

The Role of Women in Household Decision-Making and their contribution to Agriculture and Rural Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: *The thrust of this study examined and analysed impediments to the participation of women in their household decision-making and socio-economic empowerment of the woman in the 21st century, with emphasis on Nigeria, and how to emancipate rural women from political mediocrity and stagnancy through taking responsibility for their lives especially in the involvement in agricultural production which is the main activity and mainstay of the rural woman in Nigeria. Over 75% of Nigerians are subsistent farmer, holding small level extensive agricultural practice that accounts for the county's food security and agricultural development. Of note is that fact more than their male counterpart rural women account for very close to 80% of the work force in the agricultural sector, surprisingly though a curious conspiracy ignores this humungous contribution by women to agricultural development by women in Nigeria, what is however most worrisome is the woman's lack of decision-making power both at and nationally in all matters regarding agriculture. The dominance of gender division of labour occasioned by gender dynamism constitute the most striking bottleneck to all the effort by women in this all important sector in the rural areas, the institutionalized gender discrimination against women will have to be removed if their effort must be recognized and if it must yield significant result for women to work or farm their way out of poverty. The role of women-in-agriculture programme in ameliorating the inadequacies of the various education program with regards to women has been remarkable in providing women organizations with a voice that will attempt to echo their problems to the ears of the authority an ear which is deafened by gender consideration and role delineation. The effort has resulted in women farmers now enjoying better access to farm inputs and credits although many barriers remain and would have to be addressed to further enhance their role. Rural women farmers deserve better recognition and greater appreciation of their tangible contributions to agriculture and rural development and food security. Other aspects of gender issues in Nigerian agriculture are discussed.*

Key words: Agriculture % Food security % Gender inequality % Household economy % Nigeria % Women farmers

I. Introduction

The problems faced in developing agriculture in the rural areas of the developing countries is the lack of infrastructure in the rural areas particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, all efforts geared towards agricultural development will be futile if this problem is not addressed. A considerable majority of farmers operate at the subsistence, smallholder level, with intensive agriculture being uncommon. A disproportionate portion of the agricultural production is left in the hands of these smallholder farmers with average holding of about 1.0-3.0 hectares [CTA, 2000]. With little or no access to modern improved technologies their general situation does guarantee them reasonable investments in capital, inputs and labour.

Food and nutrition security at the household level is dependent heavily on the effort of these women producers at the rural level which is a major contribution to efforts aimed alleviating poverty in Nigeria. The first pillar of food security therefore is sustainable agricultural and food production, [Odurukwe, SN, Mathew EC, & N O.Ojiekwu, 2006]. The Nigerian population witnessed a steady from the 1980s with a commensurate decline noticed in agriculture and food production in many African countries [FAO, 1995]. The diminishing capacity of agriculture to guarantee household food subsistence increased the workload shouldered by women as

men withdrew their labour from agriculture. This led to increased attention to the role of smallholder subsistence agriculture in ensuring food security of the continent, as about 73% of the rural population consists of smallholder farmers [IFAD, 1993].

According to the World Bank about three quarters of the poor people live in rural areas and depend solely on agriculture and related activities,[Kotze, DA, 2003]. For development to be meaningful food security to be guaranteed and poverty to be alleviated then rapid development in agricultural growth must take place. One of the challenges will be how to assist the poor people in rural areas meet their challenges in enhancing their lives and achieving sustainable agricultural and food security. Generally speaking, a monumental increase in agricultural productivity is pivotal to growth, income distribution, improved food security and alleviation of poverty in rural Africa [FAO, 2002]. In all of these, the rural woman plays a central role and is not only crucial to the overall success of these efforts directed at agricultural development in rural areas but her household stands as an important beneficiary from the process as well.

