

**A REVIEW OF STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA.**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study was undertaken to review the strategies for improving women's involvement in sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria. To achieve this purpose, literature materials concerning the concept of sustainable agriculture, women's involvement in sustainable agricultural development, roles of women in sustainable agricultural development, and barriers to women's involvement in sustainable agricultural development was reviewed. Further effort was made to determine the strategies for improving women's involvement in sustainable agricultural development. Findings from reviewed literature reveal that women were involved in all farm activities from land clearing to harvesting, processing and marketing of produce. The constraints they encounter include lack of agricultural extension contact and access, lack of access to land, lack of access to credit facilities amongst others. Strategies such as easy access to land, favourable agricultural policies, access to farm credits, involvement in agricultural decision making amongst others is highly recommended. Serious attention should be paid to the constraints facing women in agriculture because women play an important role in agricultural development and food security in Nigeria. There is therefore urgent need to improve women's involvement in sustainable agricultural development, for a higher and long-term agricultural productivity.*

**Key words:** - Sustainable agriculture, agricultural productivity, agricultural development.

**INTRODUCTION**

The role of women in sustainable agricultural development cannot be overemphasized. Women constitute about 60 to 80 percent of agricultural labour force in Nigeria (World Bank, 2003). Apart from child bearing, feeding their household, domestic duties, women are involved in subsistence farming; women are involved in the production of about 74% of household food; also, in the production of about 70% of food consumed by families in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Ahmed, Diamond, Clarke & Adams, 2010). In the past, women were merely perceived as 'farmer's wives' as propagated by the type of farming system established by the British during their colonial rule in Nigeria (Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO], 2003). Valuing women's work could liberate them

from extreme distress, thereby enabling them to contribute to the country's economic growth. Inability to value women's work is a notable factor hindering economic growth and poverty reduction in developing countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2008). Sustainable agriculture is perceived as a unified system of agriculture that provides: food; enhances environmental quality; efficient use of non-renewable resources; sustenance of the economic viability of farm operations and improvement of the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole (United States Farm Bill, 1990). Presently, the concept of sustainable agriculture as a system of agriculture has gained eminence on supply of renewable food, income, and livelihood for present and future generations (Tait and Morris 2000; United States agency for international development, 2004). From these perceptions, emphasis are laid on the livelihood and quality of life of farm households. Around the world, about half of the world's human capital who are female are undervalued and underutilised and sustainable agricultural development can only be possible through long-term investments in economic, human and environmental capital (OECD, 2008). Therefore, in order to achieve sustainable agriculture, it is pertinent to improve and maintain women's long-term involvement in agriculture.

The basic questions from this backdrop were: what are the various roles women play in sustainable agricultural development? Are there barriers encountered by women in carrying out their roles in agricultural development? If there are, what are the perceived strategies to improve the involvement of women in sustainable agricultural development?

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to review the strategies for improving women's involvement in sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to

1. describe the role of women in sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria,
2. ascertain the barriers to women involvement in agricultural development in Nigeria;
3. ascertain the strategies for improving women's involvement in sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Literature materials concerning the concept of sustainable agriculture, women's involvement in sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria, roles of women in sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria, and barriers to women's involvement in sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria were reviewed. Further effort was made to determine the strategies for improving women's involvement in sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Empirical review on women's involvement in sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria.

From a study financed by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization on the role of women in agriculture reveal that women make up more than 50% percent of agricultural labour force. Ahmed *et al.*, (2010) mentioned that women contribute to the national agricultural output, maintenance of the environment and family food security. He opined that rural women represent more than one quarter of the world's population and produce on the average more than half of all the food that is grown in Africa. In support, Nwaogwugwu and Emodi (2012) in a study concluded that the homestead in Nigeria will continue to play leading role in agricultural productions if there is efficient and effective management of available human (the men, women and children) and material resources. According to State of Food and Agriculture [SOFA] Team and Doss (2011) women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. They further stated that roles of women differ considerably in various regions, where economic and social services are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women activities are more of producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food (such as caring for family members), working for earnings in agrarian or other rural enterprises (such as engaging in trade and marketing) and fetching fuel wood and water.

