

**THE NEXUS BETWEEN GENDER AND FOOD SECURITY AMONG RURAL FARMERS:
EMERGING TRENDS IN SOUTHWEST, NIGERIA.**

¹Koledoye, G. F and ²Michael, C. O and ³Owolabi, K. E

1. Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria.
2. Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension Services, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria
3. Department of Agricultural Extension and Communication Technology, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria

Corresponding Email: festus.koledoye@aaua.edu.ng, gbengakoledoye@gmail.com Mobile: +2348035603497 / 08156141218

ABSTRACT

Food security is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and it is widely considered as a measure of peoples' wellbeing in any country across the world. Over the years, considerable research attention has been devoted to several indicators of food security such as per capita dietary food energy supply (undernourishment), food intake (actual household food consumption), nutritional status (anthropometric measures) and food access, proxied by wealth status (total consumption, expenditure or income). However, less attention has been given to gender inclusiveness (SDG 5) as a viable variable for measuring food security, especially in Nigeria despite the numerous international models such as Gender Analytical Frameworks (GAFs) that were designed to promote gender equity and equality across every sphere of human life. At the global level, these frameworks defined the division of labour between men and women in farming by specifying gender roles, e.g. land clearing and preparation such as ridge making, operation of tractor and other muscular farm activities as men's, while women carry out tasks like planting, weeding, harvesting, winnowing, grinding and marketing. Although, women perform these activities along with their domestic and reproduction roles, thus, they are mostly involved in subsistent farming. In this paper, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) was conducted in Ekiti, Ogun and Ondo States to analyze the relationship between gender and food security with a view to establishing the link that exists between the two variables for a food secured nation and analyzed four dimensions of food security with gender in perspective. It was observed that women performed all agricultural activities ranging from land clearing to marketing in combination with their reproductive and domestic roles, yet they lack access and control over basic resources required for efficient farm practices. The division of labour proposed by Harvard Analytical Framework (HAF) was negated as women now involve in all farming activities and they dominate the rural farming households. This was therefore attributed to the decline in food production in Nigeria. This is manifested in the high level of hunger that is experienced in Nigeria. To be food secured, women

must be given equal power as men to control factors of production in farming since they form the major stakeholders in many rural communities where farming takes place in Nigeria.

Keywords: Food security, Gender, Women, Nexus

INTRODUCTION

In the world today, about 795 million out of the 7.3 billion people experience chronic hunger and 1.2 billion of these people live on less than US\$1 a day and every six seconds, a child dies from hunger and malnutrition while seven out of ten of the world hungry's are women or girls and hunger and malnutrition kill more people per year than HIV/AIDs, Malaria and Tuberculosis combined casualties. The above presented scenerios are predominant in Sub-Saharan Africa where Agriculture is the dominant occupation because 780 million out of the 795 million of the hungry people live in developing countries of Africa (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2015 and World Bank, 2015).

Over the years, there has been over representation of those who are food in-secured across the world as over 60% of undernourished people are women or girls according to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNECOSOC, 2007) and the World Food Programme (WFP, 2009) reports. At global level, many efforts have been made towards addressing this ugly situation through the implementation of programmes and projects by international organizations like the World Bank (WB), International Funds for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United States of America International Development (USAID) among others and many indicators such as capita dietary food energy supply used to measure undernourishment, food intake, which is the actual household food consumption, nutritional status, which is the anthropometric measures and accessibility to resources proxied by wealth status and these define the total consumption, expenditure and income (FAO, 2015) which had been used as unit of analysis in food security studies. However, less consideration is given to how gender influences the food security status of any given community. Though, gender has been considered in food security programmes and

projects but not at community level. This becomes necessary as the term gender is conceptualized as socially constructed (Agarwal, 2013) and as such, it varies from one society to another (Deji, 2011) and society is formed from the communities.

In Nigeria, the recent World Bank Report of 2018 stated that over 91 million out of about 170 million Nigerians live in poverty (World Bank, 2018). Hence, they are food insecure. The food insecurity in the country has led to Nigeria importing most of its food items from neighboring and other countries like Benin Republic, Thailand, China, Indonesia, Dubai, UK and USA among others. Apart from the food importation, Poverty and not food availability according to FAO (2006) is the major driver of food insecurity. Improvements in agricultural productivity may be necessary to increase rural household incomes and access to available food but are not sufficient to ensure food security. Evidence indicates that poverty reduction and food security do not necessarily move in tandem. The main problem is lack of economic (social and physical) access to food at national and household levels and inadequate nutrition. Food security not only requires an adequate supply of food but also entails availability, access, and utilization by both men and women of all ages, ethnicities, religions, and socioeconomic status (FAO, 2006).

