

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY FOR WEALTH CREATION: POTENTIAL IN EMPHASISING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

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Abstract

The roles of women in agriculture is becoming increasingly vital, as more women-headed households are emerging, and traditional methods of food production have become grossly inadequate to cope with the current food needs of families. This review emphasizes the need for appropriate maximization of the role of women in agriculture, rural development, food crop production, fisheries production, forestry/environment, livestock production and post-harvest activities.

Keywords: Cooperative business, women, agriculture, income, poverty

Introduction

In Nigeria, as in most countries, there is a significant difference in the type and scale of work for men and women even though women including girls constitute 49% of Nigeria's population and constitute 37.14 percent of Nigerians in gainful employment. With only 7 percent presence in the industrial work force and 26 percent in the service sector, it is apparent that women are highly concentrated in the informal sector of the economy. They form the backbone of the agricultural sector as they make up 67 percent of the agricultural labor force and produce about 75 percent of the food. The woman's work in the agricultural sector is largely without financial reward; and, between ten hours of farm work and seven hours of

domestic chores – 17 hours daily of unpaid labor – on the average for, rural women especially. Women's gainful employment is mainly within the services sector where they function largely as petty traders and salespersons. Their preponderance in retail trade is a result of their social role as producers who not only produce the food as subsistence farmers but also are responsible for feeding their households; it, therefore, behooves them to sell the surplus foodstuff after the family requirements have been met (Achoda, John, and Ofem; 2022; FOS, 2006; Osirike and Egbayabo, 2012).

This gender gap that persists has significant implication for economic development of most countries and has been a cause for concern for developing countries such as Nigeria where the gender gap on a scale of 0-1 is at 0.64 making it one of the goals of the SDG 2030 (Aderemi & Alley, 2019). Different government initiatives have been developed to facilitate the empowerment of women in the different sectors that they are involved in. Although women empowerment is not a sufficient condition, it is still a necessary condition for development process. Besides, women members of collective organizations also often report increased self-esteem and a sense of solidarity and support, particularly in times of need (Elaine, Smith and Wills, 2012). These and many factors may limit women's control over productive assets for business and agriculture and are all (empowerment and the other factors) important in the Nigerian scenario. Thus, the need to emphasize the role of women – 'invisible farmers of the Third World' (CTA, 1993) for appropriate maximization, empowerment and Agricultural productivity-wealth creation in, food crop production, livestock, fisheries and forestry, post-harvest activities and food security. Thus, the need for this work

The gender gap

Women are usually the poorest in the society, less educated than men, disease ridden and with very low social, economic and political status (Ezeibe, 2012). Yet men migrations often leave them in charge of the farm without capital, finances, and inputs. Extension services, loans, improved

inputs, and planting materials by-pass them because they have not been largely recognized. Extension services were often targeted exclusively at men with the assumption that they lead the informal sector and can therefore cause a ‘trickledown effect’ for women. These services, often target men’s agricultural activities such as the type of crops to grow and do not include women’s activities. Studies showed that not only did the extension messages rarely get to women, the few that got to them were inappropriate (Saito and Weidmann, 1995). Rural women’s predicaments are worsened because of the numerous daily domestic and childcare tasks that hinder their moving outside their homes to obtain agricultural assistance.

The gender gap: case of Nigeria

Nigerian women play important roles in food and agriculture. It is reported that women small holder farmers constitute 70-80 percent of the agricultural labour force. Women form the majority in the rural areas, and are involved at all stages of agricultural enterprises, responsible for about 80% of all food items produced (Njar, 1990; Mgbada 2002; Rahman, 2004) and 70 percent of food production and 50 percent of the domestic food storage in the country (Ritche, 1977). In addition, they form an active and reserve labor force, but they rarely own the means of productions (Rahman, 2004). They produce the bulk of food for domestic consumption, and they are the drivers of food processing, marketing and preservation. Despite all these enormous tasks, they have limited access to land, credit facilities, farm input, training and advice, technology and crop insurance among other things (Zarat et al., 2016)

Significant changes have occurred in the agricultural sector over the past 20 years, both in the role played by women and in the understanding of this role; programmes like women-in-agriculture, better life for rural women, family support programme, family economic advancement programme, and others have taken place. But these programmes/strategies have continued to fail because they were not appropriately carried out.

Though the programmes were meant for women, those entrusted with the task of ensuring that the proceeds of these programmes reached targeted audiences re-channeled enabling funds to their personal accounts (Omoera, 2006). It is worthy of note that none of these programmes targeted the women as either the emergent producer or as the economic mainstay at least in the food subsector and as a matter-of-fact constituting over 50 percent of the labour work force. Some of the programmes attained the notoriety of gathering only women in the middle and upper class for further enrichment with outright disregard for peasant and rural women whose lives required to be improved. The persistent failures of these programmes have given a wrong documentation of the value of women contribution in agricultural sphere. This has also caused their contribution to be invisible and unaided which has led to the failure to integrate them in development strategies and programmes – vexed issues that need urgent attention (Aroh, 2023).