Adenugba and Raji-Mustapha (2013) carried a research on the Role of Women in Promoting Agricultural Productivity and Developing Skills for Improved Quality of Life in Rural Areas and concluded that special campaign programmes are required for sensitizing communities to the negative effects of excluding women farmers from ownership of land and access to critical resources. To overcome constraints in gender related out-reach agricultural programmes might require legal or gender quotas.

Afolabi (2008) carried out a research on the role of women in household economy, food production and food security, and reveal that women are very strong pillars of the economy in the state.

There are hindrances to women involvements in sustainable agriculture. Adams (2017) carried out a research in Nigeria Women in Agriculture, and revealed that the challenges faced by women in

agriculture includes: inadequate inputs, lack of technological know-how, high rate of illiteracy, poor implementation of innovation, lack of land ownership rights and Gender inequality. According to United Nations (2015), about one in three married women from developing regions have no control over household spending, while about one in 10 married women are not consulted by their spouse on how their own cash earnings are spent. Halkias, Success, Harkiolakis, & Caracatsanis (2011) carried out a research on Challenges Facing Women Entrepreneurs in Nigeria and concluded that formal financial institutions, especially banks, have not supported women entrepreneurs as much as they could have thereby making them to rely on micro-finance institutions.

Furthermore, other researchers have outlined some strategies to women's involvements in sustainable agriculture. According to the study carried out by Odurukwe, Matthews-Njoku and Ejiogu-Okereke (2006), positive result was recorded from the adoption of women programme as these women are now able to improve in such areas as family food security and increased financial contribution to household needs. Adams (2017) opined in his study that the way forward to increasing women participation in agricultural production includes: educational and economic empowerment; capacity building through appropriate training of rural women; easy access to finance, land and being conscious of positive impact of the economy. Setiawan (2012) expressed that if women farmers are not involved in the agricultural extension activities, group discussions, and other empowerment programs, it results to low yield in farmers' vegetable products, uncontrolled use of external inputs, lack of sorting, grading and the absence of farm records, thus lowering farming productivity. Hence, there is need to increase rural women's participation in agriculture.

### Roles of women in sustainable agricultural development

Studies revealed that women play significant roles in agricultural development. These include:

(i) **Agricultural production:** In Nigeria, women produce, process and market about 80% of food, manage 70% of all small-scale enterprise and about 33% of all household chores (Auta, 2004). Women seem to constitute and play an important role in promoting agriculture in Nigeria. Agricultural production activities in which women are involved include: farm selection, bush clearing, stumping, tillage, mound/ridge making, planting, weeding, fertilizer and pesticide application and harvesting. According to Ani (2004), in the southern part of Nigeria, especially among Igbos, the women grow some minor crops which may include okra, pepper, maize, cocoyam and vegetable in homestead, within the compound where the women can easily tend them.

**(ii) Agricultural marketing:** Women are rather more active in retail marketing, very visible in open air markets than whole sale marketing. Olawoye in *Banjiet al* (2010) asserted that in Oyo state women are involved in planting 50 percent, weeding 98 percent, harvesting 85 percent, transporting 91 percent, processing 92 percent and marketing of agricultural produce 79 percent. Women find it harder to enter into the marketing of produce due to limited education, funds and low social status (Sahel Newsletter, 2014). According to Adisa and Okunade (2005), trading is the most important activity for women outside the home, followed by farming. They further mentioned that Yoruba women of south-western Nigeria are overwhelmingly traders, they sell processed commodities as well as unprocessed farm commodities. The socio- economic activities of the Hausa/Fulani women of northern Nigeria is farming, the trades are more limited because of the practice of keeping women in purdah away from the sight of male strangers. It has been revealed that local women travel long distances to bring foodstuffs to urban markets (Adisa and Okunade, 2005).

**(iii) Food processing and storage:** Women in developing countries are involved in food processing and they do this with little modern aids. Processing activities in northern Nigeria include the extraction of shear butter, butter and cheese- making, and brewing of local beer. Some food and non-food commodities such as soap, pottery, oils, clothes, beverages, cooked food are processed by Yoruba women of south-western Nigeria. In Eastern Nigeria, women are major processors of oil palm and cassava. The women either process some of their own farm produce for sale and home consumption or they obtain supplies (Adekanye, 1988). Preservation and storage of processed food are done also by women, prior to their sales in the local and urban markets. The processing landscape in agricultural value chains is mostly at small-scale level (Sahel Newsletter, 2014).

