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**POVERTY
REDUCTION
AND THE
NIGERIA
AGRICULTURAL
SECTOR**

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**Edited by
Foluso Okunmadewa**

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WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE AND POVERTY REDUCTION

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1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a pervasive problem in Nigeria and the bulk of the poor are in the rural areas (Phillips, 1975). In 1996, about 67 million people were reported poor representing more than 65 percent of the population. Rural poverty increased by 22 percentage points in the period 1980-1985, decreased slightly during the period 1985-1992, but increased in the following four-year period 1992-1996. By 1996, 69.8 percent of those living in the rural areas were poor. The rural poor are mainly farmers diverse among all occupation groups with the majority being wage earners. Table 11.1 shows that in Nigeria, agriculture provides employment for 45.0 percent of the economically active population in 1991. About 35.5 percent of women are found in agriculture. These women farmers have played tremendous roles and contributed to the agricultural sector of the economy. They have been involved in all crop production practices from land clearing to harvesting, as well as marketing of agricultural products (UN 1980; Longe 1988; and Hamilton; 1992). They are also involved in livestock production, processing of farm products and gathering of forest products.

Women are the greatest managers and custodians of the home front, as well as, working outside the home to supplement family income – contribution

to nuclear and natal family expenditure. They are great contributors and sustainers of the society. Women have worked hard over time to increase productivity, thereby enhancing their welfare and that of their children. Women also want to make sure their families are food secured (Siam walla and Valdes, 1984).

Studies have shown that a large proportion of women work on farm for crops - yam, maize, tobacco and cassava and carry out mental activities of decision-making. Women contribute as producers, distributors, processors, and marketers. Some women are farmers in their own right, while many help on their husband's farms, doing the lighter jobs of planting, fertilizer application and harvesting. It was reported that the majority of the world's food producers are women; they provide 60-80 percent of the agricultural labour in Africa and Asia and 40 percent in Latin America.

Table 11. 1: Distribution of Economically Active Population by Occupation and Gender in Nigeria

	Male	Female	All
Professional Tech	7.2	6.1	6.8
Administration	3.0	1.5	2.5
Clerical Related jobs	3.3	2.8	3.1
Sales Workers	12.3	39.4	22.2
Service workers	3.2	3.3	3.2
Agriculture & forestry	50.5	35.5	45.0
Production & related Workers	16.7	9.0	13.9
Occupation not stated	3.8	2.4	3.3
Total Percentage of Population	56.4	32.4	44.3

Source: 1991 Population Census

2. POVERTY AMONG RURAL WOMEN.

Available statistics on education, nutrition, health, and employment shows that women are often severely disadvantaged particularly in the rural areas. Table 11.2 shows that women in rural areas represent those with the highest percentage that have no education. For all levels of education, a higher

proportion of men are educated than women. Generally, those in urban areas have higher education than those in rural areas irrespective of gender.

Table 11.2: Highest level of Schooling Attained

Residence	No Education	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Women (Percentages)				
Urban	24.9	21.0	41.5	12.5
Rural	47.5	23.5	25.6	3.3
All women	40.5	22.8	30.5	6.2
Men (Percentages)				
Urban	13.4	20.8	45.0	20.7
Rural	29.7	29.0	33.2	8.1
All men	24.7	26.5	36.8	12.0

Source: Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, NPC (1999)

Other welfare measures, such as nutrition and health status, when disaggregated on gender basis are revealing. Anthropometrical measures such as height and body mass index are often used as indicators of the nutritional status of women. Height is used to identify mothers at nutritional risk. Although the cut-off point at which a mother is considered at risk varies between populations, a value of 145 centimeters is used. The body mass index is used to assess thinness or obesity. A cut-off point of 18.5 is recommended for acute malnutrition. From Table 11.3, more rural women are at nutritional risk as compared to their urban counterparts. This has implications for the health of the rural women. In view of the fact that primary health care delivery is poor in the rural areas, it shows that rural women are more at health risk.

The maternal mortality rate in Nigeria is reported to be 1000 per 100,000 live births which is higher than the average Sub-Saharan African statistic of 929 per 100,000 live weights (Human Development Report, 1997). Expectedly, more maternal mortality will be reported in rural areas compared with urban area.

