

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE, PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR INCREASED FOOD PRODUCTION IN ENUGU STATE - NIGERIA

Aneke C.U & Alio A.N

Department of Technology & Vocational Education, Faculty of Education, Enugu State
University of Science and Technology- ESUT

ABSTRACT: *The paper examined women participation in agriculture, their prospect and challenges for increased food production in Enugu State-Nigeria. It explained elaborately how committed women are in making food available for the fast growing population in Nigeria. Women activities in production, processing, marketing of agricultural products among other, were highlighted. The challenges women are facing to enhance food production were also pointed out. These challenges include; lack of access to productive resources like land, customs and tradition in some parts of Nigeria, low level of training /education among others. Recommendations to improve on the challenges were proffered, these include that the level of women training in agricultural production needed to be enhanced, that government should look into laws of land tenure and tradition placed on land acquisition and use, especially as it affect women in agriculture.*

KEYWORDS: Agriculture, Increased Food Production, Women, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has been the main source of human survival and economic growth since the ages past. Agriculture accounts for about 2.9 percent of National Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Mazulie 2010). It accounts for employment of Nigerians (graduates and non-graduates), a source of foreign exchange, provides raw materials for local industries (Iwena, 2015). Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (2009) noted that agricultural sector contributes immensely towards a more sustainable society development, because it ensures continuous production of food, raw material required for meeting the needs of rapid expanding industries. Based on this, agricultural knowledge and skills have been the first legacy transmitted from one generation to the succeeding generation gender, notwithstanding. The rate of agricultural production since 1960 when the oil sector started to boom reduced drastically. For instance, Ekong in Okoli (2011) expressed that since the discovery of oil in early 50s, the rate of agricultural output has lagged behind the rate of population growth.

The author noted that between 1960-1999, agricultural production grew at an annual rate of 1.7 percent and over one third less than 2.8 percent average annual population growth rate between 2000-2009. It grew at an annual rate of 2.7 percent which is less than 3.0 percent average annual population growth rate, World Bank indicator estimate (2009).

The discovery of oil sector, changed the phase of people interest and participation in agriculture and thus decline in food output. FAO (2009) noted that able youths/men, left the bulk of farming activities for women in search of supposed Lucrative oil jobs in the city. Ndomi (2017) pointed out that agricultural production (crops and animals) has gradually dwindled and fallen short of the demand by the population since the discovery of oil. The gradual decline was also captured by Uma, Eboh, Obidike and Ogwuru (2014) when they pointed out that

Nigeria was considerably self-sufficient in food production and was major export of food in the 1950's to 1960s, but there was decline in early 1970s, and this followed high importation of food to meet rapid increase in population of about 170 million as at 2015 and about 190 million in 2018 (Esther 2017). Canice and Onwuegbune (2017) ranked Nigeria among the mostly richly endowed nation of the world in term of natural resources and human resources to manage her agricultural resources, but the discovery of oil left, the bulk of agricultural work in the hands of women.

Women participation in agriculture in Nigeria

The activities of women in agriculture cannot be over-emphasized. In many countries of the world, women play significant role in making sure that food is available for growing population of the world. Banji and Okunade (2011) noted that women are found working all the year round producing food crops, while men perform only replanting tasks that occupy small part of the agricultural year. The international labour organisation (ILO), (1999) estimated that 78 % of women in African including Nigeria are active in agriculture compared with only 64% of the men. In the observations of Ayioko (1996), African women especially Nigerians play crucial role in production of about 60-80% of agricultural products such as engaging in growing food crops, like maize, Sorghum millet and other staple food in the North, Rice yam, cassava and some nuts in the South. women perform most of the farm operation themselves, even when such heavy work as land clearing or ridge making is involved.

In the past, the contribution of women in farming activities was not significant, but in recent times, Saito, Mokenem and Spurling in Okoli (2011) noted that there is highly acknowledgement of the role of women in agricultural development. The authors noted that three major events in the post-independent in Nigeria accounted for the notice of women role in farming. These include formal and free education of 1954/1955; the Nigerian civil war which lasted for 28 months and drastically reduced the population of men and sharp increase in oil price in the mid and late 1970s which resulted to the abandonment of agricultural sector in search of oil jobs created in the oil sectors, which could help to improve their socio-economic status. Women who were now left in agricultural sector as noted by Ogundele (2014) provided about 14-18 hours of productive physical labour in various farming activities.

