

Review

Gender inequality and women participation in agricultural development in Nigeria

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Abstract

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Agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. But the sector is underperforming in many countries in part because women, who are often, constitute a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their involvement and productivity. Most women farmers in Nigeria operate at the subsistence, small holder level in an extensive agricultural system; hence in their hand lies the country's food security and Agricultural development. Particularly striking, however, is the fact that rural women, more than their male counterparts, take the lead in agricultural activities, make up to 60-80 percent of labour force. It is ironical that their contributions to agriculture and rural development are seldom noticed. Furthermore, they have either no or minimal part in the decision-making process regarding agricultural development. Gender inequality is therefore dominant in the sector and this constitutes a bottleneck to development, calling for a review of government policies on agriculture to all the elements that place rural women farmers at a disadvantage. Women farmers deserve better recognition and greater appreciation of their tangible contributions to agriculture and rural development and food security. The objective of this paper is to discover how gender inequality can diminish women involvement and productivity in Agricultural Development. Identify the missing link between policy implementation and practice. Also, identify areas of improvement in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from the gender perspective and proffer a pragmatic approach to ensuring Gender Equality practices in the Agricultural Sector in Nigeria. Some of the factors that hinder women's involvement in Agricultural Development in Nigeria is land ownership, access to credit, Education and Legal frameworks and policies for the advancement of gender equality and women empowerment. This paper reveals that bringing about a gender equitable social order necessitates building bridges, and partnerships with a variety of interest groups, including the executives; the legislatures; the judiciary; law enforcement agents; policy makers; health and social workers; leaders of industries; civil society organizations; and the development partners. It recommends that the Constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria should be reviewed from the gender perspective.

Keywords: Agriculture, Gender Inequality, Nigeria, Women Farmers

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, women's contribution to agriculture is significant. National Policy on Women provides an estimated 60-80 percent of labour in Agriculture

especially in food production, food processing and marketing. Many women are farmers in their own right apart from working on family farms.

Women are suppliers of labour, food crop and livestock producers, processors of food and fish products, marketers of peasant farm surplus and transporters of farm supplies and farm products between the farm and the home. Unfortunately the contributions of women in agriculture are grossly undermined. Their roles in economic change continued to be inadequately recognized in the development of agricultural policies and programmes. A number of factors are responsible for this. They include the following:

- The male dominated cultures which place women in inferior positions.
- Customs, taboos, and the sexual division of labour which keeps women subordinate to men.
- The failure of economists to put value on unpaid women's domestic production.
- Uncertainty of women's ability to articulate their problems and needs effectively
- The problem of land tenure system and the inability of women to meet basic collateral security as part of the banks requirement for loan meant for agricultural production.

Consequently, women in agriculture have remained poor. Furthermore, the non-recognition of women's contribution has led to the adaption of intervention programmes whose results are detrimental to national food security, the status of women and the sustainability of such intervention programmes.

Women in Agriculture

With colonial domination in the late 19th century ushered in the introduction of the cash crop economy by the British colonial government, which altered pre-colonial gender division of labour to the detriment of women (Boserup, 1979). The British Victorian ideology interacted with pre-colonial patriarchal structures to further pushed women to the background with commercial agriculture. While cash crop became the preserve of men, women were left in the unremunerated subsistence agriculture meant for household consumption. For example, in Southern Nigeria, men took control of the cocoa cash crop economy and were thereby able to accumulate wealth for themselves, while this economy was sustained by the unpaid labour of their wives and children. According to Afonja (1986) and Aina (1989) Yoruba men considered the work performed by wives in these cocoa farms as an extension of their traditional obligation to work on (1988) reported that the free labour wives provided on husbands' farms put constraints on the time available to them for income generating activities.

Though women constitute over 60% of the agricultural labour force, and contribute about 80% of the total food production, only 14% of women own the land they cultivate. Awe and Ezumah (1991) stated that lack of

access to credit facilities is a major constraint women experience in developing their capabilities and potentials as farmers. Also, where new technological innovations are introduced to aid agricultural productivity, evidences abound that such often further engender social inequality across gender groups (Adekanye, 1984; Jackson, 1985). Also, male farmers (compared to female farmers) tend to receive more extension visits and inputs like fertilizers and improved materials (Ezumah, 1990). Worst still, among the Igbos, single women as well as widows, divorces and those separated from their husbands tend to experience greater constraints in access to land than married women (Ezumah and Di Domenico, 1995). The general experience of neglect female farmers experience in the agricultural sector is thus traceable to the patriarchal structure of the Nigerian ethnic groups and the traditional image of a 'woman' who gains status from the 'men' in their lives (e.g. fathers; brothers; husbands; and sons).

