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Gender Roles in Urban Crop Production in Imo State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

The study ascertained gender roles in urban crop production in Imo state, Nigeria. Data were collected with interview schedule from 60 respondents and analyzed using percentage and mean score. The results show that majority (60%) of the urban farmers were female with an average age of 40 years. Mixed cropping (80.4%) was the most practiced cropping system. Cassava (93.3%), maize (86.7%) and Telfaria (71.7%) were major food crops grown. Men (56.7%) and women (52.3%) were involved in finding and securing plots used for crop production. All family members (men, women, boys and girls) were engaged in fertilization and harvesting of crops. Women (65.5%) and girls (48.2%) were mostly involved in weeding and processing activities. Spraying of chemicals (herbicides/insecticides) was mostly done by men. Interventions to improve urban agriculture should be targeted towards different roles performed by each gender.

Key words: Urban agriculture, gender, extension, Nigeria

Introduction

Urban agriculture (UA) has become a contemporary issue, gaining prominence especially in developing economies. This is because it has been discovered to be a viable poverty intervention strategy for the urban poor. Urban agriculture is being practiced in almost all metropolitan areas in both developed and developing countries. The presence of UA in Nigerian cities is not in doubt (Egbuna, 2008). Urban agriculture can simply be defined as the growing of plants and raising of animals within and around cities. Food and agricultural organization (FAO) (2008) defined UA as the growing of plants and the raising of animals for food and other uses within and around cities and towns, and related activities such as the production and delivery of inputs, processing and marketing of produce. According to Spore (2012), an estimated 800 million people are engaged in UA worldwide; of these, 200 million are market producers employing 150 million people full time.

Urban agricultural activities can serve as a supplement to income or can become a primary source of income depending on the scale of activities. Foeken (2006) reports that UA generates income for urban households involved in production, processing, marketing and distribution of the products. So, the intensive horticultural production that thrive in urban areas create jobs.

In the recent Federal government agricultural transformation agenda (ATA), government is repositioning agriculture to drive Nigeria's economy. The aim is to use agriculture to create jobs, wealth and ensure food security. Food production, storage, food processing and industrial manufacturing are also integrated by value chain in the transformation agenda (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2012). This involves food processing and manufacturing from local staple crops such as maize, rice, yams, cassava and sweet potato.

The transformation agenda helps with the problem of rapid urbanization as it creates jobs and also helps in increasing the income of urban farmers. Increase in food processing will help to flourish urban supermarkets to meet the demand for “ease to prepare food” which is common among urban dwellers.

Men’s and women’s involvement in UA activities may be different from one context to another. Division of labour in urban agricultural activities is subject to context-specific circumstance within different cities or even within households. Within the household, various tasks and responsibilities are divided between male and female members. The tasks men and women perform in relation to urban cultivation differ according to the cultural group to which they belong (Horvoka *et al.* 2009). However, Saptoka (2004) observes that men and women share many agricultural tasks in urban agriculture, unlike rural farmers who exercise stricter gender division of labour. This shows that some gender behavior may be changing in the case of urban farming as both women and men are benefitting economically, and in terms of social status.

As a developing strategy, the realm of urban agriculture should address the needs and interest of both men and women. It is therefore necessary to ascertain the tasks performed by different gender groups in urban crop production activities.

The main purpose of this study was to ascertain gender roles in urban crop production. Specifically the study sought to:

- i) determine the cropping system practiced by the urban farmers,
- ii) identify major crops grown and
- iii) ascertain gender roles in urban crop production

Methodology

The study was carried out in Imo state, Nigeria. Two zones (Owerri and Orlu) were randomly selected from the three senatorial zones that make up the state. Three metropolitan wards were purposively selected from each zone based on their intensive involvement in crop production. In Owerri zone, Naze, Egbu and Nekede were selected while Ihioma, Umuna and Amaifeke were selected in Orlu zone. In each ward, ten households were purposively selected based on their active involvement in crop production. This gave a sample size of 60 respondents that was used for the study.

Interview Schedule, focus group discussion (FGD) and observation were used to elicit information from the heads of household. Data were analysed using percentage and mean.

Results and discussion

Personal characteristics of the respondents

Majority (60%) of the respondents were female while 40% were male. This implies that women are more involved in urban agriculture than male in the study area. Women tend to dominate urban cultivation because they are marginalized in other forms of employment in the formal sector of urban economy (Hororka and Lee-Smith) (2005). Besides, women are major food providers in the family.

Data in Table 1 reveal that a greater proportion (41.8%) of the respondents were within the age range of 35 and 44 years. The average age was 40 years indicating that they are still in their active years. This implies their likelihood of adopting innovations meant to improve urban crop production. This is in line with the finding of Chah *et al* (2010) who reports that the average age of urban farmers in Enugu is 38.59 years.

