

Evaluation of Gender Participation in Palm Oil Processing In Ohaji Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State

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Abstract

The study investigated Gender participation in palm oil processing in Ohaji Egbema Local Government Area (LGA) of Imo State. Specifically, the study ascertained the level of involvement of gender in palm oil processing; assessed processing activities that are gender specific, and identified constraints associated with palm oil processing. Sixty (60) respondents comprising male and female processors were randomly selected. A set of structured questionnaire and interview schedule were used to elicit primary data which was subjected to descriptive (frequency, mean, percentage) statistical analysis. Findings showed that male processors mainly involved in digesting (6.7%), boiling (16.7%) and palm oil extraction (20%). While the females are mainly found in areas of clarification (6.7%) and nut/fibre separation (6.7%). Results further showed that scrapping/stripping (5%), palm oil extraction (18.3%) and boiling (15%) are male specific operations. While digestion (8.3%), clarification (5%) and storing (5%) are female specific. The study strongly recommends that issues on gender difference should not be ignored by policy makers because of its negative implications.

Key words: Gender, participation, palm oil, processing

Introduction

Gender issues have taken a global dimension especially in the 20th and 21st century. Gender participation in agricultural production, processing, power and right to agricultural production input has increased significantly recently in Nigeria. Gender refers to social constructed role difference between men and women for the purpose of allocating powers, duties, status, responsibilities and role in any given social milieu or context (USAID, 2005) as distinct

from sex which refers to their biological differences (Quisumbing, 1994). It deals with the social relationship between men and women and how these relationships are negotiated in the production of goods and services (Ironkwe, 2011). Such gender relations exist in agricultural production where men and women have different roles, priorities, opportunities and constraints. Lack of gender consideration has often led to failure of different Popular projects in the past (Ekpo, 1999)

Women constitute majority of the farming population in rural areas. They participate actively in agricultural activities but their contributions in relation to men's are not objectively assessed, commensurate, appreciated and documented (Abiola and Omabugau, 2001) given rise to stereotype assumption on the contributions of men and women in agricultural production (Rahman, 2005). Gender in oil palm production and processing entails the analysis of male and female issues concerning the part both play in production and processing of oil palm produce and if properly conceived, refers to male and female concerns and needs and it stands for value equity and equality (USAID, 2005)

The oil palm (*Elaeis guinensis*) as stated by Anyanwu *et al* (1982) is one of the important economic crops in the tropics. Agricultural production and processing involves the conversion of the raw products into a more acceptable form. Processing improve the utilization of these raw materials (palm produce) by enhancing the sales of the resulting products in commercial quantities (Arene and Nwaigbo, 2004). The main aim of agricultural processing is to decrease or reduce the losses in quantity and improve the quality of the resultant product thereby adding value taste and satisfaction to it. The losses normally occur at harvest, handling and storage prior to marketing of the product (FAO, 2000). Some agricultural products cannot be used unprocessed of which oil palm is one of them (Arene and Nwaigbo, 2004).

The mode of processing oil in some part of eastern Nigeria remains traditional, although some aspects have being mordernized in recent times.

All the world, both men and women play critical role in cash crop production and processing eg palm oil production. However in non industrialized is very low, women particularly in rural areas produce 60-80% of food consumed which are most especially vegetable cereals and legumes while men participate and concentrate much in cash crop production eg oil palm and cocoa (Opeke, 2005). According to Unamma *et al* (2004), many constraints has limited gender participation in its production and processing techniques adopted. They posited that women have suffered the adverse effect of globalization and liberalization than their male counterparts. They further said that women are faced with problems of inappropriate processing techniques that would suit their physique. This empirical fact has often stimulated the idea that the percentage of men in oil palm production and processing is greater than their female counterpart. Also, there is an establish theory of the past which quotes that women's physique and their mental make up do not match the emerging technology and therefore are not suitable for the female folks. It is against this background that this study evaluates gender participation in palm oil processing with the following specific objectives which include to:

- Ascertain the level of gender involvement in palm oil processing;
- Assess processing activities that are gender specific, and
- Identify constraints associated with palm oil processing in the study area.

Materials and Methods

Ohaji – Egbema LGA is in Owerri Agricultural zone located at the southern region of

Imo State. The area is a rainforest zone characterized by nine months of heavy, moderate and light rainfall and three dry months. Rainfall distribution is bimodal, with peaks in July and September and a break in August. The annual temperature is above 20⁰ C and 75% relative humidity (Archibong, 2007). The oil palm tree is dominant over several other plant species in the area hence the study area is often refereed to as oil palm belt of Nigeria (Onweremadu, 1994). The people's occupation ranges from farming, soap making, palm kernel oil and cake production, broom making basket wearing, palm wine tapping and the production of locally distilled gin know as "ogogoro" and hunting.

