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EVALUATION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION
CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN FARMERS IN
KANAM AND WASE AREAS OF PLATEAU STATE

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EVALUATION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN FARMERS IN KANAM AND WASE AREAS OF PLATEAU STATE

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ABSTRACT

Increasing attention is being accorded the potential role of women farmers in Plateau State due to their significance in sustainable agricultural development. However, production impediments have often diminished the hope to fully utilise such potentials for the benefit of humanity. A study was conducted in Kanam and Wase L.G.As to examine production characteristics of women farmers in the study areas. 200 women farmers were selected from 8 wards by simple random sampling technique. However, 198 responses were available for analysis. Descriptive statistics – frequency and corresponding percentages is used for analysis. The result of the study revealed that greater number of the women range between ages of 30-39 years. (52.%) Married women were majority (72.22%), primary school leavers were majority (40.40%) majority of them operate on their husband's farm (68.18%) major source of finance is personal savings (83.33%) major farm enterprise are cattle, sheep, goat, crops (100%). Major source of labour is family labour (50.51%) common size of farm holding is less than 2 hectares (65.66%) constraints identified includes: Non Accessibility to land ownership (98.48%) inadequate access to reliable source of loanable funds (89.%) Non availability of village level technology (100%). The conclusion is that their production level is characterized by small holder agriculture with associated impediments. In view of the importance attached to role of women in agriculture, significant effort is required through effective extension services to alleviate the burden of the women.

INTRODUCTION

The declaration of the period between 1975 – 1985 by member countries of the United Nations (UN) as 'Decade for Women' marked the genesis of gender issues in development worldwide (Maigida 1990, Yahya 2002) since then the role of men vis-a-vis that of women dominate discussions among researchers policy makers, educationist and development planners (Olowu and Yahya 1998, Yahya 2002) Similarly, in agriculture, the last two decades have witnessed growing awareness on action, plans and intervention programmes that are mainly concerned about such goals as food security, improved health and low population growth (Yahya 2002). Recently, the entire world marked the 'International Women's Day on 8 march,(2003)

All these effort are aimed at emancipation of women. Historically, available records show that women have been participating in agricultural production in Nigeria for a long time. Reliable records indicates that women make-up 60-80 percent of the agricultural labour force in Nigeria depending on the region and that they produce two-thirds of the food crops in addition to active participation in forestry, animal husbandry, fishery, food processing and storage as well as handicrafts. (FAO, 1995). Despite these facts, there exists general assumption that men are the "live wire" of food production in the country. As a result, agricultural extension services have traditionally been focused on men and their farm production needs while neglecting the female half of the production force. (Ken,et al, 1997). In view of this fallacy, most extension messages targeted at women only emphasizes their domestic role with topics on child care and family nutrition rather than a comprehensive package to include their role in agricultural production. (Burvinie and Mehra, 1990). At present, the lives of Nigerians are affected by the external debt

crisis, inflation, devaluation of the currency and other elements of the socio-economic crisis resulting in widespread hunger and malnutrition about which we experience, hear on radio, see and hear on television, and read in newspapers and magazines almost everyday, (CTA, 1995). In view of the precarious sympathetic circumstance we find ourselves, there is need to promote the effort for sustainable alleviation of hunger and poverty by setting right the national economy through increasing national agricultural production which is a basis for sustainable economic growth. This is so because agriculture remains the mainstay of the Nigerian economy inspite of obvious pitfalls. However, the national agricultural production can only be improved if the active population especially women is an integral part of production machinery.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In Nigeria, there exists enormous disparity in rural sector between opportunities for men and women. The disparity begins in childhood when girls have less access to education than boys and sometimes even less attention from cultural perspectives. This is carried further to their productive years in vocations including agriculture (Ozo-Eson, 1995). Contrary to general belief that women are passive participants in development programmes, rural women are active participant in rural development activities ranging from agriculture to community development. In many cases they go out to work to buffer their husbands' income. In some households women have become the sole economic support as a result of death of spouse or male migration to towns and cities in search of white collar jobs In North central Nigeria they are engaged in agricultural production on land often less than 5 hectares. Common enterprise includes cereals (95.2%) legumes (84.1%). To a lesser extent they cultivate root crops (46.3% and vegetables (12.3%). In terms of livestock husbandry, some of them keep cattle (29.8%), goats (84.3%) sheep (61.9%), poultry (82.2%), pigs (20.2%) and camel (6.1%). However, majority of them, posses' livestock ranging between 1-5 heads of sheep (29.8%). (Yahya and Olowu 1998) Similarly, (Gbadebo et al 2002) observed that women in Onigambari forest reserve participate actively in agricultural production in order to support the income of the household. Common enterprise includes vegetable cultivation (71.7%) cereals cultivation (68.3%) maize (66.7%). They concluded that financial constraints are the major barrier to expanding the scale of production in order to generate more incomes from agricultural productions.

