



Available Online at ESci Journals

International Journal of Agricultural Extension

ISSN: 2311-6110 (Online), 2311-8547 (Print)

<http://www.escijournals.net/IJAE>

EFFECTS OF SELECTED SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES ON WOMEN IN FOOD PRODUCTION IN GUMA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Despite modernization, acceptance of scientific reasoning and advancement in technology, the Nigerian culture has a firm hold on peoples' behaviour, attitude and practices even in this 21st century and the negative aspects continue to impact on the lives of women. The study examined the effects of selected socio-cultural practices on women involved in food production in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. Total of 100 women farmers were selected as study sample using cross sectional design. Primary and secondary data were collected; primary data were collected with the use of structured questionnaire administered through interview while secondary data were collected from documents, journals, proceedings and periodicals. Descriptive statistics was used to make the data meaningful. Results revealed that 50% had problem of gender discrimination concerning land acquisition, 46% produce between 1100-2000 kg of farm produce, 97% of the women farmers performed virtually all the farm activities involved in food production, 79% needed farm inputs, 42% of the respondents were of the opinion that winnowing is one of the agricultural activities that is specifically meant for women and 81% of the respondents were constrained by agricultural support services. It is recommended that cultural and religious barriers prohibiting women's access to land should cease to exist so that women could own their personal farm land and agricultural support services should be directed towards women.

Keywords: Effects, selected socio-cultural, practices, women, food production.

INTRODUCTION:

Women lives all over the world have long been intertwined with food. Women grow, prepare and serve food in many parts of the world (Women and the Economy, 2011). In Nigeria, women constitute a formidable and significant source of labour for agricultural production, carrying out 70% of agricultural labour, 50% animal husbandry related activities and 60% of food processing activities. Their involvement cut across the entire production system starting from land preparation, planting, input supplies, weeding, irrigation and processing of agricultural produce (Christiana, 1991). In sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, it is estimated that women produce up to 80% of the basic food. In Asia, 90% of the labours that grow rice are women (FAO, 1998) over half of all the food is grown by women all over the world who

own only 2% of the world's land. Regardless of the level of development achieved by different economies, women play a pivotal role in food production and rural development in most countries. Evidently, there are serious constraints which militate against the promotion of effective role of women in those societies which are bound by age-old traditions and beliefs (Biga, 1997). There is a striking gender bias in favour of men when it comes to access to ownership of land, agricultural technology, information, training, financial services and all related productive resources (Marcela, 2010). The roles of women in many countries vary by history, cultural practice and regional differences. Nigeria is divided geographically between North and South, religious and cultural divisions exist as well. Women play vital roles as agricultural producers and as agents of food and nutritional security. Yet relative to men, they have less access to productive assets such as land and services such as finance and extension. A variety of constraints impinge upon their ability to

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participate in collective actions as members of agricultural cooperative or water user associations. In both centralized and un-centralized governance systems, women tend to lack political voice (World Bank, 2003). In Nigeria, part of the effort made in improving the status of women farmers resulted in the establishment of Women-in-Agriculture (WIA) program in 1989 (FACU, 1995). It was established by the Federal Government of Nigeria because of the need to improve extension services to women farmers. Some of the major objectives of Women-in-Agriculture (WIA) program are to increase women farmers' yield (output) and income, Improvement in decision-making among others. The reason that resulted to the establishment of WIA program was that women farmers were marginalized in our society. This view was supported by Jayaweera et al., (1994) when they observed that the gender role assumptions of middle class planners, both national and expatriate, and administrators have been based on the ideology of the domestication of women. According to them, women are perceived as house wives or farm wives rather than farmers and this gender ideology they said, is clearly reflected in policies that affect access to the means of production and the social relationships of production. FACU (1995) attributed this marginalization of women to serious lack of understanding of gender in our society and its implications for development. Because of this lack of understanding according to them, development that benefits men will automatically benefits women. Similarly, Dunmade (1990) women experience considerable difficulties in securing access to services such as extension, provision of agricultural inputs, credits, markets facilities and technical assistance.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Guma Local Government Area (LGA) of Benue State. Guma LGA is one of the 23 LGAs in Benue State. It is located in the North Eastern part of the State. It shares boundary with Gboko and Katsina-Ala LGAs to the North East, Makurdi LGA to the