Cooperative business and women

Seven percent of African population is involved in cooperative business. Despite the advantages associated with the membership to these societies, women's participation in the economy and leadership position of cooperatives is very low. Women membership accounts for less than 30% and their participation declines for upper positions (Majurin, 2012). It is not an exception to Nigeria. In some areas of Nsukka in Enugu state Nigeria, women are restricted from conducting business independently or without their husbands' consent. This poses a serious challenge to participation in cooperative activities. Even when, as should be the case, women's legal rights are stipulated in the cooperative they, may not necessarily be enforced, or they may be superseded by customary law. It is in line with this view that Ashanti (1993) and Eboh (1988) recognized that despite women's major responsibilities in the household health and nutrition and, the women's many roles in agriculture that cover all facets of agribusiness including food production, livestock production, fishery as well as farm management they, are however confronted by formidable constraints that block their active participation in business conduct.

Role of women in agriculture

According to CTA (1993), women in Africa make up more than one third of the labour force. They account for 70% of agricultural workers, 80% of food producers, 100% of those who process basic foodstuffs, and they undertake 60-90% of the marketing. This finding agrees with those from many studies in Nigeria such as Olayiwole (1983), Okojie (1991) and Ijere (1991) that show that women in Nigeria supply much of the labour for production, processing and distribution; particularly, food crops. Afigbo (1991) traced the agricultural activities of the women in eastern Nigeria to the pre-colonial era. He noted that they constituted the major source of farm labour in the villages but argued that their importance as source of farm labour derived largely from their numbers and not because of men's laziness.

Ezeani (1997) reported high participation of women in farming activities in Ideato North Local Government area of Abia State. The women in the area, according to the survey, process and market crops such as cassava, maize, palm oil, melon and cocoyam. Women in other parts of Nigeria are also playing active roles in agriculture. In a study of women in muslim and non-muslim areas of northern Nigeria, Ogungbile et al. (1997) found that the activities of the women included land preparation, planting, weeding, fertilizer application, harvesting, processing of food and transportation. Olawoye (1989) reported high participation of women in farming activities in two different ecological zones in Oyo State.

In the area of food processing and marketing, women's work and roles cannot be over-emphasised. In fact, the food processing and marketing area is traditionally regarded as women's work-area. Thus, the crop processing ability of the rural women has made them engage in some rural industries. Work-process that women especially rural women go through in producing palm oil from palm fruits and the subsequent production of palm kernels after laborious cracking of dry nuts with stones is evident of the gallant-work capacity of women (Okonjo, 1991).

According to World Bank (1989), women in sub-Saharan African including Nigeria are responsible for the production of about 70% of the total staple food supply in the region. Women are involved in every stage of food production and although, traditionally, there is gender-biased division of labour, women tend to shoulder the larger share (Gallen, 1994). He observed further that in addition to food production activities, women had the burden of preparing and processing the food while fulfilling their fundamental role of nurturing and caring for children and attending to elderly members of the household. Arene and Omoregie (1991) noted that womenfolk put in more than 15 hours a day to carry out the joint responsibility of farm and household duties as well as perform the functions of farm work, childcare, and household duties, and “rest” only at bedtime. Women cannot simply come home from work and put their feet up to rest. In parts of the country where Islamic injunctions limit women movements, women are still involved in the production and harvesting of various food crops such as tomatoes and vegetables. Egunjobi (1989) observed that among the Kanuri tribe of Borno State, who are predominantly Moslems, the number of wives a farmer has is a pointer to the contribution of women to crop production.

Women who work the land may be ‘poor and illiterate’ but are the principal force in the struggle against misery, backwardness and dependency (Gellen, 1994). In fact, they are sometimes described as the ‘invisible farmers of the Third World’ although they constitute about 50% of the labour force (CTA, 1983). In spite of this de-emphasis of women’s role in agriculture, in recent times, the roles of women may have taken on greater and larger dimensions due to contemporary developments. More women-headed households are emerging and as population continues to increase, traditional methods of food production may become grossly inadequate to cope with the current food needs of families (Erinle, 1993). Thus the need to emphasise for appropriate maximization the role of women in agriculture; role of women in rural development; role of women in food crop production; role of women in Fisheries production; role of women in Forestry/environment; role of women in livestock production and; role of women in post-harvest activities.

Theoretical framework

Collective Economic Theory

The theoretical framework for this study was anchored on theory of collective economic empowerment. This is a branch of empowerment theory that was propounded by Brazilian humanitarian and educator, Freire in 1973 where he suggested a plan for liberating the oppressed of the world. The theory of empowerment is not only concerned with the process of empowerment but also with result that economic agents such as men, women, consumers and firms can, reduce the complexities of the real world and produce greater access to resources and power for the excluded group (e.g., women). Meanwhile collective economic empowerment theory affirmed that collective economic empowerment develops when people join in action to overcome obstacles and attain social change. The theory was built on the following tenets: the notion of collective economic empowerment is referring to belonging to the social network of peers and an emphasis on autonomy while being part of the collective social solidarity vis-à-vis establishment; a collective belonging; involvement in; and control over organization in the community; collective economic empowerment involves creating a sense of community among people that will increase their ability to work together; solve problems and make group decisions for social change. This is also called social cohesion and a sense of personal freedom. The Theory of Collective economic empowerment is relevant and considered most appropriate for this study because of the following premises: collective economic empowerment was built based on people coming together for autonomous group development with collective interest. This tenets of collective empowerment is important to the community and overall society where people of common interest voluntarily come together in order to improve their livelihood/wellbeing through jointly owned investment. This premise relates to the de-

feminization of poverty and supports initiatives for open and voluntary, autonomous and independent association of persons with common interest.

