



Challenges and Prospects of Rural Women in Agricultural Production in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Women plays significant role in agricultural production, their contribution is as high as between 60 to 90 percent of the total task performed. This study focused on the prospects and challenges of rural women in agricultural production. It highlights the efforts of women in crop, livestock, fishery production, food processing/storage and marketing. Inadequate technology, poor extension services, inadequate land, lack of access to credit facilities, cultural/religious restrictions, poor health, lack of adequate infrastructure, access to education and training influenced active involvement of women in agricultural production. Women's interest in agricultural production results in an increased crop, livestock, fisheries production, food security and nutrition. The study, therefore recommends that women should be educated and trained, they should have adequate access to productive resources and government support in order to increase agricultural productivity.

Keywords: Challenges, Prospects, Rural women, Agriculture, production.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, women are regarded as homemakers, who oversee and coordinate the affairs and activities at home while their husband and children goes out to do farm work. But at home, however they are not idle as they engaged in manual processing of food crops, and other farm produce in addition to their housekeeping (Lawanson 2008). In Nigeria, women are

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saddled with most of the tasks in agricultural production but the benefit gained by them are not commensurate with their man-hours, they are hardly given attention in the area of training and visiting by extension agents with improved technologies. Banks hardly grant them loans and they are hardly reached with improved seeds, fertilizer and other inputs (Damisa, 2007). Lawanson (2008) stated that Nigerian women have worked side by side with men in agricultural production with some marked division of labour between them. The men performed the tedious tasks of felling trees, gathering and burning of bush and making ridges while women are involved in planting of seeds particularly food crops, harvesting, transportation, processing and selling of farm products. Damisa (2007) pointed out that various researchers have conducted on the contribution of women to agricultural production in the country; he suggested that women's contribution to farm work is as high as between 60 and 90 percent of the totals farm task performed. The contribution of the women ranges from such tasks as land cleaning, land-tilling, planting, weeding, fertilizer/manure application to harvesting, food processing, threshing, winnowing, milling, transportation and marketing as well as the management of livestock. Sharon (2008) viewed that both women and men plays critical roles in agricultural production throughout the world, producing, processing and providing the food we eat. Women make up half the rural population and they constitute more than half of the agricultural labour force. Rural women in particular are responsible for half of the world's production and produce between 60 – 80 percent of the food in most developing countries. Yet, despite their contributions to global food security, women farmers are frequently underestimated and overlooked in developing strategies (World Bank 2008).

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives are to;

- i. identify the efforts of rural women in agricultural production.
- ii. identify the constraints faced by rural women in agricultural production.
- iii. view the prospects of rural women in agricultural production.

Women in Agricultural production

Damisa and Yohanna (2007) stated that the effect of rural women in agricultural production in Nigeria can never be underestimated. They perform crucial roles in the domestic and economic life of the society. In the recognition of the important role of women in nation building, the Nigerian government more than ever before is keen upon rural poverty alleviation as a way of improving the economy. Effiong (2011) concluded from his study that women were not given equal opportunities in any society. To truly realize women's full potential in agriculture and maximize their impact on rural development will require addressing constraints to women's

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productivity, including the unequal access to credit resources and other virtual invisibility in statistic policy making and programs.

Crop production: Women contribute their quota in agricultural production despite the constraints. However it is usually men who plough the fields and drive drought animals whereas women do the major share of sowing, weeding, applying fertilizer and pesticide, harvesting and threshing, winnowing etc. similarly, men tend to do work of large scale cash cropping, especially when it is highly mechanized, while women take care of household of production and small scale cultivation of cash crops, requiring low of technology. Women make an essential contribution to producing staple crops e.g. (in South East Asia, it is women who provide up to 90% of the labour for rice cultivation) but they play a big role in growing secondary crops such as legumes and vegetables. (World Bank 2008).

Livestock production

Livestock is the primary subsistent activity used to meet household food needs as well as supplement farm income. A study has revealed that rural women own a few number of small ruminants (sheep and goats) and are engaged in cleaning of animals, sheds, watering and milking the animals. Furthermore, rural women are also responsible for collection, preparing dung cakes an activity that also brings additional income to poor families. Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy. The rate of women in poultry enterprise farming at household level is very high. It is the source of income and food for household for the rural women, they generate income from sell of eggs and meats.

Fishery production

Women have made a reasonable effort in the fish industry especially in the area of fish preservation and retail marketing (Williams 1997). Their contribution as traders includes the distribution of fish as food item from the domestic source. The low capital requirement of artisanal fishery is a major explanation of women's greater involvement in that sector of Nigeria's fishery economy compared with other industries. In some riverine areas, women take part in fishing methods such as the use of drag nets, funnel entrance, trap etc. in the past, fishing tended to be male occupation but now, women are actively involved and play a vital role in the activities (FAO, 1994).

Food processing and storage: FAO (1996) concluded that rural women owe the responsibility of half of the world's food production and in most of the developing countries, 60-80% food processing and storage. The staple crops including rice, wheat and maize were mainly produced by them. These

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women were also involved in sowing, weeding fertilize and pesticide application, harvesting of crops, along with thrashing and post harvest activities such as a storing, handling, stocking, processing and marketing to a greater extent.

