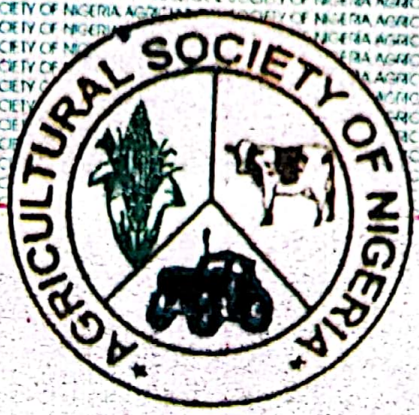

The Role of AGRICULTURE in POVERTY ALLEVIATION

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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE: A CASE STUDY OF MANGU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF PLATEAU STATE

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ABSTRACT

Primary data were collected from 60 women farmers in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State so as to study the role women play in food production in the study area. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results of the analysis indicated that 90% of the women are responsible for meeting the daily needs of their families for food, water, fuel wood, health care and other essentials. They are also involved in agricultural activities such as land preparation, planting, transplanting, weeding, fertilizer application, harvesting, processing, transporting, storing, grading and marketing of farm produce, in addition to raising domestic animals such as sheep, goats and poultry. The major constraints faced by the women included inadequate extension services, improved inputs and credit facilities. It was recommended that policies towards encouraging women farmers should be made and sustained as the potentials of women will be fully utilized by involving them in the decision-making process, providing necessary incentives and improved farming technologies.

INTRODUCTION

Women constitute a major proportion of the World population and are said to produce 80% of food and other agricultural products in Africa (Syndar, 1990). In general, the work of rural women includes child bearing and rearing and household management (cooking, clearing, fuel gathering e.t.c), in addition to some aspects of agriculture: production, processing, marketing and trading. Several studies conducted in different parts of Nigeria revealed that almost all agricultural production and marketing activities including animal husbandry activities were performed by women. Their agricultural activities which are mostly attended to simulataneously are, land preparation, planting, transplanting, weeding, fertilizer application, harvesting, processing, transporting, storing, grading and marketing of farm produce. They equally tend and raise domestic animals such as sheep, goats and cattle (Burfisher and Hovestein, 1983; Olawaye, 1989). It is however important to note that though some of these activities are carried out jointly along with the men, some of them are considered exclusively as women's activities.

Despite their apparently significant contribution to the rural and in fact national economy, women have received very little policy attention as vital change agents. The individuals that constitute the households and their varying needs are not taken into consideration in planning most rural development strategies. Hence, the man as the head and bread winner, is the one who benefits directly from land allocations, credit, extension services and facilities necessary for agricultural production (Synder, 1990).

Kaul (1993) had asserted that the roles of women in food production throughout the world are being focused, now that several research findings show the role of women in rural development efforts. This study therefore examined the level of involvement of the rural women in agricultural activities relative to their household activities.

Accessibility of rural women farmers to credit facilities, extension services, fertilizer and other inputs were also discussed. It was also meant to determine possible production constraints and suggesting ways of overcoming them using Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State as a case study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Mangu Local Government of Plateau State. Eighty percent of the people in the area are engaged in farming activities. The area has tropical climates with rainfall from April to October. The major crops grown in the area are maize, Irish potato, sweet potato and coco yam. In addition, sorghum, millet and groundnuts are also grown.

Random sampling technique was used in which a sample of 60 women farmers was drawn. Three villages (Mangu, Panyam and Mararrabar Kushi) were randomly selected and twenty farmers were randomly selected from each of the selected villages. Structured questionnaire was used to collect the required information, supplemented with personal interview by the researchers. Information on the demographic characteristics, level of involvement of women in agriculture relative to their household activities, accessibility of rural women farmers to credit facilities, land, extension services, fertilizer and other inputs were collected in July 2000.

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and means were used in analyzing the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics

The study shows that majority (62%) of the respondents fall within the age group of 21-30 years and only 11.12% were below 20 years of age. Thus the majority of the women farmers were adults and able bodied women. Seventhy-three % were married; implying that the women have to work for themselves in order to meet their financial and material needs. The study also revealed that 80% of the women farmers are engaged in farming as a major occupation, only 9% were involved in trading, handcraftship, food processing and so on. This indicates that the rural areas are full of human and material resources which if fully utilized can play significant role in the nations economic development. This is also confirmed by Olatunbosun (1974). Majority (65%) of the respondents had informal education, while 20% had primary education (Table 1). This is in line with the findings of Olawoye (1993), who reported that the vast majority of rural women were illiterates and this affects their understanding of new technologies.

The resources employed by the women farmers are land, labour and capital.

Land

Traditionally, women have no land rights because the system of inheritance in general is patrilineal and only men can make claims to land. It is evident from this study that 61.67% of the women had access to land through their husbands who acquired it by inheritance. A few (13.33%) respondents acquired their lands through purchase while 16.67% rented. Majority (78.33%) of the farmers cultivated less than 4 hectares. The average size for women farmer recorded in this study was 3.04 ha. (Table 2). This appears to be similar to what was obtained by Ogunbile *et al.* (1991) who in a study in Jos area reported that the average farm size was 3.08 ha.

Labour

The family and non-family labour use according to farm operation is presented in table 3 which shows that weeding alone constituted more than 30% of the total labour input. This is high probably because most of the women farmers use manual labour to control weeds. However, this can be minimized by the use of herbicides. Table 3 revealed that the major labour used comes from non-family labour, which can be hired or communal labour. Family and communal labour sources are generally regarded as free labour. The communal labour is regarded as assistance from neighbours and their children which is called rotational labour services. Otherwise called "Gayya" in hausa language. This varies from the findings of Ogunbile *et al.* (1991) who concluded that the greater percentage of the labour in traditional agriculture is from the family.