About 44% had tertiary education while 41.8% had secondary education. Those that had no formal education accounted for about 5% of the respondents. This is an indication that they are literate. They can therefore adopt innovations meant to improve urban agriculture, since education has a positive relationship with adoption (Agwu, 2004). However, the finding is in

contrast with that of Ashebir *et al.* (2007) who reports that in Makelle, Ethiopia, urban farmers generally have low educational status.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents according to personal characteristics

Characteristics	Percentage (%)	Mean
Sex		
Male	40.0	
Female	60.0	
Age		
<34	28.2	
35-44	41.8	40
45-54	20.0	
55 and above	10.0	
Educational level		
No formal education	5.0	
Primary education	29.4	
Secondary education	41.6	
Tertiary education	24.0	

Cropping system

Majority (80.4%) practiced mixed cropping while about 11% of them were involved in monocropping (Table 2). That most respondents practice mixed cropping is not surprising since land is often scarce in urban areas. They make use of any available space by planting different varieties of crops in a particular farm land. This ensures multiple harvests per season. Buyinza (2008) states that mixed cropping is a common practice among resource-poor farmers in the tropics and is argued to be a balanced farming practice.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondents according to cropping system

Cropping system	Percentage (%)
Mixed cropping	80.4
Intercropping	5.4
Relay cropping	3.6
Mono Cropping	10.6

Source: Field work, 2011

Major crops grown

Major crops grown included cassava (86.7%), maize (83.3%), Amaranthus (75.0%), Telfaria (71.7%), cocoyam (53.3%) and yam (42.9%) (Table 3). This shows that the respondents grow more annual food crops and vegetables. This may be due to insecurity of land in urban areas. Neergard *et al* (2009) reports that insecurity of land and limited space tend to narrow down the choice of crops. This finding is also in line with that of Salau and Attah (2012) who report that urban farmers in Nassarawa State grow mainly vegetable, maize and sweet potato.

Table 3:Percentage distribution of respondents according to major crops grown

Major crops grown	Percentage (%)
Yam	42.9
Cassava	86.7
Cocoyam	53.3
Maize	83.3
Telfaria	71.7
Amaranthus	75.0
Water leaf	32.6
Okro	31.7
Tomatoes	15.7
Banana	5.0
Garden egg	20.0
Cowpea	5.0

***Multiple responses field work, 2011**

Gender roles in urban crop production

Data in Table 4 reveals that majority of the respondents indicated that men (56.7%) and women (52.3%) find plots used for crop cultivation. Securing and guarding of plots were mainly men's task (Table 4). The finding also shows that buying of planting materials and land clearing were done by both men and women. Weeding activities were mainly the responsibility of women (68.2%) and girls (48.2%). Spraying of chemicals like herbicides and pesticides was usually done by men (54.7%), boys (48.2%) and women (42.9%) while harvesting crops cuts across all gender groups (men, women, boys and girls). Processing,

Storage and sowing of plant were mainly women activity (Table 4). This shows that most tasks in urban crop cultivation are done by men and women. The children participate in few activities like harvesting of crops. It implies that youths in urban areas may lose interest in agriculture, if they are not involved in urban agricultural activities.

From the findings, it can be inferred that women are engaged in activities that may be men's task in rural farming, such as spraying of chemicals, finding of plots for cultivation and land clearing. This implies that some taboos of gender behavior in agriculture are changing in the case of urban farming since women are involved in activities that need physical strength. Besides, the cultural beliefs are also weaker in urban areas than in rural areas where men own and control the most important resource in production of crops. In urban areas, women can have access to vacant land which she can use to grow crops.

Table 4: Percentage distribution of respondents according to gender roles in urban crop production

Crop production activities	Percentage%(n=60)				
	Men	Women	Boys	Girls	All
Finding of land for cultivation	56.7	52.3	0.5	-	5.2
Securing of land	68.5	11.8	0.5	-	3.8
Land clearing	66.0	59.1	4.7	3.6	13.7
Land preparation	54.7	47.2	11.0	8.0	16.0
Buying of planting materials	51.4	55.2	4.0	8.1	14.6
Preparing seeds	38.7	59.0	6.6	9.5	13.7
Sowing/Planting	25.6	52.4	5.1	15.0	17.5
Weeding	10.8	68.2	19.2	48.1	13.7
Composting	39.6	30.2	9.4	4.7	9.9
Irrigation	48.8	40.9	8.5	7.5	-
Fertilizer application	27.8	28.3	10.8	9.0	55.3
Spraying of pesticides and herbicides	54.7	42.9	48.2	4.7	24.5
Harvesting of crops	32.1	50.5	23.6	18.7	50.9
Processing of farm produce	18.9	88.7	14.2	24.5	28.8
Storing	31.6	66.9	10.4	12.6	24.5
Selling of produce	51.4	63.7	9.4	13.7	19.3

Source: Field work, 2011

Conclusion and Recommendation

Men and women were greatly involved in activities that required physical strength, like land clearing and preparation. This implies that some taboos based on gender behavior in agriculture are changing in the case of urban farming since women are involved in activities that need physical strength. Besides, the cultural beliefs are also weaker in urban areas than in rural areas where men own and control the most important resource in production of crops. In urban areas, women can have access to vacant land for crop production.

It is therefore recommended that the municipal leaders should address the needs of producers of either sex. Interventions in urban farming should also be targeted towards the farm families since all members are involved in the crop production activities

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