

GENDER ISSUES AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture plays pivotal roles in the economy of Nigeria and other developing countries of the world. And these all-important roles are majorly played by smallholder farmers in Nigerian-rurals. A critical look at these roles show a sharp divisions of farm activities along gender line. As roles, behaviours, opportunities, expectations and constraints are socially constructed within the social system. Gender draws attention therefore, to the socially constructed aspects of differences between women and men. This gender division of farm roles has been identified as a major factor constraining the attainment of food security in Nigeria. Studies have shown that, most technological policies in the agricultural sector are skewed towards menfolk; thereby making men as the real farmers while women are mere supporters. Despite an ostensible acknowledgement of gender in several agricultural extension services, policy makers often fail to meet or recognize the very different needs of men and women farmers, or the very different roles they may have in agriculture. This paper therefore reviewed literatures on gender issues in agriculture in Nigeria, specifically, the paper reviewed literatures on roles of women in agriculture; constraints to gender mainstreaming in agriculture; policies and programmes that mainstream women in Nigerian agricultural sector, and theories of feminism. The paper recommended that government should outlaw all forms of discriminatory practices such as land rights, patriarchal land ownership, among others against women.

Key Words: Agricultural productivity; Discrimination; Feminism; Gender mainstreaming; LGBTQ+, and Theories.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian agricultural sector is key to the economy; accounting for over 30% of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs about 70-80% of Nigerian labour force (Adebgoye, 2004; Ebenehi, Fawole, and Musab, 2024). Although the sector is predominantly dominated by small-scale farmers who are productivity constrained by limited access to farm credit, climate change, poor extension contact, poor rural infrastructure and gender-biased agricultural policies among others. FAO (2020) further reported that, despite the fact that two-thirds of the Nigerian population are engaged in agriculture, which still accounts for the majority of the country's economy, the performance of this sector have been severally handicapped by production hurdles. Gender discrimination is one of such hurdles that bedeviled this vital sector.

With the rapid increase in population growth, the gap between food demand and supply continues to widen unabated (Abdullahi, 2005). This then implies that agricultural productivity should be intensified to abate the impending food insecurity in the near future. An all-inclusive approach is therefore apt if Nigeria is to make a realistic and positive step in solving the agricultural problem. A strong and efficient agricultural sector will enable the country to feed its growing population, generate employment, earn foreign exchange and provide raw materials for both local and international industries. And to achieve this, an all-inclusive agricultural policy should be adopted by our policy-makers, specifically, avoidance of gender-biased policies that only favour the male farmers who are seen as "the real farmers" while the female farmers are seen as mere "supporters".

There is a consensus in agricultural literature that agricultural development activities had been male-biased. This was because there had been blanket recommendations to all farmers: no recognition is given to the vital roles played by women in agricultural operations. Unless this injustice is addressed, the needed food security will be a mere dream. Njuki, Parkins and Kaler (2016) posit that genderization of agriculture has greatly contributed to global hunger and food insecurity as policy makers do not recognize the important roles women play in agriculture. This paper reviewed literature on roles of women in Agricultural productivity, challenges faced by women in carrying out Agricultural operations, policies that can mainstream women into agriculture and some selected theories of feminism.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Frame Work

2.1.1 Theories of Feminism

Women's alienation has prompted feminists movement since 1960s. Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical, fictional, or philosophical discourse. It aims to understand the nature of gender inequality. Feminist theory falls under the umbrella of critical theory, which in general have the purpose of destabilizing systems of power and oppression (Burton, 2014). According to Egbert and Sanden (2019), the purpose of using a feminist lens is to enable the discovery of how people interact within systems and possibly offer solutions to confront and eradicate oppressive systems and structures.

Feminist theory or feminism, is a historically women-led movement that calls for an end to sexism in all forms. Feminists strive for social justice for those who have been oppressed by the *patriarchy*, a system of power dominated by men in society. Feminism as a whole is concerned with bringing about a better for men, women, and non-binary people (LGBTQ+ rights), and anyone in between. A few feminist theories were explained below;

Liberal Feminism (L-F): liberal feminism is rooted in classical liberal ideology, which promotes freedom, individualism, and equality. It is not the goal of liberal feminist to uproot societal structures but to give people of all genders equal place within those structures. An example of liberal feminist approach is the way the movement fought to criminalize marital rape. Male dominance over women was considered the “natural order of things”, but detrimental to women's safety and a violation of their rights, the movement fought their way to victory through legislation ([www.https://wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org)).

