



## Socioeconomic Dynamics of Migrant Remittances and Nutritional Well-Being among Rural Esan Households in Southern Nigeria

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**Abstract.** The relationship between migrant remittances and household nutritional well-being has become an important lens for understanding livelihood transformation in developing societies. Among the Esan of southern Nigeria, this nexus remains underexplored despite growing migration and dependence on external income. Existing studies often emphasize economic outcomes, neglecting how remittances reshape everyday feeding behaviour and nutrition. Despite the improvement in current research there is paucity on current study this seeks to interrogates how remittance flows influence dietary practices and nutritional security among Esan households in Edo State. Adopting a cross-sectional and an expository research design, the study employed a Triangulation of both Quantitative and qualitative approach to generate the required information through the use of questionnaire and an in-depth interview guild was complementarily utilized on 726 respondents who were systematically selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure across two clusters in Esanland. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis. Findings reveals that migrant remittances exert a substantial but differentiated influence on household nutritional status as well as wellbeing among Esan communities. Secondly, socio-demographic factors such as age, occupation, and social status influences household perceived utilization of remittances in enhancing dietary diversity, food quality, and affordability, based on the above, conclusion and advocacy was deduced

**Keywords:** Nutrition, Wellbeing, Remittances, Food security.

### 1. Introduction

Nutrition represents a core requirement for human survival and socio-biological development, referring to the systematic processes through which the body obtains, metabolizes, and utilizes food to sustain growth, generate energy, repair tissues, and preserve optimal physical and mental functioning. Effective

nutrition relies on the adequate intake, digestion, absorption, and utilization of essential nutrients, including carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, and water. Despite its centrality to well-being, malnutrition persists as a major global public health challenge, with rural populations bearing a disproportionate burden due to structural, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities. Recent evidence indicates that about 33.3 percent of rural adults experience moderate to severe food insecurity, compared with 26 percent in urban settings. In sub-Saharan Africa, structural inequalities, poverty, weak infrastructure, and limited dietary diversity contribute to persistently high levels of child stunting and wasting, often surpassing national undernourishment averages such as those reported in Nigeria (Adeyanju & Fadupin, 2024; UNICEF, 2024).

Within this context, migration has emerged as a significant socioeconomic strategy for household survival and welfare enhancement. The movement of persons across local and international boundaries generates remittance flows in the form of money, food, and material support to households in migrant-sending communities. These transfers reshape household economic capacities and consumption patterns. By augmenting income, remittances improve access to diverse and adequate food, thereby strengthening nutritional well-being. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that remittance-receiving households allocate more resources to food and health needs, resulting in improved nutritional outcomes (Babatunde, 2018; Davis & Brazil, 2016; Alenkhe, 2011). Consequently, migrant remittances operate as a critical socioeconomic mechanism linking migration processes to nutrition security in vulnerable rural households.

Nutrition constitutes a foundational household necessity, closely linked to livelihoods and overall well-being. Scholars such as Yuri, Urama, and Urom (2018) and Ndisika (2018) observe that migrants routinely transmit financial and material resources to

support the needs of relatives in their places of origin. These remittances serve not only as economic transfers but also as social instruments that sustain familial ties and enhance household food security, extending their influence beyond the immediate family unit to broader community welfare (Sadoh & Alenkhe, 2014). In many developing contexts, however, pervasive poverty continues to undermine access to adequate and nutritious food. In Nigeria, worsening economic conditions, rising food prices, and income instability have intensified vulnerabilities to hunger and malnutrition (Isenyo, 2016).

Although remittances are widely assumed to cushion households against food insecurity, their actual contribution to nutritional well-being remains uneven and context-specific. The ways in which remittance income is allocated, the stability of transfers, and existing socioeconomic constraints may mediate their effectiveness in improving diet quality rather than merely increasing food quantity. Despite the prominence of migration in southern Nigeria, particularly among the Esan people who constitute the second-largest ethnic group in Edo State (NPC, 2016), empirical evidence linking remittance flows to concrete nutritional outcomes in rural Esan households is limited. This gap raises critical questions about whether migrant remittances translate

into sustained improvements in nutrition or simply provide short-term coping mechanisms. Consequently, examining the socioeconomic dynamics through which remittances shape food security and nutritional well-being among rural Esan households becomes both timely and necessary.

