GENDER ROLES IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN THE SEYCHELLES

UZOKWE, U.N.

Delta State University Asaba Campus, Asaba. Nigeria ucheadauzokwe@yahoo.com
+234-8051721526

ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of each member of the family in food production, investigated the type of farming activities the farm families are engaged in, gender specific roles, level of participation of the female gender, gender stereotypes and suggested the use of the information for policy advocacy and strengthening of agricultural service delivery in the Seychelles. Two investigative tools were used namely Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Interview Schedule. A total of 100 farmers were interviewed. The study revealed that the farmers were mainly crop farmers. There were no gender specific roles or stereotypes. Men were more involved in all the food production activities except food processing. Other areas of high level women participation were marketing (81%), farm hygiene (76%), record keeping (42.9%)and purchasing of inputs(81%). Low level female participation was a result of attitudinal change, difficult agricultural land terrain, unfavorable government policy and unwholistic approach of agricultural extension services which focused on only the farmer instead of the entire farm family. To achieve sustainable food production in order to ensure food security, the extension services need a new orientation and better funding to enable it carry out its function. The government should make available cultivable lands for food production and encourage women to own their own farms by giving priority to them in land allocation.

KEY WORDS: Gender, role, production, stereotype

INTRODUCTION

The ability to increase food production in developing countries has great gender implications. FAO (2006) postulated that failures in food security programmes and policies are due to the assumption that large groups of people are homogenous rather than being composed of socio-economic groups with different needs and interests. IFPRI (2005) posits that equalizing agricultural inputs between men and women results in significant gains in agricultural productivity. According to FAO (1996) women produce 60-80% of food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world food production. While men are always responsible for land clearing, burning and ploughing, women specialize in weeding, transplanting, post-harvest work and in some areas, land preparation and both take part in seeding and harvesting. (Women in Development, 1996).

Wieczorek-Zeul (2007) opined that in Sub Saharan Africa, women produce up to 80% of all staple foods, they own only 10% of farmland and have title to less than 2% of land across the developing world. Women are active in cash and subsistence agricultural sectors and their work in producing food for household and community consumption is often not valued (FAO,2006). Coon (2005) asserted that unless women's roles in small-holder farming systems and rural food security are factored into the design of agricultural development projects, we will again fail to address the root causes of chronic food insecurity and hunger.

The dearth of disaggregated data on actual gender roles and responsibility in agricultural production is a big challenge to meaningful agricultural and development planning in most developing countries. Taking a look at the scenario in the Seychelles, it seems there is very little involvement of women in agricultural activities unlike what obtains in most developing countries; where women do the work while the men get the recognition. The record in the agricultural extension services unit states that 88% of registered farmers are men while only 22% are women. Agricultural extension usually works with the whole farm families since every member of the family is engaged in one way or other in food production activities. There is therefore need to identify the areas of gender involvement and role of each member of the farm family in order to plan holistic agricultural

extension programmes. It is against this back drop, that this study was carried out with the following specific objectives. To investigate the type of farming activities the farm families of Seychelles are engaged in and find out the role of each family member in agricultural production; determine if there are gender specific roles; establish the level of participation of the female gender and detect if there are gender stereotypes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Two data collecting tools used were interview schedule and Focus Group Discussion (FGD).In the interview schedule method, a sample of 102 farmers from a population of 528 registered farmers was used representing 30% of the population. However two samples of the questionnaire aborted. Samples were drawn from the four agricultural regions within the Seychelles. Proportional sampling was used to determine the number of farmers to be included in each region and also to determine the number of male and female respondents. This is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents for administration of interview schedule according to agricultural regions.

Agricultural Regions	**Sample Frame**	
	Female	**Male**
North	4	23
Central	5	9
South	5	29
Praslin/La Digue	4	23
Total	**18**	**84**
Grand Total	**102**	

Under the Focus Group Discussion(FGD) method, the north and central regions were used for the study. Focus group discussions were held with eight farmers from each of the two regions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

From the FGD it was established that the farmers are engaged in mainly crop farming and mixed farming. They are not into food processing because some of them had not given it a thought while for others, farming engaged all their time and energy. Women are involved mainly in nursery, planting, weeding, irrigation, harvesting and marketing. Ofuoku(2005) asserted that women participate fully in farming operations and most of our crops are grown by women. Marketing used to be done by the men. Later on the women took over because of the reckless attitude of most men who spend all the money they sold in having a good time and came home with little or nothing. Spraying and land preparation are done by men but when there is no man, women do them also. Most times the women have to do the household chores as well as help their husbands/partners on the farm. It is, however, interesting to note that there are farmers whose wives / partners do not work on the farm either as a result of involvement in other income generating activities like paid employment, inability to combine child rearing, household chores and working on the farm or simply lack of interest. The consensus of opinion is that the modern Seychellois women would rather do a white collar job which enables her to show off her beauty attributes than dirty her hands on the farm.