Socialist Feminism (S-F): This evolved from the ideas of Karl Marx, who blamed capitalism for promoting patriarchy by concentrating power in the hands of a small number of men. Socialist feminists believe that the traditional family is based upon capitalist system, where women stay at home and men work. As the main source of women's inequality, the system and traditional family can only be replaced by socialist revolution that creates a government to meet the needs of the family ([www.https://wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org)). Libertation feminists reject gender roles that limit women's autonomy and choice, and assert that strict gender roles limit women and men, especially if they

are legally enforced. Liberal feminism (L-F) also known as *mainstream feminism* is defined by its focus on achieving gender equality through political and legal reform within the framework of liberal democracy and informed by human rights perspective.

Marxist Feminism (M-F): This is a theoretical framework that combines the principles of Marxism (capitalism) and feminism to understand and address social, economic, and political inequalities faced by women. M-F analyses the ways in which women are exploited through capitalism and the individual ownership of property. Marxist feminists argue that working-class women are exploited by both patriarchy and capitalism. According to Dictionary of Gender Studies (2017), Marxist's division of labour into "productive labour" --- that is remunerated labour mainly done by men, and "reproductive labour" which is unpaid and carried out by women constitutes the basis of women's inequality in patriarchy. The aim of feminist movement or revolution is the liberation from male-domination as a pre-condition for the transformation of our society into one based on solidarity.

Radical Feminism (R-F): R-F is a perspective within feminism that calls for a radical re-ordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts, while recognizing that women's experiences are also affected by other social divisions such as in race, class, and sexual orientation. According to Mackay (2015), **R-F** is a philosophy emphasizing the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, or more specifically, the social domination of women by men. R-F views patriarchy as dividing societal rights, privileges, and power primarily along the lines of sex, and as a result, oppressing women and privileging men. It opposes the existing political and social organization in general because it is inherently tied to patriarchy. R-F has the aim of;

- a. Changing and overthrowing patriarchal system,
- b. Emphasizing the importance of women's experiences and perspectives, and
- c. Focusing on issues like violence against women, prostitution, and pornography.

Radical Feminists tend to be more militant in their approach than other feminists. They aim at dismantling patriarchy rather than making adjustments to the system through legal changes.

Queer Feminism (Q-F): Queer feminists are mainly those who identify themselves as a radical group in opposition to patriarchy. Not only this, they define feminism as an inclusion of queer people and goes beyond LGBTQ and other gender/sexuality minorities (<https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in>). Queer theory attempts to break down the continual use of categories and labels that stereotype and harm those who are in marginalized positions, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) people

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Roles of Women in Agricultural Productivity

The issue of gender cannot be omitted from the discussion of agriculture in Nigeria, Africa and the world over (Banji and Akunade, 2011). Traditional agriculture in Africa and Nigeria to be specific is characterized by gender division of labour according to tasks and crops. Women have been found to play active roles in agricultural production in Africa as it was estimated that about 80% of all agricultural production activities are carried out by women farmers. Majority of rural women in India and other developing countries actively participate in farm-related operations besides fulfilling other responsibilities as homemakers (Ray, 2015). The extent of their participation however varies depending on the prevailing socio-economic and cultural background of their area.

Women, who accounted for half or more of the rural population, spend more than two-third (2/3) of their time on food production activities and other family chores. Banji and Akunade (2011) reported that, on the average, in all African countries, African women are found to do most of the work in the area of primary production, animal rearing, and transportation of crops from farm to the house, processing, storage and marketing.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) (1998) estimated that 78% of the women in Africa are active in agriculture compared with only 64% of the men. Jiggins and Olawoye quoted in Banji and Akunade (2011) further assert that out of 95% small-scale farmers in Nigeria who actually feed the nation, 55% of them are women. Studies have also shown that women have been found to contribute 60% of the labour force, produce 80% of food, earn 10% of the income and own 1% of farm assets.

It is a fact that, these contributions of women to agriculture and the nation's economy is undervalued and consistently being sub-merged by the male farmers.

Ray (2015) quoting Pearson classified the roles of farm women into the following categories;

- a. Independent producers: who manage the farms largely by themselves,
- b. Agricultural partners: who share most aspect of farm work, responsibilities and decision-making with their husbands,
- c. Agricultural helpers: who only participate in farm work at busy times when extra help is needed, and
- d. Farm homemakers: who contribute to the farm production indirectly by preparing meals and attending to those working on the farms.