To say that women play a prominent and dominant role in meeting the challenges of agricultural production and development is to beg the obvious, they are so significantly relevant that they can only be ignored to the peril of all efforts aimed emancipation of the rural poor [Nnadizie, B, I Ibe 1996, S A, Rahman 2008]. A study financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) revealed that women make up some 60-80 percent of agricultural labour force in Nigeria [World Bank, 2003], depending on the region and they produce two-thirds of the food crops. Yet, in spite of these, it is generally assumed that men – and not women—make the key farm management decisions both at home and in the society in Nigeria. Expectedly as occasioned by gender discrimination female farmers in the country are among the voiceless, especially with respect to influencing agricultural decisions and policies. Policies, aimed at increasing food security and food production, either underestimate or totally ignore women's role in both production and the general decision-making process within the household.

In patriarchal societies socio-economic conditions, among other factors, affect their decision-making in agriculture. The multifaceted roles of women to the agricultural sector that has led to increase in agricultural and food production in Nigeria that has been variously described in the literature [Rahman, SA, 2008, World Bank 2003, & Amali,E 1989] have greatly been impacted by their role in the decision-making process which has led to their overall effort being minimal [FAO, 1995, Rahman SA 2008,& Damisa MA & M Yohanna 2007]. Surprisingly, women have a reputation that is generally accepted that they are known to be more involved in agricultural activities than men in sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, including Nigeria. With about 73 % involved in cash crops, arable and vegetable gardening, while postharvest activities had 16 % and agroforestry, 15 percent [Abdulahi, MR Undated]. Over the years their role in agriculture in Nigeria has attracted greater attention. While production and processing of arable crops have been taken by women in some states [Afolabi MM2008], they are also responsible for as much as 80 % of the staple food items. Estimates of their role in contributing to the production of food crops range from 30% in the Sudan to 80% in the Congo [FAO 1995]; as they substantially contribute to national agricultural production and food security, even as they are responsible for the food crops.

A variety of factors militate against women in their effort to participate in agricultural and food production and also in their effort to maximally benefit from their efforts at agricultural and food production. These factors limiting the effort of women include but are not limited to socio-cultural and economic issues both at home and in the society. Any effort to surmount these obstacles can be daunting as these obstacles are not only deep rooted in the socio-cultural fabric of the society they institutionalized gender consideration that strengthens these problems are far and in between the capacity of rural women to unravel.

Women and Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa:

The responsibility for agriculture and food **security** borne by women in Nigeria is core to the provision and guarantee of sustainable growth of the poor people in the rural areas though ignored development agencies and devoted minimal resources to women and researching the impact of their agricultural policies and new techniques on the wellbeing of Africa's women farmers [Grieco MR & NA Apt 1998]. The need for a paradigm shift is now: the urgent need for a gendered approach to agricultural policy in Africa. The integral part of the argument the farming structure and that of the dominant agriculture policies with the disproportionate involvement and influence of external experts, have ignored this gender dimension at a very real cost to Nigerian agriculture and to gender equity within the country [Boserup A 1990, Saito K & D Spurling 1992, & Godwin C 1997]. Gendered issues have instituted an operational inattention to familial and agricultural programs that women are involved in such as transport and microfinance. A more worrisome aspect of this lack of attention is that it is carried along with public statement that actively promotes participation and consultation as part of the development agenda. Meanwhile the participatory protocol and measures that is consequent upon ensuring the integration of gender into the process has not been put in place. The unwillingness to define precisely measures that surround gender split in specific benefits and directly target gender inequalities within

operational agenda and then mainstreaming the process into a paradigm that address women's and contribution in relation to agricultural economy of Nigeria it is likely that no significant change will take place. The consequences of this unfortunate situation will be dire to all concerned.

Arising from the ICPA 1994, the Beijing conference on Women on women 1995 and AU charter on Women and human rights women all over Africa have begun to demand for participation and inclusion in development planning, policy formulation and economic process with regards decision-making at home in the social environment and in agricultural development, and have started to develop and promote local expert materials in the field of Agriculture [Duncan B 1997]. Through these materials, being those which emerge out of consultation with women farmers on their needs and opportunities, we now know from existing evidence that there are gender differentiations of immense dimension within African agriculture [].

