

Effects of the National Policy Implementation Strategy on the Working Conditions of Women in Agricultural Development:

A Case Study of Akungba and Oka Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines effects of the National Agricultural Policy Implementation Strategy on the working conditions of women in agricultural development in Akungba and Oka Akoko and the socio-economic factors that impede performance of women in agricultural production. Relying on qualitative data obtained through in-depth interviews conducted on ninety (90) women selected randomly, the paper finds that, due to much awareness through empowerment campaigns, quite a number of women have been able to purchase their own lands, have divided themselves into economic groups, and have been involved in the production of both food and cash crops. But the women still lack adequate training on modern farming equipments, lack adequate extension services' programmes and lack the knowledge of environment- friendly technologies, among others. The paper then concludes that policy issues on sensitive matters like agriculture must not be politicized. It therefore, recommends that governments at all levels, especially at local levels, should urgently and vigorously pursue the proper implementation of these improvement strategies.

Keywords: National Policy, Implementation Strategy, Working Conditions, Agricultural Development

1. Introduction

The development of the African continent including Nigeria cannot be complete without agricultural input, since agriculture is a vital component in achieving sustainable development. In Africa, women are known to grow 80 percent of food production and they also constitute of 47 percent of the total agricultural labour force in food production. Rural women play a significant role in domestic and socio-economic life of society such that national development may not be possible without developing this important and substantial segment of society. Women therefore should receive assistance (Cloud and Knowles, 1988). Findings from a study financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) revealed that women make up some 60-80 percent of the agricultural labour force in Nigeria (World Bank, 2003).

In addition, women are known to be more involved in agricultural activities than men in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, Nigeria inclusive. As much as 73 percent are involved in cash crops, arable and vegetable gardening, while post-harvest activities had 16 percent and agro- forestry, 15 percent (Abdullahi, undated). Their involvement in agriculture in Nigeria has attracted greater attention in recent years. Reasons for their involvement are as many as are diverse. In some States rural women have virtually taken over the production and processing of arable crops (Afolabi, 2008), been responsible for as much as 80 percent of the staple food items. Estimates of women's contribution to the production of food crops range from 30percent in the Sudan to 80 percent in the Congo (FAO, 1995); contributing substantially to national agricultural production and food security, while being primarily responsible for food crops.

However, with their immense contribution, some factors are still militating against women's participation in agricultural production: and, some of these factors are socio- cultural and economic in nature. The task of surmounting such obstacles can be very daunting, women have largely succeeded in overcoming some of them themselves. With the efforts and persistence of women's groups and commonly-based organizations and the civil society organizations fighting their cause (Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2009).

For the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) to solve some of these challenges faced by women, through the Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development formulated a National policy on women in 2000, in the area of agriculture and the implementation strategies including the following:

- *Adequate financial support to direct agricultural extension services. Encouraging relevant agencies to adopt participatory approach to involve women in the planning and implementation of such programmes.*
- *Research and extension network to identify, develop and disseminate appropriate and affordable technologies in all areas of agricultural activities of interest to women.*
- *To encourage Local Governments to set up technological services and repairs to back up women's need for regular technical support.*
- *Explore and encourage women farmers to make use of local sources of credit for boosting production and also other viable indigenous practices and inputs.*
- *To strengthen institutional credit sources to create special revolving loan funds for women.*
- *To eradicate discrimination against women in the implementation of the 1978 land use Act.*
- *Liberalization of women's access to water resources to ensure that it is at the same level with men.*
- *Development and the use of environment friendly technology including biogas and organic fertilizers for the promotion of sustainable agriculture.*
- *Encouragement of market and distribution networks and provision of adequate information on appropriate pricing for farm produce for women.*
- *Provision of home- economics services to vigorously promote consumer education in order to encourage quality development of food and other agricultural commodities.*
- *To strengthen training activities for field extension work and skill acquisition for women farmers through the provision of adequate funding.*

