

WOMEN IN FOOD AND AGRICULTURE IN NIGERIA: SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The findings of a Nigerian case study discussed in this paper indicate that the notion of wives of leisure is really not applicable to most women in Nigeria, as women have always worked. Even those in purdah engage in income generating activities within the confines of the compound. It is therefore wasteful to continue to by-pass or displace women in development. Selective mechanisation of difficult processes in agriculture could become a useful method of integrating women into, and enhancing their contributions to, development. A deliberate attempt at the involvement of women in food and agricultural development programmes and increased productivity for them would mean better utilization of their productive capacity.

INTRODUCTION

On a continent wide basis, women contribute about 60-80 per cent of the labour input in agriculture and food related activities of production, processing and distribution in Africa (Michelwait 1974). Boserup (1970) referred to Africa as the region of female farming *par excellence* compared with Asia, Europe and other regions of the world. Similarly, several publications by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) have indicated the importance of women in agriculture in Africa. A region-by-region review of the activities of rural women in Africa reinforces this contention. In West Africa there is considerable women's involvement in the production of such food crops as cassava, rice and maize in Nigeria and cocoa in Ghana, for example. Food processing and trade in food consumed locally are almost exclusively the domain of women in West Africa. In some North and central African countries women appear to undertake a disproportionately high share of agricultural activities. For instance, in Sudan, women milk cows, fell trees, make fur-

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rows and mounds, plant, harvest, process and sell the farm produce, while men are merely involved in feeding and taking care of cattle (ECA 1976). Similarly in Egypt, women feature prominently in agriculture, particularly in poultry production, milking cows, taking care of goats and sheeps and trading in dairy produce, eggs, vegetables, and other crops. However, this involvement of women is not accurately recorded, in part for religious reasons. Most enumerators are men and religion bars them from speaking to women (Alli 1979). In South Africa and Namibia, women have no tradition of trading, as they do in West and North Africa but they work 16 to 18 hours per day in the home and outside in agricultural production, while men are engaged in hunting, fishing and in trade (Casaburri 1980).

However, this importance of women in agricultural production, processing and in trade is generally unrecognised, particularly in connection with agricultural and rural development projects. This has been traced by the ECA to the belief by colonial governments in Africa that men, rather than women, should be involved in agriculture. Thus, the wrong notion of non-working, leisured wives became prevalent. The effect of this is that men became the focus of development projects in agriculture, particularly with regard to extension services, cooperative organisations, credit supply etc., often to the exclusion of women (Mock).

The Case Study

A research project was conducted into cassava production, processing and distribution in South Western Nigeria in 1979/80 (Adekanye 1982). A sample of 105 women was selected for study, first by compiling a list of all women cassava processors (a total of 525) in selected villages in the area of study. Randomisation was effected by selecting fifth woman on the list. Sub-samples of the original sample were also used for in-depth analysis of such variables as incomes, expenditures, etc. Records were kept for samples of men and women for the time spent on specific activities. Furthermore, mechanical processing was studied by a survey of the activities of a cassava processing factory which was located in the study area and operated by a cooperative society, through the help of the State Government.

Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

The majority of the women studied (75 per cent) were between 30 and 49 years of age, 29 per cent of them were 30 to 39 years of age while 46 per cent were 40 to 49 years old. One hundred and two women (97 per cent) had no formal education while only three had attended primary school. None of them had any post-primary education. All the women sold processed cassava (gari). Beside this, 37 per cent of them sold other food-

stuffs like maize, pepper, tomatoes and oranges, while 13 per cent sold non-food items like mats, baskets and clothes. One woman was engaged in sewing on a part-time basis. Seventy-five per cent of the respondents grew no crops other than cassava. The others grew cassava and other crops (see Table 1). All the women were involved in cassava processing as their major occupation. Ninety-five per cent of the respondents processed cassava for both home consumption and sale, while 2 per cent processed cassava only for home consumption and 3 percent for sale alone. Twenty-six per cent of the women studied obtained their supplies of cassava tubers solely from their own farms ; another 72 per cent obtained their supplies from both their farms and by purchase, whereas only 2 per cent obtained supplies through purchase only (see Table 2).

