

Appraising the Role of Women in Agro-Institutions in Nigeria Since 1988: A Case Study of Women in Mangu LGA of Plateau State

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Abstract

The role of women in agricultural production in Nigeria is prominent. They play various parts in agricultural activities ranging from production, processing, and marketing since pre-colonial times. In Mwaghavul, women have taken the leading role in agricultural production especially during the colonial period due to factors associated with colonial administration. Today, Mwaghavul women are dominant both in activities and number, but despite the leading role they play production is hampered by a number of factors. The focus of this research, therefore, is appraising the role of women in agro-institutions in Nigeria since 1988: A Case Study of women in Mangu LGA of Plateau State; Constraints and Challenges. Primary and secondary sources were consulted, and the multi-disciplinary research method was used. The research portend that women with about 70 percent of the farming population, representing about

60-70 percent of most farming activities, remain an integral part of agricultural development and food security in Mangu and Nigeria at large. But this position is under threat by the issue of gender in agricultural production as reflected in the area of ownership, and management of agricultural productive resources like land, inputs, and access to loan, amongst others. Gender inequality has affected agricultural production in Mangu, resulting to food insecurity. Therefore, should the government address gender stratification in agriculture, which has caused a decline in women productivity, the issue would be halted, bringing about increased food production, hunger reduction, and food security.

Key words: Gender, Gender Inequality, Gender Equality, Food Security.

Introduction

Women constitute about 1.6 billion around the world who live in rural areas and depend largely on agriculture for their livelihoods. (Heinrichs, n.d.). That figure is more than a quarter of the total world population. They produce more than half of all the food that is grown in the world: 80 percent in Africa, and 60 percent in Asia. Women, more than their male counterparts, take the lead in agricultural activities especially food crop production, making up to 60-80 percent of labour force.(Ogunlela & Mukhtar, 19-30). They represent 43% of the world's

agricultural labour force, which rises to 70% in some countries. In Africa, 80% of the agricultural food crop production comes from small farmers, who are mostly rural women (Team &Doss,1-46). Women have played, and continue to play vital roles in advancing agricultural production and food security particularly in Nigeria. They take part in different agricultural activities in paid employment, trade and marketing, as well as subsistence and unpaidones such as tending animals, collecting water and wood for fuel, and caring for family members. This is in addition to management of household and food preparation (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 1-15). In sub-Saharan Africa for example women significantly contribute between 60 and 80 percent of the labour for food production, both for household consumption and for sale. These figures obviously reflect social and religious norms that prevail within African communities and the changing dynamics which now invalidates the theory of the division of labour between men and

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women.

Another important fact of this staggering reality is reflected in the rising number of female headed families today. The reasons for this increasing phenomenon are many and varied. There has been an upsurge in the number of young men migrating out of farm jobs in search of white collar jobs that are not there. Often times, unable to return back to their villages, the young men prefer to remain in the cities and increase the population of the urban poor. The mining sector, though largely crude and considered illegal because it is unplanned and uncoordinated, has also accounted for the migration of men to non-farm activity, causing women to take active part in, and dominance of, most food crop production activities in Nigeria, particularly in Plateau State (Adegboye, 77-83),

Apart from that, other forms of social conflicts such as crisis, war and political thuggery have also compelled men to channel their energies elsewhere. These factors among others, account for women dominant role in agricultural activities. Traditionally, men clear the land and make ridges while women undertake most of the remaining farming activities, particularly weeding and processing. Nigerian women, who now eventually constitute the majority of small scale farmers, provide most of the labour and management of a large part of the farming activities on a daily basis (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, n.d.). Statistics suggests that Nigerian women, who account for about 75 percent of the farming population, participate in agricultural activities in multifaceted ways (Sahel Newsletter, 2014). They have established role in various agricultural activities which include: production, processing and utilisation. Processing usually takes place at the informal and small-scale level. At this stage, women handle the bulk of the processing. Selling of farm produce is not left out as women are involved in the sale and packaging of most crops and processed foods such as rice, yams, maize, garri and yam flakes. These activities represent 60 and 90% of the total farm task performed by women (Damisa, Samndi, & Yohana, 412-416).

Despite all these benefits in terms of agricultural productivity and poverty reduction, many development programs and services do not adequately invest in women's agricultural

productivity (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 21-22). Women continue to face deteriorating conditions such as limited access to education and control over natural resources, insecure employment and low income.