Table 11.3: Nutritional Status of Women

	Height	Body Mass Index
Residence	Percentage below 145cm	Percentage below 18.5
	Urban	5.6 14.8
Rural	6.9	16.5
Total	6.5	16.1

Source: Social Statistics in Nigeria, 1995-1996, FOS

The total income of rural households is lower than that of urban households by 21 percentage points. In the same vein, the total income of female-headed households is lower than that of male-headed households by 32 percentage points. This indicates that rural households that are female headed have lower total income as compared to others.

While women tasks differ from that of men, the wages offered to women who work equal hours with men on the farm are not the same. A woman is assumed to have worked only 75 percent of the work done by a man and so are paid lesser wages

Table 11. 4: Household Income Pattern by Sector and Gender of Head of Household, 1996

Income items	Sector		Gender of Household Head	
	Urban(N)	Rural (N)	Male(N)	Female(N)
Basic Income	4880.9	2704.0	3788.1	3326.9
Other Income	956.7	987.2	1075.3	587.6
Cash Income	5837.5	3691.1	4863.5	3914.5
Own consumption	212.2	1144.9	810.5	386.0
Total Consumption	6086.9	5014.8	5798.6	4376.8

Source: Social Statistics in Nigeria, 1995-1996, FOS.

3. GENDER ROLES IN NIGERIAN AGRICULTURE

Nigerian agriculture is still characterized as having small-scale fragmented farm holdings, rudimentary implement usage, unskilled labour force, dearth of

improved farm input and unavailability of modern infrastructures.

In the face of all these problems, agricultural activities/operations are still being carried out by both male and female farmers. Women have moved from traditional roles of being housewives and providing labour on their husband's farms only, to also own farms of their own. Women are active in both on-farm and off-farm operations. However, some operations are more gender friendly than others, as well as, some farm enterprises. Among food crop enterprises, some crops which are gender friendly include maize and yam while some which are gender neutral are cassava, cowpea, and other cereals. It is easier to find female maize farmers than female yam farmers in the Northern area of Oyo State (Ajani, 2001). Amaza (2000) has shown that planting of vegetables (onion, tomatoes, peppers, leafy vegetables etc) are also gender neutral.

The major roles performed by farmers generally on the farm range from land clearing, stumping, heaping, weeding, harvesting, marketing to processing. It has been established by various authors (Olawoye, 1988; Babalola 1988; Adekanye, 1998) that females are found to be more in some operations than others. For example, men do more of bush clearing, stumping, and heaping, while females do more of weeding, harvesting, marketing and processing, (Afolami and Ajani, 1995). FAO (1985) documented that in Africa, in male-headed households, the labour input of women and children constitute the major input into household enterprises. About 90percent of labour for food processing and provision of welfare foods (water, health, energy), 80 percent of the labour for food storage and marketing, 90 percent for hoeing and weeding and 60 percent of labour for harvesting is contributed by women and their children. To a large extent these actions represent significant activities in the agricultural process cycle.

4. GENDER STATUS IN NIGERIAN AGRICULTURE.

Ownership Structure of Farm holdings

The highest percentage of men own their farm holdings, while women have to depend on family land. This has implications for the types of crops that can be grown on the farm and the investment that can be made. Ownership of farmland affords the farmer opportunity to cultivate perennial crops and improve the soil. While annual crops are mostly cultivated on family land as revealed in table 11.5.

About 12 percent male-headed households obtained their land as renters, squatters and others while 18 percent of female-headed households are in the

same category. Absence of title to land by a greater percentage of women has implications for their income.

Table 11.5: Distribution of Ownership Structure of farm holdings by Gender in Percentages

Sex of Household Head	Family Land	Owned	Rented	Squatter	Others
Male Head of Household	36.35	51.68	6.93	2.73	2.33
Female Head of Household	49.65	32.54	11.31	3.36	3.14

Source Poverty and the Agricultural Sector, FOS, 1999.

Size of Farm Holdings.

In Table 11. 6, about 72 percent female farmers hold small farm size, while their male counterparts with the same farm size are about 44 percent. Farm sizes greater than 20hectares are owned by 2 percent male farmers as against 0.42 percent by their female counterparts.

Table 11.6: Farm Size Distribution by Gender in Percentages

	<1ha.	5-<5ha	5-<10ha	10-<20ha	>20ha
Male holder	44.07	38.55	10.32	5.02	2.03
Female Holder	71.57	34.23	2.93	0.85	0.42

Source: Poverty and Agricultural Sector, FOS, 1999.

The farm size distribution shows that more female holder have farm sizes that are less than 1ha. This is due to the constraints they have to access land, capital and technology. Women are generally more preoccupied with household food provisioning leaving little to the market. This reduces their ability to increase their income.