South and Nassarawa State to the North. It is located between longitude 80oN and 10oE and latitude 6.30oE and 8.10oN, it is the confluence of rivers Benue and Katsina-Ala (BNARDA, 1992). Guma LGA has a landmass of 240,000 square kilometers, a population of 191,599 inhabitants (NPC, 2006). Tiv (one of the local tribes in the study area) people are the dominant ethnic group inhabiting the area; other ethnic groups include Jukun and Kabawa (BNARDA, 1992). Four council wards were selected out of 10 council wards purposively based on involvement of women in agricultural production. The council wards were Mbabai, Uvir, Gbajimba and Abinsi. From each of the selected council wards 25 women/female farmers were selected randomly. Thus, a total of 100 women farmers sample was used for present study. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaire administered through interview, while secondary data were gathered through documents, periodicals, books, journals, among others. Primary data collected were coded and analyzed through descriptive statistics using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender discrimination, land tenure policy, lack of credit facility and no restriction appeared as problems regarding land acquisition as perceived by 50%, 23%, 21% and 6% respectively as mentioned in table 1. A reasonable proportion (50%) of the respondents had problem of gender discrimination concerning land acquisition. This is an indication that women are restricted by customary law, culture and statures in having easy access to their personal farmland. In African culture, women do not have the customary right to inherit land owned by their late husband. The most surprising aspect of it all is that the male child born by the same women on attaining adulthood has the customary right to inherit the same piece of land that customary right denied the mother inheritance.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to problems acquiring farmland

Problem	Frequency	Percentage
Gender discrimination	50	50
Land tenure policy	23	23
Lack of credit facility	21	21
No restriction	06	06
Total	100	100

Nigeria is a highly patriarchal society, where men dominate all spheres of women lives. Women are in a subordinate position (particularly at the community and household levels) and male children are preferred

over the female. Marcela (2010) endorsed that there is striking gender bias in favour of men when it comes to access and ownership of land and other productive resources in agriculture.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents based on farm output

Farm Output (Kg)	Frequency	Percentage
1,100-2,000	46	46
100-1,000	42	42
2,100-3,000	09	09
4,100 and above	02	02
3,100-4,000	01	01
Total	100	100

Results in Table 2 reveal that those with annual output (Kg) of between 1,100-2,000, 100-1,000, 2,100-3,000, 4,100 and above and 3,100-4,000 as obtained by 46%, 42%, 9%, 2% and 1% respectively. Reasonable proportions (46%) of the respondents produced between 1,100-2,000 Kg of farm output. This is an indication that most of the respondents produce on small scale level which could be as a result of limitations against their effort. In spite of women contributions to food security in Nigeria they continue to face gender discrimination and other constraints. These constraints are as a result of the age-old traditions, cultures and beliefs of their communities; they have less access to productive resources and economic opportunities compared to men. Land is an

important factor in agricultural production and without it production cannot take place. The inability of the women to own their personal farmland has limited their capacities to produce on large scale basis; many women plant either on pieces of land that are not economically very productive or on small piece of land at the back of the house. The inability of women to access agricultural inputs has made the woman folk to engage in producing mostly vegetables at the back yard of their houses. Marcela (2010); FAO (1990); Oladejo *et al.* (2011) were of the view that female-operated farms output are lower compare to men operated-farms but, if women are given the same resources and chances as men in food production they are capable to out produce more than men.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to farm activities performed by women

Farm Activity	Frequency	Percentage
Planting	45	45
Post- harvest	28	28
Pre- planting	15	15
All of the above	97	97

*Multiple Responses

Results in Table 3 depict that planting, post-harvest, pre-planting and all of the above appeared as activities performed by women as 45%, 28%, 15% and 97% respectively. Majority (97%) of the respondents performed virtually all the farm activities involved in food production; they were actively involved, starting from pre-planting to post-harvest. In Nigeria, women have traditionally performed the majority of work in food production; agriculture is becoming increasingly a predominantly female sector. Economic policies favouring the development of industry and neglect of the agricultural sector, particularly domestic food production have led to an exodus of rural people

particularly men to urban or mining areas to seek income earning opportunities in those areas. This confirms (Christiana, 1991) and FAO (1994) which stated that women in Africa play major roles in sowing, weeding, application of fertilizers and pesticides, harvesting, threshing, food processing, transportation and marketing of agricultural produce and products. Results in Table 4 reveal that farm inputs 79%, credit facility 29%, labour 16% and land 7%. A major proportion (79%) of the respondents needed farm inputs. Farm inputs are essential to improving agricultural production. A direct consequence of women's lack of farm input is the low quantity of