However, the participation of women is more than what is portrayed because in some of the “men-owned” farms, the women actually man the farm while the farm is registered in the name of the man because according to the women, the ministry discriminates against women in land allocation. Another reason recorded for few women ownership of farm, is the topography of agricultural lands. The government allocates land in rocky, hilly and almost inaccessible areas which are very difficult to cultivate. Cultivating these lands is very difficult for a woman to combine with her domestic work load especially when she doesn't have a male support. Also,

because of poor financial status they cannot employ labour to cultivate the land. Achoja and Ideh (2002) observed that African resource poor farmers, have relatively little capital in total cash value terms.

The children's contribution is very minimal since they go to school and also do their homework when they come back. Most of the farmers noted that their children are not interested in farming because even during the holidays and on weekends they play on the computer, watch movies and do other exercises. They feel that farming is not a prestigious job. They can not force them do it because of the government law on children's right. In the olden days, it was obligatory for very member of the family to work on the family farm(FGD). Like from observations in Nigeria, farming was therefore a family business.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of respondents for interview schedule

Variables	Female	Male	Total %
Age Group (within gender)			
20-29	01	02	3
30-39	05	24	29
40-49	07	31	37
50-59	02	07	9
60-69	04	11	15
70+	02	05	7
Total	**21**	**79**	**100**
Marital Status			
Married	09	31	40
Concubine	05	25	30
Single	04	17	22
Separated	02	03	05
Divorced	00	02	02
Not stated	01	01	01
Total	**21**	**79**	**100**
Parity			
0	03	15	18
1	04	13	17
2	07	17	24
3	05	14	19
4	01	07	08
5	01	08	09
6	00	04	04
9	00	01	01
Total	**21**	**79**	**100**
Educational level			
Not stated	02	05	07
No formal education	01	03	04
Primary	08	25	33
Secondary	05	32	37
Post secondary	04	11	12
Tertiary	01	03	07
Total	**21**	**79**	**100**
Main occupation			
Farming	13	69	82
Others	08	10	18
Total	**21**	**79**	**100**

Table 2 shows that most of the farmers (66%) were between ages 30 to 49years. A large number of them (70%) are partnered either through marriage or concubinage. It is important to note that as many as 29% of farmers have neither wives nor concubines that means that he works solo or with paid labour. The average number of children is 3. About 70% attended primary and secondary schools. Farming is their main occupation (82%).

Table 3: Farm Related Characteristics of respondents

Variables	Female	Male	Total%
Type of farming activity			
Crop	14	53	67
Livestock	-	01	01
Mixed	06	24	30
Horticulture	01	-	01
Others	-	01	01
Total	**21**	**79**	**100**
Farming experience (in years)			
1-5	02	07	09
6-10	05	26	31
11-15	01	09	10
16-20	05	13	18
Above 20	08	24	32
Total	**21**	**79**	**100**
Land ownership			
Government Lease	15	60	75
Private lease	-	1	1
Privately owned	6	18	24
Total	**21**	**79**	**100**
Farm size (in hectares)			
>0.40	4	22	26
>0.4-0.8	01	03	04
>0.8-1.2	12	39	51
>1.2-1.6	02	09	11
z1.6-2.0	01	04	05
>2.0	01	02	03
Total	**21**	**79**	**100**

Table 3 indicates that they are mainly crop farmers (67%). Most have farming experience of between 6-10 years (31%) and above 20years (32%). They are on mainly government land (75%) of between 0.8-1.2 ha (51%). Surprisingly up to 26% of the farmers have farm size of less than 0.4 ha yet are registered despite the law against registering farmers with less than 0.4ha. It was reported that most farmers in developing countries are small scale farmers with farm size of less than 2.0ha.

Table 4: Farming Activities and methods adopted by respondents (by gender) in the Seychelles

Farming activities/methods	Female%	Male%	Total%
Land Preparation			
Manual	90.4	73.4	81.9
Mechanical	04.8	06.3	05.5
Manual and mechanical	04.8	20.3	12.6
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Weeding			
Manual	95.2	86.1	90.7
Mechanical	04.8	10.1	07.4
Manual & mechanical	00.0	03.8	01.9
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Irrigation			
Manual	76.2	57.0	66.6
Mechanical	23.8	39.2	31.5
Manual and mechanical	-	03.8	01.9
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Table 4 shows that most of the farmers used manual methods for land preparation (81.9%), weeding (90.7%) and irrigation (66.6%) which is quite tedious and will greatly limit their production potentials since labour is scarce and expensive. There is need for farmers to adopt new technologies in farm operations. Increase in agricultural production requires wide spread and continuous adoption of new technology in the form of production and new products. (Agwu, 2002). From the FGD it was observed that a lot of the farm lands were in very rocky and difficult terrains and some were almost inaccessible. It is therefore not possible to practice mechanized agriculture with that type of topography. Farmers, especially those with large land area spend a lot on labour to ensure maximum utilization of land space to enable them keep their land especially those on government land. This will definitely increase the cost of production significantly. According to FGD (2009), this is one of the factors that discourage women participation in Agriculture in the Seychelles.