Apart from farm operations, African rural women supplement household agricultural production with income earned from non-agricultural activities such as; petty trading, backyard animal rearing, handicraft, brewing etc. they have been found actively in socio-economic activities as trading, production and processing of agricultural commodities, care of children and the aged, and other household jobs.

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (1994) reported that the participation rate of women in farm labour force in the United States of America (USA) rose from 23% in 1920 to 26% in 1940, and 50% in 1987, and by now the participation must have quadrupled. It was also reported that, 98% of Tanzanian rural women are classified economically active, and engaged in agriculture. Nigerian women have excelled in the nation's economy especially in bulk procurement of produce, transportation and distribution of food stuff. In view of the enormous effort of women in farm business, it is believed that if they are empowered financially they will surely take over farm business from their male counterpart. Government and donor agencies or private individuals can come to the aid of our women farmers to enable them scale-up their productive ventures. It is a known fact that commonsense assumption is always made in Nigeria and other African countries that the male is the farmer and everyone else either helps or benefits from man's labour. Little attention is given to the responsibilities, activities, assets and power of women within the household. As a result (Jiriko, 2020) new technologies are often directed to menfolk specifically at the detriment of the womenfolk.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (2011) gave the following contributions of Women to Food and farm productivity as;

1. ***Farm and Domestic Labour:*** Women comprise a significant portion of the agricultural workforce, particularly in developing countries. They are involved in various activities including planting, weeding, harvesting, processing and marketing of farm products.
2. ***Crop Management:*** In many regions, women are responsible for growing food crops for household consumption. They manage home gardens and small-scale farms contributing to family nutrition and food security.
3. ***Livestock Management:*** Women often take charge of raising livestock, which provides food, income, and resources for their families. They manage breeding, feeding, and caring for animals which are vital for sustaining rural livelihoods.
4. ***Food Processing and Preservation:*** Women engage in food processing activities, transforming raw agricultural products into food items that can be stored and sold. This not only adds value to farm produce, but also enhances food security.
5. ***Market Participation:*** Women are increasingly participating in agricultural markets, selling their produce, and generating income for their households. They often form cooperatives to facilitate market access and negotiate better prices for farm products.
6. ***Sustainable Practices:*** Women tend to adopt sustainable agricultural practices such as organic farming and agro ecology, which contribute to biodiversity conservation and environmental health. They play key roles in seed selection and seed preservations.
7. ***Food Purchases and Preparation:*** Rural women play a pivotal role in ensuring their families' nutritional needs, and also play critical role in making decisions about food purchases and meal preparations.

2.3 Constraints to Effective Women Participation in Agricultural Activities

According to Nwachukwu (2013), the agricultural development programmes of 1970s did not put gender and its dynamics into considerations in their planning and implementation. The planners were strongly criticized for being “gender blind” (Young, 1994). The failure of these programmes to realize their set objectives was attributed to the fact that recommendations were generalized or based on the assumption that men and women will benefit equally. Men farmers were found to be the major beneficiaries of these programmes. Jiriko (2020) asserted that, persistent gender disparities hamper economic growth and efficiency of womenfolk. Therefore, knowledge of gender is imperative for agricultural growth, especially agricultural extension advisory providers.

There is the need to develop good understanding and skills needed to address critical issues around gender in livelihoods.

In spite of women's tremendous contributions to agricultural and national development in Nigeria, they are still faced with several constraints such as;