- *To support research and development of gender de-segregated information for the establishment of a databank.*
- *Development and strengthening of women cooperatives for effective participation in agricultural programmes.*
- *To maintain a register of women farmers with the appropriate agencies for regular product evaluation and other benefits. (Federal Ministry of Women and Youth Development, 2000).*

Despite the implementation strategies that were endorsed by former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2000, women still have limited access to modern, improved technologies and there have been no much improvement in the general working-conditions' of this particular set of women under study. Many of them are still found backing their children and simultaneously carrying heavy loads that can endanger their health, despite the fact that the household food and nutritional security rely heavily on them. Therefore, this paper examines effects of the National Policy on the working conditions of Women in agriculture. The paper also examines socio-economic factors that affect the performance of women in agricultural production.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Women Activities and Agricultural Extension Services

2.2 Women in Agriculture in Nigeria: According to Ogunlela and Mukhtar, (2009), this programme came about in 1988 when it became obvious that in spite of the decade of the World Bank (WB) assistance building in Nigeria, agriculture extension services, women farmers were still receiving minimal assistance and information from extension agents. Consequently, the WIA (WIA) programme within the existing state agriculture development programmes (ADPs) were created in 1990 to address the gender related deficiencies within the existing extension services programme. The programme was created to integrate women into the development process with specific reference to agriculture since the participation of women farmers in planning and policy making as well as being beneficiaries is important. A serious lapse in the country's agriculture extension system had hitherto been that it was pro male and gender insensitive towards women farmers. This arises from the fact that agriculture extension services in Nigeria had traditionally been focused on men and their farm production need, while neglecting the female half of the production force. Up until that point ADPs contained only a home economics' wing responsible for home - related women's activities. The WIA programme which was launched as a pilot study, therefore, sought to improve agriculture extension services for women entails the re-training of existing home - economics agents in agriculture and extension methodologies with emphasis on women activities. The WIA programme, however, plagued by initial teething problems which threatened its success. Different WIA found in various States of the Federation, seemed to occur sporadically and in ad-hoc manner, with some ADPs making tremendous progress and others doing nothing at all. To address this disparity, a National Planning Workshop in July, 1989, brought stakeholders together to take stock of various WIA programmes initiated country-wide, share lessons and experiences among regions, and develop a 3-year Action Plan for each State (World Bank, 2003).

There was determination to give female farmers a voice in the WIA policy-reform process, even though they were uncertain as to the best way to achieve this. The clue seemed to lie with the female extension agents who interacted with women farmers on a regular basis. They were better able to articulate constraints faced by women farmers and proffer solutions on the women's behalf. The extension-agents had firsthand knowledge of the situation and good working relations with women farmers.

Bringing about change in favour of women farmers requires farm ownership by both men and women at all levels. Consequently, each State ADP demonstrated commitment to taking action in improving services for women- farmers (Ogunlale and Mukhtar, 2009).

According to (Ogunlela and Makhtar, 2009) establishment of the WIA programme ensured that extension services in each State of Nigeria has female extension- workers at every level of operation from the State headquarters down to the grassroots. 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. A rural household survey in three parts of the country was conducted to monitor and measure achievements of the WIA programme. Positive recommendations were suggested on Action Plan resulted from the survey. The programme developed better than expected due to the dynamism and resourcefulness of Nigerian women.

In spite of the laudable achievements recorded by WIA, a number of problems are being encountered. Such problems include shortage of WIA extension agents as the ratio of extension staff to farm families is still low, making it non-feasible to individually meet the needs of women farmers. Most of WIA extension workers are not purely agriculture-based, and not trained in agriculture (Chale, 1990). Lack of adequate support from ADP management is another problem faced by the WIA programme.

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.