The importance of meeting the challenges of agricultural contribution of as regards the issues affecting their capacity and capability of agricultural development cannot be overemphasized[Rahman SA 2008]. Though Women make the most significant contribution to food production and processing men take more of the farm decisions and control the productive resources. UNDP confirmed the superior involvement of women in agricultural production and processing in Nigeria and indeed Africa as a whole, which revealed that women make-up 60-90% of the agricultural labour [PalaAO 1992, Laming GN 1983], depending on the region and that they produce two-thirds of food crops. Women in Africa have generally been known to play an important role in small-scale traditional agricultural production [Spencer DC 1976, Spiro HM 1977].

Saito and Weidemann [Saitoi KA & Weidmann 1990] showed that women in the sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, provide most of the labour and randomly some decisions for many agricultural activities, including where women are involved in cash cropping and animal production [Maigida DN 1977]. To this extent women constitute up to 90% of the workforce involved in direct arable crop production which can only be over looked at a serious price [Maliki D 19991].

Bryson J C [1981] and a series of other studies covering African villages showed that more women than men in families cultivate and did agricultural work and usually working more hours than men. Where intensive agriculture is predominantly practiced female labour seems to be in use than where extensive agriculture is practiced. Though agricultural systems in sub-Saharan Africa tend to be more extensive cultivation systems, they observation is to the effect that there is no significant difference between the labour usage practices of societies having extensive cultivation systems [Yemisi IO & MA Aisha, 2009]. This difference can be explained, in part, in factors such as social structures in practice in those societies.

The socio-cultural practice in African family and inheritance systems combine to produce an agricultural system which assigns the major role to women. Such a system is unique to this region being a hoe agricultural system compared to other systems such as the plow agricultural system in Asia and is rarely seen in other parts of the world. It was therefore concluded that the failure to recognize/enhance female labour activities is contributing to current problems with food supply but these however can be overcome most effectively by working with, rather than against, women [Bryson JC 1981]. The merits of such collaboration cannot be overemphasized or quantified.

Aside from politics, the other domains where women are actively involved are agriculture, urban workplace, the law and education. Women contribute tremendously to agricultural output but unfortunately they hardly, until recently, benefited from agricultural incentives and innovation because of economic suppression and social and traditional practices which undermine the constitutional provisions on the equality of men and women. Gender discrimination, rather than ignorance, is the reason for the lack of women participation in agricultural programmes and projects [Yemisi IO & MA Aisha, 2009].

That food production is mainly done by women in subsistence agriculture, with little contribution from the men [Boserup A 1980]. This notion is buttressed by the observation from the *Heluo* community in Kenya many years later, where Pala [Pala, AO 1996] found that the percentage of work done by women farmers far outweighs that of men. Similarly, in Ghana, for instance, smallholdings kept by women provide about 80% of the total food production in the country. In Tanzania, however, 87% of the women who live in rural areas play similar roles; while Zambian women contribute up to 80% of their labour for household crops [Abdulahi MR Undated].

Table 1: Extent of the participation of women in decision-making in agriculture in parts of Kogi State, Nigeria

Decision-making area	Nil	Only consulted	Opinion considered	Final decision
Land preparation	176 (88.0)	21 (10.5)	3 (1.5)	0 (0.0)
Time of sowing	156 (78.0)	34 (17.0)	8 (40.0)	2 (1.0)
Manure/Fertilizer types and time of application	162 (81.0)	19 (9.5)	15 (7.5)	4 (2.0)
Time of weeding	189 (94.5)	9 (4.5)	2 (1.0)	0 (0.0)
Number of hired labourers and wages to be paid	135 (67.5)	39 (19.5)	17 (18.5)	9 (4.5)

