

# WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN FOOD CROP PRODUCTION, PROCESSING AND MARKETING IN NIGERIA

*Abiola, R. O. and Omoabugan, O B.*

## **Abstract**

The subject of women involvement in food processing and marketing has become imperative, especially when the roles of women are being redefined in the global, socio-political and economic framework. Not much research has been done in this subject area. The objective of study therefore, is to determine the extent of involvement of women in food crop production, processing and marketing in a typical African locality. The research sample consists of 160 female farmers, randomly selected from four villages in two local Government Areas on Ondo State, Nigeria. Frequency distribution and percentages were employed in the data analysis. The findings show that women are greatly involved in the production, processing and marketing of food crops, especially cassava, which is one the staple foods in sub-Saharan Africa.

## **Introduction**

The supply of food for the human population of the world depends primarily on the ability of green plants to convert solar energy into carbohydrates through the process of photosynthesis. The production of food from crop plants is therefore vital to the sustenance of living and other forms of life and 70% of the world population's food comes directly from crops (Harper, 1983).

In most parts of the world, the contributions of the women farmers have not been adequately looked into. Women are still relegated to the background concerning the issues of crop production. It is being argued that the existing knowledge on women's work, particularly in the informal sectors is still inadequate. Some of the factors which are identified by Ezumah (1990) as being responsible for this paucity of data are lack of attention to women's work; "invisibility" and under reporting of women's role in agriculture.

Patel and Anthonio (1973), stated that women help their husbands in decision-making and also assist them financially to enhance their farm work. However, Ekpere (1986) reported that in Oyo State (Nigeria), women participate in production of cassava through processing and marketing. In view of the above, there is therefore the need to highlight the role of women in food crop production, processing and marketing of these food crops.

The questions raised in this study then are: Are women involved in cultivation practices of these food crops? To what extent are they contributing to food crop processing? What roles do they play in the marketing of the food crops so produced?

In order to answer the crucial questions raised above, this study attempts to achieve the following objectives: examine the level of women involvement in food crop production practices, determine the extent of women involvement in food crop processing; and, identify the extent of women involvement in the marketing of these food crops.

The study was carried out in two randomly selected Local Government Areas of Ondo State in Nigeria namely: Akoko South and Ifedore Local Government Areas. The main occupation of the people residing in these Local Government Areas is predominantly agriculture, with emphasis on food crop production. Farming in these areas is characterized by a gender division of labour according to the nature of task to be performed and crops cultivated.

The limitation of the study is that in the course of collecting data from the women farmers, memory recall lapses occurred while some farmers were reluctant to part with useful information since they cannot see the immediate benefits derivable

from a study of this nature. However, the study is in a position to answer the questions raised in the study despite these limitations.

In this work a brief literature was reviewed. A large variety of food crops are produced in Nigeria. This variety is enough to make Nigeria self-sufficient in food crop production if all the necessary developmental changes are made (Famoriyo, 1979). Constituting the most important food crops in Nigeria terms of need are cereals-sorghum, millet, maize, rice and wheat; grain legumes-beans, cowpeas and peas; roots and tubers - yam, cocoyam, potatoes and cassava. The list also includes plantain and bananas. It also includes groundnut, soyabeans and vegetables (Famoriyo, 1979). The achievement of collective self-reliance in Nigeria as in other developing countries would not be possible without the full participation of women who represent about half the country's total population (Adebusoye, 1980). Akingbule (1992) stated that women work in rural areas as fanners, food processors and distributors and that today one out of three households in the world has a woman as sole breadwinner Women cultivate food crops by themselves or together with men. They also work on cash crops with their husbands.

Women are key workers in the food chain; they produce, process and store food or they purchase it when income is adequate, also the responsibility of getting food for the family shifts to women. Women are increasingly significant with regard to food security, even when they are not the primary breadwinners (Ezumah, 1990).

The importance of women in Agriculture differs by region. The United Nations estimates that women's share in family food production is 80 percent in Africa,60 percent in Asia and the Pacific; and 40 percent in Latin America (Akingbule,1992). In Africa, women are often farmers in their own right of labour on the family farm. Women do most of the food processing and marketing of surplus produce. The shift from the cultivation of food crops to cash crops in many areas has meant that women must now take up the task of working on the cash crops. Olayide et al (1980) affirmed that in Nigeria, the women folk constitute a formidable and significant source of labour in small farming. Boserup (1970) provided evidence to show that women in the third world play significant roles in agricultural and rural development. She pointed out further

that women were major regional differences in role that women play in fanning and that Africa could be described as the "region of female farming per excellence".