3. Impact of Women in Agricultural Programmes

Odurukwe, Mathews-Njoku, and Ejioku-Okereke (2006), studied the impact of the WIA programmes on the lives of women in Imo State of Nigeria with a view to improving their agricultural production. They alluded to the need to develop a suitable extension service that is gender-specific and tailored to women-farmers and that the importance of this cannot be ignored. The formation of 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. 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. The positive effects of women adoption of WIA packages were most felt on the women than the men and children. Similarly, there are high positive impacts on rural women than their urban counterparts. Greater dependency of men on their wives for economic support was as a result of women's involvement in the WIA programme, indeed, 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.

Similarly, Afolabi, (2008) focusing on the activities of rural women in Ondo State of Nigeria made a careful analytical study of women's agricultural activities and found that women are very strong pillars of the economy in the State. Women in the state are organized into groups, which are often engaged in more than one economic activity. Emerging from the study are the following: (a) that rural women in the State are major contributors to food production; (b) that these rural women have successfully managed human and economic resources to achieve optimum results; (c) that they are employers of labour, thereby reducing unemployment; and (d) that output from the farms of these rural women contributed to reduction in food-shortage crisis. By so doing, they contribute significantly to national agricultural output, maintenance of the environment, and family-food security (Brown, et al, 2001).

4. Problems of Women in Agriculture

Lack of access to land remains a major constraint for women-farmers in Africa. Land-reform policies 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 the 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 young men provide labour on household fields that are controlled by the family-head.

Also in the area of land holdings, women have less access to credit than men. Women receive as low as 5% of agricultural loans in Burkina Faso to as high as 32% in Zimbabwe. In Benin Republic, less than 5% of the rural female-headed households have access to credit. It should be noted that in terms of women's access to credit, none of the countries was able to supply national figures while the information supplied by individual institutions varied considerably (Ogunlela & Mukhtar, 2009). There is need for caution when making generalizations about the situation of rural women at the regional level as it often differs not only among countries but also within a country, depending upon the socio-economic and ethnic groups to which women belong and other factors characteristic of a particular area. Several studies on women's status and problems have shown that gender discrimination exists throughout the world (Sreekumar, 2001) but that its intensity is felt more in the daily lives of women and children in developing countries.

Tagwireyi, (1987) noted that despite providing about 60-80% labour in food production, women in Africa receive little from the agricultural extension services due to the traditional prejudiced attitude towards women, lack of time on their part to attend meetings, and their limited decision-making powers.

Rural women in Gambia are increasingly being drawn into development process through their involvement in various income-generating projects. Malina, (1998) who studied the problems women face in Tanzania suggested that the impact of women's activities in farming should be appreciated for agricultural research to be successful. Their needs and concerns should be understood, their traditional roles and needs taken account, and their potential fully explored.

Damisa and Yohanna (2007), using Zaria in Kaduna State of Nigeria as their study area, also found that women's participation in decision-making was quite minimal and that wealthy ones are more involved than their poor counterparts. Afolabi, (2008), on the other hand, in her study on Ondo State female farmers enumerated their problems as follows: lack social infrastructure, very bad roads in most farm locations, poor agricultural mechanization, lack of agricultural implements such as pesticides, and other agricultural tools, and lack of modern storage and processing facilities.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Area of Study

This study was conducted among the women farmers in Akungba and Oka, the Akoko are of Ondo State.

The Akungba and Oka people are Yoruba people though they have their own dialects which resemble that of the Ekiti people. The people are noted for farming and trading. They engage in processing of cassava into 'gari', 'fufu' and processing of palm oil for sale and consumption. They also produce crops like cocoa, Kola-nut, yam etc. But yam is given special reference in both towns and that is why new yam festival is celebrated in both towns in July and August every year, respectively.

6. DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The data collection method for this study was qualitative. 90 women were randomly selected for sampling. Nine (9) quarters each were carefully chosen from each of the towns and 5 women were randomly selected from each quarter making 45 women from each town. Data were generated from the respondents through in-depth interviews.