In Plateau State, the role being played by women in agricultural production and natural resources management are critical to the efficient growth and development of economy of the state. Yet the female gender has often been neglected with respect to agricultural production resources. This has continued to affect their agricultural productivity.. It is against this background that the study is conducted to examine the Agricultural Production variables of women farmers in the study areas.

Objective: The general objective is to investigate the Agricultural production characteristics of women farmers in the study areas. While the specific objectives are:-

1. To identify the farm enterprise of the women farmers.
2. To identify production problems encountered by the women
3. To highlight the prospects of women farming in the study areas.

Justification: - Visual evidence shows significant contribution of women to agricultural production in the study areas. However, there is dearth of empirical research data to corroborate this assertion. Thus when this research work is accomplished, there will be

empirical data on role of women in agricultural production in the study areas. In addition, the constraints will be identified and possible solutions could be proffered.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Kanam and Wase Local Government Areas. They are agrarian settlements, located southeast of Jos- the state capital. There is substantial number of women engaged in agricultural production in the areas. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 women from 8 wards in the study areas. These are kanam, Dengi, Gadgi, kantama, (in kanam L.G.A) and Wase, Bashar, kadarko, lamba (in Wase L.G.A).

A checklist of 40 women farmers was drawn for each ward. 25 women farmers were randomly selected by drawing from the lot. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and corresponding percentages) was employed in analysis of the data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristics

Age: The results of the study revealed that majority of the women (68.20%) are in the active age brackets of between 20 – 39 years. However a modal class for the age group is 35 years. The implication is that most women are faced with dual challenges of being an active homekeeper in addition to being an active farmer. In view of this severe challenges, compatible village level farm labour saving technology designed to suit the condition of the women will enhance the productivity of the double role of a home keeper and a farmer.

Educational level: The result further revealed that almost all the women interviewed had one form of education or another. That is, they are literate to some level. The breakdown of result further showed that (40.40%) had primary school education, (35.35%), secondary school education, others had either adult and non formal education, attempted primary school or secondary school. This is an encouraging findings for gender initiative for development planning particularly with regard to agriculture. It means extension delivery packages should be through media that are accessible to the women and in the form in which is comprehensible to them.

Agricultural Production Characteristics

Farm finance

The result established that greater number of the women (83.3%) source finance for farm operation from their personal savings while (10.1%) of the women are assisted by women co-operative society, (4.1%) from relations, and (2.5%) from money lenders. This has grave consequences on their productivity because contemporary practices of agriculture demands high capital input for any meaningful output to be realized. This is an important pointer for policy makers when designing the modalities to meet the needs of women farmers.

Source of labour

The findings of the study revealed that a little above half the population of the women (50.51%) obtain labour from members of their respective families. (25.5%) from communal assistance, (13.13%) from hired human labour (8.08%) hired oxen and 3.03% personal oxen. Considering the significance of labour in agricultural production, the

available labour to the women is quite inadequate to facilitate appreciable level of production. The provision of village level labour saving technology is necessary.

Source of farmland

The study established that most of the women operate on their respective husband's lands. (68.18%) while 26.80% operates on hired farmlands to be paid in most cases in kind rather than in cash. This is a serious implication for agricultural production. This is because those operating on their husband's farms are vulnerable to the whims and caprices of their husbands in regards to decision over farm operations and fate of the output. The practice of using the produce to pay for hired land further portends danger for agriculture in the area, considering, the scale of production of the women.

Size of farmland

It is established that most of the women operate on less than 2 hectares of land (65.66%) while (34.34%) operates on 2-4 hectares. This is a reflection of the small scale of operation of the women which is far below the productive capacity of the women.

