

## ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: `A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

The study assessed the contribution of women to agriculture for economic sustainability. The study aimed at achieving three objectives viz: evaluating the extent of women participation in agricultural production, identifying the constraints faced by women in their participation in agriculture and to also investigate the impact of government on women participation in agriculture. The study also aimed at proffering policy options that can expedite the role of government in mainstreaming women participation in agriculture. From literature reviewed in the study, it was discovered that government have been making positive impact in mainstreaming women into agriculture in Nigeria through its various programmes. However, poor access to farm machinery and market are the main problems being faced by the women. The study concludes that women were significantly participating in agriculture in Nigeria and as a concomitant, the study recommended the establishment of contract/out-growing farming system in order to ensure consistent and steady farm output prices and machinery supply.

**Keywords:** Farming, Agriculture, Government, Mainstream, Machinery.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, the involvement of women in agriculture has attracted greater attention in recent years. The need to develop a suitable extension service that is gender specific cannot be overemphasized. This is in recognition that women play significant roles in Nigeria's agricultural production, processing and utilization. The United Nations report of 2017 asserts that women contribute 43% to the agricultural labor force in developing countries, ranging from about 20% in Latin America to almost 50% in East and South-east Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Some sources even claim that in many African countries up to 80 % of farm labor is done by women. This necessitates their integration into planning, policies and programs for effective and sustainable development of a nation (FAO, 2003). The Nigerian government has continued to make developmental plans, which aims at poverty alleviation and provision of an enabling environment for rural women, with little intervention for women living in urban areas.

Women play important roles in agriculture, undertaking a wide range of activities relating to food production, processing and marketing; and beyond farming, they are involved in land and water management; most often they are collectors of water, firewood and fodder. They have access to store of local knowledge on the medicinal use of plants; they have been at the forefront of soil conservation programmes; and it is women who perform most of the household labour devoted to animal (Commonwealth, 2005).

According to Balikisu (2011), women participation in agricultural production cuts across various subsectors: planting, weeding, harvesting, processing and marketing as well as tending livestock (Soubh, 2006). Hence, the role of women in agricultural production in the developing nations, including Nigeria, can never be overemphasized (Damisa & Yohanna, 2007; & Kishor; Gupta, Yadav, & Singh, 1999).

Although, rural out-migration has constituted one of the greatest challenges hindering agricultural development in developing countries. Survey has showed that in general, women in Africa have a strong desire to participate in their community affairs and contribute to its development (African Development Fund – ADF, 2003) provided that there is government effective and timely support/subsidization to agricultural sector; employment opportunities in the local area, including part-time jobs; the possibility of gaining work experience and vocational qualifications; local facilities for education and training; business services supportive to women's projects and enterprises; public transport services compatible with working hours; local childcare facilities and social services for the elderly and the sick; and supportive public and professional organizations.

The international development community has recognized that agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending

animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as “economically active employment” in national accounts but they are essential to the wellbeing of rural households. This paper contributes to the gender debate in agriculture by assessing the empirical evidence in three areas that has received much attention in the literature. But the agricultural sector in many developing countries is underperforming, in part because women, who represent a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy through their roles as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs, almost everywhere face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources. Efforts by national governments and the international community to achieve their goals for agricultural development, economic growth and food security will be strengthened and accelerated if they build on the contributions that women make and take steps to alleviate these constraints

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as “economically active employment” in national accounts but they are essential to the wellbeing of rural households.

### **1.1 Agriculture as the Engine of Poverty Reduction**

Balikisu (2011) and Overseas Development Institute – ODI (2002) identified some reasons for believing that agriculture is the engine of poverty reduction: when agriculture prospers, farmers and farm labourers benefit, and so do those with jobs upstream and downstream from farming; the wider economy also benefits from increased spending, likelihood of greater tax revenue, more investment in infrastructure, and a stronger foreign exchange position. It was also found that the impact of agricultural growth on poverty reduction is one and half times the impact of growth in other sectors (ODI, 2002).

### **1.2 The Historical Evidences**

The historical evidences prove that agricultural sector has the potentials to be the industrial and economic springboard from which a country’s development can take off as its activities are usually concentrated in the less-developed rural areas where women represent the highest vulnerable groups with a critical need for (rural) transformation, redistribution, poverty alleviation and socio-economic development (Stewart, 2000; Eicher & Witt, 1964; Oluwasanmi, 1966; Ones & Woolf, 1969).

### **1.3 The impact of Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs)**

This scenario of agriculture losing its position in the economy led to the introduction of Agricultural development Projects (ADPs) in the late 1970s by the Nigerian government. The ADPs were designed in response to a fall in agricultural productivity, and hence a concern to sustain domestic food supplies, as labour had moved out of agriculture into more remunerative activities. The ADPs are to provide agricultural investment and services, rural roads, village water supplies, and mainstreaming of women into agricultural activities. The government’s adoption of the ADP concept put the smallholder farm participation at the centre of the agricultural development strategy (Independent Evaluation Group – IEG, 2009)

### **1.4 Women do the task than Men do**

Women produce 60-80 percent of the world’s food, and women are inherently better stewards of the environment than men. Or are they? Although frequently repeated, many such “truths” about women in agriculture are increasingly being debunked.