Recent findings by ILO in Banji and Okunade (2011) shows that going by 1991. Census conducted by National Population Commission, Nigerian women constituted about 49.6 percent of the total population and are found to engage in 60-80 percent of food production in the country. Egunjobi (1991) noted that over 90 percent of economically active women engage in one form of agriculture and rural development. Ekong (2003) supported by stating that women account for about 70 percent of food production, 100 percent of those who process basic food stuffs and 50 to 90 percent in marketing agricultural produce. Olawoye in Banji et al (2010) recorded that Oyo state women are 50 percent, 98 percent, 85 percent, 91 percent, 92 percent and 79 percent involved in planting, weeding, harvesting, transporting, processing, and marketing of agricultural produce respectively. Similarly, preliminary study carried by the researcher shows that in Enugu State, about 91 percent of women are involved in planting of agricultural produce, 79 percent in weeding, 64 percent in processing and 82 percent in marketing of agricultural products.

Women have been found to contribute immensely to food security in Nigeria but these women were noted by Banji and Okunade (2011) to owe only one (1) percent of farm assets due to marginalization and tradition. Challenges such as that are bottlenecks to women farmers.

Challenges to women participation in agriculture

Many issues have been found to challenge women active participation in agriculture among these challenges are

Lack of access to productive resources

The credibility of one's success in any endeavour, will depend to a large extent on the productive resources at his reach to work with. In agriculture, productive resources such as land, capital, agricultural input such as fertilizer chemicals, seeds and other improved planting materials are necessary; but these required resources are not always at the disposal of women farmers. For instance, in Nigeria, land tenure system was modified in 1978 by then president. Land tenure is a system of land ownership and use (Iwena 2015). In Nigeria, land could be inherited, own communally, obtain through lease hold, by tenancy, by purchase, through gift or pledge or tenant at will of government. In the north, communal land is shared during the planting session. This type of sharing does not allow commercial production, land acquired by inheritance is usually fragmented among the number of male borne in the family. These resulted to much problem in acquisition of land, hence the promulgation of land use decree or land use act of 1978 (Iwena 2015).

The decree stated that all land in the country is vested in the federal government to be held in trust for the people, that is to say, acquisition of land and use for whatever purpose must be controlled by the government. With this, women found it difficult to access agricultural land because most of them are just peasant, farmers. This reform affected the contribution of women in agricultural production. Okoro (2016) noted that land acquisition process in Nigeria is usually bureaucratic and often met with bottleneck and only influential people could acquire land which in most cases are used for non-agricultural purposes.

For instance, in Enugu State Nigeria most of the productive land are bought with hundreds of thousands of naira by politician who only use them to establish hotels, residential buildings, estates for personal economic interest. A situation such as that does not allow peasant farmers and women to acquire land because prices of land are escalated beyond their reach.

Access to credit and loans

Availability to credit and loans enable farmers to acquire land for commercial agriculture to increased productivity. Akande and Igben (2004) stated that access to credit promotes high productivity because with fund, farmers acquire input, hire machines for farming, pay labourers. The author reported that only few women farmers benefit from formal credit given out for large scale agricultural production. Ekong (2011) noted that most of the women farmers do not receive fund from banks or government institution, yet their work in food production is very crucial. This might be because, most of the women farmers do not have land of their own which will be quantify before releasing or lease land to them. Men who have land are supported to some extent by government. With the support the men purchase input, have control over mechanization in the areas of land preparation, fertilizer and pesticides application, irrigation, harvesting and post-harvest activities, leaving women with more labour intensive and time consuming non-mechanized tasks like sowing, weeding, harvesting among others. If the women are exposed to better opportunities to acquire credit, the production resources such as land, labour, capital and management can easily be harnessed for high productivity.

Poor subsidy on agricultural input

Subsidy in economic terms is the amount of money that government or an organisation pays to help to reduce the cost of a product or service. Subsidy in agricultural input is imperative. Omoroegbu (2008) noted that the subsidy termed to be placed on agricultural input needed to be that which could avail farmers, especially women farmer access to acquire agricultural products and materials required for farming. Women farmers base on their husband's income to purchase agricultural input such as agro-chemicals, fertilizers seedlings and other planting materials (Okoli 2011). The author stated that women play crucial roles in food production. Increase in production on the part of these women will depend to a large extent on ensuring that women farmers as well as men have sufficient access to agricultural resources, at a subsidized rate, but these women were noted to have less access to purchase agricultural resources than men because of their dependent on their husband's fund. If there is subsidy of the agricultural products women would get reach at them for increased production.

Limited to access new practice

The Research Extension Farmer Input Linkage System (REFILS) needs to be streamlined. The REFILS according to Jibowo and Ajaji (2010) was formed to make sure that farmers access farm input such as fertilizers and improved seedlings timely and at an affordable price through training and visit system of extension staff and teach new farmers new practices. Research have shown that since the emergence of the unit in 1994, they have not been making input available to farmers timely. This poses problem to active farmers who may wish to produce two times during the planting season. Regarding training of farmers, the extension farmers neglect rural small scale farmers, focusing their interest on large scale farmers. The bulk of production comes from the rural small scale women farmers who are many and work consistently to produce food for the populace. If attention is paid to these neglected but active small scale women farmers, food security would be ensured.