Constraints to women's efforts in agriculture

Although women had better opportunities in agriculture, their efforts in Agriculture are seriously affected. Some of the constraints rural women faced in Agricultural production are state below:

Education and training: Education is very essential in development process. It enhances participation and helps to build confidence in women. Inequality with men counterparts inhibits progress. Women's access to education and training influences productivity (Adejeye, 1991). Lack of education and training in basic skills contributes to the vicious cycle of under development, low productivity and poor conditions of health and welfare of women (Odejide 1998). Rural women usually rely on their service providers due to lack of education. These service providers include the transporters, marketers, input suppliers and loan providers.

Category	Literacy rate (%)
male	67.3
Female	43.7
Urban	70.9
Rural	46.8
Total	55.3

Source: Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 2003.

Land constraint:

Land title and tenure tend to be vested in men, either by legal condition or by socio-cultural norms. Land reforms and resettlement have tended to reinforce this bias against tenure for women. Land shortages is common among women, women farm smaller and more dispersed plants than men and are

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less likely to hold title, secure, tenure or the same right to use, improve or dispose of land (World Bank 2008).

Lack of access to technology:

Rural women use traditional technologies in their food production and processing activities. Most farming such as weeding, clearing, planting and harvesting are done manually using the hand hoes and cutlass. Simple traditional implements are used in food processing activities such as mortar, grinding stones, bowls etc. using traditional technologies make farming and food processing activities time – consuming, low productivity and high wastages rate in food processing (Okojie, 1990).

Insufficient agricultural extension services:

Women farmers have less contact with extension services than men, especially where male – female contact is culturally restricted. Extension is often provided by men agents to men farmers on the erroneous assumption that the message will trickle “across” to women. Infact, agricultural knowledge is transferred inefficiently or not at all from husband to wife. Also, the message tends to ignore the unique workload, responsibilities and constraints facing women farmers (The World Bank 2008).

Lack of adequate infrastructural facilities:

Generally, the rural areas are neglected in terms of provision of social amenities such as schools, electricity, hospitals, good access road, pipe borne water, and housing facilities. Since rural dwellers are mainly women and children, who carry out virtually all subsistence functions, it follows the effects of social amenities in the rural areas, directly on women.

Comparison of some constraints faced by women in Agricultural production with that of their male counterpart

Female have less access to formal financial institution than men, thus faced with financial constraints than men. Women are less mobile than men because of their childcare and household responsibilities. Due to involvement in too many tasks by women, their health is usually affected. The migration draft of men 75% usually increases passion on women. Religious/cultural barriers on women and economic constraints 70% affects women’s agricultural productivity and profitability, women are usually given lower status than men and are not allowed a voice in development.

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Variables	Percentage (%) constraints	
	Women	Men
Financial constraints	70	30
Mobility problem	80	20
Health issues	60	40
Time Constraint	70	30
Migration Drift	75	25
Social and economic constraints	70	30

Source: Field Survey (2011).

Prospect of Rural women in agricultural production

The fundamental issues in rural women in agricultural production is on how to increase agricultural production, more family income, children's welfare, nutrition and food security to the society threatened by constraints faced by women during the production process. However, when these fundamental issues which include access to productive resources, education, technology, extensive services and decision making barriers are taken care of, the prospects of rural women will begin to manifest. One of such prospects will be the participation of women in agricultural decision making to equate the gender balance. A clear look at the Nigerian agricultural sector indicates that the decision making machinery is monopolized by the male gender. However, once this policy reforms are reflected to accommodate gender balance, then gender-related obstacles i.e. extension services, land right, religious/cultural restriction will be eradicated. This is because decision making is crucial to women's empowerment which further translated into increased in productivity, food security. Once food security is assured, the prospects for the self sufficient become more glaring. The Nigerian women tilled the land, reduced to the barest minimum and this can be attained by removing the barriers from land ownership and maintaining gender balance in land ownership Lawson (2008). According to Danladi (2007), therefore are opportunities in the field of education. Here every, citizen irrespective of sex is given the equal opportunity to aspire to the highest level of his or her professional callings, employment opportunities, access to science and technologies, loan etc. this then metamorphosed from agricultural

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development into national development. Extension services however are important for diffusing technology and good practices but female farmers requires careful consideration. In some contexts but not all, it is culturally more acceptable for female farmers to interact with female extension agents. Hiring female extension agents can be an effective means of reaching female farmers. Properly trained male extension agents may be able sensitized to the rural women improved. Extension system will also have to be more innovative and flexible to account for time and mobility constraints. Farm tools that are predominantly used in operations dominated by women e.g. weeding or post harvesting are often not gender neutral e.g. women specific technology is the long-handle hoe introduced in several African countries which eased women's burden of work as compared to traditional short handle hoes. Greater involvement of women in agricultural research and higher education could also enhance the development of female friendly technology which will lead to increase in agricultural output Adejeye (1991).

CONCLUSION

The rural women play vital roles in food production, processing/storage, livestock keeping, marketing and distribution activities etc. They are faced by several constraints such as limited access to education, land, credit facilities and poor distribution networks. These results to low yields and high wastage rate during harvesting, processing and storage therefore reducing available food supply and rural women's income. Despite all this challenges, women generally have great potentials for sustaining agricultural production and family income, if given adequate incentives and gender equity.

RECOMMENDATION

Women have been found to participate in most of the agricultural activities and production process. Improvement in their social status and productivity is to increase output. Therefore, women should be allowed to have access to all the productive resources necessary for agricultural production.

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