Table 5.1: Gender roles in agricultural activities (within gender) in the Seychelles

Farming activities	**Female %**	**Male %**
Nursery management	81.0	89.9
Land preparation	76.2	83.5
Planting	85.7	91.1
Weeding	81.0	87.3
Fertilizer application	71.4	82.3
Spraying	61.9	87.3
Snail pallet application	71.4	91.1
Rat block application	66.7	88.6
Purchase of inputs	81.0	88.6
Farm hygiene	76.2	88.6
Construction of shade houses	00.0	11.4
Maintenance of shade houses	00.0	15.2
Irrigation	76.2	83.5
Harvesting	85.7	88.6
Transportation	66.7	88.6
Marketing	81.0	87.3
Processing	9.5	8.9
Record Keeping	42.9	88.6

Table 5.1 which captures the gender roles of the farmers themselves exclusive of employees, children and relations showed no significant difference in gender roles in the different agricultural tasks except in construction and maintenance of shade houses. Unlike the information from the FGD, it seems that the male farmers have taken over marketing as before.

Table 5.2 Gender roles in farming activities (between genders) in the Seychelles

Farming activities	Female %	Male %
Nursery management	35.3	64.7
Land preparation	28.2	83.7
Planting	38.3	61.7
Weeding	35.3	64.7
Fertilizer application	19.3	80.7
Spraying	29.5	70.5
Snail pallet application	33.4	66.6
Rat block application	32.0	68.0
Purchase of inputs	43.1	56.9
Farm hygiene	49.8	50.2
Construction of shade houses	25.0	75.0
Maintenance of shade houses	15.0	85.0
Irrigation	31.7	68.3
Harvesting	44.2	55.8
Transportation	17.5	82.5
Marketing	47.3	52.7
Processing	68.6	31.4
Record Keeping	44.6	55.4

Table 5.2 which shows the overall gender roles indicates a high male participation in land preparation, fertilizer application, spraying, construction and maintenance of shade houses vis-a-vis the level of women participation which confirms the information from the FGD. It is only in processing that the level of women participation is higher. Other areas of high level women participation are marketing, farm hygiene, record keeping and purchase of inputs.

This study does not show gender specific roles and gender stereotypes of any significance except construction and maintenance of shade houses which seems to be exclusive male preserves. This is a deviation from most other developing countries where agricultural activities are patterned along gender lines.(World Bank, 1995).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that there are no gender specific roles or stereotypes in food production activities. It however established the fact that women are not adequately involved in food production that is why the level of food processing activities in which women are know to excel is low in the country. The Seychelles Agricultural Agency has to work at removing hindrances to effective women participation in agriculture. There is urgent need to strengthen extension services and make it focus on the entire farm family.

SUGGESTIONS

In other to realize the agricultural strategy 2007-2012 of food security, full women participation in agricultural production is needed. The following actions need to be given urgent consideration.

The women should be encouraged by giving equal opportunity to them and their male counterparts in the distribution of productive resources like land and capital.

They should be given farm lands in less difficult terrain.

Women should be sensitized and educated on the different agricultural activities which they can engage in which are less strenuous and very lucrative, for example food processing which is neglected.

More female extension officers should be recruited and trained to work with the women and extension should be targeted at the whole farm family.

REFERENCES

Achoja, F.O. and Ideh, V. (2005) Performance of Rural Women Farmers in Micro-Credit Repayment: Evidence from Coastal Area of Delta State, Nigeria ed. Ogisi, O. D. and Oyaide, W.J. Proceedings of 19th Annual Conference of FAMAN Held at DELSU, Asaba Campus, Asaba. 18th-20th October, Pp237-242

Agwu, A.E.(2002) Cowpea Varietal Needs of Farmers in Bauchi and Gombe States of Nigeria. Journal of Tropical Agriculture, Food, Environment and Extension. 3(1):55-62.

Coon, K. (2005) The Food Crisis and Gender. The Morning Express, a Daily Publication of Morning for Indigenous Affairs and Just Peace. Pp.1and 2

FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations) (1996) Women and Sustainable Food Security. Towards Sustainable Food Security Pub. Women and Population Division (SD Special)

FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations)(2006)Gender and Food Security Emergencies, Women, Girls, Boys and Men; Different Needs- Equal Opportunities. Pub. International Agency Standing Committee (IASC)Pp.59-60

Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul (2007) Without Women No Sustainable Development in Dembowski, H ed. Development and Cooperation International Journal. Pp.188-190.

Ofuoku, A.U.; F.N. Emuh and C.N. Osuagwu (2005) " Adoption of Improved Varieties of Soya Bean (*Glycine max*) among Rural Female Farmers in Ndokwa West and Ukwuani Local Government Areas of Delta State, Nigeria ed. Ogisi, O. D. and Oyaide, W.J. Proceedings of 19th Annual Conference of FAMAN held at DELSU, Asaba Campus, Asaba. 18th-20th October, Pp.257-261

World Bank (1995) Rural Women and Agricultural Extension in the Sahel. Findings. Pub. Africa Technical Department.Pp.1 and 2.