee citizenship, few Nigerian women are using this as a coping strategy, as it allows them to gain protection from their husbands especially against police aggression and other perpetrators, improve their economic situation, gain social acceptance and integration, form emotional connections and build a family, enhance their sense of belonging and identity, develop a support system and learn about and embrace Cameroonian culture. Ultimately, getting married to Cameroonian men can be a positive and empowering experience for Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon, if approached with awareness, respect, and mutual understanding. This is reflected in the story of 39 year old Nigerian woman from Enugu State Nigeria:

“I didn’t want to go through the stigma and aggression I saw other Nigerian women going through, so I went on a secret mission to seduce a military Cameroon man to fall in love with me and marry me. For me it was not love at first but with time I have grown to love this man so dearly because he protects me and makes me feel safe. Nobody can talk or treat me anyhow. In fact many people address me by my husband’s name and so many people mistake me for a Cameroonian. This makes me feel great and I am so proud of myself for taking such a beautiful decision to marry my husband. My husband recently secured me a Cameroonian national identity card which allows me travel freely to any part of Cameroon without restriction. I feel more like a Cameroonian like a Nigerian. But I will not advise anyone to follow my footsteps because they may not be lucky as I am.”

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## **4. Conclusion**

The socioeconomic space of Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon is complex and multifaceted. Despite facing numerous challenges such as cultural and language barrier, discrimination and stereotypes, gender-based violence, discrimination, and high cost of resident permit and police brutality, Nigerian women in Tiko have demonstrated resilience and agency in navigating their circumstances. Through various coping strategies, including social support networks, economic empowerment, and legal action. Nigerian women in Tiko are reclaiming their power and asserting their rights. Additionally, some have found solace in marrying Cameroonian men, which can provide a sense of belonging and security. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the structural barriers and systemic inequalities that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and socioeconomic exclusion. Addressing these underlying issues is essential to creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for Nigerian women in Tiko. Ultimately, the experiences of Nigerian women in Tiko serve as a testament to the strength and adaptability of women in the face of adversity. By amplifying their voices and advocating for their rights, we can work towards creating a more just and equitable society for all.

Therefore, advocacy for policy reforms have to be implemented to address gender-based discrimination, promote economic empowerment, legal support and protection from gender-based violence, social programs to foster community engagement and social cohesion and empowerment initiatives to promote economic independence and self-sufficiency. By implementing these recommendations, we can help create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Nigerian women in Tiko, Cameroon.

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## **Compliance with ethical standards**

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.



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