Time of harvesting	111 (55.5)	37 (18.5)	49 (14.5)	48 (24.0)
Storage and marketing of farm produce	28 (11.5)	37 (18.5)	92 (46.0)	48 (24.0)
Purchase and sale of farming implements	156 (73.0)	29 (14.5)	13 (6.5)	2 (1.0)
Purchase and sale of farmlands	161 (80.5)	23 (11.5)	11 (5.5)	5 (2.5)
Farm credit	117 (58.5)	57 (28.5)	26 (13.0)	0 (0.0)

The role of women in agriculture and national development

Nigerian women have over the years come to prove that they have and are ready to play a serious role in the male dominated agricultural sector if they are given the right avenue and opportunity to do so. When the gender considerations that hold women down are removed, they can make significant contribution to policy making and governance [Yemisi IO & MA Aisha, 2009].

In spite of these unfavourable conditions they have slowly but steadily advanced their contribution to agricultural development and are progressively beginning to dominate agricultural and food production processes in the country, they have to a large extent, impacted on the Federal government and government has responded positively in diverse ways.

Statistics show that women perform very crucial roles on the domestic and economic scene. Neglecting the contribution of women or trivializing it will be to the detriment of rural development and to a large extent national development. [Kishor RB et al 1999]. The keenness of the Nigerian government more than ever before to address poverty alleviation can be traced to the recognisance of the importance effect the women are playing in that sector and the significant impact derivable by women when government invest in poverty alleviation programs as the bulk of the poor are women [Yemisi IO & MA Aisha, 2009].

Deliberate effort targeted at rural development in the form of agricultural development will have a significant effect on the decision-making power of women. Literature abounds of the various contributions of women to agricultural production in Nigeria [Amali E 1989, Okonjo K 1991, Rahman, SA & JF Alamu 2003, & Damisa MA & M Yohanna 2007]. The need therefore to explore the decision-making role of women in agriculture has is very apt at this period more than ever before.

Damisa and Yohanna [2007], found that the decision-making role of women in agriculture was very minimal when the examined these variables in a study area in using Zaria in Kaduna State of Nigeria, examining the various levels of participation of rural women in the decision-making in different areas of agriculture while studying the factors influencing their participation in the decision-making process in farm management. They found that women's participation in decision making was quite minimal (Table 1). In each of the farm operations, less than 20% of the women were consulted, except in the sourcing of farm credit, where about 28% were consulted; about 13% or less of the women had their opinion considered in each of the farm operations. However, only between 1.0 and 2.5% took the final decision in all of the farm operations. Women's participation in farm management decision-making process is said to increase with age, older women participating more in decision-making in the different areas of agriculture than their younger age group counterparts. This is owing to the fact that over years women would have acquired high level of knowledge and experience about improved farm practices [Damisa MA & M Yohanna 2007]. Wealth status of women is also another major determinant of the role of the women in farm management decision-making; richer women being more involved than their poorer counterparts.

Women in Anambra State of Nigeria contribute more than the men in terms of labour input in farming and are solely responsible for household management duties [3NEARLS, 2000]. In studies elsewhere in Nigeria, involving the *Jukun* people [Meek C 1981] and the nomadic *Fulfude* women and *Kulka* women farmers, between 70 and 80% of agricultural labour force is represented by women [Ngur N 1987]. A survey of peasant agricultural women in northern Nigeria also revealed that rural women take part in income-generating activities, particularly in the processing of agricultural produce. In a related survey of food processing and cottage industries by Simmons [Simmons EB 1973] in three Zaria villages, he observed that 90% of the women were involved in at least one food processing activity or the other.

