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Implications of Feminization of Agriculture on women farmers in Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study surveyed 120 rural women in Anambra State, Nigeria. Majority of women farmers had taken up new roles in agriculture which were in the past regarded as male roles and included clearing of farmlands (93.3%), making of mounds and ridges (77.3%), planting of white yams (73.1%), harvesting of tree crops such as mango, oranges, cashew nut, etc (75.6%), among others. Some of the reasons indicated for taking up new roles in agriculture included increase in family responsibilities, increase in prices of food items and other household basic needs, rural-urban migration of men for white collar jobs, shortage of farm labour and education of children. The study recommends the need to formulate appropriate agricultural policies and programmes that will help to boost their productivity.

Key words: *Feminization, women farmers, agriculture, new roles and implications, Nigeria*

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, women traditionally play significant roles in agricultural activities. They are dominant in farm work and sustaining their families even on a subsistence level. Alongside their male counterparts, women play key roles in production for subsistence and creation of wealth. In modern times, the roles of women have not diminished. Nevertheless, the actual contribution of women is neatly subsumed under home production and leisure. Consequently, it is conveniently ignored or underestimated in the national budget (Dinye, 2003). Continuing, he notes that in several Nigerian communities as in most other African societies, women's activities in all aspects of human endeavour are determined by a male centered allocation of traditional entitlements and privileges arising from the neo-patriarchal ideologies that emanate largely from the predominant patrilineal kinship system.

In many parts of the world today, there is an increasing trend towards what has been termed the 'feminization of agriculture'. The feminization of agriculture is occurring even where it goes against the cultural norm (Dinye, 2003). As young men leave for employment in the cities, more women are working in the fields and

more households are headed by women. Men are becoming increasingly absent from farms and rural areas. As men's participation in agriculture declines, the role of women in agricultural production becomes ever more dominant (Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture (LEISA), 2002). In the face of economic change, men are migrating from rural areas to towns and cities, in their own countries or abroad in search of paid employment. In addition, war, sickness and death from HIV/ AIDS take a high toll on rural male populations. This has also left many households bereft of the main earning member and forced women into a labour work force, which they are often not adequately prepared. Women are therefore taking more responsibility for agricultural production.

Feminization of agriculture refers to women's increasing participation in agricultural labour force, whether as independent producers, unremunerated family workers, or agricultural wage workers (Katz, 2003). Deere (2005) provides more specific definitions for the feminization of agriculture, namely:

- an increase in women's participation rates in agricultural sector, either as self-employed or as agricultural wage workers; in other words, an increase in the percentage of women who are economically active in rural areas; and
- an increase in the percentage of women in agricultural labour force relative to men, either because more women are working and / or because fewer men are working in agriculture.

According to Cornhiel (2006), there are two types of feminization of agriculture, namely: feminization of agricultural labour (labour feminization) and feminization of farm management (managerial feminization). Feminization of agricultural labour is the process by which increasingly more of on-farm work is done by women, while feminization of farm management occurs in two ways. First, when women increasingly become primary decision makers on the farm; or second when they gain greater access to agricultural income (dominate the execution of specific agricultural activities in which income is collected); for example, marketing of crops and livestock.

However, over the years in Igbo land, farming activities have been highly associated with a wide variety of beliefs and taboos, hence planting of certain crops such as white yam is regarded as a preserve of men while cocoyam, cassava etc. are regarded as women's crop (Okwor, Asiedu, and Ekanayake., 1998). At present women now cultivate certain crops grown by men in the past. Most of the traditional beliefs about planting of certain crops are fast fading away. They are no longer being observed critically. A lot of changes are taking place as who should cultivate or harvest what type of crop.

Often, the poorest in a rural community are women, whether in male or female-headed households. They are faced with several barriers, which are cultural, political and economic problems (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1998). Baden (1993) also notes that due to increase in labour migration of men and the greater likelihood that men will have the education and skills required for formal sector employment, the responsibilities of women in agriculture are increasing. In areas close to an urban center with a demand for

seasonal labour, men leave the village usually after planting the dry season crop, and return in time to help with the harvest. This is done in order to earn cash to finance the inputs needed for the dry- season crop production (Eisses and Chaikam, 2002). This practice is widely observed in some parts of Igbo land, especially Ebonyi and Enugu states. More women are participating in both subsistence and cash crop smallholder farming.