## **2. Research Methodology**

A cross-sectional survey and expository research design was adopted for the study as it seeks to examine Esan rural household members who maintain regular contact with family members residing outside their home communities as well as their remittances influence on their nutritional status and wellbeing. The research was conducted across sixteen purposively selected communities within two Local Government Areas (Esan West and Esan North-East) in the Edo Central Senatorial District of Edo State. 726 respondents were systematically selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure across two clusters in Esanland. Also, household Head were interviewed using purposive sampling. Data collected were analysed using an descriptive statistic for the quantitative and for the qualitative data, thematic content analysis was adopted to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights relevant to the study findings

3. Findings

Variables	Response categories	Esan North East (n=348)	Esan-West (n=378)	Total (n=726)
Age	21-30	1 (0.3)	31 (8.2)	32 (4.4)
	31-40	18 (5.2)	47 (12.4)	65 (9.0)
	41-50	94 (27.0)	144 (38.1)	238 (32.8)
	51-60	144 (41.4)	111 (29.4)	255 (35.1)
	61-70	74 (21.3)	35 (9.3)	109 (15.0)
	70+	17 (4.9)	10 (2.6)	27 (3.7)
	<i>Mean Age</i>			
Sex	Male	181 (52.0)	202 (53.4)	383 (52.8)
	Female	167 (48.0)	176 (46.6)	343 (47.2)
Highest Level of Education	No formal education	89 (25.5)	81 (21.4)	170 (23.4)
	Primary Six	65 (18.7)	48 (12.7)	113 (15.6)
	SSCE	50 (14.4)	73 (19.3)	123 (16.9)
	OND	41 (11.8)	48 (12.7)	89 (12.3)
	HND/BSc	64 (18.4)	70 (18.5)	134 (18.5)
	MSc	23 (6.6)	37 (9.8)	60 (8.3)
	PhD	16 (4.6)	21 (5.6)	37 (5.1)
Marital Status	Single	33 (9.5)	61 (16.1)	94 (12.9)
	Cohabiting	21 (6.0)	30 (7.9)	51 (7.0)
	Married	225 (64.7)	227 (60.1)	452 (62.3)
	Divorced/Separated	31 (8.9)	39 (10.3)	70 (9.6)
	Widowed	38 (10.9)	21 (5.6)	59 (8.1)
Occupation	Unemployed	42 (12.1)	86 (22.8)	128 (17.6)
	Student	-	4 (1.1)	4 (0.6)
	Self-employed	191 (54.9)	161 (42.6)	352 (48.5)
	Civil servant	86 (24.7)	98 (25.9)	184 (25.3)
	Banker	13 (3.7)	13 (3.4)	26 (3.6)
	Religious leader	13 (3.7)	11 (2.9)	24 (3.3)
	Others	3 (0.9)	5 (1.3)	8 (1.1)
Position in the Household	Husband	132 (37.9)	128 (33.9)	260 (35.8)
	Wife	109 (31.3)	108 (28.6)	217 (29.9)
	Daughter	43 (12.4)	63 (16.7)	106 (14.6)
	Son	54 (15.5)	76 (20.1)	130 (17.9)
	Other	10 (2.9)	3 (0.8)	13 (1.8)
Religion	Christianity	205 (58.9)	217 (57.4)	422 (58.1)
	Islam	66 (19.0)	86 (22.8)	152 (20.9)
	African Traditional Religion	77 (22.1)	75 (19.8)	152 (20.9)
Monthly income	Less than N15000	37 (10.6)	35 (9.3)	72 (9.9)
	N15000 – N20000	50 (14.4)	66 (17.5)	116 (16.0)
	N20001 – N40000	47 (13.5)	73 (19.3)	120 (16.5)
	N40001 – N60000	40 (11.5)	63 (16.7)	103 (14.2)
	N60001 – N80000	66 (19.0)	48 (12.7)	114 (15.7)
	N80001 – N100000	69 (19.8)	47 (12.4)	116 (16.0)
	N100000 and above	39 (11.2)	46 (12.2)	85 (11.7)