Women's Groups and Organizations:

In an attempt to bridge the gap between men and women farmers in Nigeria, Yemisi IO & MA Aisha, 2009 opined that women farmers have joined different groups and have contributed immensely to the advancement recorded by women farmers in their new found voice to aggregate and advocate their needs in national development with particular reference to agriculture development and food production. One such group is the Women Farmers' Advancement Network (WOFAN), a private initiative founded in the early 1990s whose headquarters is in Kano, Nigeria. WOFAN works with 250 women's groups in five different states in northern Nigeria in an effort to mobilize and train rural women in the management of information and communication.

Community participation is a key strategy in getting women to participate in learning activities and share experience [WOFAN 2003]. Alongside this the network also organizes a weekly radio broadcast that features the efforts of rural women.

The main thrusts of WOFAN's aims include creating a forum for women to express themselves, encourage them to form community development groups cooperative societies through which they could access credit and insurance facilities; and introducing low cost and labour-saving technologies, as well as modern farm implements and the use of solar energy. Initially, WOFAN helped women farmers in rural areas with issues of health and agricultural technology and have since diversified to other areas of importance.

The effort of national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in providing the much needed assistance to the rural population is increasingly receiving notice on the both locally and internationally, the growth in recent years of NGOs and women's associations which pay attention to gender issues has benefited rural women immensely. In Sudan, there is significant increase in the number of national NGOs working in the area of agriculture, as the number of regional and international NGOs decreased [Franklin S 2007]. And many projects are targeting women in the area of livestock and dairy. In Tanzania, on the other hand, NGOs have become a dynamic arena for women's empowerment and support to rural women in agriculture has increased with the formation of women-in-development at NGOs headquarters. While the number impacting on women and agriculture, among others increased. The number working in Namibia is few but their work is no less significant as these enhances women's role in agriculture and food production and advocate on behalf of women farmers [Yemisi IO & MA Aisha, 2009].

Research has shown that one of the surest ways to reach women is by working through women's groups these has been found to be richly rewarding and can bring significant rewards, the ability of women's groups in paving the way through initiating activities that will positively on poor households is very effective. Upon realization that women belong to different recognized formal and informal women's groups led government to expand the activities of women-in-agriculture (WIA) program, government fields, For instance, the WIA programme used NGOs to help identify women beneficiary groups and for WIA field staff to target for the initiation and execution of project activities.

While forming the WIA farmer groups has facilitated the dissemination of agricultural innovations and provided women farmers with better access to farm inputs and credit than they would have as individuals through the efforts of WIA agents women were now able embark on all aspects of subprojects, from identification through to planning and implementation [Kotze DA 2003].

Women-in-Agriculture in Nigeria

Established in 1988 when it became clear that the more than a decade role of the World Bank in building up Nigeria's agricultural extension services, that women farmers were still receiving little or no assistance from extension agents [World Bank, 2003]. Therefore, WIA programs within the agricultural development programmes (ADPs) were created in 1990 to address the gender-related deficiencies within existing extension program. The aim of the program was integrating women into development process using agriculture as a platform, noting that the participation of women farmers in planning and policy-making as well as the beneficiaries is important [Maigida DN 1997]. Like every institution in a patriarchal society the services targeted provided was pro-male and gender-insensitive towards women farmers [Yemisi IO & MA Aisha, 2009]. Previous programming was male centred while discriminating female farmers who form half of the world's population and, majority of the farming population in rural areas

Like all programs the WIA had its own teething problems when it was launched as a pilot project it sought to improve women's access to agricultural extension services included in the program is the training of home economics agents in the training as home economics agents in agriculture emphasizing on women activities. The teething problems threatened the very survival of this laudable objective, WIA in different states grew in an adhoc and sporadic manner, some states experienced tremendous growth others didn't even take off, in a bid to address this anomaly a national planning workshop was organized in 1989 bringing together all stakeholders it developed a 3 year action plan after sharing success and trying experiences [World Bank, 2003]. They were better able to articulate constraints faced by women farmers and proffer solutions on their behalf. They had first-hand knowledge of the situation and good working relations with women farmers.