The method was preferred since many of the women are not literate, as the method also allows generating qualitative and cogent responses. Although, selection of 90 women might not be sufficiently representative but it is able to give specificities, individual experiences, and the general perceptions of some of the effects of National Agricultural Policy Implementation Strategies on the working conditions of Women in agriculture. The Table below shows the distribution of the population sample.

QUARTERS				
	Akungba Akoko	Sample Population	Oka Akoko	Sample Population
1	Ibaka	5	Owalusi	5
2	Ilale	5	Okado	5
3	Okusa	5	Ikese	5
4	Akua	5	Korowa	5
5	Igbelu	5	Okia	5
6	Akunmi	5	Ebo	5
7	Okele	5	Owake	5
8	Abe	5	Agba	5
9	Araromi	5	Okela	5
	Total	45	Total	45

7. Discussion of Findings

7.1 Education

Of the 90 respondents interviewed, it was observed that 53.3% had no formal education, 36.6% had primary education and 10% were secondary school drop-outs. From all indications it is obvious that agricultural production is dominated by the non-literate and the semi-literate women. One of the respondents 'Mrs. Ode' palm oil processor and kolanut seller aged 65, lamented her inability to acquire formal education she claimed that she was growing up her parents preferred to send her younger male siblings to school because of the belief that a woman's education ends in the kitchen. However she concluded that things are better now, as the female child is being encouraged. It can be concluded that the lack of education the women made it impossible for the introduction of modern technology which might be too cumbersome for them. Aside from formal education, more NGOs are needed in the study area to educate and encourage the women.

7.2 Family size

Despite the four per women family size introduced by Babangida administration (1986-1993) it was found that 70% out of the 90 women interviewed had more than 4 children. The large family-size was not as a result of lack of knowledge of family planning or birth control pills but as a result of cultural beliefs. Most of the women love having many children because of the belief that many children will bring wealth to the family and serve as security in their old age. Also, the intensive factor required on the farms require large families for bumper harvest. But some of them confessed the risks involved in having many children with the economic condition in the country and also the risk involved in child birth. As in the words of one of the respondents, 'Mrs. Olo' a palm oil processor, "I almost lost my life when I was giving birth to my last child". This means that the government needs do more in the area of Medicare for women. And more awareness needed to be created as regards the danger of having too many children.

7.3 Land

When the respondents from the two towns were asked questions about their access to arable land, 38.8% out of the 90 women interviewed claimed that the land they used are owned by their husbands, 33.3% said they purchased their land, 10% claimed they inherited their land, 22.2% said they rented it while only 5.5% claimed their land were given to them as gifts.

The claim by most women that the land they used are owned by their husbands reflected the patriarchal cultural system in Akoko-land, where it is the male members of the society that have right to ownership. It was also observed that a significant number of the women purchased and rented the land themselves. This means that some of the women have access to credit in micro finance banks and cooperative societies if they wish and know how to go about it. Furthermore, the fact that some of the

women can purchase land by themselves shows some level of improvement in the awareness of women through empowerment campaigns.

Another problem that was reported by the farmers was that of displacement. According to 'Mrs. Aro' a yam farmer, government has displaced a large number of the subsistence farmers from their land and have been transformed to wage labourers, thereby depriving a large number of families of their main source of livelihood. Thus, there is paramount need for government to create an avenue where women-farmers can lease land from government.

7.4 Labour and Water

During the interview sessions, it was observed that about 46.6% of the women interviewed and their children were the main sources of labour. 33.3% of them hired migrant labourers who are mostly available on seasonal basis. 20% reported that they participate in the 'Aro' system whereby members take turns to work in the farms of others. In the area of access to water, all the women interviewed lamented that water is one of the greatest challenges they have in agricultural production in the study area. And all the women believed that something could be done such as irrigation like in the North. For the fact that a third of the women are able to employ labour indicates that they are most likely to have large farm-holding.