**Table 1:** Distribution by the socio-demographic data of respondents

*NB: Figures in parentheses are in percentage (%)*

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents from the household survey. The mean age of respondents was 50.24 ± 9.93 years, indicating a predominantly middle-aged population. Age distribution shows that most respondents in Esan North East (41.4%) and Esan West (38.1%) were within the 41–50 age bracket, representing about one-third (32.8%) of the total sample. The youngest cohort (21–30 years) was least represented, accounting for only 0.3% in Esan North East and 8.2% in Esan West. Sex composition was relatively balanced across the two LGAs, with males constituting 52.0% in Esan North East and 53.4% in Esan West, while females represented 48.0% and 46.6% respectively. Educational attainment indicates that a substantial proportion possessed tertiary qualifications, particularly HND/BSc (18.4% in Esan North East; 18.5% in Esan West) and MSc (6.6% and 9.8%). Nevertheless, about one-quarter of respondents reported no formal education (25.5% in Esan North East; 21.4% in Esan West).

Marital status shows marriage as the dominant category, comprising 64.7% of respondents in Esan North East and 60.1% in Esan West. Singles and divorced/separated respondents were more prevalent in Esan West than in Esan North East. Occupationally, self-employment predominated in both areas (54.9% in Esan North East; 42.6% in Esan West),

though unemployment was higher in Esan West (22.8%) than Esan North East (12.1%). Within households, respondents were mainly husbands and wives. Christianity emerged as the major religion, followed by African Traditional Religion. Income distribution indicates concentration within the ₦20,001–₦40,000 and ₦60,001–₦80,000 brackets, while the lowest earners (<₦15,000) constituted the smallest share in both LGAs.

Variables	Response categories	Esan North East (n=348)	Esan-West (n=378)	Total (n=726)
Number of Household members that migrated	1-3	318 (91.4)	320 (84.7)	638 (87.9)
	4-6	29 (8.3)	47 (12.4)	76 (10.5)
	7 and above	1 (0.3)	11 (2.9)	12 (1.7)
Types of migration/ remittances they engaged in	Internal	206 (59.2)	296 (78.5)	502 (69.2)
	International	135 (38.8)	74 (19.6)	209 (28.8)
	Both internal and international	7 (2.0)	7 (1.9)	14 (1.9)
Relationship with the migrant	Father	20 (5.7)	49 (13.0)	69 (9.5)
	Mother	9 (2.6)	49 (13.0)	58 (8.0)
	Brother	90 (25.9)	67 (17.7)	157 (21.6)
	Sister	42 (12.1)	43 (11.4)	85 (11.7)
	Son	74 (21.3)	70 (18.5)	144 (19.8)
	Daughter	46 (13.2)	30 (7.9)	76 (10.5)
	Cousin	49 (14.1)	39 (10.3)	88 (12.1)
	Distant relatives	18 (5.2)	31 (8.2)	49 (6.7)
Duration the migrant has been away	Less than a year	92 (26.4)	104 (27.5)	196 (27.0)
	1-3 years	61 (17.5)	115 (30.4)	176 (24.2)
	3-5 years	89 (25.6)	72 (19.0)	161 (22.2)
	5 years +	106 (30.5)	87 (23.0)	193 (26.6)
If the migrant call home regularly	Yes	218 (62.6)	268 (70.9)	486 (66.9)
	No	130 (37.4)	110 (29.1)	240 (33.1)
The frequency of migrant calling home	Daily	102 (29.3)	155 (41.0)	257 (35.4)
	Weekly	140 (40.2)	82 (21.7)	222 (30.6)
	Bi-monthly	70 (20.1)	35 (9.3)	105 (14.5)
	Monthly	23 (6.6)	54 (14.3)	77 (10.6)
	Anytime	13 (3.7)	52 (13.8)	65 (9.0)
If the migrant often visits home	Yes	130 (37.4)	234 (61.9)	364 (50.1)
	No	218 (62.6)	144 (38.1)	362 (49.9)
The migrant has sent home items in the last one year	Yes	246 (70.7)	284 (75.1)	530 (73.0)
	No	102 (29.3)	94 (24.9)	196 (27.0)
Amount remitted in the past one year	Below N100, 000	35 (22.0)	22 (15.6)	57 (19.0)
	N100,001-N200,000	52 (32.7)	23 (16.3)	75 (25.0)
	N200,001-N300,000	21 (13.2)	12 (8.5)	33 (11.0)
	N300,001-N400,000	9 (5.7)	3 (2.1)	12 (4.0)
	N400,001-N500,000	6 (3.8)	12 (8.5)	18 (6.0)
	N500,001-N600,000	3 (1.9)	15 (10.6)	18 (6.0)
	N600,001-N700,000	-	7 (5.0)	7 (2.3)
	N700,001-N800,000	6 (3.8)	5 (3.5)	11 (3.7)
	N800,001 +	27 (17.0)	42 (29.8)	69 (23.0)
The frequency with which migrants send money and items back home	More than 3 times	44 (29.9)	38 (23.8)	82 (26.7)
	2-3 times	81 (55.1)	91 (56.9)	172 (56.0)
	More than 1 time	22 (15.0)	31 (19.4)	53 (17.3)

