

CONTRIBUTIONS OF RURAL WOMEN TO VEGETABLE PRODUCTION IN OMOKU AREA OF NIGER DELTA NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the contributions of rural women to vegetable production in Omoku area of Rivers State, Nigeria. Data for the study was collected from 100 randomly selected respondents in the study. Findings showed that women contributed significantly to vegetable production and have favourable attitude to vegetable production. To assist women efforts should be made by Extension workers to provide adequate services that will reinforce them to produce more and move beyond the subsistence level. This could be by providing inputs needed for vegetable production. Opportunities for training should also be given to women in the study area to get contemporary knowledge on vegetable production

Key words: rural women, vegetable production

INTRODUCTION

Women are the major force to reckon with in terms of food production in Nigeria and many other parts of Sub-saharan Africa. Women have traditionally been the invisible workforce, the unacknowledged backbone of the family and the national economy. The pivotal role women play in the development process is amply reflected in most time – budget studies (Adeyemo, 1990). These studies show quite clearly that women do not only perform heavier physical tasks but they also work relatively longer hours than men. Women have been at the forefront of agricultural development in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. It has been estimated that about 60 – 80 percent of all agricultural production activities are carried out by women farmers in the continent of Africa (Adisa and Okunade, 2005). Women have been known to be at the fore of rural development efforts. Mathews-Njoku (2004) found women contribution to be high in the area of projects like health centres, schools, and community halls. These are some of the activities that women have been found to have high participation.

Among the populace, the cultivation and consumption of vegetables in Nigeria is gaining wider attention. According to Tindall (1989) the commercial production of vegetables is developing as a result of the demands of growing towns and cities. Traditionally, market places with their long established methods of buying and selling vegetables are faced with new problems which are likely to produce many changes in the general pattern of marketing, due to some factors which influence the growing of growing vegetables.

Women contribute immensely in the development of agriculture. They are found in agriculture and outside of it. In vegetable farming they hold an unparalleled preeminence tending the children and the whole household. It is quite obvious that no nation can achieve collective self-reliance without the full participation of women. They constitute an important life wire of the small scale agricultural enterprise. Ikeme (1990) explained that farm women are responsible for the operation and management of farm. They took part in decision on what crops to grow, what seeds and planting stock to be selected and how production activities like seed selection, planting, weeding and maintenance should be carried out. Some women are farmers on their own while others help their husbands to do lighter jobs on their farms. Food processing, sundrying, and smoking of fish, etc., are clearly reserved for women, though this varies from one ethnic group to another. Patel and Anthonio (1973) posited that

80% of Yoruba wives of tobacco farmers worked on the farm for crops such as yams, maize, cassava, etc. They also participated in land preparation, clearing and planting. In the riverine areas, women market fish, cray fish, and periwinkles. In Okuku community of Ogoja, Cross River State, Nigeria women are mainly gari producers. In the northern States of Kano, Niger and others, women spend hours processing groundnut cakes. In Mbieri area of Imo State, Nigeria, women produced mainly vegetables and tomatoes. All these examples prove women as good producers, processors, utilizers and marketers in the production process of agricultural commodities. It is in this respect that Njoku (1994) stated that most women are known for their business acumen.

Growing vegetables is an old art in the West African sub region. Joy (1980) pointed out that different types of vegetables are grown depending on the taste of the people and how well these vegetables are suited to the climatic and soil conditions. Though, it is not easy for the rural women to grow good vegetables on a commercial basis in Omoku area, they produce the bulk of the vegetables in the market. Vegetable crops hence are gender-specific. This study examines the contributions of rural women in vegetable production. The study specifically identified the types of vegetables cultivated by rural women; the study also described personal characteristics of respondents, and also

METHODOLOGY

The study area is the Omoku in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government area of Rivers State, Nigeria in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. The population for the study consists of women in four quarters (clans) in the study area. From each of these clans, 25 women were randomly selected and structured questionnaire was administered to them. In all, one hundred respondents were involved in the study. Data analysis was mainly through descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage and mean.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Personal characteristics of respondents (n=100)