**iv) Family health and nutrition:** In Nigeria, rural women working twelve (12) or more hours a day, maintaining their homes, caring for their children, growing and preparing the food that sustains the nation through earnings that are fundamental to economic growth and households' welfare (Ezeh and Anyiro, 2013). According to Adenugba, & Raji-Mustapha (2013), rural women produce as much as 80% of the food we eat, bear the primary responsibility of family health and nutrition. The functions of the farm women with regard to household health and nutrition include; nursing the new-born, ensuring good health of members of the household, food preparation and household budgeting. Ani (2004) observed that village women in Africa and Asia are known for catering for the family. It is up to them to see that husbands and children are fed, children are cared for, fetch water for household. Many hours of back breaking labour

are spent on providing the cereals which form the base of the diet of many rural communities particularly in the northern part of Nigeria. Women are not simply keepers of the home and overseers of their family nutrition and health, they also participate in home base businesses such as caring, pottery, rearing, knitting and sowing.

**(v) Farm decision making:** Women's participation in farm management decision-making process is said to increase with age, older women participating more in decision-making in the different areas of agriculture than their younger age group counterparts. The high level of knowledge and experience about improved farm practices acquired by the educated women farmer have more positive influence in that regard (Damisa & Yohanna, 2007).

### **Empirical Review on Women's Involvement in Sustainable Agricultural Development**

#### **Barriers to Women's Involvement in Sustainable Agricultural Development.**

It has been observed from different literatures that various factors hinder women's active participation in the agricultural sector. There has been unhealthy gender inequality prevailing in women's involvement in agriculture and its sustainability in developing country is quite difficult for women to achieve (State of Food and Agriculture [SOFA] Team & Doss, 2011). OECD (2008) noted that despite the invaluable contributions of women in agricultural production, women have been marginalized, undervalued and underrated as regards agricultural production. It is then pertinent that female must be actively involved in agriculture in order to achieve sustainable growth and effective development, female must be integrated.

Various government, private and non-profit agencies are stepping up their efforts to improve women participation in sustainable agricultural development but several constraints limit these efforts in developing countries.

- a. **Lack of Agricultural extension contact and access:** It is perceived that policy makers fail to recognize that men and women are often responsible for different crops, livestock, tasks (such as income generating activities) and that their extension needs differ. It has been revealed that women still lag behind in accessing extension agents, agricultural trainings and other indices of development education for agriculture (Tolobonse, Jibrin, Auta, & Damaisa, 2013). It is in response to this situation that the Women in Agriculture (WIA) programme was introduced.
- b. **Lack of access to land:** In Nigeria, It is perceived that women rarely own land despite their heavy involvement in agriculture. In general women's access to land in African

societies is quite restricted, even in cases where the law protects women's rights to land, traditional customs inhibit their access and control over land (Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey [NDHS], 2013). According to the British Council Nigeria (2012) women own 4% of land in the North-East, and just over 10% in the South-East and South-South, less than 10% of Nigerian women own land. Thus, the lack of land ownership significantly reduces the chances for women's access to financing because of the need for collateral.

**Table1: Distribution of land ownership by gender in Adamawa State, Nigeria.**

Sector	Sector land ownership	
	Female	Male
Total	7.2	38.1
Rural	8.5	46.1
Rural poor	10.1	49.5
Urban	4.5	22.4
Urban poor	5.9	28
Zone	Zone	Zone
North-East	4	52.2
North-West	4.7	50.1
North-Central	7.9	41.2
South-East	10.6	38.1
South-West	5.9	22.5
South-South	10.9	28.3

**Source:** Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire, 2006.

- c. **Lack of access to credit facilities:** Women farmers have limited access to credit. Even where loans are available, access requires collateral(either property or credibility (land or livestock) to guarantee loans and partly to exclude women from male-oriented data networks and extension services. (Adenugba& Raji-Mustapha, 2013). A productive means such as agricultural finance is very necessary foreffectiveagricultural production especially in evolving countries (Nweke, 2001). Women farmers, have less access than men to productive resources and government support, even though they make up the majority of farmers (Ferguson, 2011).
- d. **Poor access to education for women and girls:** In some rural Areas, in Nigeria, male children are valued more than the female, as a result of this the males are better trained in schools than the females. Lack of education and higher levels of illiteracy among women is a constraint to women receiving agricultural extension services (FAO, 2011). Okoli, (2011) opined that rural women farmers illiteracy rate is as high as 78%; yetwomen constitute the bulk of food producers in Nigeria.
- e. **Poor involvement in farm decision making:** Women comprise of about 60-80 percent of agricultural labour but are voiceless in decision making (Ogunlela& Mukhtar, 2009). In (Damisa