Women confront particular barriers such as relative lack of mobility, lack of access to credit facilities or the extra time taken up with responsibility for children (Ezumah and Domenco, 1995). Nigerian women are faced with several constraints that are cultural, economic and political. These constraints limit women's opportunities and access to society's cherished values. Access to the resources and benefits of the production process are limited. In Igbo land women do not traditionally own lands as in most African countries. They are by-passed for agricultural loans, credits, extension services, technological labour saving devices and training for farm resources management. The conditions provided for acquisition of loans such as collaterals cannot easily be met by poor and landless women. Nigerian women traditionally have no direct access to land; their acquisition of land is through their male relatives thereby increasing their dependence on men (Ezumah and Domenco, 1995).

Ezumah and Domenco (1995) also reported that despite the overlap in men and women's involvement in agricultural activities, there are still culturally attached differences, inequalities in their pattern of economic contributions. Women believe that they are deeply involved in agriculture while men tend to see female participation in this field as secondary. The questions to be asked are: What are the new roles women have assumed in agriculture? What are the reasons for taking up such roles? And what are the implications? The study therefore aims to:

1. identify new roles assumed by women in agriculture;
2. determine the reasons for taking up such roles; and
3. ascertain the implications of the new roles of women in agriculture.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Anambra State, Nigeria. The state is made up of four agricultural zones, namely; Aguata, Anambra, Awka and Onitsha. Two zones namely; Awka and Aguata were selected from the four agricultural zones using a simple random sampling. Aguata zone is made up of six extension blocks, which consist of forty-five circles while Awka zone comprises five blocks made up of thirty- five circles. Two blocks and six circles were selected respectively from the zones and circles using a simple random sampling technique. In each of the circles selected, ten women farmers were selected randomly for the study. In general, the study comprised four (4) blocks and twelve (12) circles, giving a total of one hundred and twenty (120) women farmers. The questionnaire used for data collection was divided into two sections based on the objectives.

The first section sought information on the new roles assumed by women in agriculture which included clearing of land; making of mounds and ridges; planting of white yams; harvesting of oil palm fruits; harvesting of tree crops such as mango, oranges, pear etc; processing of cassava and oil palm fruits using mills. The second section considered reasons for taking up new roles in agriculture by women such as rural-urban migration of men; death of men as a result of war, sickness, and rapid emergence of HIV/AIDS; female headed households; shortage of farm labour; absence of men as heads of households and increase in family responsibilities. The last section which centered on implications of new agricultural roles of women was achieved by measuring the following variables: excess work load on women; additional responsibilities for women; increase in food production; increase in household food consumption, assurance of food security, availability of varieties of crops; breaking of cultural barriers in farming; economic empowerment of women and increase in self-reliance. Data generated were presented using frequency counts and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

New roles assumed by women in agriculture

Majority (93.3%) of the women farmers reported that one of the new roles they had assumed in agriculture is clearing of farm land. About 77.0% and 73.0% have taken up making of mounds and ridges and planting of white yams, respectively. Also, most (73.9%) of the women farmers carried out staking of yams with bamboo, while about 65% were involved in harvesting of white yams. Similarly, women farmers were involved in harvesting of oil palm fruits (56.3%), 75.6% harvested tree crops such as mango, orange, pear, cashew nut etc, 61.3% processed cassava using mills, among others (Table 1).

Generally, women farmers were highly involved in many of the new roles. The findings seem to contradict a study carried out by Reddock and Deare (1996) which reported that men are responsible for land clearing and preparation, while women are completely responsible for growing of yams and vegetables, sowing, weeding and harvesting of crops. The findings agreed with a study carried out by Cornhiel (2006) which stated that women are taking over more of the agricultural tasks previously done by men such as land preparation and they are investing more in food crop production. Greater involvement of women farmers in agricultural roles which was in the past done by men can be attributed to a lot of factors such as rural-urban migration of men for wage employment, female headed households, increase in family responsibilities, among others (Table 2).

TABLE 1: Distribution of the respondents according to the new roles they have assumed in agriculture

New agricultural roles	Percentage (n=120*)
Clearing of farm land	93.3
Making of mounds and ridges	77.3
Planting of white yams	73.1
Staking of yams with bamboo	73.9
Harvesting of white yams	65.5
Harvesting of oil palm fruits	56.3
Harvesting of tree crops such as mango, orange, pear, cashew nut, etc	75.6
Processing of cassava using mills	61.3
Processing of oil palm nuts using mills	44.5
Storage of yams in the barn	69.7