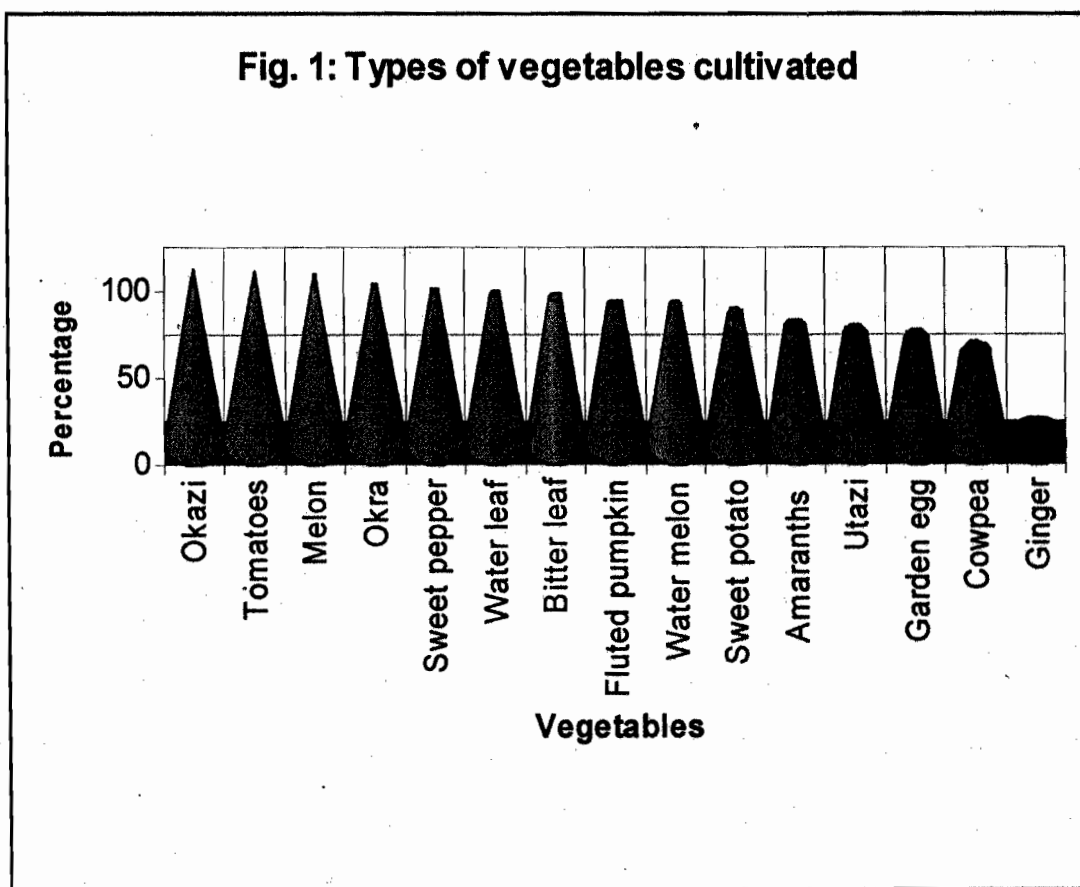
Personal characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Marital status		
Single	39	39
Married	61	61
Household size		
Less than 3	23	23
3 – 5	27	27
6 – 7	32	32
Above 7	18	18
Farming experience		
Less than 5 years	29	29
5 – 10 years	33	33
Above 10 years	38	38
Education level		
Attended school	45	45
Did not attend school	55	55

From table 1, majority of the respondents are married and had large household size. Also, a significant percentage have considerable years of farming experience and majority were educated. It then follows that respondents have the wherewithal to carry out vegetable production. This is an indication that rural women were living up to expectations in the study

area with respect to vegetable production. Nwachukwu and Asiabaka (2007) reported that rural women who were involved in community development associations were active stakeholders in development projects.

Types of vegetables cultivated by respondents

Figure 1, respondents 100% of the respondents cultivated okazi, 99% cultivated tomatoes, 96% of the respondents cultivated melon, 90% cultivated okra, 87% cultivated sweet pepper, 86% cultivated water leaf, 84% cultivated bitter leaf, 80% cultivated fluted pumpkin, 79% cultivated water melon, 74% cultivated sweet potato, 67% cultivated amaranths (green), 63% cultivated utazi, 60% cultivated garden egg, 52% cultivated cowpea, 2% cultivated ginger.



Contribution towards vegetable production

Onuebunwa and Adesope (2006) had reported that women contributed significantly to crop production. Results as presented in table 2 reveals that most respondents (65%) carry out all the work on their vegetable farm. This is an indicated that they are active and serious with vegetable farming activities. Also, 82% of the respondents stated that they enjoy vegetable farming, and 90% further asserted that they were deeply involved in vegetable farming. Majority of the respondents (90) cultivated vegetables manually. Also 90% of the respondents encourage others to be involved in vegetable farming.

Table 2: level of involvement in vegetable production (n=100)

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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I carry out all the work on my vegetable farm	25	40	28	7
I enjoy vegetable farming	60	22	12	0
I am deeply involved in vegetable farming	41	49	10	0
Most women are involved in vegetable farming	73	11	12	4
Cultivation of vegetable is mainly done manually	60	30	8	12
I encourage others to be involved in vegetable farming	47	43	6	4

Attitude of women towards vegetable production

The findings of this study showed that women's attitude towards vegetable production was favourable. This is not surprising because women have always been active stakeholders in food production. They contribute largely to homemaking and ensure food security. Eboh and Ogbasi (1990) stated that women are the key factor in agricultural production especially vegetables. Their roles in agriculture are numerous, varied and fundamental. Therefore sustained improvement in the agricultural sector is never complete without the active involvement of women. Joy (1980) stated that women contribute between 46% and 65% of all hours spent on the growing and farming of vegetables of different kinds.

Table 3: Attitude of women towards vegetable production

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I know all techniques needed in vegetable farming	38	42	13	7
2. vegetable farming needs to be fully encouraged	77	23	0	0
3. I appreciate the importance of vegetables to the body, this motivates me to cultivate it	67	33	0	0
4. My level of vegetable cultivation is purely subsistence	44	28	18	10
5. vegetable production has further given women more respect in the community	59	33	8	0
6. vegetables are widely accepted and this should encourage more women to grow them	74	26	0	0
7. Women have contributed significantly to food security through vegetable production	80	20	0	0
8. All women have vegetable gardens in their backyard which is an indication that they appreciate that vegetable is a necessity to the home	92	8	0	0

The statements, as itemized in the table, confirm women's contribution to food security which is a contemporary phenomenon in meeting one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Women have once again proved that they are major stakeholders in the

development of the nation. Though, it is not encouraging that the women are still operating at purely subsistence level.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is widely demonstrated that rural women as well as men throughout the world are engaged in a range of productive activities essential to household welfare, agricultural productivity, and economic growth. However, the role of women in various development efforts is without doubt. This study has further demonstrated that women were indispensable to the development of agriculture. The study showed that women contributed significantly to vegetable production and have favourable attitude to vegetable production. To assist women efforts should be made by Extension workers to provide adequate services that will reinforce them to produce more and move beyond the subsistence level. This could be by providing inputs needed for vegetable production. Opportunities for training should also be given to women in the study area to get contemporary knowledge on vegetable production.

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