The situation is further compounded with the issue of gender in agricultural production. Women suffer neglect in agricultural production despite the huge role they play. In many societies and cultures within Nigeria, the role of women in agriculture is considered as a "help" and not an important economic contribution to agricultural production. Women, especially rural women, are seen to be responsible for cooking, carrying water and fetching firewood, limiting their participation in decision-making processes and their exposure to those economic opportunities that arise, thus increasing the level of inequality vis-à-vis their partners (Sofa & Cheryl, 1-46).

Not only are Nigerian women considered "helpers" in spite of their involvement in agriculture, many of them are restricted or outright denied access to or ownership to land which is the most important factor of production in agriculture. This paper examines the various intervention programmes, and gender-based agricultural institutions meant to address the challenges faced by women in Mangu LGA of Plateau State.

Gender: Gender, that is socially constructed relations between men and women, is an organizing element of existing farming systems worldwide and a determining factor of ongoing agricultural restructuring (Damisa, Samndi, & Yohana, 412-416).

Gender Inequality: Gender inequality is a situation that places either men or women at a disadvantage. It is one of the most pervasive forms of inequality, particularly because it cuts across other forms of inequality. Gender inequality in agricultural production is common in most developing countries where women are in most cases at a disadvantage in terms of the control of productive resources like land, input, extension services and policy matters. For example, in parts of West Africa, including Nigeria, women generally have usufruct rights to separate holdings through their husband's lineage (Ogunlela, & Mukhtar, 19-30).

Gender Equality: It is a situation where there is no discrimination on the grounds of a person's sex in the allotment of resources or access to social services. Men and women are not discriminated against but are respected as human beings entitled to some treatment, same benefits. It means that in the implementation of welfare programmes women are not discriminated on the basis of sex (Ogunjimi, 157).

Food Security: Food security depends critically on improvement in agriculture. It requires strategies that focus on increasing food productivity and incomes among small-scale farmers and access to income and employment for rural poor people who lack access to land (Mehra, Rkha, & Rojas 2016).

Gender Issues in Food Crop Production in Mangu

A look at gender discrimination against women in agricultural production in Nigeria generally suggests the degree of disadvantages suffered by women in terms of agricultural production. These issues concern lack of access/ownership to land, labour, capital, farm inputs and education, amongst others. This is true in the case of women in Mangu LGA who engage in food crop production.

Culture and Land Tenure System in Mangu

Land in most societies in Nigeria is seen as the great possession of a family. The right to land among the Mangu people is vested in the oldest member of the family who holds it in trust for others. He however determines who gets what portion and at what time.

In the customary system of land ownership in Mangu, women are not considered in the ownership and control of land. Women do not own land because they are given in marriage to someone who is from a different clan or ethnic group. Not only are women denied right to land by their parents, their husbands also restrict them from using land. Where the husbands are magnanimous enough to give some portion of land, it is usually limited and on temporary basis. In the event where the husband dies, and she has no son, his brothers or relatives automatically assume ownership of the land. But if she has a son, the land could be given to him to enable the widow and her children make a living (Langji 2016).

The conditional or outright lack of access to

land due to either family or marital restrictions discourages and frustrates women's full participation in agriculture. Land can be seized or taken over anytime by a male member of the family in the case of family ties, and even when married, appropriation of the produce thereof is decided by the husband. This goes to show the disadvantages suffered by women in terms of access to, and management of agricultural productive resources.

As a result of the disadvantage they suffer, most of the women are now being pushed to operate on hired farmlands (Umar, Kareem, & Madugu, 15). This is an attempt to avoid the conditions associated with family land, and marital land tenure system. Yet, hired farmland does not provide the safety net the women need. Hired farmlands are in most cases paid in kind rather than cash payment. In other words, the farm produce is used as payment for hired land. This practice portend danger for agriculture, as their labour had already been mortgaged even before the produce is cultivated.

Another challenge is the division of farm activities between men and women. The compound and distant farm: the compound farm is fenced and usually around the household which is left for women to cultivate because it is around the household and, therefore, is considered an auxiliary farm to the distant farm which they consider the main farm. The compound farm is mainly cultivated by women where early maturing crops and vegetables were planted. Intensive cultivation is also practiced on this farm due to its proximity to the source of compost manure (Goshit 92).