Gender-based inequalities all along the food production chain "from farm to plate" impede the attainment of food and nutritional security. Maximizing the impact of agricultural production on food security entails enhancing women's roles as agricultural producers as well as the primary caretakers of their families. Food security is a primary goal of sustainable agricultural development and a cornerstone for economic and social development of any nation. Therefore, this paper will serve as a policy document that can be used to implement how gender issues within agricultural sector has served as an impediment to the growth of agricultural sector in Nigeria and unraveled who are actually food insecure between male and female and how this problem of food insecurity can be solved permanently. The paper demonstrates the vital and often unacknowledged roles women play in agricultural sector and in programmes that ensure food stability of a nation, as well as how their critical roles can ensure sustainability in agricultural programmes and how these can be translated into household-level improvements in food and nutritional security of members of the households which in turn affect the larger society. With numerous articles on gender and food security in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, none of such articles had been written to establish the relationship that may exist between gender and food security in states where agriculture is the dominant occupation of the people.

Therefore, the paper accesses the link between gender and food security using PRA as a gender analytical tool in Southwest, Nigeria in order to establish the relationship that exists between the two variables. It also examines the four dimensions of food security with gender in focus.

In reviewing relevant literature for this article, typically, gender refers to the widely shared expectations and norms within a social system about appropriate male and female behavior, characteristics, and roles. It is a social and cultural construct that differentiates women from men and defines the ways in which women and men interact with each other (Deji, 2011). This implies that the word gender has strong association with societal norms and culture. The analysis of Harvard Gender Analytical framework that established division of labour between male and female might have arisen from the conceptual definition of gender as a social construct.

The gender roles in this context are those functions that are culturally allotted to individuals on the basis of their gender but are not related to biological functions of that individual. They are roles that can be carried out by a man or a woman (Deji, 2011). Furthermore, the assigning of such roles varies from culture to culture and over a period of time. Gender roles relate to what a man or a woman should do and how a person of a particular sex walks, talk, dresses and relates with outsiders. This is culturally determined. For example, child caring is allotted to women. It is a female gender role but not a female sex role since a man or a woman can carry out the function. Also, household chores such as washing of plates are assigned to women and a man can also do it. Gender roles differ from sex roles such as carrying pregnancy or breast-feeding that are exclusively female sex roles. In gender roles, no specific organ is required for it to be performed. For example, a man needs his hands and his brain to work as a medical doctor. Also, a woman also needs the same thing to perform the same function. Therefore, both men and women can be medical doctors. Also, a man needs his hands and brain to cook just as women do. Thus, this is regarded as a gender role.

Furthermore, in agriculture, gender roles are well defined in terms of activities and operations. Based on the Harvard Analytical Framework, men are assigned the roles of land clearing which involves activities such as bush clearing, tree felling, stumping and ridge making while women are assigned farm operations which involve post-planting activities like weeding, fertilizer application and harvesting and postharvest handling like processing, preservation and marketing (Bittman, 2013).

Descriptively, Harvard Analytical Framework (sometimes referred to as the Gender Roles Framework) was developed by researchers at the Harvard Institute of International Development (HIID) in collaboration with USAID's Office for Women in Development. It represents one of the earliest efforts to systematize attention to both women and men and their different positions in the society. It is based upon the position that allocating resources to women as well as men in development efforts is a viable strategy to development. Relating this to the food security in Nigeria requires the historic trajectory behind agricultural development. Abiwon (2017) posited that the Nigerian agriculture was a viable sustainer of the economy in terms of food supply, job creation and national income generation. This was possible as a result of focused regional based policy on comparative commodity production with absolute advantage. However, the sector has struggled to perform the above stated functions since the 1980s due to policy neglect, economic distraction and economic indiscretion due to over dependent on crude oil. The exploration of crude oil in commercial quantity and the "oil boom" of 1970s heralded an era of decay and decline in food production with the attendant food insecurity in Nigeria.

