

GENDER ISSUES IN SUSTAINABLE COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE IN NIGERIA A WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

Women play a significant role in food production and food security on agricultural enterprise. In most parts of rural Nigeria, division of labour within the households is gender specific and according to age. Women perform different roles; have unequal decision-making power as well as differences in access to land and control over agricultural productive resources. As a result of these challenges, their views, needs, priorities and constraints to improving their productive potentials differ. This affects their various outputs even in sustainable agricultural development. Therefore, understanding of gender participation and constraints in food production, processing and marketing among rural farmers in Nigeria is important due to the current threat to food security as a result of the economic recession facing the country and this calls the need to increase and sustain the enterprise among farmers. Despite the important roles women play in family farming in Nigeria, they are hardly given any attention in the area of training and/or visitation by extension agents with improved technologies, lack of access to Banks loans, are rarely reached with improved seeds, fertilizer, other farm inputs and are highly disadvantaged in economic empowerment for agricultural development. Government should pay more attention to breaking the gender barriers in farming and there is need to review the existing land tenure system.

Keywords: Gender, Issues, Sustainable, Agriculture, Nigeria

Introduction

Home Economics Agriculture is prestigious, noble and lucrative profession that can no longer be left in the hands of novices and old people to be operating with crude implements. Women play important roles in agriculture, going through a broad sphere of activities that relates to food production, processing and marketing (Commonwealth, 2005). Women participation in agricultural production therefore cut across various agricultural processes such as planting, weeding, harvesting, processing, and marketing as well as tending livestock (Soubh, 2006). Hence, the women's role in agricultural production in the developing nations, including Nigeria, cannot be overemphasized (Damisa and Yohanna, 2007). Agricultural production process is involving and highly demanding. Women farmers in the rural area play crucial role in food production and food security. Women have much more limited access to resources than their male counterparts especially in the areas of education, land, agriculture extension and access to credit, all of which combine to restrain women's ability to increase their productivity and incomes. Afolabi (2008) contends that women are very strong pillars of the economy in

Nigeria as far as agricultural activities are concerned. It has been found that rural women in Nigeria are the major contributors to food production and that these rural women have contributed a lot to the management of human and economic resources to achieve optimum results (Brown, Feldstein, Haadad, Pena and Quisumbig, 2001). They maintain that output from the farms of these rural women particularly contributes to food production that addresses food shortage crises. It is important to add that those women who engage in the cultivation of staples of agriculture produce are significantly predisposed to improved incomes that tend to positively impact on the livelihood stakes of people in the rural communities.

Despite the significant contribution of women to food systems, they continue to face challenges that hinder their full participation. Women are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence, which can undermine their physical and mental health, as well as limit their ability to participate in the workforce. Additionally, women's unpaid care work responsibilities leave them with limited time to engage in income-generating activities, further exacerbating their economic vulnerability. Mkindi (2023) emphasizes that despite the significant contribution of women to food systems, they continue to face challenges that hinder their full participation. Limited access to resources, including land, water, and agricultural inputs, coupled with limited access to education, information and training, poor infrastructure, gaps in government policies, and limited access to credit and financial services further restrict women's participation in food systems. Mkindi (2023) also stated that these challenges perpetuate gender inequalities and hinder the creation of more sustainable and resilient food systems in the region. Recognizing the critical role of women in food systems and addressing the underlying barriers they face is essential to promote gender participation and achieving sustainable development.

Most Sub-Saharan Africa countries now recognize that the fight against gender bias in agriculture is crucial to sustaining economic growth and ensuring food security. This is particularly germane in countries where the vast majority of the populations earn their incomes from agriculture-based activities. According to recent statistics, agriculture accounts on average for 30% of the Gross Domestic Product in Sub-Saharan Africa countries, provides about 45% of earning sources, and employs over 65% of the total labour force (World Bank, 2015). If these countries could harness the full potential of their agricultural sector, then the impacts at household and national levels would be substantial.

Roles of Women in Agriculture

Women play a central role in crop production, processing and marketing, contributing about 58% of total agricultural labour in the south west, 67% in the southeast and 58% in the central zones of Nigeria (FAO, 2014). However, they almost entirely responsible for virtually all the activities like ridging, planting, weeding, harvesting, transporting, sorting, processing, marketing and domestic chores which provides them with additional income-earning opportunity to enhance their ability to contribute to household food security Mgbako (2013). Rural women are involved in both crop and livestock production at subsistence and commercial levels. They produce food and cash crops, providing two thirds of the food crops and manage mixed agricultural operations, involving crops, livestock and fish farming that considered as part of the agricultural labour force Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2011).. According to Mbah, Saror and Agada (2016) reported that 97% of women in Nigeria were involved in weeding (97%), processing (92%), transportation (91%), marketing (79%) planting

(50%) and harvesting (35%). They are also involved in collection of fuel wood and water, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as economically active employment but they are essential to the well-being of rural households. An understanding of gender contributions to food output in rural households in Nigeria is important. This will ensure effective allocation of production resources within the rural households. Given equal opportunities to both men and women will increase the farm output of the households and improve their standard of living. Numerous studies indicate that rural development policies directed at the household may not have their intended effects or produce unintended negative outcomes, unless the role and position of gender in rural households are explicitly taken into account (Chinasaokwu, 2012). According to the author Socio-economic and political obstacles have for long been intensifying gender inequality and exacerbating poverty among women.