The importance of working through was so great that from the state level down to the LGA women were to involved in all stages of WIA activities and programming. The formation of WIA farmers' groups facilitates the dissemination of agricultural innovations and provides women farmers with better access to farm inputs and credit than they would have as individuals. In a bid to monitor and measure achievement WIA program a rural household survey was conducted in 3 regions of the country. Positive results of recommendation and action plans manifested from the survey. The programme developed better than expected due to the dynamism and resourcefulness of Nigerian women.

Problems such as shortage of extension agents due to low ratio of extension staff to farm families making it almost impossible to pay an individualized attention to each women farmers. most WIA extension workers are not core agriculture-based, not trained in agriculture [Chale F 1990]. Lack of adequate support from ADP management is another problem faced by the WIA program. It has taken quite some time for the WIA concept to find its way into the heart of most decision makers in the ADPs, with even some yet to be reconciled with the fact.

Importance and Roles of the WIA Program

1. The organization contributes to economic growth of the country by ensuring household food security thereby stamping the fact that women's productivity cannot over ignored as their contribution is significant and thus must be recognized in agricultural strategies and given a place in the country [Katerine SA et al 1994].
2. Their role in boosting the income-earning capability of women farmers is unparalleled [Karikari SK, IP Mathew 1990, Halandedu J, 2005], empowering women to be part of the decision-making process not only in their homes but the society at large where gender consideration has kept them out for too long, this singular act has the capacity to improve food supply, supplement staple food earning and reduce malnutrition in Nigeria [Muhammed R, 2002].
3. The view that women farmer's contribution to agriculture is significant has been reinforced by the activities of WIA, as their contribution to household welfare and farm income is fast become the main source of income for rural families
4. Odurukwe *et al.* [2006] in their work alluded that the need to develop a suitable extension service strategy that is gender-specific and tailored to women farmers is too important to be ignored.
5. Encouraging women to form farmers groups and join cooperative societies has facilitated the access of women to agricultural innovations better access to farm inputs and credit facilities than would have been available for them as individuals. Through WIA extension agent's low cost technology were disseminated but the adoption rate has not matched the expected target.
6. It was reported that the WIA extension agents disseminate technologies of the WIA programme to women's groups. Unfortunately, as the result of their study reveals, high awareness level does not imply high adoption rates [Odurukwe et al 2006], a situation the women attributed to the complexity of such technologies. Fortunately, most of the transferred WIA technologies were found to be very relevant to their socio-economic wellbeing.
7. The positive effects of women adoption of WIA packages were most felt on the women than the men and children. Similarly, there were high positive impacts on rural women than their urban counterparts. Greater dependency of men on their wives for economic support was a result of women's involvement in the WIA programme was also one of the positive impacts of the programme. Improved family food security and increased financial contribution to household needs were other reported benefits of the WIA programme.

Gender Inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa

One of the most pervasive forms of inequality faced by women today is gender inequality as it cuts across other forms of inequality [Franklin S 2007]. Different rules, norms and values govern the gender division of labour and the gender distribution of resources, responsibilities, agency and power. These are critical elements for understanding the nature of gender inequality in different societies.

Lineage-based homesteads sustain gender segmentation in household arrangements in sub-Saharan Africa and this is prevalent in Nigeria in the face of highly complex gender dynamism. Much of SSA is matrilineal, with women's access to land being through their husband's lineage group. Since women's obligation to the family includes is both productive and reproductive, they are granted this access to enable them carry out these responsibilities.

In parts of West Africa, including Nigeria, women generally have usufruct rights to separate holdings through their husband's lineage. Women's low participation in national and regional policy-making, their invisibility in national statistics and their low participation in extension services have meant that those issues of most concern to women have been neglected in the design and implementation of many development policies and programmes.