Yet in the distant farm which is considered to be the main farm, women also participate in the process. It is usually not less than three kilometer away from home, and is seen as men affair. But because the distant farm is usually larger than the compound farm, the entire family labour is needed, which also include women (Dakurum 2016). The men do the hard jobs like tillage, and cutting of trees, while women do the light jobs such as weeding, clearing of grasses, planting/transplanting, winnowing, transporting and marketing of produce. A combination of the entire role played by men, and women would reveal that women play the bigger role constituting 65-70 % of the agricultural labour. This is in addition to cooking and taking food to farm during cropping

season. Even more, once the crops of these farms mature, it is the household head that has the right to appropriate, and the woman has no say in that (Dash, 2016). Table 1. Below shows labour distribution based on activities and gender where women dominate most labour activities.

Table 1: National Distribution of Family Labour Based on Gender

Activity	% of Adult Men Aged 15 & Over	% of Adult Women Aged 15 & Over	% OF Children Under 15 Involved in the Work	Total
Clearing	36.2661	37.493	26.2409	100
Slash and burn	22.00604	43.43379	34.56017	100
Burning and residue spreading	23.64247	41.96879	34.38875	100
Ploughing	28.80571	37.11997	34.07431	100
Seeding/transplanting	33.34912	39.99457	26.65631	100
Seeding guarding	28.09028	39.59511	32.31461	100
First weeding	35.43395	39.24539	25.32066	100
Second weeding	34.90895	39.97137	25.11968	100
Third weeding	30.90486	42.35083	26.74431	100
Fertilizer application	27.94005	43.94672	28.11323	100
Herbicide application	35.61019	32.48457	31.90524	100
Bird scaring	25.86458	38.22584	35.90958	100
Harvest	37.82532	35.32332	26.85136	100
Threshing	32.5475	39.88216	27.57034	100
Drying	29.18009	41.08149	29.73842	100
Transport	32.46982	37.05907	30.47111	100
Others	33.60337	33.69249	32.70414	100
Average	31.47775	38.81984	29.70241	100

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2009)

Government Interventions and Perpetuation of Discrimination against Women

Mangu women are not only victims of cultural oppression as it relates to roles differentiation and access to land. Labour recruitment in the modern sectors has borrowed from the traditional society and looks at women based not on competence but on biological function. This attitude explains why government interventions in agricultural sector exclude women in favour of men. Each time governments at all levels decide to intervene to ensure food security, the women who constitute the largest population and major labour force in the sector are ignored.

Women do not own land or have right to land ownership and other assets through inheritance despite their heavy involvement in agriculture. These constraints constitute huge

obstacles to agricultural production as they are prevented from exercising or improving their expertise in crop production because of insecurity and lack of access. Because of this, it has traditionally been difficult for women to access bank facilities or other forms of credit through the banking system or other financial institutions. The inability to have rights to land disqualifies them from responding to market signals where land will be an important index.

Farm Inputs and Women Farmers

Since colonial times when new crops, especially cash crops like groundnuts, cotton, cocoa, etc. were produced, farm inputs like seeds and fertilizer have always been difficult to access till date. During the colonial time, new seeds for crop production were inaccessible. The seeds had always ended in the hands of Government officials without reaching the real farmers, who are there in the rural areas (Gudye 2016). The case is not different with chemical fertilizers. Since chemical fertilizer became effective for crop cultivation, and generally acceptable, the farmers suffer in accessing the product. Just like seedlings, it always ends up in the metropolitan areas without reaching the actual farmers. Ploughs, especially oxen ploughs, and tractors are always very expensive for the peasant farmers (Shonekon p.7).

Inadequate access to farm inputs (fertilizer, improved seeds, herbicides/pesticides), are the major areas of concern for the women. For example, it is believed that between 1993- 2006, between 63,262 metric tons, and 112,130 metric tons of fertilizers were used by farmers in the country as a whole. Northern states like Benue, Borno, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Nasarawa, Niger, Sokoto and Yobe reportedly used larger quantities (above 3,000 metric tons annually). However, it

must be argued that these states are believed to have traded in the commodity more than others. This shows that despite the large scale distribution of fertilizers, it did not actually reach the hands of many farmers who needed it most but ended up in the hands of traders and business men who sold it either too exorbitantly to the peasant farmers or simply traded it only to the highest bidders. The interesting thing about the distribution, based on NBS report as cited above, is that the bulk of the commodity was said to be directed to states that have their women in purdah due to religious restrictions (National Bureau of Statistics, 17).

Cultural perspectives and need for paradigm shifts

There exists enormous disparity in rural sector in Mangu 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. Contrary to the general belief that women are passive participants in development programmes, rural women are active participants in rural development activities ranging from agriculture to community development. In many cases they go out to work to buffer their husbands' income. There are many female headed families in Plateau where 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 (Umar, Kareem, & Madugu 15).