Types of Agricultural Enterprises.

Females are found in such agricultural activities like crop farming, 91 percent and 62 percent in livestock and poultry. Minority of female farmers perform such activities as fishing and forestry.

Table 11. 7: Distribution of Farmers by Type of Agricultural Activities in Percentages. (4)

Sex	Crop Farming	Livestock/poultry	Fishing	Forestry
Male Holder	98.57	74.70	1.21	1.10
Female Holder	91.24	62.30	1.91	0.65

Source: Poverty and the Agricultural Sector in Nigeria FOS, 1999.

Types of Crops Cultivated.

Women grow all types of crops as men though in differing proportions. More women grow food crops only (71 percent) than men (59 percent) while the reverse is the case for mixed crop. Women's preference for food crop cultivation is to provide food for household consumption. While this does not enhance the income of the female farmer, it is important for household food security. Inability to increase women's cash income further impoverishes them. Men grow about 36 percent and women 22 percent of food and cash crops. Women grow cash crops, cash and tree crops and food, cash and tree crops as shown in Table 11.8.

Table 11.8: Distribution of Farmers by Type of Crops in Percentages (5)

Gender	Food crop	Cash crop	Food & Cash crop	Food & tree crops	Cash and tree crops	Food cash and tree crops
Male	58.71	0.01	35.70	4.50	0.02	1.07
Female	71.36	0.01	21.68	5.77	0.03	1.16

Source: Poverty and Agricultural Sector in Nigeria, FOS, 1999

Use of Agricultural Inputs

In terms of access to improved inputs like fertilizer and pesticides, male farmers have more access than their female counterparts. For example, over 41 percent of male farmers have access to fertilizer as against only 19 percent of female farmers. Only in case of improved seeds and farm credits, are female farmers better off as revealed in Table 11.9.

Table 11.9: Distribution of Use of Improved Farm Inputs and Credit by Gender in Percentages.

	Improved seed	Pesticides	Fertilizer	Farm Credits
Male holder	10.84	10.52	41.36	5.65
Female holder	11.23	5.32	19.37	7.15

Source: Poverty and Agricultural Sector in Nigeria, FOS, 1999.

Table 11.10: Sources of Credit for Male and Female Farmers in Percentages.

Sex	Money lenders	Buying Agents	Banks Credit Inst.	Cooperative	Friends/ Relations	Personal Savings	Others
Male	15.8	23.7	10.5	42.0	-	-	-
Female	12.5	12.5	3.1	46.9	-	-	-

Source: Akanji, B. and Akande, S (1994)

Table 11.10 shows that although women have access to credit as men, their sources of credit are mostly informal. The higher rate of interest paid on informal loans remains a burden to the borrowers. Only 3 percent of women have access to loan from formal sources. This situation is derived from women's lack of collateral.

Table 11.11: Gender Distribution of Agricultural Poverty.

Sex of Holder	Extreme poor	Moderate poor	Non-poor
Male	48.59	28.60	22.81
Female	42.82	30.19	26.99

Source: Poverty and the Agricultural Sector in Nigeria FOS, 1999.

The data in Table 11.11 shows that about 73 percent of women farmers are poor as against 77 percent of male farmers. The percentage of women who are moderately poor is higher than that of their male counterparts. However, more male holders are extremely poor relative to female holders.

5. CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN PRODUCTIVITY AND WELFARE IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Despite women's significant contribution to agricultural production and to rural households generally, they have less access to land, capital, credit, technology and training than men do in the same system. These constraints significantly reduce the productivity of both the rural sector and the entire national economy. The constraints can be described as follows:

Culture

This differs from region to region. Beauvoir (1987) reveals that a culturally held myth is that women are wombs. Women are also said to be inferior morally, physically and mentally (Ogala, 2000).

Culturally speaking, women are meant to be at home or farm to do all the hard labour getting little or nothing in return. They cannot own any parcel of land or landed property, it has to belong to their husbands. In families, land is transferred to male children after the death of the "family-head" and where there is no male child, the land goes to the entire extended family. Although women may be culturally constrained from earning their own income but they go all out to do so. They are often able to produce surplus of some sort from kitchen gardens, gathering wild foods or even eggs from chicken.

Credit Restriction

According to Olayemi (1998), credit involves all advances released for farmers' use to satisfy needs at appropriate time and returned at later days. Credit can therefore be in form of cash or kind, being obtained from either formal or informal sources.