Results from this study also shows that majority (75%) of the respondents spent 6-8 hours on the farm each day and only 5% spent 2-4 hours. About 71% of the women farmers spent 4-6 hours in the domestic front. On average the women spends 12 hours daily on both farm and domestic activities. This was also confirmed by Mekoingi (1996). Thus women farmers hardly have time to rest, and this lack of rest affects their state of health.

Capital

The non-durable capital inputs employed by the women farmers were seed, fertilizer, manure and storage chemicals (Table 4). Majority (85%) of the respondents used seeds from the previous harvest while 10% purchased improved seed varieties from government agencies. This is in agreement with Baba and Yusuf (1995). The remaining 5% obtained seed as gift. Fertilizer was the commonest improved input used in the area as reported by 88.33% of the respondents. Fertilizer utilization was relatively low because of inadequate supply and high cost as majority of the farmers indicated that they purchase their fertilizer from the market. A few respondents used storage chemical .

This study revealed that the majority (98.33%) of the women farmers still use inefficient tools such as hoes, cutlasses and sickle in cultivating their farm lands. Some of the reasons attributed to this are poor financial stand and the poor technological growth of the country. This is made worse in case of women because of the baisness toward men. Only one respondent reported having an animal drawn plough.

Capital is needed for making different types of investment decisions on the farm. In this study, majority (83%) of the respondents finance their farm business through personal savings, 3% through Nigerian Agriculture and Cooperative Bank (NACB), only one respondents received financial assistance from her husband. Eleven percent obtained capital through rotational saving schemes "(Adashe)". This further confirms the report of Okonjo (1979), in his study of credit acquisition among rural women in the Igbo land; he found that out of his respondents 80% had no access to banking facilities. Fadason (1993) also stated that, the NACB which is meant to serve about 50-55 million farmers in the country has no special forum whether outside or otherwise to treat women farmers preferentially. Baba and Yusuf (1995) in a study in Sokoto State deduced that the conventional banking system has performed poorly in the study area.

Farming System

Seventy percent of the respondents practiced mixed farming which is the cultivation of crops and rearing of livestock; while 30% are involved in crop production. This situation could have some nutritional deficiency implication on diet of the rural populace especially women and children.

However the need to increase livestock production in the study area in order to meet up with the standard protein and mineral requirements of the people in the study area; as bulk of the food crops produced are carbohydrate sources.

Participation in Farming

All the respondents participated in virtually all aspects of farming. However the major areas where women participated actively include planting, weeding, fertilizer application, storage, processing and utilization with 100%, 80%, 86.67%, 76.67, 73.33% and 91.67% respectively (Table 5 & 6). The areas of low level participation were land clearing, ploughing and ridging. This finding is in agreement with that reported by Baba and Yusuf (1995) when they reported that activities such as planting, weeding, fertilizer application, storage, processing and utilization were activiely participated by the respondents. Also women participated actively in the domestic front as majority (over 80%) of the women farmers reported to be involved in fetching fuel wood, fetching water, cleaning, providing food/or cooking.

Marketing

This study revealed that women are the single most active participating group (32%) in marketing. Majority (80%) of the women farmers had control over the revenu4 they generated from the sales of their farm produce. Fifty percent of the respondents spend their earning either directly feeding the family with yields from their farms or using their money to pay family dues and other financial commitments. This is in agreement with the findings of Baba and Kyiogwon (1992) which reported that women shoulder some of the family's financial obligations along side the men.

CONCLUSION

The roles of women in agriculture have been examined. Results of the study indicated that majority of the women are responsible for meeting the daily needs of their families for food, water fuel wood and health care. They are also involved in nearly all agricultural activities such as land preparation planting, transplanting, weeding etc. The major constraints faced by the women are inadequate extension services, improved inputs and credit facilities among others. It was recommended thar policies towards encouraging women farmers should be made and sustained as the potentials of women will be fully utilized by involving them in the decision making process, providing necessary incentives and improving farming technologies.

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Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their Educational Background

Educational Background	Frequency	Percentage
Non-formal	39	65.00
Primary	12	20.00
Secondary	6	10.00
Post Secondary	3	5.00
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2000

Table 2:

Farm size	Frequency	Percentage
0.00 – 2.00	9	15
.01-4.00	47	78.33
4.01 – 6.00	3	5
>6	1	1.68
Total	60	10

Source Field Survey: 2000

Table 3: Type and amount of labour used on the farm (Mandays/ha)

Operation	Family Labour	Non Family Labour	Total	Percentage
Land Preparation	2	8	10	15.39
Planting	3	2	5	7.69
Weeding	3	17	20	30.77
Fertilizer application	2	2	4	6.15
Harvesting	2	8	10	15.39
Threshing	2	5	7	15.75
Winnowing	1	8	9	13.85
Total	15	50	65	100

Table 4: Distribution of respondents based on improved inputs used:

Improved inputs	Frequency	Percentage
Fertilizer	53	88.33
Improved seed varieties	2	3.33
Fertilizer/storage chemicals	4	6.67
Fertilizer/animal traction	1	1.67
Total	60	100

Table 5: Low-level participation of women in farming activities

Activity	Frequency	Percentage
Land clearing	30	50
Land clearing and ploughing	12	20
Ploughing	10	16.67
Ridging	8	13.33
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2000

Table 6: Active participation of women in farming

Activity (Active participation	Frequency	Percentage
Planting	53	88.33
Weeding	48	80.00
Fertilizer application	52	86.67
Storage	46	76.67
Processing	44	73.33
Utilization	55	91.67
Total	298	496.67

Source: Field Survey, 2000