All the women interviewed also complained about their health conditions since they too work on their own farms, most of the time and, particularly when out of season. It is thus very desirable that government needs to consider providing women-farmers with medical facilities since they contribute considerably to food production.

7.5 Modern Technology

Despite the guarantee by the national policy on agriculture that there shall be the provision of environment friendly technologies, none of the women have ever used tractors or oxen to plough, though all the women interviewed claimed they have used either of these items like fertilizer, insecticides, herbicides, and storage chemicals.

All the women lamented that none of them have ever been given any support either in form of technology or organic fertilizers. The ones they ever used were mostly bought by them. Probing further, Mrs. 'Aye' a cassava farmer and gari processor, revealed that the few women who had access to some technology are those in food-processing like gari and palm oil. Even the few who were opportuned belong to one political party or the other. This shows the level of backwardness of the study area in enjoying the 'FGN' policy implementation strategy; and, this is counter-productive to the developmental process. Also 'Mrs. Aje' cocoa farmer, revealed that there is no more female-oriented crops and that more women are now into the production of cash-crops like yam, cocoa, kolanuts etc.

7.6 Credit

Another major problem encountered by women-farmers is lack of access to credit. All the women interviewed in the two towns reported that there is no credit assistance whatsoever the government. One of the respondents from Akungba, 'Mrs. Ade' a farmer and a trader said "there was rumour at a particular time that they should register at the local government at Oka with ₦10,000 each, so that they can access funds from the local government but after the last administration, nothing heard thereafter. She claimed that the major problem in the country against agricultural policies generally is the problem of continuity in government. In her words, "when this government comes with one policy, such policy ends with the government" She wished that every new government should continue with the policy of the previous administration. This she believes can speed up sustainable development. The women also expressed the need for the assistance of NGOs and more private initiatives in the areas of credit accessibility and training.

7.7 Access to training in agricultural production and utilization

Despite the fact that training was one of the major objectives of the policy, all the women interviewed claimed that they have never undergone any training whatsoever in agricultural production, processing, and utilization either from any agricultural extension agency or any other. This indicates that the respondents do not have benefits of improved agricultural technologies. During the in-depth interviews it was also found that the women were engaged in more than one economic activity and divided themselves into groups in order to render economic support. They however lamented the lack of government support and the politics involved in the distribution of rarely available resources given by the 'government that these resources does not normally get to the actual farmers. It is believed that members of the economic groups were not sincere about the contributions especially when they might have collected their own 'portion'. According to 'Mrs. Bolo' palm oil processor and cocoa farmer 'I can never belong to such groups except there is government intervention'. The women also felt that they cannot allow their children to become farmers if the present situation continues without no proper support for women-farmers. 'Mrs. Agun' yam and cocoa-yam farmer, concluded that "two generations cannot continue to be poor".

8. Conclusion

From the literature review and the actual study conducted, this paper concludes that human-food survival and sustenance of agriculture and as well as rural sustainable development rest heavily on women since they are co-pillar in food production. The contributions of women-farmers are highly undervalued as the way and manner at which the Federal Government implements its policy on agriculture is rather faulty and counter-productive. It is also concluded that many of the women-farmers are still very poor as many of them cannot afford to purchase enough necessary farm-inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides and improved seedlings, necessary for increased productivity. Also, the ability for the proper maintenance of their health and productive life is greatly at risk since many of them are still carrying heavy loads on their heads and still perform intensive labour in their farms inspite of industrialization. The paper recommends that policy-issues on agriculture must not be politicized. Government at various levels, especially at local levels, should endeavour to undertake the proper implementation of these improvement strategies by improving extension services, providing social infrastructure, making available to farmers improved seedlings and agricultural inputs like fertilizers, pesticides, more importantly, the FGN needs to encourage youths in agriculture, organizing adult literacy programmes on farm management, and introduce more private initiatives to support women-farmers.

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