Ten communities in the LGA were randomly selected and these includes: Etekwuru, Umudike, Mgbara, Obokaofia, Amafor, Awara, Assa, Umuapu, Ohoba, and Umuokanne. Six palm oil processors were randomly selected from each of the communities given a sample size of sixty(60). Primary data were collected through a set of structured questionnaire administered to the respondents. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency, mean and percentage)

Results and Discussion

Result in Table 1 show processing activities the processors are involved in. Findings indicates that 6.7% processors are involved in digesting of stripped fresh fruit bunches. About 16.7% (male) and 10% (females) participated in boiling. However, 3.3%, 20% and 5% (males) and 6.7%, 11.7% and 6.7% (Female) processors are involved in clarification, palm oil extraction and nut/fibre separation respectively. Results indicates that male processors are mainly involved in digesting of the stripped fresh fruit bunches, boiling and palm oil extraction. On the other hand, majority of the female processors are involved in clarification and nut/fibre separation respectively

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents on level of involvement in palm oil processing

Operations	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total Freq	Total percentage
• Boiling	10(16.7)	6(10)	16	26.7
• Scrapping/stripping of palm fruits	3(5)	2(3.3)	5	8.3
• Digesting	4(6.7)	3(5)	7	11.7
• Clarification	2(3.3)	4(6.7)	6	10
• Palm oil extraction	12(20)	7(11.7)	19	31.7
• Nut/Fibre separation	3(5)	4(6.7)	7	11.7
• Total	34(56.6)	26(43.4)	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

* Figures in parenthesis are percentages

As shown in Table 2, the following operations are perceived to be male specific; Scrapping/stripping (5%), palm oil extraction (18.3%), boiling (15%); while digesting (8.3%), clarification (5%), storing (5%) are female specific. Result further revealed that nut/fibre separation which recorded 3.3% in either way is not

gender specific. Previous studies on this subject matter showed that this varies in different location as culture may have roles to play in this issue.

Table 2: Respondents Distribution on processing Operations that are gender specific

Operations	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total Freq	Total percentage
• Sterilization	-	-	-	-
• Scrapping/stripping of palm fruit	3(5)	1(1.7)	4	6.7
• Digesting	3(5)	5(8.3)	8	13.3
• Palm oil extraction	11(18.3)	9(15)	20	33.3
• Clarification	1(1.7)	3(5)	4	6.7
• Boiling	9(15)	7(11.7)	16	26.7
• Storing	1(1.7)	3(5)	4	6.7
• Nut/fibre separation	2(3.3)	2(3.3)	4	6.7
Total	30(50)	30(50)	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

*Figure in parenthesis are percentage.

Result in Table 3 shows reasons why processors participate in various processing operations. It was revealed that about 27% of the respondents participates in various operations because they are easy to perform. Others includes 60% due to wages paid for the operation, about 13% are due to their states of health. However, 0% was recorded for the following options; social status, academic status/activities, not time and energy consuming. This implies that processors participate in a given palm oil processing operation not because of its gender specificity but because of some interest.

Table 3: Respondents distribution on reasons for participating in various processing operation

Operations	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total Freq	Total percentage
• Academic status and activities	-	-	-	-
• Easy to perform	14(22)	2(3.3)	16	25.3
• Gender physique	-	-	-	-
• Wages gained	31(51.6)	5(8.3)	36	59.9
• Not time and energy consuming	-	-	-	-
• State of health	6(10)	2(3.3)	8	13.3
• Social status	-	-	-	-
Total	51(83.6)	9(14.9)	60	98.5

Source: Field Survey, 2009

- Figure in parenthesis are percentages

As shown in Table 4, various constraints are found to be associated with palm oil processing in the study area. Multiple response was recorded as shown in the table. Results reveal that poor extension contact (10.6%) and unproductive attitude of workers (11.3%) were problems. Others includes lack of fund (18.2%), processing facilities used (16.1%), inadequate land spacing (11.6%) and processing techniques used (16.8%). Findings also showed that irregular power supply (9.27%) and incompetent personnel (5.8%) were not serious problems. With the constraints identified, it implies that palm oil processors in the study area are challenged, and this could lead to poor quality and quantity of palm oil produced which negatively affect the price of the product both in local and international markets.

Table 4: Respondents Distribution on constraints associated with palm oil processing

Constraints	Freq	Percentage
• Irregular power supply	27	9.27
• Poor Extension contact	31	10.6
• Unproduction attitude of workers	33	11.3
• Processing facilities used	47	16.1
• Lack of fund	53	18.2
• Land spacing	34	16.6
• Processing techniques used	49	16.8

• Incompetent personnel	17	5.8
Total	291	99.6

Source: Field Survey, 2009

*291 (multiple response)

Conclusion

The study which evaluated gender participation in palm oil processing found that processors level of involvement differs depending on the operation. Male processors are mainly involved in digesting of the stripped fresh fruit bunches, boiling and palm oil extraction. The females are greatly involved in clarification and nut/fibre separation. However, scrapping/stripping of palm fruits, palm oil extraction and boiling are male specific operations while digesting, clarification and storing are female specific activities. This calls for carefulness among policy makers on gender related issues while formulating policies. This is because; ignoring issues on gender difference may lead to unfavourable outcomes which in turn could result in projects that are technically successful but negatively affects women.

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