The theory is also relevant to the study because it encourages active involvement of individuals and groups in participating collectively in the economic empowerment and improvement activities for their common operative-well-being in society. As such, this will give the marginalized groups sense of belonging and control over their investment. Meanwhile, this premise supports and affirms the principles of economic participation of marginalized groups in democratic-controlled economic empowerment and improvement activities.

Collective economic empowerment theory creates sense of community that increases the ability of marginalized groups to work together collectively and participate in group decision making process. Therefore, this will boost self-confidence, self-reliance, and self-esteem within their community particularly of prior marginalized groups. Conclusively, the theory was designed to empower people economically by working together, and women particularly, and framed in the light of making efforts to give women and girls economic inclusion through access to credit facilities, training, etc. and efforts of engaging them in various economic empowerments activities like employment

Income, feminization of poverty and women

Many people in the world today are living in unacceptable conditions of poverty, mostly in developing and least developed countries. The great majority of those poor are women. In no part of these regions are, women equal to men in legal and economic rights. There are widespread gender gaps in access to; resources and control of resources; power, voice/governance, economic opportunities. Women bear the largest and direct costs of inequalities. The gender disparities in economic power sharing are important contributing factor to the poverty of women (Beijing Platform for Action, 1995).

In last two decades for instance, the number of women living in poverty has increased disproportionately to the number of men, particularly in least developed and developing countries. The feminization of poverty

has also recently become a significant problem in the countries with transitional-economies which sometimes products and, short-term consequence of the process of political, economic and social transformation (Beijing Platform for Action, 1995). The feminization of poverty is fueled by cultural conceptions of women as dependents of men; the gender division of labor within families, widespread discrimination in private and public realms, dichotomous labor market and pervasive discrimination that women and girls still face in schooling, housing and at work (Simon, 1988).

Many experts on poverty talk about empowerment when they talk about defining poverty. Thus, in lieu, Kathleen (2006) defines poverty as an individual's inability to affect change in their lives whilst empowerment refers to the ability of an individual to make choices regarding his or her life. Often, the poor are not empowered – they are forced to work at certain jobs or do certain things, and often, this state of existence can be linked to poverty. When people are disempowered, many times, they are in poverty. Most of the empowerment projects and income generation schemes are sometimes not fully maximized as they sub-pedal to combined direct action to negotiate support from one or more external agency (local government, national agency, national or international donor) for; low-income women and men working in cooperatives, community-based organizations along with local NGOs, or communities. The need to act on different fronts – in response to the many kinds of deprivation that most low-income groups face especially women must recognized if, poverty can be managed or conquered. Thus, initiatives including, community-based organizations and NGOs developing savings and credit schemes for emergency credit or funds for micro-enterprise and/or housing; women and individual building or housing improvement initiatives of, installing some infrastructure and setting up and managing some basic services – cannot be over-emphasized (Anzorena et al., 1998).

All over the world, women are at the center of poverty. Women specifically find it more difficult, if not impossible, to have access to loans

from financial institutions, in which their male counterparts can easily get the same help. As Buvinic (1998) notes, this accounts for a disturbing global trend described as “the feminization of poverty”. When the yardstick used to measure the degree of people’s poverty is their level of well-being, women are traditionally found to be more impoverished than men. This situation is worse in developing countries like Nigeria (Aroh, 2023).

The feminization of poverty should be considered a legitimate foreign policy concern because women are increasingly economic actors and heads of households as well as mothers. Their poverty slows down global economic growth. In a world of blurring orders, women’s poverty creates enclaves of want amid wealth and puts rising pressures on the developed world, either by; fueling costly humanitarian crises or unleashing-for the first, waves of females who migrate without spouses to seek work in richer countries (Aroh, 2023).

Conclusion

All over the world, women are at the center of poverty. Since poverty is defined as an individual’s inability to affect change in their lives. This is linked to the control and liberation effect which refers to the ability of an individual to make choices regarding his or her life. Often, the poor are not empowered – they are forced to work at certain jobs or do certain things, and often, this state of existence can be linked to poverty. When people are disempowered, many times, they are in poverty. Most of the empowerment projects and income generation schemes especially for women are sometimes not fully maximized as they sub-pedal to combined direct action to negotiate support from one or more external agency (local government, national agency, national or international donor) for; low-income women and men working in cooperatives, community-based organizations along with local NGOs, or communities. The need to emphasize for appropriate maximization the role of women in agriculture and, act on different fronts – in response to the many kinds of deprivation that most low-income groups face especially, women must be recognized if, poverty can be managed or conquered. Thus, initiatives including, community-based organizations and NGOs developing savings and credit

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