Constraints to Women's Agricultural Participation

Women's participation in agriculture is hindered by various factors. The most prominent are enumerated below:

Land Ownership

Kabane (2010) argues that constraints which are faced by women farmers differ from country to country and culture to culture. In Nigeria, Afghanistan and other patriarchal societies for instance, women lack independent rights to land. Land rights are only allocated through men, either sons or husbands. The FAO (2009) agrees with the sentiment that women be allowed to access land either directly or indirectly, as the majority have limited or no access to or control over land. In some African countries, women are rarely allocated land in their own right, particularly in patrilineal areas. Land is allocated to men, who are the heads of household. Women in matrilineal societies on the other hand are allocated land in their own right, but the land is still commonly controlled by their husbands or male clan heads (FAO, 2009). Men are the ones who have full ownership of property and any valuable goods in the household must belong to the head of the household. For example, if someone purchases a lounge suite for the house, the minute the lounge suite enters the door it becomes the property of the household head, the father. This, of course, is in line with culture.

Women's lack of independent land rights rules out one of the main fallback positions for women seeking sustainable livelihoods in the face of rising poverty. While there is enormous variation from one communal tenure system to another, women do not usually qualify to hold

land independently from men. Rules of access and inheritance generally tend to favour men over women and women with children over those without (Mutangadura 2004). The factors that constrain women in acquiring land rights as in many countries include: firstly, the application of the customary law of patriarchy, which discriminates against women, secondly, the lack of women representatives on community land committees and participation in traditional community decision-making structures. Although in some communities, women are now allowed to attend and participate or actively speak at public meetings, observations noted by an NGO working with rural women indicate that women bear the legacy of entrenched traditional values that make it difficult for them to freely in the presence of men (Hargreaves, 1999). Lastly, there is widespread ignorance among women of their rights to land from the provisions of the constitution due to factors such as illiteracy and lack of dissemination of the legislation to the grassroots levels.

Women in the village are not aware of the existence of the laws in the country, which are meant to protect them against traditional laws and social norms. The majority of these women are old and some of them have not progressed to higher education, one of the places where they can be exposed to such laws and policies. The laws they are aware of are those which are imposed to them by society and culture and those are the laws they are obliged to abide by. The presence of these statutory laws that affect women does not make sense if they are not known and utilized by those who are meant for, like the women of the village hence the implementation or rather introduction of such laws is necessary for the rural women.

Access to Credit

In addition to limited access to land, women face problems of access to their inputs, including credit (capital/money). This is because many credit associations and export crop market cooperatives limit membership to household heads in many African countries, thereby excluding married and single women (Manuh, 1998). Women face greater difficulties than men, particularly with regards to participation in rural cooperatives and access to credit, training and agricultural extension. These difficulties rarely flow from explicitly discriminatory norms, as legislation on these issues is in most cases gender neutral. Rather, they mainly arise from cultural practices and stereotypes (e.g. women's role within the family and on interactions between persons of different sexes) and from socio-economic factors (e.g. as for access to credit, women's higher illiteracy rates, lack of information about available credit programmes, lack of land titles to be offered as collateral, more limited access to formal employment, and

exclusion from credit cooperatives (FAO, 2005). Onguonu (2010) notes that, in Nigeria women do not have access to resources such as finance for the execution of planned projects like their female contemporaries. In some Nigerian communities women are encouraged only to produce food crops for sustaining the family, leaving men in control of the production of cash crops. Berger and Buvinic (1990) note that there are various factors that limit women's access to credit. They argue that in some Mexican rural areas socio-cultural factors can be major limitation to women's access to credit. In rural Mexico for instance, women are not allowed to walk long distances between their homes in rural areas and the banks in town by themselves or to offer the occasional bribe to male officials in charge of credit applications. Furthermore, entering a bank may intimidate the women because they are unfamiliar with the environment and the procedures. In addition women are often excluded from social gatherings where males learn about how and where to access certain sources of credit and how to apply.

For Berger and Buvinic (1990), the lack of collateral security, illiteracy and mere gender discrimination can negatively influence women's access to credit. For example, the culture based idea that rural women are financially supported by males and that their only responsibility is to maintain the household is the reason bankers refuse to give credit to rural women farmers. Berger and Buvinic (1990) conclude that, unless women are exposed to the relevant channels of credit distribution they will continue to be ignorant about many sources of loans and therefore they will continue to be at disadvantage when it comes to credit access.