Women's access to land was rarely discussed and thus their benefits from land reforms were few [FAO, 1988]. In the nine countries examined by Franklin [Franklin S 2007] in a recent study, as throughout Africa in general, he found that while women are present in greater degrees in agricultural/rural organizations, they tend to comprise a low proportion of the membership and are often not represented in the higher levels of leadership. Many rural organizations do not sufficiently concern themselves with the needs of rural women.

Women's participation as office holders in these organizations tends to be even more limited. The most striking example is in Zimbabwe, where despite the fact that women constitute 75% of the members in the Zimbabwe

Farmers Unions, only 5% of the officials are women. The largest numbers of women decision makers are found in the Sudan, where 14% of the office holders in agricultural cooperatives are graduate women.

Overall, women hold an extremely low number of decision-making positions in the ministries dealing with agriculture and rural development. It is clear that the sharing of decision-making between genders varies substantially from country to country and among different cultural and ethnic groups within the same country. While women's decision-making power tends to increase in many countries when the husband is not present, men may remain involved in many of the most important decisions.

Lack of access to land remains a major constraint for women farmers in Africa and land reform programmes have led almost exclusively to the transfer of land rights to male heads of households [FAO, 1990]. Even in countries where ownership and inheritance laws have been reformed in favour of women, in practice women do not necessarily have more rights to land, as local customs and lack of information act as barriers.

In rare cases where women own land, they are still at a disadvantage in the sense that their land holdings tend to be smaller and less fertile than men's. There is distinct division of labour between men and women as far as agricultural activities and tasks are concerned. Women and junior men provide labour on household fields that are controlled by the compound head. [Sreekumar B 2001]

Tagwireyi [Tigwareyi JT 1987] noted that despite providing about 60-80% labour in food production, women in Africa receive little from the agricultural extension services in that country due to the traditional prejudiced attitude towards women, lack of time on their part to attend meetings and their limited decision-making powers. Malina [1988] who studied the problems women face in Tanzania suggested that the impact of women's activities on the farming system should be appreciated for agricultural research to be successful.

Their needs and concerns should be understood, their traditional roles and needs taken account of and their potential fully explored.

Reasons for Women's Involvement in Agricultural Activities and Barriers to Achievement

The desire to earn extra income led women to embark on agricultural activities for a variety of other reasons. Among such reasons is that of being a family tradition and personal interest. The scenario whereby more and more of men either temporarily or permanently migrate has caused shortage of labour in rural areas.

As a result, more women are left behind to do much of the farm work as paid or unpaid family labour [Abdulahi MR Undated]. Other reasons that have been identified include ease of handling; lack of other alternative occupations; acquisition of technical know-how; and husband's influence.

It has been observed that religion and availability of funds or farming facility also influence degree of women's involvement in crop production. Apart from providing employment and income for resource-poor small farmers, especially women, family poultry also serves as a means of capital acquisition and accumulation [Gueye EF 2003].

In an effort to reach and engage the poor, we must recognize that some issues and constraints related to participation are gender-specific and stem from the fact that men and women play different roles, have different needs and face different challenges on a number of issues and at different levels.

It cannot therefore assume that women will automatically benefit from efforts involving poor people in project design and implementation. Experience has also shown that unless specific steps are taken to ensure that women participate and benefit, they usually do not.

A number of barriers to women's participation in agricultural activities have been identified. Some of the very important ones will be discussed here.

It has been noted that systemic gender biases may exist in the form of (a) customs, beliefs and attitudes that confine women mostly to the domestic sphere, (b) women's economic and domestic workloads that impose severe time burdens on them and (c) laws and customs that impede women's access to credit, production inputs, employment, education, or medical care.

A careful examination alludes to the fact that there is definitely need for sensitivity on the social and cultural barriers that may inhibit women's participation in agricultural activities. In the Nigeria WIA, for example, specific steps have been taken to reduce the conflicts in women's schedules and guarantee their regular attendance at meetings.

It is definitely important to seek women's views by obtaining good information about gender roles, needs, activities, access to and control over resources, existing institutions and the constraints operating against women's participation.