- Lack of access to productive inputs/resources such as land, credit, agro-chemicals, extension services, etc.
- Inadequate credit facilities: rural women in developing countries like Nigeria encounter constraints in acquiring and using human and material capital. They have no capacity to hire labour neither do they have the collateral needed for credit. Most farm operations are labour intensive especially in the rain forest zone of Nigeria; the cost of land clearing, stumping, ridging, planting and weeding is great, the need to assist these farmers is apt. The scenario is similar to other climatic zones of the country. Farmers need money to purchase farm inputs such as seeds, stock, cassava cuttings, fertilizers, and other agro-chemicals if they have to strive in farm business.
- Education/Training: most rural women farmers are not adequately trained. Their low level of educational attainment could be attributed to socio-cultural and religious factors. Most rural settings do not see the need to train their girl-child, they were made to go into early marriage, child-bearing, and other domestic chores. This therefore limit their access to vital information on new technologies, market outlets, and best practices.
- Land tenure system: in several African culture women do not own land or allow to intent any. Land inheritance in most parts of Nigeria is ***Patrilineal***. Women only acquire land through gift from their husbands as women lack land rights. This will limit the expansion of their farm lands and hence, low productivity in farm business.
- Obasi (2005) reported that, there are several socio-cultural values and beliefs on which the domination of women by men is predicated. There is "*genderization*" of behavior and attitudes. Certain behaviours such as those that borders on "*submissiveness, dependency, emotionalism, weakness, receptivity, cowardice, supportiveness, etc*" are associated with women, while traits such as "*bravery, dominance, strength, etc.*" are associated with manhood. Women are to be subjected to less tasks that do not need much strength.
- Economic constraints: women are discouraged or denied the opportunity of independent struggle for wealth or property. In rural areas, women engaged in limited economic

activities which are considered secondary to those of men. Women earn little from farming, and all work done by women is not given economic value.

- Poor state of rural infrastructure: most rural areas in Nigeria lack infrastructural facilities that complement agricultural activities. Most agricultural produce are wasted due to lack of storage facility. Farmers are forced to consume or sell their produce at give-away prices. Worst still is the road networks which are impassible. While the rural electrification programme of the Federal Government could not reach most remote areas where agricultural activities are mostly carried out.
- Time constraints: women's multiple responsibilities, including household chores and childcare, can limit their time to participate in agricultural services extensively.

It is in response of all these that feminism movement started. Simply put, feminism is a social, cultural, and political movement that advocates for women's rights, equality and empowerment. Feminists aim to challenge and dismantle patriarchal systems, structures and attitudes that perpetuate gender-based oppression, discrimination, and violence.

4.0 DISCUSSION

4.1 Policies and Programmes that can Mainstream Women in Agricultural Productivity

Gender analysis provides the necessary data and information to integrate a gender perspective into policies, programmes and projects. As a starting point for gender mainstreaming, gender analysis identifies the differences between and among women and men in terms of their relative position in the society, and the distribution of resources, opportunities, constraints and power in a given context. Conducting a gender analysis allows for the development of interventions that address gender inequalities and meet the different needs of women and men.

Several policies/programmes are necessary to strengthen women farmers in farm business. If these strategies are really adopted by government women farmers will surely take over farm business from their men counterparts. Some of these policies are;

- ***Gender mainstreaming***: this strategy ensures equality between men and women (gender equality). Nwachukwu (2013) refers to gender mainstreaming as equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, or girls or boys. This does not mean that men and women will become the same biologically, but that rights,

responsibilities and opportunities will not be dependent on being born a female or male (sex). Women and girl-child inclusion in our agricultural policies and empowerment is now widely accepted. It has been reported (Olawoye, 2002) that the farming population is now ageing and depleting because males are leaving the profession and the females are not empowered through access to resources as credit, and landed properties. According to Akubuilu, *et al.* (2008), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1987 recommended the entrenchment of a Special Women-in-Agriculture Programme (WIAP) in the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) in Nigeria to ensure adequate participation of women in agricultural programme.

- ***Women-in-Agriculture Programme (WIAP):*** The WIAP of ADPs was intended to focus women's productions activities within the confine of the wide diversity of economic, cultural, ethnic and religious differences within the country (Banji and Akunade, 2011). Specifically, the programme is designed to; a) develop innovative gender-specific programme for women farmers in close collaboration with research institutions; b) promote the development and use of appropriate agricultural technologies which reduce drudgery and meet the needs of women; c) assist in linking women farmers to sources of credit; d) support group/individual women activities aimed at increasing the animal protein resources of the country; e) increase agricultural productivity and income of women farmers; f) improve skills of women in food processing, utilization and marketing; g) organize women into cooperatives to gain credit, information etc. and h) encourage women farmers to keep livestock to improve their nutritional status.
- ***Educate Women for Development Programme:*** this programme is concerned with the development of mental and physical capacity and skills in women in order to operate meaningfully in their social milieu (environment). Education is the bedrock of women empowerment. It develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behavior which are of positive value to the society. The aim of Educating Women for Development is to widen women's access to formal and non-formal education and create awareness and enlighten parents on the importance and benefits of educating women and girl-child. Young girls through early marriages or teenage pregnancies dropped out of school were

encouraged to return to schools. Education enables women farmers to acquire and adopt agro-innovations that bring about improvement in their farm practices.