**Table 2:** Distribution by Social Relationship with Migrant

**NB:** Figures in parentheses are in percentage (%)

The analysis of Tables 2 reveals households' social relationships with migrants. The findings indicate that most households in both Esan North East and Esan West had between one and three migrant members, accounting for 91.4% and 84.7% respectively. Only a small proportion reported four to six migrants, while very few households had seven or more migrant members (0.3% in Esan North East and about 2.9% in Esan West). Regarding migration type, internal migration predominated across both LGAs, representing 59.2% of migrants in Esan North East and 78.5% in Esan West. International migration was less common, accounting for 38.8% in Esan North East and 19.6% in Esan West, while only marginal proportions combined internal and international mobility.

In terms of kinship ties, brothers constituted the largest category of migrants (25.9% in Esan North East; 17.7% in Esan West). Fathers, sons, and daughters also featured prominently, whereas mothers, sisters, cousins, and distant relatives were comparatively fewer. Duration of absence shows that most migrants had lived away for over five years (30.5% in Esan North East; 23.0% in Esan West), followed by those away for one to three years. Communication patterns indicate sustained social ties, as most households reported regular contact with migrants (62.6% in Esan North East; 70.9% in Esan West), with weekly communication being the most common. Visiting behaviour differed significantly: most migrants in Esan West visited home frequently (61.9%), whereas the majority in Esan North East did not (62.6%).

Remittance behaviour was widespread, with over two-thirds of households receiving money or items in the preceding year (70.7% in Esan North East; 75.1% in Esan West). Amounts commonly ranged between ₦100,001–₦200,000 and ₦200,001–₦300,000. Transfers below ₦100,000 also constituted notable shares. Remittances were typically sent two to three times annually, followed by households receiving transfers more than three times within the year.