Constraints to Agricultural production

Non Access to land ownership, loanable funds, and Extension. Agents

The result revealed that 98.48% of the women had no access to personal land for farming. Most of them cultivate/rear livestock on their husbands land. It is enough to discourage full investment of their meager resources to agricultural production. This is because their production tenure is tied to their marital tenure, which in most cases gives women, great concern. Apart from that, they are vulnerable to the whims and caprices of their husband's interns of production. Slimily, 89.90% had no access to reliable loanable funds from corporate bodies such as banks. Contemporary agricultural production requires substantial financial investment for any productive operation to be undertaken. Inadequate access to extension agents is also identified (68.18%). Current relevant information is necessary for meaningful agricultural production.

Inadequate Access to farm inputs (fertilizer, improved seeds, Hebrides/pesticides)

Farm inputs are also major areas of concern for the women. Fertilizer (45.45%) improved seeds (31.82%) pesticides/herbicides (22.73%)

Lack of improved storage facility, problem pests and diseases, Non Availability of village level technology for farm operations

All the women (100%) admitted to lack of improved storage facility and village level technology for farm operations to ease the problem of produce spoilage and manual labour respectively. In addition they also face problems of pests and diseases. These are all limiting factors to sustainable agricultural production on any scale, especially when women are the victims

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the study have established that the women production level is characterized by small holder agriculture. The land available for cultivation to greater number of the women is less than 2 hectares. There is little or no a significant financial investment or availability of credit facilities for production. This affects input-input combination for production hence productivity is low.

In view of this, the exigency of food at the moment calls for rapid approach to combat hunger. And one of the strategies is to utilize the immense potentials of women in agriculture in Plateau State. Doing this is as important as the commodity that necessitates the study-that is: Food!.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are hereby suggested in view of the findings of the study.

1. There is need for government to strengthened gender units within the Ministry of Agriculture and reorganize the extension systems to reach rural women more effectively.
2. The concept of involving women in project formulation, planning, monitoring and evaluation should be adopted and implemented.
3. There is need to abolish all discriminatory legislation against women.
4. Adoption of special consideration for women in terms of loans/ credit facilities.
5. Women farmers should be assisted to have unrestricted access to agricultural resources and services particularly labour saving technology to facilitate agricultural production and processing.
6. The erroneous assumption that needs of women farmers are equal to that of men farmers should be corrected. Therefore all agricultural programs should address the particular needs of the target sub-groups to ensure sustainability.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of Women Farmers in Kanam and Wase Local Government Areas.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
Less than 20 years	30	15.20
20-29 years	32	16.20
30-39 years	103	52.00
40 years & above	33	16.60
Marital Status		
Unmarried	15	7.57
Married	143	72.22
Separated	05	2.53
Divorced	05	2.53
Widowed	30	15.15
Educational level		
Not educated	05	2.53
Adult & non Formal education	12	6.06
Attempted primary education	05	2.53
Primary education	80	40.40
Attempted secondary education	07	3.54
Secondary school education	70	35.35
Higher education	14	7.07
Arabic education only	5	2.53

Source: field survey, 2001.

Table 2 Agricultural Production Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Farm holdings & acquisition		
Inherited	3	1.5
Husbands farm	135	68.18
Hired farm	53	26.8
Co-operatives farm	2	1.0
Gift	05	2.52
Sources of finance		
Personal savings	165	83.33
Relations	8	4.04
Money lenders	5	252
Women co-operatives society	20	10.10
Banks	-	-
Farm enterprise		
Cattle alone	-	-
Sheep & goat	-	-
Poultry alone	-	-
Crop alone	-	-
Combination of some of the above	198	100
Sources of Labour		
Hired human labour	26	13.13
Family labour	100	50.51
Communal labour	50	25.25
Personal oxen drawn labour	06	3.03
Hired oxen drawn labour	16	8.08
Size of farm holdings		
Less than 2 hectares	130	65.66
2 – 4 hectares	68	34.34
5 hectares and above	-	-
Reasons for farming		
Inherited by birth	58	34.34
No other alternative	116	58.59
Natural interest	14	7.71

Source: field survey, 2001

Table 3. Constraints to Agricultural production

Variables	Frequency	%
Non Access to land ownership	195	98.48
Inadequate Access to reliable sources of loanable funds	178	89.90
Inadequate Access to farm in puts		
Fertilizer	90	45.45
Improved seeds	63	31.82
Pesticides/herbicides	45	22.73
Inadequate Access to extension Agents (training & visit	135	68.18
Lack of improved storage facility	198	100
Pest & diseases	198	100
Non Availability of improved village level technology	198	-

Source: field survey 2001

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