Women's Contribution to Household Economy, Food Production and Food Security.

Afolabi [Afolabi MM 2008] showed that rural women in Ondo State of Nigeria are very strong pillars of the economy in the State. Working in organized groups, often engaged in more than one economic activity are

major contributors to food production; have successfully managed human and economic resources to achieve optimum results; became employers of labour, thereby reducing unemployment; and the farms of these rural women contributed to reduction in food shortage crisis and contributing substantially to national agricultural output, maintenance of the environment and family food security [Todaro MP 1994].

In sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture accounts for approximately 21% of the continent's GDP and women contribute 60-80% of the labour used to produce food [FAO, 1995]. Estimate of women's contribution to the production of food crops range from 30% in the Sudan to 80% in the Congo, while their proportion of the economically active labour force in agriculture ranges from 48% in Burkina Faso to 73% in the Congo and 80% in the traditional sector in Sudan.

Data available support the trend throughout Africa that: smallholder subsistence women farmers substantially contribute to national agricultural production and food security and are primarily responsible for food crops. [FAO, 1995].

In most of SSA, the responsibility for the production of household food supply lies with women. As providers of food and nurturers of children, women ought to play a role in any attempt to increase food production and food security [Kotze DA 2003]. Aside from household duties, women carry out a variety of agricultural labour. Performing almost all tasks and activities associated with subsistence production and produce more than 74% of household food in African countries and up to 70% of food consumed by families in rural areas [Todaro MP, 1994, Geier G, 1995 & Melamed C 1996].

The gender division of labour and social responsibilities in the household is to a large extent the deciding factor in women's commitment to subsistence production and to fulfil their responsibility to feed the family and ensure food security for the household. Most women in the low-income food-deficit countries (LIFDCs), especially in rural areas, are therefore over-burdened with a wide range of activities and tasks in agriculture, animal husbandry and in the household [Gueye EF 2003].

Belonging to disadvantaged groups in most rural communities in LIFDCs they are main poultry owners in LIFDCs, though there are variations within and between countries. According to Gueye [53]; more than the 70% of chicken owners in rural areas of SSA are women. On the whole, women's involvement in poultry farming tends to decrease with increased levels of intensification.

Any serious attempt to eradicate poverty must address the role of women as producers food as income earning capacity for women and ensure that they have in policy and decision-making [[Yemisi IO & MA Aisha, 2009].

Any program to increase food security among the poor, particularly the rural poor, must ensure not just representation but full participation of women. Kotze [2005] concluded that the role of women in the household economy and their contribution towards food production and food security as a matter of urgency need to be acknowledged in any policy, program and project aimed at promoting food security and rural and agricultural development.

II. Recommendations

1. Women's access to basic economic resources such as land (as owners), low cost labour-saving machines, food processing machines, credit and agricultural innovations need to be improved.
2. They need to address consideration which presents women's housewives and excluded them from being identified in agricultural statistics; underestimating the role of unpaid workers in many countries and the ignoring the role of farm women all underestimate the contribution of women to agriculture and food security.
3. There is for the report of monitoring and evaluation of agricultural programs to women and women groups as feedback as this will allow equalization of the full participation of women in the entire process, this is most effective and appropriate way forward.
4. Support systems for women farmers within a holistic gender-sensitive framework are urgently needed to form a policy development, project design and implementation agenda. Women must be directly involved with the development and implementation of the new technology.

III. Conclusion

The contribution of rural women to agricultural production and rural development in Nigeria is grossly underappreciated in spite of the dominant role women play in the sector. Women compete more favourably than men in terms of their participation in agricultural activities and household economy and food security is unappreciated. The survival and sustenance of agriculture and rural development in Nigeria, as well as in many sub-Saharan Africa countries, rest squarely on the rural women. They therefore deserve to be given due recognition as far as decision-making process in agriculture is concerned.

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