Due to limited education by Women farmers, accessibility to information and communication technology poses a challenge. This results in inadequate technical know-how on irrigation farming which is always evident in their farm (Dossa, Mohammed, & Ndah 27). Consequently, families headed by women seem to focus more on food crop production as against cash crop production since their primary expectation is to feed themselves and their children. This is largely as a result of lack of access to vital information about market trends.

Education of the female members of many households is never considered a priority. It is important to note that the level of literacy has implication for agricultural innovation and its

adoption. Table 2 below shows the educational gap between men and women

Table 2: National Distribution of Education Level and by Gender

Education LEVEL	Sex		Percent (%)	
	Male	Female	Total	
None	70976	20912	91889	32.2
Primary	108764	13585	122349	42.8
Junior High School	5450	1983	7434	2.6
Senior High School	35955	5059	41014	14.4
Tertiary	9043	795	9838	3.4
Literate	10689	2151	12839	4.5
Other	228	61	289	0.1
Total	241105	44547	285652	100.0

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2009)

Generally, there seems to be a high level of attainment of primary education between men and women, but the progression changes after primary school level where the number of women in school is limited. Again the huge lack of education beyond the primary school by the women folk poses some level of limitation on the degree to which the attendance of formal school could be translated to improved capabilities, especially for processes that are more demanding in terms of technical skills and decision-making prowess. The table is also indicative of the gap in educational attainment between men and women in Nigeria

Trends in Government Intervention Programmes and Gender Based Institutional Frameworks

There is a high level participation and contribution of women to agricultural development not only in Nigeria, but the world over. However, gender inequality has adversely affected and continues to affect their overall performance and output. This has persistently manifested in a number of ways: high level of poverty, low educational attainment, marginalization by agricultural extension services, inadequate input supply, and restricted access to agricultural productive resources, amongst others

These indicators favor the men folk, thus justifying government efforts in the area of

intervention programmes, and institutional framework to empower women and enhance their productivity. Noteworthy in this regard are such programmes as Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank (NACB), Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), Agricultural Development Project (ADP), Better Life for Rural Women (BLP) and Family Support Programs (FSP), Women-in-Agriculture (WIA), as well as the activities of Women Development Associations. These are targeted at reducing marginalisation of women and promoting gender equity and equality (Ifenkwe, 293-295).

Though some of the interventions like NACB (1973), ACGS (1978), and ADP (1974) are not entirely gender-based agro institutions, they laid the background of gender bias against women, which occasioned programmes like Better Life Programme (BLP), and later gender-based agro institutions like the Women in Agriculture (WIA) in 1988 which was meant to address challenges faced by women in agricultural production. Other programmes like the (FSP), and Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) came up in 1994 and 1996 respectively, but did not stand the test of time.

Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank (NACB)

The Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative bank was one of such banks that were brought to address the challenges in agricultural production including the bias suffered by women farmers. This bank was founded in 1973, jointly by Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), to dispense credit to cooperatives, agribusiness, and individual small holder farmers including women farmers at a subsidised interest rate (Uche, 26). The bank provides for two credit markets: direct-lending to individual farmers and organizations and on-lending to established institutions mainly state governments and cooperative bodies against guarantees for on-lending to third parties.

By 1995, its total credit was N3, 179.6 million on 68.945 projects, with direct lending dominating at 62.4%. Despite this apparent impressive performance, quantity of loans granted to small-holder has proved grossly inadequate. For instance,

most peasant farmers/women farmers lack knowledge of even the source of credit or terms of loans due partly to illiteracy on the part of the farmers, and largely because of inadequate communication facilities in place for the programme. Secondly, most banks insisted on the quality of the managerial skill of any venture, into which they are called upon to invest, and the women farmers fall short of these requirements of the banks (Nwaobi 7). This meant that small scale farmers were exempted from fulfilling the obligation as far as loans under the ACGSF were concerned. Most chunks of the loans are manipulated and given to big farmers who mostly engage in marketing functions rather than production functions, thereby cutting out the women farmers who constitute the majority in the sector.