Nigerian customs/traditions

In Nigeria, tradition holds it that males have right to land ownership. This tradition deprives women of the most valuable resource (land) in agricultural production. Iwena (2015) describe land as the most basic and important factor of production which supports the growth of crops, rearing of animals among others. Women rely on the use of land given to them by their husbands in the west while in the natal family land is most used (Akande & Igben 2004). The authors noted that in some cases, women resort to using leased land for their farming activities (This is only possible with few enlightened women farmers). Okoli (2011) observed that men who are ready to give farm land, first select land before given out areas that are less productive to women, while some would not work and would not give out. In most cases they would select the most productive lands, leaving women farmer with land that are either over-used or places prone to erosion, invariably, the women are victims of unproductive land.

Furthermore, the system of temporary acquisition of land does leave women vulnerable to planting permanent crops like fruits tress, oil palm, cocoa, coffee, rubber (Ekong 2003). Also tradition limit women farmers to plant some crops leaving some which are forbidden by tradition. For instance, in part of Enugu State Nigeria women do not plant or harvest yam, palm tree etc. If women are allowed access to valuable production factors like land and are not limited by tradition they would improve food production in Enugu State.

Education/Training/Technology

It is widely expressed that education is an instrument for social, economic, and political change. No country can witness development without human resources that are educated. According to Ihebereme (2010), Girl-child education has unique feature akin to it because of their outstanding role in national development. Osuji (2005) noted that women are light in most homes, especially when they are empowered through education. But most rural women do not meet up with men and their urban counterparts in education and training despite wide spread campaign and effort by government to reduce illiteracy. For instance, Okoli (2011) stated that rural women farmer's illiteracy rate is as high as 78%, yet these rural women farmers form the bulk of food producers. Farmers education and training at any level, will expose the women to access loan, embrace new technologies that will boost agricultural production, stand on their right to access land for production, form and manage cooperative society and oppose most traditions that pose problem to food production by women.

Farmer education is meant to be provided by extension workers. Agricultural extension workers as described by Aneke (2011) are personnel trained with the aim of disseminating research information on improved farming techniques, helping them to improve on the farming skills and general welfare and as well as the development of leadership qualities.

They also help farmer to learn how to make less expenses and give them other economics information and decision about farm operation. The extension workers also help rural farmer to form co-operative society which help them contribute their resources to improve on their production (Watoye 2016). They are expected to organise seminars, conferences, workshops where they teach, train and enlighten farmers on skills and practices that would boost agricultural production. This means that if farmers are trained via extension workers through seminar, workshops, farm and home visit, field demonstration, they will do well. But researches have shown that the rate of performance of extension workers is low, this according to Santo and Sairing (2011) was due to some bottleneck caused by the government. The author noted that extension workers are poorly equipped to meet up the standard that will enable them function properly. In most cases, they perform duties outside their training which impact a little to increase food production for instance in countries such as Yemen, Sudan, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Cyprus and Iran, the percentage of female extension workers are estimated at 19.6, 12, 22.7, 4.8, 4.2, 2.6 and 1.9 respectively (FAO, 2005) but when these women extension workers visit farmers, instead of perform their farm visit, they lay emphasis on topics such as food and nutrition, child care, and other.

This is not what they are trained to do, the extension workers need to train the rural farmers so that they would be able to; take good farm decision, access agricultural input, adopt new practices for increase productivity, access loans from banks, acquire leadership qualities and market their produce through marketing board to maximize profit.

Means of transportation of produce

Agriculture products need to get to the final consumers. This is done by road, rail etc. But the deplorable state of roads in Enugu state of Nigeria has increased the transport fare and also makes it difficult for farmers to transport their goods hence limited the farmers marketing activities. Also most of the products usually perish as a result of bad road to transport them to consumers.

CONCLUSION

The following conclusions were made from the study.

Women play significant, roles in agricultural production in Enugu State and Nigeria in general. They perform most of the activities in production, processing and marketing of agriculture products. These women have some challenges to their contribution in food security. These include lack of access to productive resources, in ability to access loan, poor subsidy on agricultural input, low level of basic education, customs and tradition among others. These issues needed to be tackled to enable the women farmers of Enugu state function effectively to promote food security.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended the following

1. Women farmer education/training should be given priority attention to increase their skill acquisition.
2. Customs and traditions that devoid women access to land for farming should be reviewed.
3. Women should be trained on how to access loans from agricultural financial institutions
4. Farm input should be provided to farmers at subsidized rate and on time.

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