It is believed that women in Africa do up to three quarters of all agricultural work in addition to their domestic responsibilities. Patel and Anthonio (1973) discovered among other things, that 93 percent of women studied, worked on farms for crops such as yam, maize, tobacco and cassava;64 percent helped to find new ideas for improving crops and livestock while 48 percent encouraged their husbands to continue with , or reject new ideas. Also, 80 percent of the women gave money to their husbands for agricultural purpose. These results were from the study conducted on the socio-economic activities of wives of tobacco farmers in two administrative divisions (Osun and Oyo) of Western Nigeria.

In Yoruba land, women are found to predominate in the retail marketing of agricultural products and a high proportion of women in the rural areas appear to earn most of their incomes from trade on agricultural commodities. An analysis of the rural markets revealed that men usually constitute less than 5 percent of the traders. Table 1 illustrates the women's contribution to agricultural work.

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**Table 1: Women's Work m Africa (%)**

| Activity     | Women | Men |
|--------------|-------|-----|
| Growing food | 70 -  | 30  |
| Storing      | 50    | 50  |

|                            |     |    |
|----------------------------|-----|----|
| Community projects         | 70  | 30 |
| Selling,exchanging produce | 60  | 40 |
| Grinding,processing food   | 100 | -  |

**Adapted from:** *UN Economic Commission/or Africa/The Hunger Project*

### Research Methodology

In Ondo State of Nigeria, almost all the villages/towns produce food crops to a significant level, hence two areas were chosen for the purpose of this study. These areas were Akoko South situated in northern savanna zone of the State) and Ifedore local government (situated at the southern zone).

A total sample of 160 farmers (women food crop producers) in the two selected areas were drawn using the stratified random sampling technique. Four villages were randomly selected from each of the two Local Government Areas and 20 food crop women producers were randomly selected in each village. The selected farmers were interviewed with the use of prepared structured interview schedule. The questions were designed based on the objectives on the objectives of the study as earlier stated. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used in analyzing the data obtained.

### Results

**Table 2: Educational Background of Women Food Crop Producers**

| Educational Level | Frequency | %      | Cumulative % |
|-------------------|-----------|--------|--------------|
| Illiterate        | 16        | 10.00  | -            |
| Non formal        | 01        | 0.62   | 10.62        |
| Primary           | 66        | 41.25  | 51.88        |
| Secondary         | 54        | 33.75  | 85.63        |
| Tertiary          | 23        | 14.38  | 100.00       |
|                   | 160       | 100.00 |              |

Source: Field Survey

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Table 2 shows the educational background of the women food crop producers. A high percentage (14.25%) of respondents received primary education. 14.35% had post-secondary education. The implication of majority of the respondents having formal education (89.38%) is that adoption of new innovations may be high, since education plays a vital role in adoption of new improved technology. The relevance of farmers' literary level (which is largely determined by education) to farm productivity and production efficiency have been documented by Oboniola (1988).

### Women Involvement In Production Practices

**Table 3: Respondents' Farm Sizes (Ha)**

| Land Holding (Ha) | Frequency | %     | Cumulative % |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|--------------|
| Under 0.5         | 79        | 49.69 | -            |
| 0.51-1.00         | 50        | 31.45 | 81.13        |
| 1.01-1.50         | 09        | 5.60  | 86.79        |
| 1.51- 2.00        | 18        | 11.32 | 98.11        |
| 2.01-2.50         | 01        | 0.63  | 98.74        |
| Over 2.50         | 02        | 1.25  | 100.00       |

|       |     |     |  |
|-------|-----|-----|--|
| Total | 159 | 100 |  |
|-------|-----|-----|--|

Mean - 0.82 ha Range 0.07 - 4.00 ha.

Source: Field Survey

Table 3 shows total farm size cultivated. Mean farm size was 0.82% ha with a range of 0.07 to 4.00 ha. A higher percentage (81.13%) of the respondents cultivated small plots of land up to a maximum of LOO ha each. Only 18.87% cultivated anything over 1.00 ha. The implication of this most farmers in the study area are small-scale farmers especially women.

#### Types Of Food Crops Produced

**Table 4: Types Of Food Crop Produced (N =160)**

| Crops     | Frequency | %     | Crops           | Frequency | %     |
|-----------|-----------|-------|-----------------|-----------|-------|
| Yam       | 113       | 70.63 | Sweet potato    | 03        | 1.88  |
| Cassava   | 150       | 93.75 | Vegetable       | 88        | 55.00 |
| Coco yam  | 68        | 42.50 | Pepper          | 14        | 8.75  |
| Cowpea    | 18        | 11.25 | Melon           | 28        | 17.50 |
| Soyabean  | 04        | 2.50  | Tomato          | 05        | 3.13  |
| Maize     | 117       | 73.13 | Okro            | 10        | 6.25  |
| Rice      | 07        | 4.38  | Plantain/Banana | 06        | 3.75  |
| Groundnut | 18        | 11.25 |                 |           |       |

Source: Field Survey

Table 4 shows the percentage of food crop producers in the study area. The table indicates that the major crops produced are cassava, yam and maize. 93.7% of the respondents grew cassava while 70.63% produced yam.