Food security is one of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and is widely considered as important measure for evaluating the progress of a country in terms of its wellbeing (Vasco, 2007). Despite, various concerns by governments across the world on ensuring that every household can at least provide three square meals for their family, food insecurity continues to be a major development problem across the globe, undermining people's health, productivity, and often their very survival (Smith and Subandoro, 2007). Global hunger is severe, as nearly 30 per cent of the world's population is currently suffering from one or more forms of malnutrition which includes inadequate caloric consumption, protein deficiency, poor dietary quality, and inadequate concentrations of protein and micronutrients (Basudeb, Acharya, and Davis, 2007). Globally, approximately 840 million people are undernourished and as many as 2.8 million children and 300,000 women die needlessly every year due to malnutrition in developing countries (Basudebet *al.*, 2007). The situation is particularly worrisome in Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria inclusive. While lack of sustained economic growth is an important determinant of hunger, the persistence of hunger also feeds back to limit economic growth. Basudeb, Brinda and Meenakshi (2007), provide empirical evidences which point to the negative impact of hunger and malnutrition on labour productivity, health, and education, which ultimately leads to lower levels of overall economic growth and

development. Hunger is thus as much a cause as an effect of poverty.

The concept of food security first emanated in November, 1974 at the World Food Summit held in Rome. It was explicitly discussed that food security is achieved, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary requirements and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO 1996). However, many people have been experiencing hunger in Nigeria long before the concept of food security was coined. This was due to the general neglect of agricultural sector, leading to a serious decline in food production (Abiwon, 2017). The neglect of agricultural sector by able body men put farming in the hands of women and the vulnerable, who cannot move out of rural areas due to age, disability and low level of education. Hence, there was a gradual decline in food production. Unfortunately, many interventions programmes of the successive government over the years have failed to put agriculture in the right perspective due to the gender insensitivity of the policy driving such programmes.

METHODOLOGY

The study focusses on three out of the six States in Southwest Nigeria where agriculture absorbs over 75% of her inhabitants and with agricultural friendly climatology. These States were Ondo, Ekiti and Ogun. In each of the three States, two (2) Local Government Areas (LGAs) were used. In Ekiti State, Emure and Ikere LGAs were used, in Ondo State, Akoko Southwest and Ose were used while Obafemi Owode and Ijebu East Local Government Areas were used in Ogun State. Basically it uses secondary data from literature by reviewing relevant articles on food security and gender and critically analyzed them. Qualitative data by using Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and In-Depth Interview (IDI) guide. Qualitative findings were transcribed in-line with the guideline of reporting FGD and IDI and findings were used to buttress the information obtained from the literature review.

FINDINGS

The four dimensions of food security: A gender perspective

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2013) established that there are four basic dimensions to food security from a gender balanced perspective. These are: availability, stability, utilization and access as explained below:

Availability. Inequalities in ownership of, access to and control of livelihoods assets negatively affect women's food production and their physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious

food to meet their dietary requirements. Tenure insecurity for women results in lower investment and potential environmental degradation. It compromises future production potential and increases food insecurity and reduces women's income and the availability of food. This dimension can be used to explain the availability of resources like land and inputs such as fertilizers to farmers. Many scholarly articles have been conducted on gender accessibility to land in Nigeria and many of these articles established the gender differential in land ownership. Adekola, Adereti, Koledoye and Owombo (2013) reported that male farmers in Ondo State had control over land than their female counterparts. Similarly, Ojo, Bila and Iheanacho (2015) opined that women access to agricultural inputs were limited in Borno State, Nigeria while Olagunju and Ajiboye (2010) submitted that decisions on what to produce and how to produce are predominantly controlled by men in Nigeria. One of the implications of these findings is that male would determine the size of farms and the locations for the women. In situations where the fertility of the farmland is known, male would probably take over the areas that are more fertile; leaving women with the unfertile areas. Consequently, decline in production in female cultivated farmland is experienced.

Stability. Differences in risk and vulnerability between men and women can affect the stability of their food security in different ways. During times of crisis, women and girls are often forced to reduce their intake in (favor) of other household members. In cases of crop failure or natural disasters, cultural traditions make it easier for men to leave their farm in search for employment elsewhere, leaving women behind to struggle for feeding their families and making ends meet.