Collateral security seems to be one of the major factors constraining the access of women to agricultural inputs. A study conducted by Arun (1999) reports that, in Moorkanad, India, women complained of having limited access to credit resources. These women were not allowed to borrow money from the bank because they lacked collateral security. He explains that, because these women did not have collateral security which can be in the form of land or production equipment, they were denied the right to borrow money from banks. Africans, especially in patriarchal communities, consider it a waste to give a resource such as land to a girl because when she marries, she will give away the wealth of her forefathers to her in-laws.

Education

Education is one of the significant factors affecting the participation of women in agricultural development. Rad et al. (2010) agree that education is one of the important factors that help development to be realized. The purpose of education (formal and informal) as stated by Rad et al. (2010) is to communicate accumulated wisdom

and knowledge from one generation to the next. Secondly, education enhances active participation in innovation and the development of new knowledge. Ani et al. (2004) further argue that education enhances the ability to derive, decode and evaluate useful information for agricultural production. The Food and Agricultural Organisation /United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organisation (FAO/UNESCO) (2002) note that better education and training have become essential for sustainable development and for rural economies to survive.

Manuh (1998) is of the view that the lack of education and training has been identified as a key barrier to women's advancement in the society. She argues that in Africa, female illiteracy rates were over 60 percent in 1996 compared to 41 percent of men. Certain countries have extremely high rates of low education on women. In many African countries parents still prefer to send boys to school, seeing little need for sending girls. Hence, illiteracy is still evident in most African countries (Ravinder et al., 2009).

A study conducted by the Natural Resources Management and Environment Department (2010), reveals that, illiteracy is a major constraint facing women in development. Women are unable to understand and utilize technical information because they lack basic formal education on. This department also reveals that, because of their illiteracy, women farmers are unable to read and understand the written material provided by extension programs that educate farmers. Penin (1999) supports the latter sentiment by arguing that, education has a relationship with farm progressiveness. The reason is that there is positive correlation between education and farming.

Through education, farmers are able to acquire new improved and effective written material. Educated farmers are able to acquire more information in the form of written material such as magazines, newsletters and farming instruction pamphlets, booklets, and on packaged hybrid seeds, pesticides, fertilizers and many more (Penin 1999).

In addition, as noted by Anselm et al. (2010), education plays a significant role in positively influencing the status of women in farm decision-making. He states that highly educated women are likely to make a higher contribution to farm decision-making than uneducated ones. A study conducted by Ani et al. (2004) on the relationship between socio-economic characteristics of rural women farmers and their adoption of technology in Nigeria showed that educated women farmers adopts farm technologies at a higher rate than less educated people who continue to use more rudimentary technology. Therefore, the education of rural women is important for their progressive participation in sustainable development. Revinder et al. (2009) notes that, socio-cultural factors also play a role in hindering women from accessing and furthering their educational interests. They

argue that, factors such as early marriage place a greater burden on household labour and acts as a barrier to girls' progress in education.

In her study, Blaai (2009) notes that ignoring the empowerment of women adds to the challenges faced by women in rural areas. As a result, women received limited training while their developmental responsibilities demand more skills and more extension services. She adds that, the study subjects lacked basic skills in literacy and mathematics which were very crucial for the success of a project.

Legal Frameworks and policies for the advancement of gender equality and women empowerment

The normative framework for the promotion and protection of gender equality and women's right in Nigeria are: Constitutional; Legislative; Judicial; Policy and International human rights and Humanitarian Law Treaties. The combination of federation and a tripartite system of civil, customary and religious laws make it difficult to harmonize legislation and remove discriminatory measures. However, any law which is contradictory to Federal Law or the Constitution can be challenged in a Federal Court. As a legal system with varying legal standards, the Constitution provides the ultimate principles, rules and doctrines from which the legitimacy and hierarchy of all other legal norms in Nigeria are validated.

A gender analysis of Nigeria's local laws and policies affirms that many legal instruments are discriminatory, and at best, gender blind. The tripartite nature of the Nigerian legal system makes it difficult to set standards, and to insist on a common parlance of the law in the area of gender discrimination and gender abuse. Federalism grants the states almost autonomous powers, which often makes it difficult to challenge much socio-cultural behaviour which entrenched gender discrimination in our society (Ladan, 2008).

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria prohibits discrimination against any citizen of Nigeria on the grounds of ethnicity, place of origin, sex, religion, political opinion and circumstances of birth. Despite this, the Constitution itself is shrouded in ambivalences and contradictory messages about gender relations. First, the Constitution exhumes patriarchal undertones and principles, evident in the language it utilizes, and many of its provisions.

