

**Role of Women in Food Security in Nigeria**

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**Abstract.** The issue of food security in Nigeria is of national concern as it affects all facet of lives both the young and old-female and male, literate and non-literate. The paper assessed the role of women and their contributions to food security in Nigeria. To achieve the objectives, the paper described the concept of food security, examined the specific roles of women in food security and identified some of the factors affecting women participation in national food security. For better coverage, a review approach was used in discussing the role of women and their contributions to food security in Nigeria. The study found that in Nigeria, women are more active in processing and marketing of agricultural products. Furthermore, it was also established that low level of education, inadequate supply of farm inputs, poor extension services, training and infrastructure, low access to finance and low access to technology were some of the factors affecting women participation in National Food Security. The study concluded that the potentials of women if properly harnessed through training and development will serve as an asset for national food security in Nigeria. It was recommended that women should be training through regular exposure to recent and culturally relevant technology capable of supporting and enhancing the food security campaign in Nigeria.

**Key words:** Food security, Kaduna State, Nigeria, Role of Women

**Introduction**

Food security is a situation that exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2002). By definition, food security is therefore not simply about availability of food, it also entails accessibility that is the ability of individuals or a nation to acquire food on a sustainable basis, and its reliability and distribution. The former is about utilization and consumption of safe and nutritious food, while the latter relates to the equitable distribution of food to points of demand at the right time and place (Mkanawire, 2004 in Ademilua, Adeeko, Gbotoso, Akomolafe & Ishola, 2017). Food security means sustainable access, availability and affordability of adequate quantity and quality food to all citizens to meet up with their physiological requirements (Okuneye, 2014).

The main goal of food security is for individuals to be able to obtain adequate food needed at all times, and to be able to utilise the food to meet the body's needs. Food security is multifaceted. The three pillars underpinning food security according to World Bank (2001), are food availability, food accessibility, and food utilization. Thus, food security is not just a production, other issues such as gender role among others were contributory factors. It will be recalled that food security threat worldwide started in 1995 and all attempts at curbing it seems unfruitful at least in different region. According to Food and Agriculture Organization (2012), more than one billion of the six billion of the World population are undernourished. This estimation nevertheless set the pace for possibility of gender inclination or perspectives and perhaps a relationship between it and food security. A gender approach to food security can enable shifts in gender power relations that all people, regardless of gender, benefit from, and

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are empowered by development policies and practices to improve food security and nutrition (Asian Development Bank & FAO, 2013). Over 800 million people throughout the world and particularly in developing countries do not have enough food to meet their basic nutritional needs. Despite substantial increase in food supplies, other constraints such as continuing inadequacy of household and national incomes, instability of supply and demand, as well as natural and anthropogenic disasters such as climate change prevent meeting basic food needs from being achieved.

Approximately 3.1 billion people (45%), of the global population, live in rural areas. Of these, about 2.5 billion depend on agriculture as their principal means of subsistence (FAO, 2012). A portion of this figure is made up of peasant women, specifically 500 million, who do not own any land and receive barely 5% of the agricultural resources. Women in Nigeria are the backbone of agricultural sector accounting for 70% of farm labour and being responsible for 80% of food production (Adisa and Okunade, 2005). Despite these substantial contributions of women to agricultural and rural development in Nigeria, women's role continue to be marginalised and not given adequate recognition in economic policies (Ademilua et. al., 2017); while men's role remains the central and often times the only focus of attraction.

In many developing countries, the agricultural sector represents over 30% of GDP and two thirds of the workforce. In such countries according to the World Bank (2012), agricultural sector growth would be more effective 3.2 times in reducing poverty by 1 dollar/day than growth in any other sector. This sector can be far more resistant to economic and financial crises (FAO, 2012). Unless urgent action and concerted effort are taken, problems of hunger and food insecurity are likely to persist and even increase dramatically in some regions, given the anticipated increase in the world's population and the stress on natural resources (FAO, 2012). The persistence of hunger in the developing countries means that ensuring adequate and nutritious food for the population will remain the principal challenge facing policy makers in many developing countries in the years to come (Stamoulis et al., 2004 in Adepoju, Ogunniyi, & Agbedeyi, 2015).

Rural woman in Nigeria plays an essential role in the four pillars related to food security: availability, accessibility, stability and utilisation. However, based on gender issue these women in rural areas are at a disadvantage due to the fact that they do not have access to the same opportunities or resources as men (Adebayo, Sanni, & Baiyegun, 2012). There is a wide gender gap as regards access to certain resources such as: land, energy, technology, loans, pesticides and fertilisers. Furthermore, women have more limited access to training, information, public services, social protection and markets (FAO, 2011).

The percentage of food insecure in Nigeria houses was reported to be 18 percent in 1996 and over 40 percent in 2005 (Sanusi, Adebukola, & Oyindamola, 2006). The Food and Agriculture Organization (2005) reported that 9 percent of Nigerian population was chronic undernourishment between 2000 and 2002 (FAO, 2005). Food security is an age long concept as the quality of life of a people, and as such, a household needs to ascertain how to feed, and continue to feed its members (FAO, 2004). However, food security is said to exist when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Ayodele, Ogunwale, & Adewale, 2011). Consequently, in Nigeria, food security which goes with food self-sufficiency and sustainability is still elusive (Ugbajah, & Uzuegbuna, 2012). This is because the agricultural sector has not been able to deal effectively with the problem of food security for the Nigerian people when viewed from the stand point of the nutritional status of Nigerians household food security and price (Vision, 2010).

Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women specifically states obligations to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas. Yet, despite such commitments, governments are not responding with sufficient urgency in

order to address the needs and priorities of rural women (UN Human Rights Council, 2010). According to FAO, if women had the same opportunities in terms of access to productive resources (seeds, fertilisers, tools, loans, etc.) as men, they could increase their yields by 20-30%. This would mean an increase in the production of agro-food of between 2.5 and 4%, thus reducing the number of people affected by malnutrition by around 12-17% (FAO, 2012). By implication, women represent a veritable source of livelihood in terms of food sustainability and security. Hence all technicalities and technologies required to assist them to contribute their best in this area should be put in place for their best and optimal efficiency and effectiveness.

### **Specific Roles of Women in Food Security in Nigeria**

Women in rural areas play a very important role in advancing the course of their communities, though this role is not always acknowledged. These roles include care of domestic chores, such as collecting water and fuel wood, they do agricultural and livestock tasks as well as sell any surplus from their harvests at local markets. Also, they look after the care and education of their families. Women in Nigeria also play a key role in animal husbandry, fishing and forestry, although their work receives less acknowledgment and their activities in these sectors generally prove less profitable than that of men (Global Gender & Climate Alliance and UNDP, 2012).

According to Odebiyi (2010) women play a crucial role in food security because of their strategic position and activities in the household and productive work they do outside. Their personal characteristics such as position in the family, education, income, social status and many other equally affects their productivity (Odebiyi, 2010). According to Ajayeoba, (2010), in Nigeria, women play more important roles in agricultural production compared to men.

For instance, in Nigeria women constituted 49.2% of the total population who account for 60-80 percent of food produced in the country (Bureau of Statistics (BOS), 2016). This productive level account for the establishment of Women-in-Agriculture (WIA) programme Nigeria. This development earned the country an acronym “a center of female farming per excellence” (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2013).

### **FAO Account of Women Contribution to Food Production in Nigeria**

The FAO (2013) maintained that women play a prominent role in agricultural production and their contribution to the household food basket varies from one ethnic group to the other. The structural role of men and women in agricultural cycle in Nigeria reveal that women are more active specifically in processing and marketing of agricultural products. Women in Nigeria provide approximately 40% of total agricultural labour but own only 1% of the land. In a report of FAO (2012), data compiled by the International Food policy Research Institute (IFPRI) revealed that African Women Perform about 90% of the work of hoeing and weeding, processing food crops, about 80% of providing household water and fuel, 85% of the work of marketing food crops, about 80% of the work of food storage and transportation from the farm to the village, and 60% of harvesting (FAO, 2012). However, these roles or contribution are affected by some factors such as low level of education, inadequate supply of farm inputs, poor extension services, low or no access to finance, low or no access to appropriate technology, training and infrastructure.

### **Factors Affecting Women Participation in National Food Security**

1) Low level of education: Majority of women farmers in Nigeria are on small scale and with low level of education. The low level of education of women who form the bulk of the agricultural labour force has remained a major constraint to the adoption of modern farming

techniques and the ability to access other inputs necessary for increased productivity in the sector (Adeniji, 2016).

2) Inadequate supply of farm inputs: Most of the major farm inputs that are critical for agricultural production such as fertilizer, seed, agro-chemical, machineries etc. are not readily available at the appropriate time and at the right price which has remained a source of worry and frustration for women (Barret, 2010).

3) Poor extension services: lack of well-trained extension officials is another factor as the extension workers many at times do not address the problem of gender access to new innovation to women's in agriculture.

4) Low access to finance: in most cases financial services in rural areas are directed towards household and the male members who are usually seen as the head receive credit and insurance via development agencies. Women on the other hand are employed as mere helpers without any substantive decision making power within rural farming families, instead of entrepreneurs who should have access to credit. Since there is bias in control over access to finance, women mostly own low value animals such as poultry while livestock which is high value is usually owned by men.

5) Low access to technology, training and infrastructure: Gendered roles of women hinder them from accessing technology, agricultural training and rural infrastructure. Women's success in food security in most countries revolve around their reach to equal resources as men in aforementioned factors. Women's limited access to technology resulted in the failure to address women's time constraint to agricultural technology. Moreover, agricultural training marginalised women as they are normally conceived as farm wives rather than farmers.

### **Conclusion**

The study having assessed the roles of women in food security in Nigeria found that women farmers generally are strong asset to food production and security but have comparative advantage and stronghold more than men in processing and marketing. Also, it found that constraints or bottlenecks such as low level of education, inadequate supply of farm inputs, poor extension services, low or no access to finance, low or no access to appropriate technology, training and infrastructure can halt or hinder these contribution if left unchecked through adequate mechanisms such as training and manpower development that are culturally acceptable.

Involving women in specific agricultural roles will bring out the maximum performance in them.

### **Recommendations**

It was recommended that women should be afforded training in the area of agriculture such as production and marketing in which they have comparative advantage than men counterpart using relevant present day technologies such as social media and other forms of Information and Communication Technologies to get across the folks in their number for better access and uniform acceptance. In using these technologies to contribute meaningfully to food security, it is imperative to note that consideration must be given to cultural acceptability and affinity since majority of women targeted in this study live and carry out their daily activities in the rural communities. To effectively do this, the role of extension agent is required to motivate and provide the rural women farmers the needed support and knowledge in agriculture.

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