In rural settings, the contribution of women in agriculture should not be faced with irony and mirage. Women contributed most especially in all facets of agriculture except where culture and norms placed barrier from their participation. They engaged seriously in farming activities like; land preparation, planting, weeding, fertilize application, processing of agricultural produce. They participated heavily in farming of crops like rice, okro, sweet potato, cowpea, cassava, melon, maize mention but a few. However, if equal opportunity could be given to all farmers in the area that is allowing both men and women to grow whatever crops he/she wants to crop without gender disparity, there is tendency to boost food security in Nigeria.

Gender Issues in Sustainable Commercial Agriculture

Agriculture is the world's oldest profession. Nature has placed food and water at the second list after air in order of importance and services in the world. In order of priority, nature has made this ranking a necessity of life. Food is the product of agriculture and water and from biological perspective; water is one of the classes of food reported by Nnebedum (2020). Therefore we must embrace agriculture at all cost to sustain life and progress. Under male dominated social structures and political systems, women do not derive equal access to land, technology, education and resources Uduji and Elda (2022). The problem of food shortages in Nigeria has been attributed to an acute dearth of gender equality and a shift of farm responsibilities to the women (FAO, 2020). There has also been a great disparity between women and men in the size of land holdings as well as any overall trend of increasing landlessness pressure. In the light of these, the key constraints affecting women's ability to improve efficiency in agriculture in Nigeria includes; lack of knowledge and skills, capital, institutional support limited availability of inputs, restricted market information and adverse macroeconomic conditions.

Lack of Access to Loan

Agricultural credit is seen as one of the strategic resources for crop production, which has led to an increase in the standard of living for the rural poor. There are two main sources of agricultural credit: formal and informal. Farmers in the across the six geo-political zones have not benefitted from the formal sources (bank and government). It is the view of the women are not likely to have access because • face barriers such as poor financial literacy and high illiteracy, and hence are unfamiliar with loan procedures, collateral requirements, and negotiating male-dominated banking facilities (FAO, 2018) In Nigeria, women farmers receive less than 10% of the credit offered to small-scale farmers. Women farmers are deterred from

applying for formal loans because of the complexity of the administrative process, unsuitable loan sizes and credit rates. These aforementioned problems affect women who want to go into farming. According to Yidau, Tafida and Yusuf (2021) inadequate funds for women may lead to the abandonment of some projects limiting their ability to contribute to the extent they should have being to be involved in commercial farming.

Lack of Access to Information and Communication

Women participation in farmer training is low due to the lack of awareness, society barriers, and transportation facilities. Women farmers in Nigeria do not participate fully in agricultural training. Due to the fact that some of them may not be aware of the training. There is need to disseminate information across to everybody through town crier and radio station (Arthur, Kwarteng and Dorinaa, 2016). Mulauzi (2020) reported that varied technologies can be employed to different records, to take advantage of technology-based management.

High Cost of Farm Inputs

Women farmers are unable to use inputs due to high cost in the open market. FAO, (2018) reported tractors used to be provided, subsidized by the government, but these are currently individually owned. Both men and women have physical access to such agricultural equipment, but not equal economic access, as men are more likely to have more financial resources. Women have small landholdings and low capital, and hence have limited access to agricultural equipment. Groups of women do come together to contribute money to hire a tractor or animal traction for land preparation. Some farmers also access tractors through registered farmers' cooperatives connected to agricultural banks; this may need to be explored. In the same vein Yidau (2022) indicated that necessary farm inputs such as disease resistant variety and fertilizers should be provided by government at reasonable prices and right time in the local markets and provide storage/processing facilities to reduce the loss of farm produce.

Land Ownership

Women in the community generally own less land due to traditional authority. According to the 2012 Gender report in Nigeria by the British Council, women own 4% of land in the North-East, and just over 10% in the South-East and South-South has less than 10% of land allocated to women. (Karl, 2005). Therefore, lack of land ownership significantly reduces the chances for women's access to produce enough food due to limited land assigned to them. Sequel to this, farmers in the area said that the major factors that constrain women involvement in commercial farming and processing in the community are non-ownership of farm land; their pre-occupation with household chores, inadequate farm size, as well as high cost of processing. FAO (2018) stated that one of the challenges that must be tackled by the proposed sustainable agricultural farming is that of women's landlessness in the face of diminishing arable land. Women's participation in the commercial farming depends largely on adequate access to land.

Conflicts and Civil Insecurity

The spread of communal war and conflict interrupted production of food and displaced people leaving fertile land uncultivated. Also, there are occasional communal crisis that has had devastating effects on the community economic development especially in the area of food production. Other conflicts may take the form of physical fighting, structural violence without

declaring war which may result from premeditated pervasion of poverty, rich oppression of the poor, police brutality, intimidation of the common citizens by politicians, women and children oppression and monopolization of resources and power.. As a matter of fact, in many rural communities where there were many female farmers, the fear of conflicts and insecurity has discouraged many from continuing the farming activities which have resulted in rising scarcity of food and poverty (Afolabi, 2022).