and Yohanna, 2007) study on rural women in the decision-making in areas of agriculture, about 13% or less of the women had their opinion considered in decision-making in agriculture. They further revealed that women's participation in farm management decision-making process is said to increase with age than their younger age group counterparts. The high level of knowledge and experience gained by educated women farmers on better farming practices has had a positive influence on this. Wealth position of women is another key factor of women's role in farm management decision-making.

**Table 2: Constraintsof Nigeria women participation in agriculture.**

Constraints	Frequency(f)	Percentage(%)
Inadequate inputs	19	15.83
Lack of technological knowhow	83	69.16
High rate of Illiteracy	37	30.83
Lack of means of implementation	23	19.16
Inadequate finances	78	65.00
Lack of women's right to own land	56	46.67
Gender inequality	49	40.83
Religious and Cultural belief	32	26.67

**Source:** Adams,(2017).

**Strategies for improving women's involvement in sustainable agricultural development.**

With the application of these necessary strategies, women can become a major tool for enhancing sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria. The following initiatives could improve women participation in sustainable agricultural development; **(a). Access to land and other production resources:**Production resources such as land, capital amongst others should be made available to women at all time. This strategy can be achieved through the arrangement of special campaign programmes for sensitizing communities to the negative effects of prohibiting women farmers from ownership of land and access to other production resources. Also, the use of legal bodies, administrative or even gender quotas can be applied to achieve this strategy (Adenugba& Raji-Mustapha, 2013). According to Gomez and Hien (2012), Property rights commonly comprises of the right to own, use, access, control, transfer, exclude, inherit and make decisions about land and other properties. Therefore, the Law and the Courts of Law are devoted to exterminating every form of prejudice against women. Also, Government and NGOs should set up women programmes where

women can access farm inputs and credits (Kotze, 2003).

**(b) Access to gender specific extension services and improved technology:** Notwithstanding the fact that the World Bank is assisting Nigeria's agricultural service, women farmers are still obtaining insignificant help and information from agents (World Bank, 2003). It is pertinent that women be identified as an integral part of the agricultural extension policy and gender-specific operational guidelines be developed to direct extension activities of women farmers.

**(c) Consistent review of favourable agricultural policies:** According to Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development [FMARD] (2016), the main purpose of gender policy for the sector is to promote and ensure the adoption of gender sensitive and gender responsive approaches to the agriculture in such a way that men and women have access to and control of productive resources and facilities to bridge gender gaps. The International Food Policy Research Institute [IFPRI] (2005) set some goals to reaffirm the empowerment of women as a key to sustainable agriculture. These goals and policies should be consistently reviewed from time to time in order to ensure its successful implementation.

**(d) Women's involvement in decision making:** Women should be seen as precursor of development. Therefore, there is need to grant women in agricultural full participation in decision making in order to increase agricultural productivity (Ajani, 2009). It is necessary that a fair decision that equally protects the interests of both men and women should be propagated to adjust the mostly male-dominated political system. Women will have a say and their voice will be heard as well in policy formation (OECD, 2008, Alvarez & Lopez, 2013). Women should be actively involved from the identification to the implementation of any agricultural programme (Kotze, 2003).

**(e) Educational empowerment of women:** Government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) and private organisations should provide educational empowerment for women. This is to enable women farmers have training needs more than men, and these training to be linked to their domestic and household cares. Skills development for women farmers should comprise of a combination of training in formal settings (such as schools and training institutions) and non-formal ones (such as community groups, NGOs, and learning from family and peers) (Adenugba & Raji-Mustapha, 2013).

## CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Nigerian women farmers remain inefficiently involved at the different levels of sustainable agricultural development despite the enormous investments from governmental and non-governmental agencies. There are still hindrances preventing women from actively being

involved in agricultural development. In order to achieve Sustainable agricultural development, the contributions of agricultural human resources (especially women) to agricultural development should be maximized by implementing solutions to the specific problems women encounter both as economic and social stakeholders.

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