#### Farm Operations Carried Out By The Women Farmers

**Table 5: Farm Operations Carried Out By Women Farmers (N =160)**

| Farm Activities | Frequency | %     | Farm Activities        | Frequency | %     |
|-----------------|-----------|-------|------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Land clearing   | 41        | 25.63 | Planting               | 140       | 87.50 |
| Tree felling    | 01        | 0.63  | Fertilizer application | 62        | 38.75 |
| Burning         | 133       | 83.13 | Staking                | 66        | 41.25 |
| Packing         | 121       | 75.63 | Spraying               | 10        | 6.25  |
| Ridging/Heaping | 05        | 3.13  | Weeding                | 99        | 61.88 |
| Set Cutting     | 74        | 46.25 | Harvesting             | 153       | 95.63 |

Table 5 shows the various farm operation in which the farmers engaged themselves. Those that Cannot engage in one form of operation claimed they engaged the services of hired labour. According to the table, women were mostly involved in harvesting (95.63). 87.50% engaged in bush burning and 75.63% engaged in packing.

#### Women Involvement In Food Crop Processing Types Of Food Crop Processed

**Table 6: Types of Food Crop Processed (N =160)**

| Crops   | Frequency | %     | Crops   | Frequency | %     |
|---------|-----------|-------|---------|-----------|-------|
| Yam     | 51        | 31.8  | Cassava | 135       | 84.38 |
| Cocoyam | 02        | 1.25  | Pepper  | 03        | 1.86  |
| Maize   | 26        | 16.25 | Okro    | 01        | 0.63  |

|           |    |      |          |    |      |
|-----------|----|------|----------|----|------|
| Melon     | 02 | 1.25 | Soyabean | 04 | 2.50 |
| Vegetable | 01 | 0.63 | Plantain | 01 | 0.63 |

*Source:* Field Survey

Table 6 shows the various food crops that were being processed into one form or the other by the women. Almost all the respondents processed one crop or the other. One hundred and thirty-five respondents (84.38%) processed cassava, 26 respondents (16.25%) processed maize while about 0.63% processed plantain.

### **End Products Of Processing**

The highest number of respondents (78.13%) processed cassava into "garri", 56.25% into cassava flour while 16.25% processed cassava into "fufu". Maize was also processed into pap by 15.00% of respondents. All the yam processors processed yam into yam flour and this constitutes about 31 - 25% of the total respondents. However, other food crops enjoyed little processing. Cassava appears to be the most processed crop because of the various forms into which it can be processed.

### **Equipment Of Processing**

Most of the processing are done locally. The various equipment used in the processing of the food crops are calabash, knife, frying spoon, sieve, tray, grating machine, etc. The choice of any these equipment, or their combination however depends on the type of food crop to be processed and into what form. For instance, cassava processing involved the use of knife, frying pot, frying spoon, grating machine and sieve while vegetable required only knife and fry.

### **Women Involvement In Food Crop Marketing Table 7: Foods Crop Marketed**

| Food Crops Marketed | Frequency | %     |
|---------------------|-----------|-------|
| Cassava             | 136       | 85.00 |
| Maize               | 66        | 41.25 |
| Vegetable           | 64        | 40.00 |
| Yam                 | 44        | 27.50 |
| Cocoyam             | 40        | 25.00 |

*Source:* Field Survey

Table 7 shows the food crops that are commonly marketed in study area by the women. All the respondents claimed that they involved themselves in marketing activities of the food crops they produced or processed. This indicates that the crops were either sold raw or processed. The products were sold either on the farm, in the village market, next village market or in the town. About 71.25% of the farmers got their products to the market through public transport while 43.12% carried their product on head to the market. Others used private vehicles, motorcycles or bicycle to transport their products.

The study also revealed that a larger percentage of 83.75% of the respondents engaged in small-scale marketing using the local units of measurement such tins "Kongos", bags and basin.

### **Discussion Of Results, Recommendations And Conclusion**

This study has highlighted the crucial role played by women in food crops production, processing and marketing. The need arises for any society to continue to encourage women participation in agricultural activities in order to boost food production, avoid waste and achieve the much desired food self-sufficiency. In order to achieve the above, this study recommends the

following:

- a. Government at the various levels should improve the technological base of food crop production by introducing the use of adaptive technology, specially adapted for use of the small farmers especially women. This will go a long way in promoting farm production activities.
- b. Farmers should be encouraged in the act of processing food crops produced during the peak period in order to avoid waste and selling at very cheap prices by providing the necessary processing equipment for the use of farmers.
- c. The women should be assisted by the government to market their products and should be adequately patronized by same.  
Construction of feeder roads to link villages with urban centres is highly essential in the regard.

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