This was the situation in Nigeria during the oil boom of 1970s when men in many rural areas of Nigeria where drifted to urban centers at a time when ministries and parastatals were created. There was a mass migration of men to secure white-collar jobs while women could not move due to factors like their level of education, responsibilities of child caring and the care for the aged. This puts agriculture in the hands of women who ordinarily have other household responsibilities like domestic and reproductive which have been regarded as unpaid labour among women within a family as reported by Schober and Scott (2012) and Scott and Plagnol (2012). This makes women to have higher vulnerability than their male counterparts. Hence, they tend to be vulnerable to food insecurity crisis than the men.

Utilization. Women's role in food utilization for food security is perhaps the most critical and outweighs the importance of their role in food

production and how they spend the income they earn. Women are typically responsible for food preparation and thus are crucial to the dietary diversity of their households. Despite, they lack access to the nutritious part due to the patriarchy nature of most African homes where men control household decisions. Given that in most developing countries most of the food consumed is produced locally, to provide sufficient quantities of food on a consistent basis it is necessary to look at the production factors for agriculture. One of the most important factors is the availability of land of good quality which can -at least potentially- have an adequate yield (World Bank, 2010). Since men control decisions, they usually select first and in the process of selection, they select the best resources and of course eat the best food. In a slaughtered chicken for instance, the gizzard which is one of the most nutritious parts of chicken is given to men while women and children eat the legs. The ugly scenario may be attributed to the way men treat women in a typical patriarchy society as it can be seen in the report of an In-depth Interview conducted in Supare Akoko in Ondo State on respondents' level of knowledge of technologies utilized for minimizing postharvest losses in tomato and pepper production as transcribed below:

... we are created to dominate. Even if they know, they will tell you they do not. These are women for you. I am very sure my wife had once told me how sun drying and per-boiling of pepper were used to preserve it for months while she was with her parents. Young man, let them give us our respect. You are also a man! This is how women should treat a man but I must tell you, they are well knowledgeable, though, we do not use them anymore because demand for such product is discouraging. I think it is due to civilization. Tell government to provide us with modern technologies as they have overseas and more importantly, electricity. I cannot even afford freezer not to talk of generator because the prices are too high. The white men have made things easier for us. One of my friends was telling me few weeks ago that we now have a machine that can process cassava from peeling to final product (garri), but hungry man like me cannot buy it. So in tomato too, I am sure we will have machines that can preserve it for a longer time. We are really suffering on this issue as we experience a lot of wastage during the peak period as from July to January. We sell at ridiculous prices, otherwise, they will be wasted on the farm.... Excerpt from one of the FGD held in SupareAkoko, Ondo State.

The underlined statements in the above transcribed excerpt summarily show how men treat women in a typical rural setting. This will invariably affect every aspect of women livelihood as men have the orientation that they are more superior to the women

in every sphere of life. On the other hands, women are equally being naturally disorientated to be submissive to the voices of men looking at the statement that stated '*even if they know, they will tell you they do not*'. The report of a group interview conducted at Ajibandele community in Ijebu East area of Ogun State under the Emergent Farmers' Survey sponsored by the Michigan State University further buttressed the above assertions as transcribed thus:

...Our husbands are not at home, so we cannot give you any answer... Excerpt from a group interview at Ajibandele in Ijebu East LGA, Ogun State, Nigeria.

A woman among her colleagues at Onidundun at Obafemi Owode LGA of Ogun State has this to say during a visit to her group on a survey conducted on the Emergent Farmers in Nigeria.

... can I call my male child who is a Motor mechanic at the Junction to give you all that you need to know about my farm and access to land because my husband is not at home but my son can stand in for him. I may not be allowed to give you information regarding my farm unless my husband is available... Excerpt from a woman at Onidundun at Obafemi Owode LGA

This is how pathetic the men and women relationship is in many rural areas where agriculture is the mainstay. Interaction between men and women in these communities is not inline whatsoever with the assumptions of Harvard Gender Analytical Framework that explicitly creates a division of labour for both sexes for smooth societal development and increased in food production for a food secured nation.

