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WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN FOOD CROP PRODUCTION, PROCESSING AND MARKETING IN NIGERIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

The subject of women involvement in food processing and marketing has become imperative, especially when the roles of women are being redefined in the global socio-political and economic framework. Not much research has been done in this subject area. The object of this study therefore, is to determine the extent of involvement of women in food crop production, processing and marketing in a typical African locality.

The research sample consists of 160 female farmers, randomly selected from four villages in Two Local Government Areas of Ondo State, Nigeria. Appropriate statistical techniques were employed in the data analyses. The findings show that women are greatly involved in the production, processing and marketing of food crops, especially cassava, which is one of the staple foods in sub-Saharan Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The supply of food for the human population of the world depends primarily on the ability of green plants convert solar energy into carbohydrates through the process of photosynthesis. The production of food from crop plants is therefore vital to the sustenance of living and other forms of life and 70% of the world population's food comes directly from crops (Harper, 1983).

In most parts of the world, the contributions of the women farmers have not been adequately looked into. Women are still being relegated to the background concerning the issues of crop production. It is being argued that the existing knowledge on women's work, particularly in the informal sector, is still inadequate. Some of the factors which are identified by Ezumah (1990) as being responsible for this paucity of data are: lack of attention to

women's work; "invisibility" and under reporting of women's work; neglect of and 'blindness' to women activities; and myths about women's role in agriculture.

Patel and Anthonio (1973), stated that women help their husbands in decision making also assists them financially to enhance their farm work. However, Ekpere (1986) reported that in Oyo State (Nigeria), women participate in production of cassava through processing and marketing. In view of the above, there is therefore the need to highlight the role of women in food crop production, processing and marketing of these food crops.

The questions raised in this study then are; are women involved in cultivation practices of these food crops? To what extent are they contributing to food crop processing? What roles do they play in the marketing of the food crops so produced? In order to answer the crucial questions raised above, this study attempts to achieve the following objectives: examine the level of women involvement in food crop production practices; determine the extent of women involvement in food crop processing; and identify the extent of women involvement in the marketing of these food crops.

The scope of this study consists of two randomly selected local government areas of Ondo State in Nigeria; Akoko South and Ifedore Local Governments Area. The main occupation of the people residing in these local government areas is predominantly agricultural, with emphasis on food crop production. Farming in these areas is characterised by a gender division of labour according to the nature of tasks to be performed and crops cultivated.

The limitation of the study is that in the course of collecting data from the women farmer's. Memory recall lapses occurred while some farmers

were reluctant to part with useful information since, they cannot see the immediate benefits derivable from a study of this nature. However, the study is in a position to answer the questions raised in the study despite these limitations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A large variety of food crops are produced in Nigeria. This variety is enough to make Nigeria self-sufficient in food crop production if all the necessary developmental changes are made (Famoriyo, 1979). Constituting the most important food crops in Nigeria in terms of need are cereal — sorghum, millet, maize, rice and wheat; grain legumes — beans, cowpeas and peas; roots and tubers — yam, cocoyam, potatoes and cassava. The list also includes plantain and bananas. It also includes groundnut, soyabeans and vegetables (Famoriyo, 1979).

The achievement of collective self reliance in Nigeria as in other developing countries would not be possible without the full participation of women who represent about half the country's total population (Adebusoye, 1980). Akingbule (1992) stated that women work in rural areas as farmers, food processors and distributors and that today, one out of three households in the world has a woman as its sole bread winner. Women cultivate food crops by themselves or together with men. They also work on cash crops with their husbands.

Women are key workers in the food chain; they produce, process and store food or they purchase it when income is adequate, also the responsibility for getting food for the family shifts to women. Women are increasingly significant with regard to food security, even when they are not the primary breadwinners (Ezumah, 1990).

The importance of women in

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Agriculture differs by region. The United Nations estimates that women's share in family food production is 80 percent in Africa, 60 percent in Asia and the Pacific; and 40 percent in Latin America (Akingbule, 1992). In Africa, women are often farmers in their own right of labour on the family farm. Women do most of the food processing and marketing of the surplus produce. The shift from the cultivation of food crops to cash crops in many areas has meant that women must now take up the task of working on the cash crops farm while continuing to cultivate food crops. Olayide et al (1980) affirmed that in Nigeria, the women fold constitutes a formidable and significant source of labour in small farming. Boserup (1970) provided evidence to show that women in the third world play significant roles in agricultural and rural development. She pointed out further that women were major regional differences in the role that women play in farming and that Africa could be described as the "region of female farming per excellence".

