

## GENDER ROLES IN SUBSISTENCE CROP PRODUCTION IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA.

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### ABSTRACT

The paper describes the major sources of food production in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study strictly examines the participation of women in the production system which hitherto has been invisible. The primary data for this study were obtained as part of a larger survey of rural women in Kwara State between 1989 and 1990. The analysis is based on the descriptive examinations of women agricultural activities in four Local Government Areas. As a result of the emphasis on market economy that features very prominently in National Income accounting, the erroneous belief that most rural women do not make an appreciable contribution to crop production is over-turned in this study. Most women take part in planting, weeding, harvesting and post-harvest activities of "subsistence" crops. Crop production in the study area is, therefore, a function of sexual division of labour. Also gender-specific constraints to women full participation in agricultural production are brought into focus. Recommendations are made on how to motivate and enhance women productivity in agriculture while making the work more pleasant.

**Key Words:** Subsistence crop production, gender roles.

### INTRODUCTION

**F**ood is one of the basic needs of man, but its provision is not always adequate for all nations especially Africa and other developing countries. Insufficiency of food had led man to seek better ways of producing it. Thus agriculture which is the art and science of the cultivation of land and livestock production is a major occupation of both male and female in many countries including Nigeria. However,, studies in agricultural production have repeatedly failed to take women's roles into significant account despite their customary activities in farming systems, particularly in African countries of which Nigeria is one (Boserup, 1970). This has resulted in consequences that are often detrimental to national food security, social status of women and agricultural programmes (Ajayi, 1992).

This paper, therefore, sets to synthesise the present knowledge of rural women's work situation in agricultural systems in old Kwara State. It is hope that the synthesis will be useful for agricultural development planning, both at the micro and macro levels.

### METHODOLOGY

The primary data for this work were obtained as part of a larger survey of rural women in four Local Government Areas (LGAs) of old Kwara State between 1989 and 1990. Based on Yate's (1960) and Libreor (1985) method for similar studies elsewhere, multistage sampling technique was adopted in selecting 25 villages and 1,100 respondents. In doing this, twenty five per cent (25%) of the rural settlement of which their population were accounted for by the 1963 Nigeria census were selected in each district. Also ten per cent (10%) of the household in the selected villages were chosen for the study using simple random sampling technique. In the selected houses one women farmer was used as the respondent. This process was used for spatial analytical trends by Kish (1965) and Haggett; (1975). Interviews were conducted among women in the study area to give wider coverage to the investigation and to gain better understanding of the variables. Though the farmers recorded the size of farms in heaps, the conversion into hectares was adopted using the ADP standard method. At the time of the survey it must be noted that three of the LGAs had not

been split into two each as shown in the discussion. The LGAs affected are Okehi and Adavi which used to be Okehi; Ijumu and Kabba which was known as Oyi LGA; and East and West Yagba which used to be Yagba LGA.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### (a) GENERAL OVERVIEW

Since few people live alone in these rural communities agricultural production is intrinsically a collaborative endeavour with agricultural household as the most common unit of production along sexual division of labour. Women in the study area play specific roles in agricultural production process. They grow, process, store and market food crops. They earn income through the sale of agricultural products as well as through agricultural wage labour. They are also active in community as well as in family life.

### (b) SEXUAL DIVISION OF FARM LABOUR.

Labour is a primary resource in peasant production system. Most peasant studies have treated household as a common pool of labour (Normann, 1983). However, cultural practices differentiate between female and male labour at two levels in the study area. The levels are:

- (i) Direct productive activities; and
- (ii) Supportive activities.

Table 1 present response that women participate in direct productive farm works at varying degrees. It also shows that men and women have separate but complementary responsibilities on farm works. From the table, women perform crucial roles in all aspects of crop production but more importantly in harvesting and post harvest operations on food crops. In all the seven Local Government Areas covered, women recorded 100 per cent in marketing of farm products. In terms of harvesting and processing, their percentage contribution is between 75 and 100 per cent. On the other hand, men are said to feature more in physically demanding works of land

preparation and weeding than women as recorded by the women.