The myth of the noble and responsible rural woman still permeates many development initiatives. Within this narrative, all rural women have unwittingly been appointed the caretakers of not only the household, but also farms and landscapes. This persistent discourse leaves women shouldering an unreasonable share of responsibility, and its misconceptions results in ineffective and, at times, counter-productive efforts to increase gender equity in agriculture.

The millions of women engaged in agriculture across the globe are a heterogeneous group with vastly different realities, opportunities and challenges. Today, their roles are changing as part of the constantly evolving

social, environmental, cultural and economic contexts they live in. This complexity makes it challenging to design and implement interventions to improve gender equity in agriculture.

Yet, doing just so—increasing equity—is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable intensification of agriculture, concludes a recent synthesis of three years of gender research carried out by the CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE).

It goes on to say that increased equity is both a practical and a social justice issue. Practical because, after all, women make up half the population and play an important (however varied and evolving) role in agriculture. Ensuring that women have opportunities to participate in making food systems more sustainable therefore increases the chances that such a transformation will succeed. Equity is a social justice issue because some of the old gender myths do hold true—in many cases, women have less access and control, fewer rights and opportunities, than men.

The simple answer is that there is no single truth about the role of women in agriculture today. There are many truths, and it is imperative that development interventions and investments are based on solid understandings of gender roles and dynamics in the local context. Over the past three years, researchers have been shedding light on such dynamics, and have developed approaches to better understand them.

In order to make this research more valuable, answers must be provided to the following questions:

1. What is the extent of women participation in agricultural sustainability?
2. What are the constraints being faced by Women in their participation in agriculture?
3. To what extent has Agricultural Development Project impacted on women Participation in agriculture since inception?

## **2 ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE AND ITS ALLIED FIELDS**

Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields. The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture varies greatly from region to region. But regardless of these variations, women are actively involved in various agricultural activities.

As per Census 2011, out of total female main workers, 55 per cent were agricultural laborers and 24 per cent were cultivators. However, only 12.8 per cent of the operational holdings were owned by women, which reflect the gender disparity in ownership of landholdings in agriculture. Moreover, there is concentration of operational holdings (25.7 per cent) by women in the marginal and small holdings categories.

Rural women perform numerous labour intensive jobs such as weeding, hoeing, grass cutting, picking, cotton stick collection, separation of seeds from fibre, keeping of livestock and its other associated activities like milking, milk processing, preparation of ghee, etc. Details of activities taken up by women in Agriculture and its allied activities are as follows.

### **2.1 Agriculture**

Mainly rural women are engaged in agricultural activities in three different ways depending on the socio-economic status of their family and regional factors. They work as paid labourers, cultivators, managers of certain aspects of agricultural production by way of labour supervision and the participation in post-harvest operations. The types of agricultural activities taken up by women includes sowing, nursery management, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.

### **2.2 Livestock**

Livestock is the primary livelihood activity used to meet household food needs as well as supplement farm incomes. It is a common practice in the rural areas to give an animal as part of a women's dowry. Studies have revealed rural women earn extra income from the sale of milk and animals. Mostly women are engaged in cattle management activities such as cleaning of animal and sheds, watering of cattle, milking the animals, fodder collection, preparing dung cakes, collection of farm yard manure. Except grazing, all other livestock management activities are predominantly performed by women. Men, however, share the responsibility of taking care of sick animals. It is evident that women are playing a dominant role in the livestock production and management activities.

### **2.3 Poultry**

Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy. The rate of women participation in poultry farming at household level is central in poultry industry.

#### **2.4 Feminization of Agriculture**

Economic Survey 2017-18 says that with growing rural to urban migration by men, there is ‘feminization’ of agriculture sector, with increasing number of women in multiple roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs, and labourers. Globally, there is empirical evidence that women have a decisive role in ensuring food security and preserving local agro-biodiversity. Rural women are responsible for the integrated management and use of diverse natural resources to meet the daily household needs. This requires that women farmers should have enhanced access to resources like land, water, credit, technology and training which warrants critical analysis in the context of India. In addition, the entitlements of women farmers will be the key to improve agriculture productivity. The differential access of women to resources like land, credit, water, seeds and markets needs to be addressed.

With women predominant at all levels-production, pre-harvest, post-harvest processing, packaging, marketing – of the agricultural value chain, to increase productivity in agriculture, it is imperative to adopt gender specific interventions. An ‘inclusive transformative agricultural policy’ should aim at gender-specific intervention to raise productivity of small farm holdings, integrate women as active agents in rural transformation, and engage men and women in extension services with gender expertise.