- ***Development of Women-Oriented Technologies:*** there is need to incorporate knowledge and skills of women in the development of modern farm technologies by our scientists. The blending (Ray, 2015) of indigenous wisdom of farm women with the modern technologies is vital; this is because women are involved in both farm and household activities. Farm technologies that have little drudgery, health hazard and take less time to complete a particular farm task is crucial for women farmers. These technologies should be location-specific; this is because all the agro-ecological zones of Nigeria have different soil and environmental characteristics (such as soil structure, temperature, humidity, etc.).
- ***Unhindered Access to Credit:*** availability of fund has been the major driver of all farm operations world-wide. Fund is needed for land acquisition, clearing, purchase of farm inputs, payment of farm labour and other sundry expenses. Women farmers make decision about what and how much to produce, they normally take into account the price of what they will produce and the costs of items to be purchased. An in-depth understanding of women's contribution to cassava production output in rural household in Nigeria is very imperative. This will ensure effective allocation of production resources. This is why Shamsodini, *et al.*(2011) stated that women are almost responsible for virtually all activities like hoeing, weeding, harvesting, transporting, storing, processing, marketing and domestic chores which provides them with income-earning opportunity and enable them contribute to household food security. In view of all these, access to credit by these women farmers is necessary to enable them scale-up their farm business. A study carried out by Abali, *et al.* (2014) among cassava farmers in Rivers State showed that most (M=3.80) women farmers lacked credit facilities to effectively carry out their operations. Government should create an enabling environment for women farmers in Nigeria to thrive in their farm business by providing soft loans free of interest to women farmers.
- ***Constant Access to Extension Services:*** small-scale agricultural production in Nigeria has been a risky business and majority of our rural farmers have only rudimentary principles of agricultural marketing, and hence need marketing advice/information by

the extension advisory services. Agricultural extension is concerned with making agricultural knowledge reach wider but targeted clientele. Apart from providing women farmers with current farm innovations, the extension service goes further to give market information where the increased produce due to innovation adoption is marketed. Most rural female farmers have no access to this extension service due to the notion that “men” are the real farmers and almost all extension advisory services are directed to men farmers. It then behooves on government agencies or Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development to create this awareness so that women farmers can benefit from these services to boost their farm operation.

- **Targeted Extension Services:** government or non-governmental organizations should design extension services that specifically target women’s needs and priorities.
- **Recruitment of Female Extension Agents:** constant recruitment and training more female extension officers to work with women, especially those in the northern parts of Nigeria is therefore apt to ensure women inclusivity.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

A strong and efficient agricultural sector would enable Nigeria to feed its growing population, generate employment, and earn foreign exchange and improvement of farmers’ socio-economics. Nigeria cannot achieve all these if the discrimination against women farmers is not addressed. Womens’ enormous roles in farm business are not given the regards they desired; hence the global agitation for gender mainstreaming in agriculture. Factors constraining their productive efforts such as lack of credit to expand their farmlands/businesses, tough cultural beliefs, and lack of access to extension services among others were identified by several scholars.

5.1 Recommendations

To ameliorate these constraints, gender inclusion/mainstreaming, women-in-agriculture programme, women and girl-child education, and unhindered access to sources of credit were some of the suggested policies/strategies to keep women farmers in farm business. In view of the aforementioned, the following recommendations are made;

- Government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private individuals should give financial aids to our women farmers to boost their productivity. Government should come

out with a policy directing Central or Commercial Banks to give loans to women farmers with little or no interest and security.

- To enhance their farm business, productive inputs like seeds/stock/cultivars, fertilizers and other agro-chemicals should be provided free to these set of farmers.
- Government should outlaw all forms of discriminatory practices against women such as land right, more preferences to male-child, among others.
- Education and training programmes should be organized for women farmers especially those in remote areas to enable them appreciate and adopt farm innovations. Education brings about desirable changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and ideas of farmers.
- Agricultural extension service providers should consider rural women farmers in their schedule of activities. These women should be contacted frequently for exchange of ideas and problem identification and solutions.
- Nigerian-rural areas should be made habitable; this will assist farmers to boost their productive venture. Good road network, power, health care, schools, storage facilities etc. can lead to farmers' comfort and consistency in farm business.

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