Access to formal credit services is often an insurmountable barrier for women. Lending is directed at large enterprises, dominated by men so that the minimum loan is even larger than what is needed by women. In order to get large amounts, collaterals like land, houses are required. Women lack sufficient level of these collaterals. However, this scenario is far changing in urban areas.

Therefore women's inability to provide acceptable assets as collateral

securities drastically reduce possibility of obtaining credit facilities for their farming activities which is a great limitation to what women can do on the farm.

Nonetheless, women have come together to form women groups, to exchange labour, mobilize savings and credit for self help, social and ceremonial purposes. Women groups accept collateral which should not be limited to formal titles, land and business registration but could include jewelry and other valuables available to women. The women groups have been found to eliminate many socio-cultural difficulties, involved in formal lending and savings mobilization.

There are few banks in rural areas, with the view to helping women farmers. Due to the protocol involved, women prefer informal lending where they can borrow small amounts, sometimes pay back in kind. For example a cash loan taken to purchase a cow could be repaid by turning over the first calf. According to Lycette (1984), this flexible repayment scheme tends to dramatically reduce the rate of default on loans.

The peasant women farmers' present productivity level makes it difficult for them, to increase their income, to save and to source for credit to remain in production. Their welfare is invariably curtailed.

Land Reform and Tenure

Women's access to land varies throughout the world, its ownership and control being a crucial variable in agricultural production and natural resource management. Ownership, use of land and control are determined by tradition or by law or both. The land tenure system varies from one region to another.

In Nigeria, for instance, women do not have direct access to land. It is even more difficult for widows, divorced, and separated women. Holding of titles to land is essential to gaining access to agricultural services, credit, loans and technical assistance and to joining producer cooperatives. Cutting off women from having access to services, declines their productivity and efficiency along with their incentive to continue to farm.

Women are forced to farm on marginal lands or may even lose access to the land due to privatization of land and commercialization of agriculture, moving from subsistence farming to cash cropping. Henn (1983) argues that the improvement and expansion of the traditional women's food sector is likely to be both the cheapest and most reliable method of increasing domestic food supply. It implies that women should be encouraged to stay on farming and

increase their level of productivity.

Labour

Research shows that women work longer hours than men in developing countries. Low-income women work longer hours than wealthier women, and rural women work longer hours than urban women. Fetching water is generally a task allotted to women and children; consuming a significant portion of their working hours, limiting the time they can spend on other agricultural activities.

Male out-migration from rural areas have resulted in more women-headed households, shortage in male labour for land preparation and can cause production problems like delays in planting, resulting in lower yields.

Capital

Women's access to funds with which to invest in agriculture is a major constraint in their efforts to purchase inputs, to hire labour or to invest in labour-saving technology. Projects had been developed in the past, to help in generating income but rural women have been said to still have limited capital. Vegetable production and marketing support is one of such projects. Women are facing infrastructural constraints in the quest to increase their capital base (Adeoti and Adenegan, 2000).

Access to Education and Agricultural Extension Services

Women in the rural areas who engage in farming do not have the opportunity of being enlightened either formally or informally. It has affected their knowledge of a number of things e.g. new methods of planting, processing, etc. Introduction of new varieties of crops are slowed down, hence affecting the level of productivity by the women.

Extension agents cannot share information with them but for the formation of groups as well as, the introduction of the 'Women-in Agriculture' programme of the Agricultural Development Projects. Adult education should be encouraged in rural areas and matters of interest to women should be taken up at trainings such as childcare to enlighten and empower them. Education increases the ability and willingness to reallocate resources efficiently when prices/technology change. Entry into activities that provide higher returns depends on dissemination of information about such opportunities on well-functioning labour and capital market.

Health and Nutrition

Women work longer hours than men, are less well nourished and in poor health. The extent of the health impact on women in relation to the environment is most pronounced in rural areas of the developing world. Being a home-manager, economic provider and reproducers generates health problems and hazards. Conditions and factors that have negative health implications for women can be categorized as: those in the immediate surroundings, local environment, as well as, the wider environment.

Shelter is a strong health determinant if unavailable in adequate sizes, designs or robustness then it is hazardous to health. The health risks include tuberculosis, mental stress, etc. Insufficient food intake by women is also a factor based on the status. Culturally, girls are brought up to believe they do not eat as much as boys, in the home.

Food taboos add to women's nutritional deficiency in some societies by stopping intake of high protein sources like fish, eggs and chicken in pregnancy (Houston, 1979). A vicious circle of under-nutrition, ill health and infection can develop, making women increasingly vulnerable to disease.