Successive governments in Nigeria had taken several steps aimed at reducing gender disparities through policies, legislative reviews and programmes. Much of these efforts have come out of the country signing up to relevant UN Declaration, Conventions, and Treaties on gender equality and women's empowerment. In that period, also, Nigeria women have not been complacent. Section 26 of the Constitution discriminates out rightly

against women in the area of residency rights. For example, Nigeria men are given the right to transfer citizenship to their foreign wives by registration. While this is not so for women married to foreign husbands. Also, section (29) (4) (b) provides that “any women who is married shall be deemed to be of full age”, thereby stamping the practice of ‘child marriage’ in its borders. Also Section 12 of the Constitution restricts implantation of international treaties signed by Nigeria, except the treaty has been “enacted into law by the National Assembly”. Hence, many of the International gender responsive treaties ratified by Nigeria are yet to be enforced because they have not been transformed into domestic law (s), for example the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Although the Nigerian Constitution guarantees the right of individual (man or woman) to own movable and immovable property, on the contrary the customary laws and practices in number of ethnic communities do not support the right of women to own immovable property (Ladan, 2008); while Sharia Penal Code which is operational in over 13 Northern States in Nigeria is often misunderstood to mean same thing with culture and tradition.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several barriers affecting women’s participation in agricultural activities have been identified in the above discussion. As the discussion suggests women are inhibited from practicing activities they desire and their rights are denied them by the social norms and customs of their societies. It has been noted that systemic gender based biases or inequalities are one of the major issues limiting women in engaging and accessing agriculture related resources.

One of the issues discussed in this literature is that credit constraints for women put a severe limit on the full participation of women in agriculture related activities, thereby leading to less contribution to the economic development and self sufficiency of the rural community.

In spite of several attempts at achieving gender equality and women empowerment in the country, gender gaps remain abysmally unacceptable and gruesome. A central factor in this issue is the role of cultural values and the tendency to romance with age-long traditions which are often detrimental to national development goals. It is impossible to sustain democratic governance where about half of the human population (women) are denied rights to livelihood skills, education; health leadership roles, and/or encumbered with unpaid care work which are supposed to be valued and shared across gender groups – all in the name of cultural identities and cultural distinctiveness.

The cultures of the various groups in Nigeria provide the base for individual gender discrimination, which are sometimes contradictory to elements of nation building, and having a true national identity. For example, the Nigeria tripartite legal system (statutory-customary-Sharia legal systems) presents contradictory evidence on the status of the Nigerian woman and the girl child. It is therefore important for those who govern the Nigerian state, to first and foremost see the country as a secular state, and to clearly separate state interests from those of religious and other traditional institutions, and to ensure that the interests of its citizenry are protected by law irrespective of religious and/or other cultural affiliations.

Patriarchy and other socio-cultural practices and traditions play very fundamental roles in shaping the structure of gender inequality, gender role relations, and the relation of power and the sexes. The paradox of ‘Patriarchy is that it is adapted across various Nigerian ethnic groups depending on a number of factors – socio-economic class; religion and ethnic cultures. While patriarchy bites hard on some women because of ethnic culture and/or religion, for others, it is somehow bearable, especially for women who have gained economic autonomy and/or those from privileged class. Policy makers may need to be more eclectic in dealing with systemic disparities caused by unequal treatment of women and men in our society. For example, ‘one-size-fits-all’ policy intervention, such as universal basic education may not successfully address the development problems faced by certain subgroups, such as low literacy and low school completion among ethnic minority women. Exposing girls to school without investing in ‘gender education’ for both boys and girls may not necessarily change gender stereotypes, discrimination and gender abuses in our society. Also building institutional mechanisms for gender equity and women’s rights in Nigeria at the macro level many lead to intended positive outcomes without social engagement with men and women who hold the cord of power of traditional local structures at the community and household levels.

No doubts, unlike other social issues, bringing about a gender equitable social order necessitates building bridges, and partnerships with a variety of interest groups, including the executives; the legislatures; the judiciary; law enforcement agents; policy makers; health and social workers; leaders of industries; civil society organizations; and the development partners. The key ingredients for success will include:

- Technical skill in gender analysis and gender mainstreaming;
- Investing in gender statistics that is providing evidence of gender equity engagements;
- Bridge gender gaps across sectors through appropriate macro-economic framework and plans.
- Institutionalization of gender responsive budgeting in key sectors to ensure that gender equality commit-

ments are translated into realities through appropriate funding

- Re-awakening of political will for gender equality and women empowerment mandates in the country. The first step will be to review the Constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria from the gender perspective
- Institution an enabling environment for gender equality engagements across Nigerian ethnic group through intensive media engagements, gender equality value, re-orientation; and massive social mobilization of the rural communities to imbibe gender equality standards and practices.

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