output. Nigerian culture highly discriminate against women, although women farmers play predominant roles in food production, they often lack access to farm inputs. For instance, membership in co-operative and distribution of farm inputs tends to be based on men head of household criteria, thus excludes women. Women farmers in Nigeria generally lack access to agricultural services, land ownership restricts women farmers' access to credit facilities as land is used as collateral. This confirms (FAO, 1998a) which reported that membership in rural organizations and farmers' associations is important for access to agricultural

resources, credit, information, training and other support services because these organizations represent the interest of their members in relation to governments, project management and development policy makers and planners at different levels. Women farmers' access to leadership positions in these organizations is restricted by law, religion and culture, their ability to make their views known to policy makers and planners is also restricted. The obvious implication is the inability to carry out their roles in food production to the optimum level.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents based on specific needs of women for food production.

Specific Need	Frequency	Percentage
Farm Inputs	79	79
Credit facility	29	29
Labour	16	16
Land	07	07

*Multiple Responses

Table 5. Distribution of respondents based on agricultural activities that are women specific.

Activity	Frequency	Percentage
Winnowing	42	42
Threshing	30	30
Hand weeding	21	21
All of the above	40	40
Others	2	02

* Multiple responses

Table 6. distribution of respondents according to constraints faced by women in food production

Constraint	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of agricultural support services	81	81
Inability to access loans	73	73
Gender discrimination	06	06
Unavailability of land	01	01

*Multiple responses

Results in Table 5 indicate that winnowing 42%, threshing 30% hand weeding 21%, all of the above 40% and others 2%. A reasonable proportion (42%) of the respondents stated that winnowing is one of the agricultural activities specifically meant for women. Winnowing, threshing and other food processing activities that are not very tasking are considered to be women specific in some locations, as men are expected to perform farm activities that are tasking like tillage, mounding of heaps among others. FAO (1998b) reported that women in developing countries perform food processing activities. However, agricultural activities that are women specific differ from locations

depending on religious, economic and socio-cultural factors. In Nigeria, particularly in Muslim dominated areas, women are limited by seclusion (purdah) an Islamic practice which prohibits women from going outside their house especially in the day time. Furthermore, Muslim women to a large extent are involved in off-farm activities such as threshing and processing of small quantities of agricultural produce. This agrees with FAO (1998b) which reported that women and men have distinct responsibilities for certain crops and livestock, fish and forests.

Results in Table 6 show that agricultural support services 81%, inability to access loan 73%, gender

discrimination 6% and unavailability of land 1%. Majority (81%) of the respondents were constrained by agricultural support services. This is an indication that they had no or little access to extension and other services. This could be attributed to the fact that extension and other services are often directed towards men and they tend to aim their advice and services on men and women access to training and extension is very minimal. These findings are similar to those of Adekanye et al., (2007) who reported that extension services have often been ineffective in food and agriculture production. The problem is more compounded in the case of women because, men are always the first and perhaps the only target and recipients of planned change in agriculture. Women in Agriculture (WIA) have tried to address this but the problem is far from being solved.

Women farmers still lag behind in terms of extension contacts, attendance at training and other indices of developmental education for agriculture. These findings are also similar to those of Himanshu and Dileep (2014) who observed that women play an important role in aquaculture sector. This role encompasses social and economic activities and duties, both within and outside the family. In spite of this, presence of women in aquaculture sector is very negligible due to some social and cultural stigma.

CONCLUSION

Women play important roles in food production and security but they are often constraint by culture and customary laws directly or indirectly. Their substantial contributions to agriculture and food production continue to be undervalued in conventional agriculture especially in Africa general and Nigeria in particular, while men's contributions remain the central or the main focus of attention. Women do not have enough access to farmland and programs are not directed to their needs, accessibility to credit facilities proves very difficult and access to extension services is very minimal. However, these constraints do not stop their commitment towards food production and food security as women provide the greater proportion of labour in production and processing of agricultural produce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study it is recommended that cultural and religious barriers prohibiting women's access to land should be abolished and

agricultural support services should be directed towards women.

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