Lack of water and sanitation causes morbidity and mortality in the developing world. For the rural women, the greatest symptom of their marginalization and powerlessness is lack of time, not only, to perform their tasks but to ensure sufficient leisure time to maintain health. This invariably affects their level of productivity.

Religion

In Nigeria, there are different types of religion namely: Christianity, Islam and traditional religion. None of these, endorses equality between men and women. In Islam, for example, the women are kept in Purdah, making it difficult for married women to fully benefit from the educational system. In traditional religions, women are also kept at the background as well as kept out of shrines and cults. The existence of those religious beliefs and traditional laws is not peculiar only to Nigeria but can also be seen in other African nations which have marginalized women, consigning them to the status of second class citizens. (Miri, 2000).

6. POTENTIALS OF WOMEN IN POVERTY REDUCTION

The most effective way to increase rural women's income and alleviate poverty is by increasing their productivity. Women farmers are traditionally food crop producers and are faced with the challenge of increasing their productivity. This can be achieved by expanding their access to productive resources, cash cropping, improved technology, extension and government policies. Improving the productivity of women farmers will mean providing them access to land (women beg for land rather than own it), capital or credit or cash (women do not usually raise cash crops which are in the male domain), fertilizer or manure, technological training and extension services and the non-farm labour markets (Gladwin 1991; Gladwin and McMillam, 1989). Expanding women farmers' access to productive resources needs to be augmented with the provision of additional infrastructure and technologies to improve the productivity of these resources. Simple technologies such as wells for water, small mills that grind grain, machinery such as cassava peelers will decrease women's workloads, improve women's labour productivity and can help raise the standard of living and welfare of farm households.

Cash Cropping

Cash cropping on small portions of women's land normally devoted to the subsistence crops(s) should also be encouraged. Cultivating very profitable cash crops can improve the income of women. This will help them acquire modern yield – increasing inputs of production thereby increase their food production.

Improved Technology

Agricultural research efforts hitherto have been biased and have laid emphasis on cash crops improvement rather than food-crops and also mostly on crop production rather than crop processing, which ignores women. Research should focus on food crops grown by women, develop food processing and storage technologies for women farmers, investigate links between commodity improvement and better family nutrition and produce ecologically sound farming and agro forestry techniques that utilize the knowledge of, or can be adopted by women farmers. Due to women's severe cash and credit constraints, they cannot adopt high cost technologies. Research that will yield improvement in post-harvest activities for small farmers will increase the productivity of women small farmers and the price of their crops.

Extension

Agricultural extension services can help raise the productivity of women by making information accessible to women farmers. Women's access to information can also be improved by using existing networks of women's production teams and social groups. Information can be made available at places where they gather such as cooperative society meetings. Extension workers can emphasize the training of couples and accommodate women farmers who are heads of households by providing training directly to them where they work.

Policy and Institutional Reforms

Policy and institutional reforms that will benefit women farmers are important for effective poverty reduction that is sustainable. Policy reforms would include investments in the development for crops grown by women and agricultural processing, where women predominate. Other policies include price and open access to markets for products from agribusiness firms managed by women; and policies that assure women's access to credit. Changes that improve women's access to modern institutions like banks, cooperatives and schools are necessary. Consolidation of tenancy or ownership rights for men has not generally led them to take expanded responsibility for household food provision and income support. Redistributing assets, including capital and land, to poor women through legal and legislative reforms would enhance their productivity and income.

7. CONCLUSION

Women play prominent roles in the Nigerian agricultural economy. They provide labour for various operations on their husband's farms and own theirs to cultivate food crops for household food consumption. Women are also actively engaged in processing and marketing of agricultural products. Most of these activities do not yield sufficient income to bring women out of poverty. Women's lack of access to productive resources, information, technology and markets limits their productivity and income. In most male-headed households, women depend on their husbands to get farm inputs while in female-headed households; they are often limited by culture. The need to help women out of poverty is urgent.

There should be policy reforms that will improve their access to productive resources. The price of women's labour should be increased by assisting them

to be more involved in market oriented production enterprises. This can be done by training women and providing technological innovations that transform subsistence production into market production. The productivity of women's time can also be improved on as this will assist them to have more time to be engaged in income generating activities. These include provision of potable water, small mills and small agro-service centers within their community. Provision of health care centres will improve women's health and productivity. Provision of good access roads to markets will help marketers move their products at lesser cost and increase their profit and income.

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