Climate Change and Natural Disasters

Global climate change is another important driver of food insecurity that cannot be overlooked. Climate change is responsible for biodiversity loss in the ecosystem as well as other physical access. It has become one of the key factors that is redefining the global food equation and thus having so much impact on the food security of developing nations. Natural disasters and climate variability constitute other key factors making people from less developed nations vulnerable to food insecurity. According Pudmenzky, Lisk, Vitos Ribero, Millar, Steinbach, Bannon, Drew Alis, Sjaavik, Galasch, Tripathi and Tapia (2022) stated the improving community on awareness, women's understanding of climate change and disaster risks.

Lack of Technology for Processing and Storage

The use of modern technologies in the production and distribution of agricultural products is very low in the community so the farmers depended more on manual labour for farm activities. This is because of lack of innovation in local technology, particularly as it relate to mechanization of agriculture to improve productivity. Local farmers can hardly afford imported technologies and lack maintenance capacity. Inadequate or lack of facilities to preserve food items such as cereals, yam, beans, and so on. can result in wastage thereby further deepening the insecurity level of food. Also, lack of food processing apparatus sometime leave farmers with no choice than to consume significant fraction of their harvest within short period. Food processing is an important aspect of agriculture that prevents wastage of food items that cannot be easily stored in their original form by transforming them into other form that can enable their preservation. To achieve a sustainable food security, effort must be made to avert any wastage. Bamigboye and Ademola (2019) pointed out that usage of technology in Nigeria is inadequate skilled manpower; mostly women farmers are unskilled and uninformed in terms of new farm technology.

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is one of the primary driving forces of food insecurity because this is the most important concern of people who are denied access or unable to engage in labor. Women face lots of discrimination both in seeking education, land for cropping and job. They face similar fate even at home within the household, yet women are mostly responsible for preparing meals and taking care of 'he children. They mostly spend all or a good fraction of their income on feeding and their children's needs. The role of women in ensuring adequate land use, as well as food production, processing, distribution and marketing cannot be over emphasized. Women often deprived of access to agricultural assets, inputs and service when compared to men. Analysts, have suggested that if women where to have the similar access as men to productive resources, yield would increase by 20% - 30%, boosting the total agricultural output by 2.5% to 4% in developing countries. If gender inequality is minimized and women are given better access to agricultural facilities, achieving food security will be much easier. It has been

established over time by raising women's status, poverty will decline and nutrition will be enhanced. FAO (2018) indicated that most of the gender issues in agriculture have their roots in gender inequality. The most common involve the non-recognition of the productive activities of women and the unequal distribution of resources, benefits, opportunities, and decision-making powers. Women are responsible for half of the world's food production, and in most developing countries produce between 60% and 80% of the food, yet they continue to be regarded as home producers or assistants on the farm and not as actual farmers and economic agents.

WAY FORWARD

Addressing gender issues in sustainable commercial agriculture is not just a matter of equity; it is a strategic imperative for national development. A gender-inclusive agricultural sector can drive food security, economic empowerment, and environmental sustainability.

To move forward:

- Stakeholders must adopt a holistic, gender-sensitive approach to agricultural development.
- Government agencies, NGOs, financial institutions, and community leaders should collaborate to dismantle barriers that limit women's participation.
- Data collection and research must be gender-disaggregated to inform evidence-based policies and interventions.
- Youth and rural women should be targeted for mentorship and empowerment programs that position them for leadership in agribusiness.

CONCLUSION

Women farmers cultivate smaller land, have less access to inputs, advisory and extension services, display a lower rate of modern inputs application than their male counterparts, and suffer from discriminatory land laws. Despite the dominant and important roles women play in family farming in Nigeria, they are hardly given any attention which have led to gender productivity differentials in Nigeria. Reallocating productive resources evenly between female and male farmers may unlock the productivity potential of women farmers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Land Reform Policies:**
Government and traditional institutions should ensure women have equal rights to own, inherit, and control land. This includes legal reforms, awareness campaigns, and enforcement mechanisms.
2. **Gender-Responsive Credit Schemes:**
Microfinance institutions and agricultural banks should design products tailored to women farmers, such as group lending, low-interest rates, and collateral-free loans.
3. **Capacity Building and Education:**
Empower women through training in agribusiness, financial literacy, and use of agricultural technologies. Gender-sensitive extension programs should be developed to reach more women.
4. **Subsidized Inputs and Mechanization:**
Women farmers should be targeted in input distribution and mechanization schemes to

- enhance their productivity and encourage commercial farming.
5. **Inclusive Policy-Making:**
Ensure that women are adequately represented in agricultural decision-making bodies and that their voices are heard in policy dialogues.
 6. **Improve Market Access:**
Develop rural infrastructure—such as roads, storage facilities, and marketplaces—to ease access to markets. Promote women’s inclusion in agricultural cooperatives and value chains.

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