Some of the factors which have brought about the relatively heavy involvement of women in food production are (1) fiscal policies of the early colonial period which drew men from the village to work on plantations, in mines or road construction; and (2) the spread of cash crops, particularly between the 1920s, and 1940s (Olatunbosun, 1975). For example, Ebira men of Okehi Local Government Area migrate to the adjoining forest states of Edo and Ondo States to work as migrant tenant farmers (Udo, 1978). As a result of this persistent situation, women's labour inputs for food production in Adavi and Okehi LGAs increased because men had less time to assist the women in food crop production.

The table also indicates that in Edu, Adavi and Okehi LGAs, women participation in food processing, storage and marketing of crops account for 100 per cent. The most important male tasks on the farm are, land preparation with 65 per cent in Edu LGA and 55 per cent in Adavi and Okehi, LGAs. Planting of crops and weeding are also done by men. However, the situation in Ijumu, Bunu-Kabba and Yagba LGAs are slightly different. Here, men dominate the tasks of land preparation and weeding with 70 per cent and 60 per cent respectively. Unlike in Edu, Adavi and Okehi LGAs, they also participate in processing and storage of farm produce. This suggests that in Yoruba communities of Ijumu, Bunu-Kabba and Yagba, agricultural tasks for men and women are highly mixed than in other cultural groups of Nupe and Ebira. Therefore, it can be said that, differences in the degree of women participation in direct farm works have relationship with cultural practices and the socio-economic processes that modify the basic patterns. This finding conform, to a great extent, with the finding by the United Nation (1975) and quoted in FAO (1982) for African countries.

### (c) WOMEN AND FARM OWNERSHIP

Agricultural division of labour among men and women in the study area was said to

have been affected by complex factors relating to land tenure system, farmland ownership and control. The fact that women have easier independent access to land in the pre-colonial era has gained prominence among many feminist scholars. However, land ownership and control have changed over time. Table 2 shows that in all the seven LGAs, high percentage of women farmers are engaged on family plots, with some women also having separated fields. The individual women farmland owners, however, vary from one LGA to the other. For example, only 10.45 per cent of the women farmers in Edu LGA own separate farmlands, while 40.72 per cent of women in Adavi and Okehi LGAs manage their own farms. The situations in Bunu-Kabba, Ijumu and Yagba LGAs are similar with 30 per cent each.

Various reasons have accounted for the differences in the preparation of women with farm ownership in the study area. In Edu LGA, the fish culture has limited the women activities in arable agriculture. Also, the migration of men to adjoining states account for the high percentage of Ebara women who work on their tiny fields. The situation in the Yoruba areas of Bunu-Kabba; Ijumu and Yagba is however, different. Here Man/Land ratio is low

#### (d) VARIATIONS OF FARM SIZE BY SEX

The division of land between men and women within the same household to meet certain responsibilities can influence women's involvement in agriculture and in the production of certain crops as shown by this study. Table 3 shows that in all the Local Government Areas, large proportion of women have their farm sizes smaller than those of men. In general, majority of the women who claimed to have personal or separate fields have their farmlands ranging between 0.02 hectares and nowhere exceeding 1.49 hectares. Some men in Edu, Bunu-Kabba, Ijumu and Yagba LGAs have farmland exceeding 2.00 hectares. However, there are spatial variations in the plots within and between the LGAs. In Edu, Ijumu, Bunu-Kabba and Yagba LGAs men

have their farmlands ranging between 0.02 hectares; while in Okehi and Adavi LGAs, the farmland range between 0.20 and 0.49 hectares.

From the table, it can be observed that women have relatively smaller fields than men. Therefore, women cultivate and harvest smaller crops from their tiny farmlands. Where women have their own farms, it is customary for them to work on their own farms first since their output is under their control. For example, the widows with the responsibility of providing food for their children have a separate economic opportunity cost to consider when deciding how best to allocate their labour. This type of sexual variations in labour allocation and farm size also affect sexual preferences in the type(s) of crops produced in different ecological zones. This rationality is very important when considering women's involvement in crop production.