**Multiple responses*

Reasons for taking up new roles by women in agriculture

The major reasons for women taking up men's role in agriculture included: increase in family responsibilities (89.2%), increase in prices of food items and other household basic needs (78.3%), rural-urban migration of men (65.8%), shortage of farm labour (65.0%); and education of their children (56.7%). About 44% and 26.7% of the women farmers asserted that female headed households and death of men as a result of war, sickness and rapid emergence of HIV/AIDS respectively were their reasons for taking up new roles in agriculture. This shows that greater involvement of women in agricultural activities previously done by men was as a result of numerous factors (Table 2). The findings of this study are in agreement with Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2002) which observed that men are migrating from rural areas to towns in search of paid employment thereby leaving their families to be headed by women. This has resulted to women taking more responsibilities in agriculture in order to meet up with increase in family responsibilities. Walsum (2002) reiterated that increasing involvement of women in agriculture is as a result of male rural-urban migration which has led to increased responsibilities and added work load on the women.

TABLE 2: Distribution of the respondents according to reasons for taking up new roles in agriculture

Reasons	Percentage (n=120*)
Rural-urban migration of men for white collar jobs	65.8
Death of men as a result of war, sickness and rapid emergence of HIV/AIDS	26.7
Female headed households	44.2
Shortage of farm labour	65.0
Increase in family responsibilities	89.2
Education of children	56.7
Increase in prices of food items and other household basic need	78.3

**Multiple responses*

Implications of the New Roles of Women in Agriculture

Benefits of taking up new roles by women farmers

Entries in Table 3 show that majority (79.2%) of the women farmers had an improvement in household food consumption since they took over men's role while about 74% had increase in food production. Other benefits reported by the women farmers were availability of different varieties of crops (71.7%), increase in self-reliance (62.5%), control over household income (55.8%), among others. This result confirms Ibemesi (1996) which stated that women's greater involvement in agriculture has led to increase in farm family's income, availability of food for human consumption, increase in food production and assurance of food security.

TABLE 3: Percentage distribution of the respondents according to benefits derived from taking up new roles in agriculture

Benefits	Percentage (n=120*)
Increase in food production	74.2
Improved household food consumption	79.2
Availability of different varieties of crops	71.7
Assurance of food security	50.0
Economic empowerment of women	50.8
Increase in self reliance	62.5
Control over household income	55.8

**Multiple responses*

Constraints/problems encountered by the women farmers while carrying out new roles in agriculture

The major constraints were lack of farm inputs such as fertilizer, herbicides, etc (83.3%), additional responsibilities for women (77.5%), excess work load on women (71.7%), exposing women to environmental hazards (65.0%) and extension of working hours for women (62.5%). Other constraints include: poor access to information on sources of subsidies and loans (62.5%), unavailability of labour (61.7%), poor access to extension services (50.8%), among others (Table 4). Most of the constraints serve as additional responsibilities for these women farmers. The findings of this study agree with Baden (1993) which reported that the responsibilities of women in agriculture are increasing due to increase in rural-urban migration of men for formal sector employment. Women farmers in Nigeria according to Ezumah and Domenco (1995) are by-passed for agricultural loans, credits, extension services, technological labour saving devices and training for farm resources management. This has made the activities of women in agriculture difficult as well as reducing their production capacities.

TABLE 4: Percentage distribution of the respondents based on the constraints/problems encountered in taking up new roles in agriculture

Constraints/Problems	Percentage (n =120*)
Excess work load on women	71.7
Additional responsibilities for women	77.5
Breaking of cultural barriers in farming	44.2
Extension of working hours for women	62.5
Poor access to extension services	50.8
Lack of farm inputs such as fertilizer, herbicides, etc.	83.3
Exposing women to environmental hazards	65.0
Inappropriate labour-saving technologies	44.2
Less control over land	38.3
Unavailability of labour	61.7
Poor communication channels among women farmers	49.2
Lack of markets for sales of farm produce	37.5
Poor access to information on sources of subsidies and loans	62.5

**Multiple responses*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rural women's contribution to agricultural production is marked by considerable diversity and influenced by factors unique to the specific community and household in question. Mounting economic pressures have compelled many women in rural areas to modify their roles and to perform a range of agricultural tasks not normally associated with women. As women have taken over greater traditional agricultural male activities, this has given rise to an increasing workload and an increasing responsibilities, among others for women farmers.

In the context of an increased and more onerous workload for rural women, the effect of persisting gender inequalities in access to productive resources is even more significant. Female headed households, rural-urban male migration, shortage of labour, emergence of HIV/AIDS, among others have significant impact on the various contexts in which rural women operate. Agricultural policies and programmes should be formulated to meet the agricultural needs of the women farmers in order to increase their productivity.

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