

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Women in Akwa Ibom State have a very important roles in agriculture, undertaking a wide range of activities relating to food production, processing and marketing; and beyond farming, they are involved inland and water management: most often they are collectors of water, firewood and hay.

They have access to a store of local knowledge on the medicinal use of plants; they have been in the forefront of soil conservation programmes; and it is women who perform most of the household labour devoted to animals (Commonwealth, 2005).

Women participation in agricultural production therefore cut across various subsectors: planting, weeding, harvesting, processing, and marketing as well as tending livestock (Soubh, 2006). This necessitates their integration into planning, policies, and programmes for effective and sustainable development of a nation (FAQ, 2003). Hence, the role of women in agricultural production in the developing nations, including Nigeria, can never be overemphasized (Damisa and Yohanna, 2007; and Kishor, Gupta, Yadav, and Singh, 1999). Although, rural out-migration has constituted one of the greatest challenges hindering agricultural development in developing countries, surveys showed that, in general, women in Africa have a strong desire to participate in their community affairs and contribute to its development, African Development Fund – ADF, (2003) provided that: there is government effective and timely support/subsidization to agricultural sector; employment opportunities in the local area, including part-time jobs; the possibility of gaining work experience and vocational qualifications; local facilities for education and training; business services supportive to

Women's projects and enterprises; public transport services compatible with working hours; local childcare facilities and social services for the elderly and the sick; and supportive public and professional organizations. One of the rationales for improving women participation in agriculture is that when a woman is educated, her children tend to be better fed and healthier. As a woman earns income, she is more likely than the man to spend it on improving the well-being of the family. This scenario can build women self-esteem and lead to a more participatory role in both public and family decision making (FAO, 2011).

The full use of productive potential of human resources (male and female) cannot be realized in developing nations if women do not have access to adequate resources, productivity enhancing inputs and services; and policies such as price incentives cannot be fully successful in stimulating agricultural production if the institutional arrangements prevent women producers from getting the benefits.

As such, the role of agriculture has been re-appraised and re-valued on its contribution to industrialization and its importance for harmonious development, political, and economic stability with emphasis on women participation in agricultural activities. As agricultural resources have become increasingly responsive to market forces and increasingly integrated in the network of industrial interdependencies mainly shaped by technological advancement, vertical integration, marketing and consumer preferences (FAO, 2003b). The International Development Community (IDC) has thus recognized agriculture as engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the larger proportion of the people. And as agriculture sector is becoming more technologically sophisticated, commercially oriented and globally integrated; the developing countries have to fully utilize their human resources in order

to take advantage of the global opportunities for all agricultural producers, including improving women participation in agriculture (FAO, 2011).

Overseas Development Institute – ODI (2002) identified some reasons for believing that agriculture is the engine of poverty reduction: when agriculture prospers, farmers and farm labourers benefit, and so do those with jobs upstream and downstream from farming; the

wider economy also benefits, from increased spending, likelihood of greater tax revenue, more investment in infrastructure, and a stronger foreign exchange position. It was also found that the impact of agricultural growth on poverty reduction is one and half times the impact of growth in other sectors (ODI, 2002).

The historical evidences prove that agricultural sector has the potentials to be the industrial and economic springboard from which a country's development can take off as its activities are usually concentrated in the less-developed rural areas where women represent the highest vulnerable groups with a critical need for (rural) transformation, redistribution, poverty alleviation and socio-economic development (Stewart, 2000; Eicher and Witt, 1964; Oluwasanmi, 1966; and Jones and Woolf, 1969).

The Nigerian experience during the first decade of independence could reasonably be described as an agricultural economy because agriculture served as the engine of growth of the overall economy (Ogen, 2003). From the standpoint of occupational distribution and contribution to the GDP, agriculture was the leading sector. During this period Nigeria was the world's second largest producer of cocoa, largest exporter of palm kernel and largest producer and exporter of palm oil. Nigeria was also a leading exporter of other major commodities such as cotton, groundnut, rubber and hides and skins (Alkali, 1997).

The agricultural sector contributed over 60% of the GDP in the 1960s and despite the reliance of Nigerian peasant farmers on traditional tools and indigenous farming methods, these farmers produced 70% of Nigeria's exports and 95% of its food needs (Lawal, 1997). It is on this background that this work is set to evaluate women in Agriculture and food sufficiency in Akwa Ibom State.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Women as farmers, workers, and entrepreneurs face more constraints than men in accessing productive resources, markets and services a "gender gap" which hinder their effective participation in socio-economic (including agriculture) and political activities thereby reducing their contributions to the attainment of broader societal goals (FAO, 2011).

Women have been said to be much involved in virtually all aspects of the agricultural processes despite their daily domestic chores such as meal preparation, compound cleaning and child caring. Greenidge (2000:4) states that, "in most sub-Saharan African countries women make significant contribution to food production and the processing and marketing of foodstuffs. However, rural women in Africa still face formidable obstacles to their potential role as a major economic and social force in the development of the agricultural sector in their countries". Most indigenous agricultural and food processing equipment like hoes, mortar and pestles, winnowing baskets and grinding stones are labour intensive and strenuous to utilize. Jaja (1990) observed that the use of modern technology is low especially among women and that most of the modern labour saving devices like tractors and dehuskers are designed for men because lots of energy is needed to operate them. In some cases, the introduction of these labour saving devices, made men to take over women's sources of regular income.

Though women have been much involved in virtually all aspects of the agricultural processes, their potential has remained underdeveloped. However, women seem to be having a change of role especially in agricultural production in that they now do the bulk of agricultural work which was not the case before. Women had some selected crops which they cultivated like Beans and Guinea Corn, but now women cultivate some male crops which include Yams, Cocoa Yarn and Cassava. This has made some men to be redundant. It is obvious therefore that the changing role of women in agriculture has made most women to be food providers under stringent conditions.

Furthermore, a clear observation of more number of women engaging themselves in political activities, has hindered their time schedules and passion for agricultural activities. They attend series of meetings and political movements for sharing of money and some other dividends. Hence, There is no more reason to stress and go to the farm, as long as there is an easier way of achieving their financial needs. There are empirical evidences that

increased equality in access to economic assets has shown a significant raise in the productivity of female producers. This in turn helps improve household welfare through better bargaining power. These evidences concluded that increasing women's control over economic assets have strong and immediate effects on the welfare of the next generation and on the level and pace at which physical and human capital are accumulated. The evidences also demonstrated that although there are forms of structural discrimination against women in relation to access to credit networks; women borrowers have lower risk of default as a result of lower prevalence of corruption and bribes among women groups leading to higher repayment rates (World Bank 2004).

It's on this premise that the present study is set to evaluate women in Agriculture and food sufficiency in Akwa Ibom state.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The above statement of the problem, the following questions are imperative:

What is the extent of women participation in agricultural production in Akwa Ibom state?

What are the constraints being faced by Women in their participation in agriculture in Akwa Ibom State?

To what extent has Akwa Ibom Agricultural Development Project impacted on women participation in agriculture since inception?

What other policy options can enhance Akwa Ibom Agricultural Development Project to perform its role in mainstreaming women participation in agriculture in Akwa Ibom state.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to analyze women participation in agriculture:

To examine effects of women participation in agricultural production in Akwa Ibom state.

To examine effects of constraints being faced by Women in their participation in agriculture in Akwa Ibom state.

To examine the effects of Akwa Ibom Agricultural Development Project impacted on women participation in agriculture since inception.

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SUFFICIENCY IN AKWA IBOM STATE 2010-2016

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