#### (e) WOMEN IN CROP PRODUCTION

The division of farm labour between men and women can influence women's involvements in agricultural activities. Specifically, this influence can be in the area of crop specialisation. This specialisation could be as a result of the capabilities of women in specific agricultural tasks where they have comparative advantages and technical know how.

Men and women do not only have separate labour roles for household food production; in many communities some food crops are regarded as women's, even though men may contribute labour and women provide some production inputs, organise labour and control the use; storage and sale of the crop. This is the type of farming conditions presented in Table 4.

The fact that a very large proportion of the study area falls within the "Middle Belt" region of Nigeria, the ecological conditions do not favour the production of forest crops significantly but subsistence crops such as yam, cassava, rice, maize, sorghum, groundnuts and benniseeds. From the fieldwork, it was noted that some women operate on family farmland which rarely

exceed 0.8 hectares, characterised by extreme disposal of holding. Here, Man/Land ratio is relatively low except in Ebira land where we have dense population.

This table also shows that there are regional specialisation of crops cultivated by women. For example, rice is cultivated by women in Edu LGA; benniseed in Adavi and Okehi and some cash/tree crops in Bunu-Kabba, Ijumu and Yagba LGAs; in addition to cassava, sorghum, maize and beans. These regional variations could be accounted for by the ecological and environmental conditions of the different areas.

(f) **CONSTRAINTS IMPEDING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION:**

There are a number of complex factors acting against the participation of women in agricultural production in the study area. These include (i) farmland acquisition; and (ii) access to credit facilities and capital.

(i) **WOMEN CONSTRAINTS IN FARMLAND ACQUISITION**

Table 5 shows that constraints of women to productive farmland make it difficult for them to improve upon or exercise their expertise in crop production. The Table reveals that 38.20 per cent of the women in Edu LGA indicated that inadequate farmland constitutes a serious problem. The proportion of women in this category is higher in the hilly regions of Adavi and Okehi LGAs with 41.31 per cent. From the interview conducted, most of the women in Ijumu, Bunu-Kabba and Yagba LGAs indicated that only very distant "marginal lands" are left for them by the men, therefore, it becomes difficult to combine larger personal fields with their domestic chores and workload on family plots. The reasoning behind this general phenomena in the study area seems to be suggestive of the fact that traditionally, women subject their land rights to their father before marriage and to their husbands upon marriage. Such

opinion gives support to Wiese (1989) who observed that many women's rights have been lost since precolonial times.

Undoubtedly, the most detrimental blunder which frustrates agricultural production of rural women is the regulation for land tenure. Okeyo, (1980) noted how under traditional systems of land tenure, women are allowed to grow food for their families without farmland ownership in many parts of Nigeria. Keberry (1952) also observed the situation where male farmers own the land and women the crop. Keberry advocated that women should be given the right to acquire land on equal terms with men. Unfortunately very few people agreed with her.

(ii) **ACCESS TO CREDIT FACILITIES AND CAPITAL:**

The other related problems for women farmers are their limited access to credit facilities, agricultural improvement information and modern technology. From the fieldwork, agricultural activities, especially crop production, involved a channelling of farm implements and inputs through men; despite the current official focus on Women In Agriculture and Rural Development (WIARD). This in effect has increased women labour while assisting men's work domains technically in the areas of land preparation and cultivation by tractors. The genesis of this situation is somewhat related to the explanations by FAO, (1979) report that agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides and other productive resources are directed to the men, rather than women in the production systems.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Rural women's labour inputs on farms are based on ecological conditions of their communities as shown in this study. Also, some crops are designated as "Women's crops" for planting and processing. These include vegetables, groundnuts and cassava; while yam

and tree crops such as cocoa and palm produce are said to be men's. It is also reported that women perform light tasks of planting, weeding, harvesting, processing and marketing of farm produce; while men do the more strenuous work like land clearing, ridging or ploughing. In general the study shows serious implication of regional variations and occupation segregation by sex in agricultural activities. The involvement of women in agricultural production in the study area was discussed.