#### **2.5 Women constraints in farming**

The low economic status of women limits their opportunities for broader participation in society. This is compounded by the trouble women experience in child-bearing and rearing. African culture discriminates a lot against women and girls, especially in the area of inheritance (land). Culture is not static and in modern-day Nigeria, it is subject to pressure and influences. Modern education and the development of technology and information have introduced Nigerians to new cultural concepts and norms. Since culture is not static, the forces of social change may be expected to lowering the barriers against Land tenure system should be reviewed and changed since the world is also changing. Credit facilities and input should be made available through farmers’ cooperative societies and families. The existing women’s group in the village should be organized and strengthened to increase women’s access to extension services, credit facilities, agricultural inputs and even marketing services. More female extension workers should be trained and sent to help female farmers. It is necessary to particularly identify women as an integral part of the agricultural extension policy and develop gender-specific operational guidelines which will direct the extension activities of women farmers. Input should be sold to farmers at subsidized rate and on time to avoid late supply.

#### **2.6 Women’s key role in Agricultural Production emphasized**

African leaders called for greater investment in women in order to increase agricultural production and improve livelihoods, at a three-day Sharefair on Rural Women’s Technologies to Improve Food Security, Nutrition and Productive Farming held in Nairobi, Kenya between October 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

H. E. Rhoda Peace Tumusiime, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, African Union Commission, UN Women’s Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa, and other dignitaries attend the Exhibition Walk at the Sharefair Agricultural Technologies Exhibition Stands in Nairobi, Kenya.

Held in Nairobi, Kenya to coincide with the International Day of Rural Women on 15 October and World Food Day on 16 October, 2014 the exhibition was organized jointly by UN Women, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in collaboration with the African Union Commission (AUC). It highlighted opportunities to invest in technologies that support rural women, with approximately 100 technologies from 14 countries in the region displayed.

Her Excellency Rhoda Peace Tumusiime, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture at the African Union, opened the event by noting that women contribute significantly to household investments, community resilience, national economic growth and the vibrancy of regional economies.

She said women play a predominant role in African agriculture. They stand out as pillars of economic growth, especially when it comes to agriculture and agribusiness, which dominate rural economies throughout Africa, Ms. Tumusiime said.

UN Women Regional Director for East and Southern Africa, Christine Musisi, challenged governments and financial institutions in the region to prioritize support for female farmers through policies, funding and programming — an investment she said will accelerate agricultural growth while addressing food security.

Ms. Musisi noted that women are central to all aspects of agriculture and off-farm activities in their communities. Despite this, their efforts are often hampered by their lack of access to productive resources, technologies, services and markets.

High-level policy discussions and panels with regional and national government officials, and other sector leaders, took place concurrently with the exhibitions. These highlighted efforts on gender-sensitive agricultural and nutrition policies; identification of promising technologies and addressing the constraints to scaling up innovations.

### 3 CONCLUSION

The contribution of women in agricultural development for sustainable economy cannot be over-emphasized. Following from the preceding discussion, the following conclusions were reached by the study:

Agricultural undertakings are found to be the work of youth and adult among the women in the study area. Sampled women aged 18 – 57 years are those found in agriculture and none of those above 58 years of age were identified to be engaging in agricultural undertakings. An agricultural undertaking in the study area is also seen as a supportive mechanism given that widow and the divorced dominate in the participation.

The study also found that women participation in agriculture in the study area is significant. This is due to their involvement in the three forms of participation identified in the study: participating all year round, participating seasonally (sometimes) and participating in vegetable garden. The farm produce of majority of women was also found to be greater than 1 Ton even though small farm land (1 – 2 hectares) is prevalent among the sampled women.

The major problem facing women farmers in the study area is poor access to farm machinery as majority depend on commercial equipment thereby making them to employ labour intensive technique of farming. The sampled women also identified non access to efficient market as well as poor prices for their farm produce.

Government was found to have positively impacted on women participation in agriculture in the study area. This was achieved through the effort of government in organizing sampled women into farm group and introducing exclusive women agricultural programme: women in agriculture. Federal government also embark on the provision of basic farm input to women in the study area which they have rated as best and good: chemical/fertilizer, extension services, and improved seedling while capital and farm machinery programmes are not effective.

### 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are imperative:

1. The government should introduce programmes that will encourage the youth and adults to remain in agriculture sector. These programmes should also address the plight of the widow and the divorced who are the majority participants among the women.
2. Government should formulate and implement policy on land tenure system that will give women adequate access to farming land so that their farm land could improve to medium (4 – 5 hectares) and even large (at least 7 hectares). In this policy, land allocation for residential and industrial development should be clearly distinguished from agricultural lands.
3. Contract and out-growing farming system should be developed in the state as a way of ensuring consistent market and steady agriculture output prices. This will enable women farmers the opportunity to earn high income from their participation in agriculture and help in the fulfillment of their dreams. These systems of farming can also help reduce poor access to farm machinery as the involved agro – allied industries and other participants will make some of the required machinery available to those women farmers that may be involved.
4. Government should redesign its programmes and projects towards becoming women focus as this will provide them the opportunity to develop and utilize their endowed potentials thereby making competitive and efficient in agriculture and home management as well.

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