TABLE 1 CROPS GROWN BY THE RESPONDENTS, NIGERIA, 1979/80

Crops Grown	Respondents	
	No.	%
Cassava alone	79	75.24
Cassava and Maize	18	11.43
Cassava, Maize and Yam	4	9.51
Cassava and other crops	4	3.82
Total	105	100.00

Source : Survey Data

TABLE 2 SOURCES OF CASSAVA PROCESSED, NIGERIA, 1979/80

Items	Respondents	
	No.	%
Only from own farm	27	25.71
Mainly from own farm and by purchase	52	49.52
Mainly by purchase and some from own farm	24	22.86
By purchase only	2	1.90
Total	105	100.00

Source : Survey Data

A major problem encountered by the women in cassava processing was the difficult methods used (see Table 3), particularly the manual peeling of the tubers, the need to obtain and carry big stones used for de-watering grated cassava and the tedious method of toasting the grated mash on an open fire. Furthermore, bacterial blight, *mosaic* and other diseases had affected cassava production. The scarcity of tubers therefore set an upper limit to the amount of cassava that could be processed by the women. The women were asked to give suggestions for improving the traditional cassava industry. About 65 per cent of them suggested the provision of processing machines and increased supply of cassava tubers (see Table 4).

TABLE 3 PROBLEMS IN TRADITIONAL CASSAVA PROCESSING, NIGERIA, 1979/80

Items	Respondents	
	No.	%
Scarcity of cassava tubers	49	46.67
High labour cost	5	4.77
Difficult traditional processing method and scarcity of tubers	47	44.76
Lack of funds	4	3.80
Total	105	100.00

Source : Survey Data

TABLE 4 SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE TRADITIONAL CASSAVA INDUSTRY, NIGERIA, 1979/80

Ways of Improvement	Respondents	
	No.	%
More loans	1	0.95
Provision of processing machines and increased cassava supply	68	64.76
Loans and machinery	7	6.67
Increased cassava supplies	23	21.90
No response	6	5.72
Total	105	100.00

Effects of Innovation

Three types of innovation were identified and studied. These were those connected with the use of cassava graters in traditional processing, the involvement of cooperative organisation in the establishment of a factory for mechanised cassava processing and infrastructural improvements.

(i) Mechanical Graters

Before the introduction of mechanical graters, women grated cassava manually, as one of the stages in traditional processing. The women studied said that they could not afford to buy the graters. In any case, extension officers (mainly men) used men as their reference points. Investment opportunities were therefore opened for men and the women who used the graters used those owned by men, paying a fee. This had the effect of by-passing women in development as it was done at the expense of a job loss for women. However, the replacement of metal-sheet manual graters with the mechanical ones reduced a labour constraint and bottleneck, resulting in selective mechanisation in traditional processing.

(ii) Co-operative Organisation

Cooperative development was used as an instrument for mechanisation through the establishment of an integrated cassava farm and processing factory in the area of study. The State Ministries of Agriculture and Trade and Cooperatives were involved in this venture, particularly in providing the technical guidance for the establishment of the cooperative society which was later encouraged to take up cassava production and processing.

(iii) Factory Processing

Government Ministries and parastatals were involved in the provision of the initial capital, extension service and the supply of such factor inputs as tractor services. However, a high proportion of non-resident members and farmers belonged to the cooperative that operated the cassava farm and factory complex. Furthermore, men rather than women were used as reference points in the establishment of the cooperatives, for extension service etc. and hired farm labour and factory workers (who were usually men) contributed a high proportion of the labour input for the complex. Therefore, the cassava factory complex seemed grafted onto the rural economy without really becoming part of it. Its general effect was not just to by-pass but to displace women in development, since women were involved in cassava processing in the area before the complex was established. Like the use of graters in traditional processing it had the effect of focusing attention in, and opening investment opportunities for, men in what had been previously a predominantly female occupation. But, unlike the case of the grater, it did not have the potentially bene-

social effect of being *relevant* to the needs of the women who were responsible for the greater proportion of the cassava processed in the area.