It is believed that women in Africa do up to three-quarters of all agricultural work in addition to their domestic responsibilities. Patel and Anthonio (1973) discovered among other things, that 93 percent of women studied, worked on farms for crops such as yam, maize, tobacco and cassava; 64 percent helped to find new ideas for improving crops and livestock, while 48 percent encouraged their husbands to continue with, or to reject new ideas. Also 80 percent of the women gave money to their husbands for agricultural purposes. These results were from the study conducted on the socio-economic activities of wives of tobacco farmers in two administrative (Osun and Oyo) divisions of Western Nigeria

In Yorubaland, women are found to predominate in the retail marketing of agricultural products, and a high proportion of women in the rural areas appear to earn most of their incomes from trade on agricultural commodities. An analysis of the rural markets revealed that men usually constitute less than 5 percent of the traders. Table 1 illustrates the women's contribution to agricultural work.

TABLE 1 WOMEN'S WORK IN AFRICA (%)

Activity	Women	Men
Growing Food	70	30
Storing	50	50
Community Projects	70	30
Selling, exchanging produce	60	40
Grinding, Processing food	100	—

Adapted Form; UN Economic Commission for Africa / The Hunger Project.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In Ondo State of Nigeria, almost all the villages/towns produce food crops to a significant level, hence two areas were chosen for the purposes of this study. The areas were Akoko-South (situated in the northern savannah zone of the state) and Ifedore Local Government (situated at the Southern zone).

A total sample of 160 farmers (women food crop producers) in the two selected areas were drawn, using the stratified random sampling technique. Four villages were randomly selected from each of the two local government areas and 20 food crop women producers were randomly selected in each village. The selected farmers were interviewed with the use of prepared structured interview schedule. The questions were designed based on the objectives of the study as earlier stated. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used in analysing the data obtained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

I. AGE: the age distribution of the farmers in the area of study is shown in table 2 below.

About a quarter of the respondents (25.62%) fell within 41 – 45 years while only one farmer representing 0.62% was above 60 years of age. The implication of the above table is that a higher percentage of the women food crop producers were middle aged and young implying that there is high prospects for increased food production, processing and marketing because majority of the farmers are still in their productive ages.

A higher percentage (41.25%) of respondents received primary education. 14.35% had post-secondary education. The implication of majority of the respondents having formal education (89.38%) is that adoption of new innovations may be high, since education plays a vital role in adoption of new improved technology. The relevance of farmers literacy level (which is largely determined by education) to farm productivity and production efficiency has been documented by Oboniola (1988).

Table 2: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN FOOD CROP PRODUCERS.

Age group (Yrs).	Frequency	%	cumulative %
Below 30	13	8.12	-
31 – 35	26	16.25	24.38
36 – 40	36	22.50	46.88
41 – 45	41	25.62	72.50
46 – 50	29	18.12	90.63
51 – 55	10	6.25	96.88
56 – 60	04	2.50	99.38
Above 60	01	0.62	100.00

Source; Field Survey

TABLE 3:

ii **EDUCATIONAL STATUS:** Table 3 shows the educational background of the women food crop producers.
EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF WOMEN FOOD CROP PRODUCERS.

Educational Level	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Illiterate	16	10.00	-
Non Formal	01	0.62	10.62
Primary	66	41.25	51.88
Secondary	54	33.75	85.63
Tertiary	23	14.38	100.00
	160	100.00	
Source: Field Survey			

TABLE 3: RESPONDENTS' FARM SIZES (HA) (N = 159)

Land holding (ha)	Frequency	%	Cumulative%
Under 0.5	79	49.69	-
0.51 – 1.00	50	31.45	81.13
1.01 – 1.50	09	5.60	86.79
1.51 – 2.00	18	11.32	98.11
2.01 – 2.50	01	0.63	98.74
Over 2.50	02	1.25	100.00
Total	159	100	

Mean = 0.82 ha. Range 0.07 – 4.00 ha.

Source: Field Survey

WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN PRODUCTION PRACTICES

i. FARM SIZE (HECTARES):

Table 3 shows total farm size cultivated. Mean farm size was 0.82% with a range of 0.07 to 4.00 ha. A higher percentage (81.13%) of the respondents cultivated small plots of land up to a maximum of 1.00ha each. Only 18.87% cultivated anything over 1.00ha. The implication of this is that most farmers in the study area are small scale farmers especially women.

ii. TYPES OF FOOD CROPS PRODUCED:

Table 4 shows the percentage of food crop producers in the study area. The table indicates that the major crops produced are cassava, yam and maize. 93.7% of the respondents grew cassava, while 70.63% produced yam.

iii. FARM OPERATIONS CARRIED OUT BY THE WOMEN FARMERS

Table 5 shows the various farm operations in which the farmers engaged themselves. Those that cannot engage in one form of operation claimed they engaged the services of hired labour. According to the table, women were mostly involved in harvesting (95.63%). 87.50% were involved in planting, 83.13% engaged in bush burning and 75.63% engaged in packing.

WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN FOOD CROP PROCESSING

i. Types of Food Crop Processed

Table 6 shows that various food crops that were being processed into one form or the other by the women. Almost all the respondents

processed one crop or the other. One hundred and thirty-five respondents (84.38%) processed cassava, 26 respondents (16.25%) processed maize, while about 0.63%-processed plantain.

ii. End Products of Processing

The highest number of respondents (78.13%) processed cassava into "garri" 56.25% into cassava flour while 16.25% processed cassava into "fufu". Maize was also processed into pap by 15.00% of respondents. All the yam processors processed yam into yam flour and this constitutes about 31 – 25% for the total respondents. However other food crops enjoyed little processing. Cassava appears to be the most processed crop because of the various forms into

TABLE 4: TYPES OF FOOD CROP PRODUCED (N = 160)

Crops	Frequency	%	Crops	Frequency	%
Yam	113	70.63	Sweet Potato	03	1.88
Cassava	150	93.75	Vegetable	88	55.00
Cocoyam	68	42.50	Pepper	14	8.75
Cowpea	18	11.25	Melon	28	17.50
Soyabean	04	2.50	Tomato	05	3.13
Maize	117	73.13	Okro	10	6.25
Rice	07	4.38	Plantain/Banana	06	3.75
Groundnut	18	11.25			

Source: Field Survey

Table 5: FARM OPERATIONS CARRIED OUT BY WOMEN FARMERS (N – 160)

Farm Activities	Frequency	%	Farm Activities	Frequency	%
Land Clearing	41	25.63	Planting	140	87.50
Tree felling	01	0.63	Fertilizer Application	62	38.75
Burning	133	83.13	Staking	66	41.25
Parking	121	75.63	Spraying	10	6.25
Ridging/Heaping	05	3.13	Weeding	99	61.88
Set Cutting	74	46.25	Harvesting	153	95.63

Source: Field Survey

TABLE 6: TYPES OF FOOD CROP PROCESSED (N = 160)

Crops	Frequency	%	Crops	Frequency	%
Yam	51	31.88	Cassava	135	84.38
Cocoyam	02	1.25	Pepper	03	1.86
Maize	26	16.25	Okro	01	0.63
Melon	02	1.25	Soyabean	04	2.50
Vegetable	01	0.63	Plantain	01	0.63

Source: Field Survey

which it can be processed.

iii. **Equipment of Processing**

Most of the processing are done locally. The various equipment used in the processing of the food crops are calabash, knife, frying pot, frying spoon, sleeve, tray, grating machine etc. The choice of any these equipment, or their combination, however depends on the type of food crop to be processed and

into what form. For instance, cassava processing involved the use of knife, frying pot, frying spoon, grating machine, and sleeve while vegetable required only knife and fry.

WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN FOOD CROP MARKETING

All the respondents claimed that they involved themselves in marketing activities of the food crops they produced or processed. This

indicates that the crops were either sold raw or processed. The products were sold either on the farm, in the village market, next village market or in the town. About 71.25% of the farmers got their products to the market through public transport while 43.12% carried their product on their heads to the market. Others used private vehicles, motorcycles or bicycles to transport their products. Table 7 shows the

TABLE 7; FOOD CROPS MARKETED.

Food Crops Marketed	Frequency	%
Cassava	136	85.00
Maize	66	41.25
Vegetables	64	40.00
Yam	44	27.50
Cocoyam	40	25.00

Source: field survey

food crops that are commonly marketed in the study area by the women.

The study also revealed that a larger percentage of 83.75% of the respondents engaged in small scale marketing using the local units of measurement such tins, "kongos", bags and basin.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has highlighted the crucial role played by women in food crops production, processing and marketing. The need arises for any society to continue to encourage women participation in agricultural activities in order to boost food production, avoid waste and achieve the much desired food self-sufficiency. In order to achieve the above, this study recommends the following:

a. Government at the various levels should improve the technological base in food crop production by introducing the use of adaptive technology, specially adapted for the use of the small farmers especially women. This will go a long way in promoting farm production activities

b. Farmers should be encouraged in the act of processing food crops produced during the peak period in order to avoid waste and selling at very cheap prices by providing the

necessary processing equipment for the use of the farmers.

c. The women should be assisted by the government to market their products and should be adequately patronised by same. Construction of feeder roads to link villages with urban centres is highly essential in this regard.

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