**Table 3:** Changes Resulting from Remittances on Current Nutritional Status of Esan Households with at least one Migrant

Variables	Response categories	Esan North East(n=348)	Esan-West (n=378)	Total (n=726)
Remittances from migrant affects the household feeding	Yes	211 (60.6)	241 (63.8)	452 (62.3)
	No	137 (39.4)	137 (36.2)	274 (37.7)
State how remittances affected the household feeding	Feeding more regularly	17 (8.1)	16 (6.6)	33 (7.3)
	Availability of more food	31 (14.7)	31 (12.9)	62 (13.7)
	Eating of variety of meals	76 (36.0)	96 (39.8)	172 (38.1)
	Changing diet	25 (11.8)	30 (12.4)	55 (12.2)
	Feeding well/better	24 (11.4)	27 (11.2)	51 (11.3)
	Access to resources for food	26 (12.3)	15 (6.2)	41 (9.1)
	Increase in food quality/quantity	12 (5.7)	26 (10.8)	38 (8.4)
Before remittances, daily meal variety was not achievable	Yes	243 (69.8)	290 (76.7)	533 (73.4)
	No	105 (30.2)	88 (23.3)	193 (26.6)
There are changes now resulting from remittances	Yes	160 (65.8)	192 (66.4)	352 (66.2)
	No	83 (34.2)	97 (33.6)	180 (33.8)
State the changes	Improved food quality	70(20.2)	53(14)	123(35.0)
	Enhanced food affordability	49(14.1)	58(15.4)	107(30.5)
	Adequate nutritional rich diet	38(10.9)	83(22.0)	121(34.5)
Food intake is richer and better due to remittances	Yes	179 (51.4)	190 (50.3)	369 (50.8)
	No	169 (48.6)	188 (49.7)	357 (49.2)
If yes, Please explain	Regular daily meal variety	34 (9.8)	53 (14.0)	87 (12.0)
	Better meal	1 (0.3)	18 (4.8)	19 (2.6)
	Better quality meal	51 (14.7)	21 (5.6)	72 (9.9)
	Complete diet	30 (8.6)	30 (7.9)	60 (8.3)
	More proteinous meal	53 (15.2)	66 (17.5)	119 (16.4)

**NB:** Figures in parentheses are in percentage (%)

Results from the table present the distribution of respondents according to changes in nutritional outcomes associated with migrant remittances among Esan households with at least one migrant member. Findings indicate that remittances significantly shape household feeding practices in both Esan North East

and Esan West. Specifically, 60.6% of respondents in Esan North East and 63.8% in Esan West acknowledged that remittances influence household feeding patterns, while a smaller proportion expressed contrary views. In terms of mechanisms, remittances were widely perceived to enhance dietary diversity

and food availability. A large share of households reported increased consumption of varied meals (38.1%) and improved food availability (13.7%). Others noted changes in diet composition (12.2%), better feeding practices (11.3%), greater capacity to purchase preferred foods (9.1%), and improved food quality and quantity (8.4%). Only a few respondents indicated more regular feeding as the main effect.

Before receiving remittances, most households lacked daily meal variety. Evidence shows that 69.8% of households in Esan North East and 76.7% in Esan West did not enjoy diverse meals prior to migrant support, underscoring existing nutritional constraints. Following remittance inflows, 66.2% of respondents reported noticeable changes in dietary habits, suggesting that remittances contribute to the modification of food consumption patterns. Post-remittance improvements were mainly reflected in enhanced food quality (35.0%), improved affordability of nutritious foods (30.5%), and greater access to nutritionally rich diets (24.0%). A smaller proportion emphasized strengthened food security (10.5%), indicating improved availability, access, utilization, and stability of food supplies.

Perception of nutritional improvement was moderately positive. About half of respondents in both Esan North East (51.4%) and Esan West (50.3%) believed that their food intake had become richer and better due to remittances, whereas nearly half remained unconvinced. Among those perceiving improvement, the dominant reasons included increased consumption of protein-rich foods (16.4%), regular meal variety (12.0%), and better-quality meals (9.9%). Others cited access to complete diets (8.3%). Overall, while remittances enhance several dimensions of household nutrition, perceptions of benefit vary across socio-demographic contexts and expectations.