The main infrastructures which impinged on cassava processing in the study area were extension education, credit supply and storage and transportation facilities. In general, the women received little extension service from Government Ministries which tended to focus attention on men. Similarly the women received little or no funds from institutionalised and public credit sources involved in financing the operations of the cassava complex. Although there had been some improvements for transportation, in terms of better roads and improved accessibility due to the establishment of the cassava factory, these had limited impact on the women.

Socio-Economic Activities

The women were asked to rank their socio-economic activities in order of importance in terms of the amount of time spent on each. Child care and housekeeping were rated first and second by 50 per cent and 40 per cent of the respondents respectively. Farming, processing, trading and socio-political activities (including attending family, religious, trade associations and political party, meetings) were ranked third, fourth, fifth and sixth by 35 per cent, 37 per cent, 38 per cent and 58 per cent of the respondents, respectively (see Table 5). However, a frequency distribution of the respondents on the basis of their main occupation outside the home indicated that farming, processing and trading were the main occupations of 38 per cent, 43 per cent and 19 per cent of the respondents respectively. Furthermore, male-female time allocation and workload were studied through actual recordings of time spent on particular activities by samples of men and women in the study area (Adekanye 1982). In general, the women worked longer hours and had shorter hours of sleep and rest. Furthermore, men did very little housework, with women spending about 30 per cent of total time on child care and home-related activities compared with 1 per cent in the case of men, in spite of the fact that they spent about the same proportion of total time on income-generating activities of farming, processing and trading—33.63 per cent for men and 33.29 for women (see Table 6).

TABLE 5 SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN CASSAVA PROCESSORS, NIGERIA, 1979/80

Rank	Socio-Economic Activities (% of respondents)					
	Farming	Processing	Trading	Child Care	House Maintenance	Socio-Political Activities
1st	15.0	10.2	10.0	50.4	28.2	—
2nd	10.1	12.1	11.6	23.6	40.3	—
3rd	35.2	22.3	11.6	14.0	22.1	—
4th	20.4	36.7	20.3	12.0	9.4	2.0
5th	16.0	10.3	37.8	—	—	40.0
6th	3.3	8.3	8.7	—	—	58.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source : Survey Data

TABLE 6 TIME ALLOCATION AND WORK LOAD FOR MEN AND WOMEN 1979/80

	Men		Women	
	Hrs. per day	% of Total Hrs.	Hrs. per day	% of Total Hrs.
Farming	7.02	29.25	3.37	14.04
Processing	0.10	0.42	3.46	14.42
Trading	0.95	3.96	1.16	4.83
Child Care	0.12	0.50	3.80	15.83
Housekeeping	0.11	0.46	3.48	14.50
Socio-political	3.21	13.38	0.02	0.08
Others	1.01	4.21	0.32	1.33
Leisure	3.36	14.00	1.38	5.75
Sleep	8.12	33.82	7.01	29.22
Total	24	100	24	100

Source : Survey Data

Summary And Implications

The findings of a Nigerian case study of the involvement of women in food and agriculture were discussed in this paper. The socio-economic profile of the women studied was discussed in terms of their age, education, occupation etc. The effects of innovation on the women were also indicated, with regard to the introduction of mechanical graters, cooperative organisation and factory processing in cassava production and processing in the study area. The women played an important role in agriculture in the study area, not just as cassava processors but as farmers growing such food crops as cassava, yams, and maize. The cassava graters introduced into the study area had the effect of opening up investment opportunities for men at the expense of a job loss for women. Women grated cassava manually prior to the introduction of mechanical graters. In general, however, women could not afford to buy the mechanical graters but had their cassava grated mechanically by paying a fee for the service. Furthermore, the introduction of factory processing of cassava through cooperative organisation mainly involved men. This also had the effect of displacing women in productive employment.

The main policy implication of the Nigerian case study is that there is an urgent need to involve women in food and agricultural development programmes in Africa. Neglecting or by-passing women in rural development is a wasteful use of valuable productive capacity. A potentially effective method for both integrating women into rural development and enhancing their productivity is selective mechanisation of difficult processes in agriculture. For example, simple mechanical graters and grinders can be introduced into village processing of such food commodities as yam and cassava through women cooperatives. This could have the beneficial effects of involving women in the development effort, and increasing their productivity.

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