Access. Access to food within the household is determined by cultural practices and power relationships within the family. Although food may be available, adequate amounts to maintain nutritional intake may not necessarily be accessible to women compared to men. This is because, women consume the less nutritious parts of the meal compared to their men counterparts. In many Nigeria rural societies, men eat the best parts of meat, fish and portion of a complete meal as they are usually served first. The children are usually served after their fathers while the mothers and the female child eat the left over and in situation where there is inadequacy in food supply, the women suffer more. This may be used to explain the reports of the FAO (2015) and the World Bank (2015), where it was reported that over 795 million out of the 7.3 billion people around the World experience chronic hunger, 1.2 billion live on less than US\$1 a day and 780 million of the hungry people are from the Sub-

Saharan African while seven out of ten of the world hungry's and malnourished are women or girls.

Inter-relationship between gender and food security

The Harvard Gender Analytical Framework defined the division of labour between men and women in farming. The role of men is focused on land clearing and preparation, while women carry out tasks as planting, weeding, harvesting, winnowing and grinding (Bellows, Franco and Jenderedjian, 2012). The planting, post-planting and postharvest activities of women in agriculture make them to be crucial and key factor in the agriculture sector, but mostly in subsistence agriculture, as they are often the persons who cultivate food (vegetables) crops. In general, women are in charge of food selection, preparation and childcare. If they generate an income, this is most likely to be spent on food and the needs of their children (Baden, 2013). However, many women are now performing men's tasks as the men have migrated or have died from HIV or AIDS (Brown and Gallant (2014).

Relating this to the agricultural development in Nigeria, men have the requisite requirements like education, and freedom to migrate more than their female counterparts. This was the situation in Nigeria in the 1970s when the oil boom drafted men to urban centers to take up salary jobs due to their education and their ability to move freely unlike the women whose domestic activities aside their education were factors that hinder their mobility out of the rural area. Thus, the only option for the rural women is to take up agriculture as their mean of livelihood while their other responsibilities like reproduction and domestic remain constant. Generally, in Nigeria, there is wide gap between male and female in terms of education. With the absence of men in charge of land preparation and other farm activities that were exclusively ascribed to men from the gender analytical framework (Bellows *et al.* 2012), women have to take them up. This makes women to be key players in the agricultural sector in Nigeria. despite this, the few available men in the agricultural sector still control the resources (Deere and Doss 2006; FAO, 2010). This has been documented as a general phenomenon not only in Nigeria but also in African countries. Women feature prominently in Agriculture as they are known to produce more than half of all the food that is grown, specifically, up to 80% in Africa (Mehra and Rojas, 2008). Yet access, control and ownership of land largely remain the domain of male privilege, entrenching patriarchal structures of power and control over community resources, history, culture and tradition. It is therefore, assumed that if incomes of women are increased, they may have more access to resources and invest in their children's education, health care and nutrition. However, they are constrained by poor access to resources, taking new opportunities, including new

markets, by their limited educational background, poor networks and mobility restrictions. Gender difference, arising from the socially constructed relationship between men and women, affects the distribution of agricultural resources and cause many disparities in development outcomes, thereby affecting food security status in favour of men. The power and control of men was also lamented by some women in Elegbeka in Ondo State as reported thus:

As a woman in my town, you cannot even give out anything even information without the consent of your husband. Even the information I am giving you my husband permitted me to come here, otherwise, you can never see me here. This is not fair on our part but there is nothing we can do. If it is possible to return to my mother's womb and come back again as a baby, I would rather prefer to come as a male child... Excerpt from the In-depth Interview at Ago Elegbeka, Ondo State, Nigeria.

This shows that women may not even like the position that men put them but the cultural attachment to most of their activities may be a strong factor that needs to be considered in analyzing the gender dynamics in a typical rural set up in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The significance of women in food production as well as food security in Nigeria cannot be disputed despite the fact that they are hardly seen as farmers but mostly as farmers' wives especially when agricultural inputs and credits are to be disbursed to farmers. This paper revealed that women involvement in farming out-weight that of men. Yet, the control of resources and decisions on household resource allocation including nutrition are at the mercy of the men. This put women at the disadvantaged position among the stakeholders in agricultural sector. Therefore, to attain food secured status as a nation, there is needed to adopt a framework that is gender sensitive and responsive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were put forward

1. Women should be the target of any food security programme of any government or organization for such programme to record meaningful success
2. Women must be seen as important stakeholders in agricultural programmes and rewarded accordingly in input distributions
3. Every food security programme in Nigeria should adopt frameworks that are gender sensitive and responsive.

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