In corroboration with the above findings, respondent gave determinant for their narratives on the changes or no change in their nutritional habit despite the initiation of migrant remittances. This ranges from factors such as Age, occupation, non-active service and social status influences the participant responses. On the positive response from participants, respondents stated that age, occupation and social status play key role in influencing the respondent's narrative on the subject matter.

### Age

On the ground of age, there may seem to be no changes on the household head but on the household members the narrative seems different as a respondents said:

I am an old man who is closer to where he is going to than where he is coming from. Food to me now is never a priority as I hardly eat huge chunk of food especially considering my health. However, with my children money I eat what I want especially fresh vegetable, fish and other things that will help prolong my health. But my household members are feeding well and better because their siblings outside is sending them money for their upkeep. (IDI – Male Retired civil servant- Esan North East- 2023)

From another participant, the narrative shows that remittances from children critically supports the family's sustenance and dignity amid economic hardship. He noted that:

The money they (my children) sent to me has been of great help in my household feeding as well as our daily upkeep. My son knows how the situation is at home and they help me to cover the disgrace of not only getting quality food to eat but in varieties. especially this critical time where the government is not helping matters. (IDI- Male Pensioner- Esan North West - 2023)

### Social Status

Social status is a determinant to the responses of respondents on the influence of remittances on current nutritional status of household members. As a respondents said:

My son, no amount of money is too much, when it comes to feeding. I have many households to feed and my income cannot carry it but the support from my children especially the ones overseas, have made it easier for me to carry on without complain. The amount of money we spend on feeding is no small amount. We buy bag of rice every month, not the soup ingredients, nor other food items like yams, beans, etc. look at me I eat certain food due to my health and based on doctors' prescription, so plantain, wheat, beans etc. are the kind of food I eat and it has been easier getting it with the money from my children. So, I can say that my feeding habit have been duly improved due to the money from my children outside the state. (IDI-Elder Stateman and Politician- Esan West-2023)

In a similar response, a participant gave his narrative that the daughter's migration and subsequent financial support have significantly alleviated the burden of feeding and improved the diet for the retired participant household. It was narrated that:

My son, as a retiree and position in this community. things are pretty tough and the travelling of my children (especially my daughter) came at the right time. Upon retirement, feeding my household was not

an easy task and the burden was becoming increasingly too much, until she travelled. Her support for our feeding is greatly helpful in quality and quantity by enriching our diet/meal to a great extent. She has taken the burden off my shoulder (IDI- Retired Male Civil servant- Esan West-2023)

### Occupation

Occupation is also a determinant that influences the perception of the participant toward the influence of remittances on nutritional status as well as the feeding habit of household members. In this, a narrator suggests that while financial support from relatives abroad has been consistent, it has not significantly altered their already satisfactory feeding habit. In his word:

My son, as men grow old, they eat less. Whether they have the money or not. My relative oversea have been sending money home for our welfare and upkeep which covers feeding. I may say there is no significant change in the feeding habit in my household because we are feeding well before they left and we are still feeding well now (IDI – Farmer-Esan North East-2023)

### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study reveals that migrant remittances exert a substantial but differentiated influence on household nutritional status as well as wellbeing among Esan communities. While remittances generally enhance dietary diversity, food quality, and affordability, their effects are mediated by socio-demographic factors such as age, occupation, and social status. Households with greater dependency and social obligations experience stronger nutritional gains, whereas those already food-secure report marginal change. Overall, remittances function as an important livelihood strategy, improving nutritional wellbeing while reflecting existing social and economic heterogeneity.

Based on these, the study advocates the following:

- Government and development agencies should integrate nutrition education into rural livelihood programs to help households utilize remittances more effectively for balanced and nutrient-rich diets, especially for vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly.
- Governmental should enact Policies that encourage households to channel part of remittances into small-scale agriculture and food-related enterprises such as home

gardening, poultry, food storage. thereby improving long-term food security beyond short-term consumption gains.

- Local governments should expand livelihood support and social protection schemes for households without migrants to reduce nutritional inequality and ensure broader access to quality food, since remittance benefits are socially differentiated.

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