The bank edged out women who are mostly peasant farmers in the provision of loans, and this was made possible through the conditions that came with it. First, there was the barrier of communication with regard to the knowledge of the loan, which was also partly associated with lack of education. This leads to the managerial skill as a requirement for the bank to grant loans, and most of the women farmers lack such skills since education among the women was limited. Hence there was insufficient funding especially to women

Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS)

Since loans reaching the peasant farmers were insufficient, the Agricultural Credit Scheme (ACGS) was established to increase credit to the agricultural sector in 1977, but came into operations in 1978 (Uche, 30). The objective was to provide guarantees in respect of loans granted for agricultural purposes by any bank, so as to increase the level of bank credit to the agricultural sector. The agricultural purposes in respect of which loans can be guaranteed by the fund are those connected with the establishment or management of plantations for the production of rubber, oil palm, and similar crops, the cultivation of cereal crops, animal husbandry, including cattle rearing and poultry and fish farming.

From when the scheme came into operation in 1978-1995, the total number of loans guaranteed by the bank rose from 18079 million in 1978 to 341

million in 1995 respectively, while the value rose from N 11,284 million in 1978 to N164.190 million in 1995. These figures are grossly inadequate given the increasing population of the country. As with most government interventions, bureaucrats and vested interests have always skewed the facilities their own way. They have always created bottlenecks particularly for the poor women farmers through delayed processes in having their applications processed by the banks to insistence on extant laws in the nation's Land Use Act. This law which has failed to recognize the right of women to land has always been the basis of denying women farmers' credit facilities.

The scheme later provided guarantee for increased loans to peasant farmers by banks as against the conditions by the Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative Bank, yet the issue of land as a collateral became an impediment

Agricultural Development Project (ADP).

Agricultural Development Projects (ADP) came at a time it was needed most, when the country fell into food crisis due to negligence of the agro-sector, and ADP came with the promises to cover gaps like information, farm input supply, and extension services which were lacking in the previous interventions. ADP was another programme by the World Bank which earlier came under the name Integrated Agricultural Development Projects (IADP) in 1974 (Akinbamowo, 148). The objectives of the programme were targeted at bringing about solution to the decrease found in agricultural productivity by sustaining domestic food supply, through massive infusion of World Bank funds. The ADPs were established to provide extension services, technical input support and rural infrastructure to the farmers/rural dwellers, which was to be achieved through counterpart funding with states and federal government.

Some problems that occurred in the course of executing the projects were lack of funding especially by some state government which led to shortage of competent staff, and provision or purchasing of materials and facilities needed for the projects. This made implementation of the programme objectives difficult to achieve.

Nonetheless women farmers were still receiving minimal assistance and information from ADP

extension agents. There were gender-related deficiencies within the existing extension programme. The programme was created to integrate women into development process with specific reference to agriculture since the participation of women farmers in planning and policy-making as well as the beneficiaries is important. But the ADP and PADP were pro-male and gender-insensitive towards women farmers. Agricultural extension services in Nigeria have traditionally been focused on men and their farm production needs, while neglecting the female majority in the sector. For example, the ADPs created only a home economics wing responsible for home-related women's activities (Ifenkwe, 293-295).

Therefore, ADP did not live up to its promises. There was still information gaps as most peasant farmers in rural areas are not reached by extension agents due to shortage of staff, as a result of inadequate funding, and even the few existing staff women are not represented. Thus there were still no changes in terms of enhancing the capacity of women farmers.

Better Life Programme (BLP)

Better Life Programme was significant in the sense that 'it came up mainly as a gender-based programme. It was supposedly meant for rural women farmers' (Iwuchukwu, & Igboke, 15). It was aimed at stimulating and motivating rural women towards achieving better living standards, and raising consciousness about their rights. It was also targeted at inculcating the spirit of self-development, especially in the area of agriculture amongst others. As with all other interventions that were hastily or poorly conceived, the program failed woefully. The rural women were neither identified nor reached. The wives of governors, ministers, etc. became the rural women and most of the meetings were held at the Sheraton Hotel, etc.

The programme which was meant to create general awareness for rural women farmers ended up being a failure because its objectives were not achieved until it faded away.

Women in Agriculture (WIA) 1988

A major change in women activities in agriculture surfaced with the establishment of The Women in

Agriculture (WIA) as an institution for women activities in agriculture. The Women in Agriculture was established by the Federal Agricultural Coordinating Unit (FACU) in all the Agricultural Development Programs (ADP) and was designed to make the agency (ADP) address gender-specific agricultural production and post-harvest technology issues. Specifically, WIA was designed to develop innovative gender-specific programs for women farmers in close collaboration with research institutions; promote the development and use of appropriate agricultural technologies which reduce drudgery and meet the needs of women; assist in linking women farmers to sources of credit; support group/individual women activities aimed at increasing the animal protein resources of the country; improve skills of women in food processing, utilisation and marketing; organize women into cooperatives to gain credit, information, etc. and encourage women farmers to keep livestock to improve their nutritional status.