Women are involved at almost all levels of subsistence agriculture in Kwara State and indeed Nigeria. It is therefore, important to reduce the ordeal they face at these levels to optimise their productivity and benefits derivable while allowing them some time for recreation. The recent efforts of the Federal Government of Nigeria on food and agricultural programmes aimed at increasing food production and integrating women into the development process are therefore, in the right direction. The government agencies for this include; The Ministry responsible for the status of women affairs and social welfare and other international agencies such as FAO and the World Bank.

Table 1: Percentage Division of Agricultural Labour By Sex

Type of Farm Activities	Local Government Areas.							
	Edu%		Okehi/Adavi %		Bunu-Kabba/Ijumu%		East and West Yagba %	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Land Preparation	35	65	45	55	30	70	30	70
Crop Planting								
Weeding	65	35	70	30	70	30	75	25
Harvesting	65	35	60	40	40	60	35	65
Processing	80	20	90	10	75	25	75	25
Storage	100	-	100	-	90	10	90	10
Marketing	100	-	100	-	90	10	90	10
	100	-	100	-	90	10	100	-

Source: Fieldwork 1990

\* F: Female

\* M: Male

Table 2: Percentage of Women With Different Types of Farm Ownership

Type of Farm Ownership	Percentage of Respondent Per LGA with Different Type of Ownership			
	Edu %	Okehi/ Adavi %	Ijumu Bunu- Kabba %	East and West Yagba %
Sole Ownership	10.45	40.72	30.25	35.10
Family Plot	60.30	53.44	62.45	59.00
Cooperative Field	20.50	5.80	9.20	7.30
Partnership	8.70	-	-	-

Source : Fieldwork 1990.

Table 3: Percentage farm Size By Sex In The Local Government Areas.

Farm Sizes (In Hectares)	Percentage of Male/Female Farm Size In the Local Government Areas (%)							
	Edu %		Adavi/ Okehi %		Ijumu/ Bunu-Kabba %		East & West Yagba %	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Under 0. 20 Hect.	35.23	60.00	50.00	62.10	25.00	45.00	41.00	49.00
0.20 - 0.49	52.30	35.10	40.00	37.90	45.00	40.00	44.20	39.00
0.50 - 0.99	9.50	4.30	8.99	-	14.70	13.59	10.97	12.65
1.00 - 1.19	1.50	0.50	1.01	-	3.25	1.20	2.45	0.35
1.20 - 1.49	1.00	0.10	-	-	1.02	0.20	1.00	-
1.50 - 1.99	0.25	-	-	-	0.52	-	0.35	-
2.00 and above	0.20	-	-	-	0.51	-	0.30	-

Source : Fieldwork 1990.

Table 4: Percentage Share of Women Cultivating Each Crop.

Type of Crop	Percentage Cultivators In Different Sectors			
	Edu %	Adavi & Okehi %	Ijumu and Bunu-Kabba %	East and West Yagba %
Yam	2.5	15.8	10.1	13.7
Maize	7.0	15.5	19.5	18.4
Cassava	5.5	17.3	22.4	24.2
Beans	7.2	15.2	12.2	10.3
Rice	35.8	-	-	-
Sorghum	15.9	12.0	23.6	25.1
Groundnut	20.4	5.4	9.7	5.2
Millet	5.7	-	-	-
Benniseed	-	17.8	-	-
Tree/Cash Crop	-	-	2.5	3.1

Source: Fieldwork 1990.

Table 5: Percentage Of Women Access To Agricultural Resources/ Inputs.

Local Government Area.				
Agricultural Resources and Input by Type	Edu %	Adavi/Okehi %	Ijumu/ Bunu-Kabba %	East and West Yagba %
Farmland.	38.20	41.31	52.10	55.30
Credit Facilities	-	-	3.00	2.00
Tractor	3.10	4.30	8.40	6.10
Fertilizer	9.60	13.20	15.10	10.30
Pesticide	-	-	1.10	-
Herbicide	-	2.3	3.20	1.20

Source: Fieldwork 1990.

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