Women-in-Agriculture (WIA) project was based on the realisation that female farmers in Nigeria were marginalized in research and extension services delivery. This is in spite of the critical roles they play in agricultural production, processing and marketing; household commitments including childcare; and farm and home decision making, etc.

Establishment of the WIA programme ensured that extension service in each state in Nigeria has female extension workers at every level of operation from 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.

Women in Agriculture (WIA), which was established generally for women interest in agriculture, specifically addressed the gap in ADP, with a laudable progress in terms of input, knowledge, credit, etc. However, other vital needs such as control and management of agricultural productive resources are yet to be addressed.

Family Support Programme (FSP)/Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)

Later gender-based programmes like the Family

Support Programme (FSP) and the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), which were meant to consolidate on the gains of WIA had their own issues. Family Support Programme was established in 1994, and Family Economic Advancement Programme in 1996 respectively by the late Gen. Abacha and his wife Mrs. Maryam Sani Abacha. These programmes led to the formation of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare (Iwuchukwu, & Igboke 15). In general, the programme stressed women empowerment in many areas, and agriculture is one among such areas where credit needs, inputs supplies, and loan in form of cash were to be meted (Uche, 49). Unfortunately, the programme died as soon as the administration that came with it was out, thereby limiting their impact on women.

Women Farmers Organization

Frustrated with the various intervention programmes, the women farmers did not relent, but resorted into forming association with the view of looking into the challenges in their own way. The Women farmers in Mangu have organized themselves into cooperatives to provide a single front against key challenges like funding, land, labour, and farm inputs, etc. (Panshak 2016).

Cooperative in this regard is an organized set of farmers' organisations that enables women farmers increase their productivity (Olatinwo, Fawole, Ojoko, & Ibrahim 2-5). They voluntarily come together to achieve a common goal. In the Nigerian parlance, it derived its origin from the traditional informal financial organisation variously referred to as "Adashi" which is a widespread indigenous system.

Women farmers have drawn their resources into cooperatives with the aim of enhancing their productive capacity. It serves as an instrument of education, provides a channel for communication on modern technique, and is a source of capital enhancement, etc. However, this effort has not proved to be enough. They need help to break the restriction on land ownership, and access to other productive resources like loan, farm inputs, etc. Therefore despite the existence of the women farmers' organisation, it does not appear that they have made significant impact in agricultural production in terms of demand and supply,

especially when looking at the constraints in accessing loan, and the disparity that exists in the area of land ownership, appropriation of the produce therein after sinking their meager resources in production. These further compound the difficulties faced in production, which leads to a decline in crop production, and threatens food security, since women take part in most aspects of agricultural production.

Recommendations

By and large the frustration of women farmers in Mangu can be summarised into three key areas: institutional framework; government policies; and lack of will power. The various institutions as discussed which is supposed to provide succor to the women were largely inconsistent and hardly sustained. Success can be achieved in this regard if the government can be more focused, consistent and sustained in all its institutional framework to the objectives upon which they are established. Secondly, government policies most of the time begin from the top, instead of from the bottom, which leaves the main producers at the rural levels hardly consulted in matters that concern them, thereby making it difficult for them to access adequate credit facilities or loan, which is a major input to agricultural production. There is always gender discrimination in lending. Usually, the lending institutions request for collaterals. The major collateral in farming communities is land and women do not own it. This is also an important pointer for policy makers when designing the modalities to meet the needs of women farmers. The women need to be consulted in every way of the development with regard to their participation in agricultural production; otherwise they would continue to be cut out or short changed in the process. All these need to be backed up by government willingness to change the mentality or stereotype of “men always in charge” and involve more women in the process since they participate heavily in food crop production.

Conclusion

This paper has taken a critical look at the important role of women in agriculture in Mangu, and how gender discrimination has continued to frustrate their contribution to the food security needs of

Nigeria. We argued that though women farmers constitute about 70% of the total population in the agricultural sector, their productivity is threatened in the area of ownership, and management of agricultural productive resources like land, inputs, and access to loan amongst others. The paper has contended that gender inequality and poor conceptualization of government interventions, together with very weak existing gender based agro-institutions have compounded the challenges of food security and poverty in Mangu and Nigeria at large.

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