

## Role of Women in Agricultural Activities in Abua-Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria

Emeya Salome

Department of Agricultural Science, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Ndele Campus, P.M.B 5047,  
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria  
Email – [salo\\_gee@yahoo.com](mailto:salo_gee@yahoo.com)

**Abstract:** This study focused on role of women in agricultural activities in Abua Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. A simple random sampling technique was used to select five communities from the LGA and 150 women farmers. Information obtained from the women was through interview scheduled on socio-economic characteristics, agricultural activities, agricultural production and their constraints. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data collected. The result revealed that 94% of the respondents were involved in processing, 90% in harvesting and 86% in marketing of farm produce. 80% of the respondents planted pineapple, 60% planted orange and plantain while 40% planted palm fruit and pepper, and about 50% planted cassava and groundnut. The result shows that women produce crops for family consumption and generate income within their locality. The result also revealed that 50% of the respondents' ages were 41-60years which is the active years of production. 80% of them do not have access to land, 60% of them were married while 40% had primary education. The result showed that women were involved in all farm activities from land clearing to harvesting, processing and marketing of produce. They rear animals and keep poultry. The women constraint include mainly finance, lack of land for farming, poor transportation network, lack of farm input, inaccessibility to modern production technology, poor and weak farmers groups and co-operative unions. Recommendations were made for training of females by extension workers. [Emeya Salome. **Role of Women in Agricultural Activities in Abua-Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.** *World Rural Observ* 2014;6(2):1-6]. ISSN: 1944-6543 (Print); ISSN: 1944-6551 (Online). <http://www.sciencepub.net/rural>. 1

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### 1.0. Introduction

The responsibility placed on the shoulders of women in the rural areas to meet the daily food and need of most families cannot be overemphasized. Rural women farmers play a vital role in food production and food security. Banji, Adisa and Esther (2005) reported that most studies on women showed that trading is the most important activity outside the home followed by farming. Women are also known to be fully involved in all operations of farming including planting, thinning, weeding, fertilizer application, harvesting, storing, marketing and processing (Mybada, 2000). It is often stated that women are responsible for more than half, the world's food production overall and produce up to 60 to 80% of basic food stuff in Africa (Fresco, 1998). The role women play in agriculture and the rural society is fundamental to agricultural and rural development in sub-Saharan Africa. The technical centre for agriculture and rural co-operation (CTA, 1993) reported that women in Africa make up more than one-third of the workforce. Studies have also shown that rural women are usually disadvantaged in their access to all factors of production and processing in spite of their involvement in farming generally (Ani, 2004). Yet as more men migrate to urban areas from rural areas, more women are left as household heads carrying on with the agricultural

activities that provide basic needs for their families. It is documented that over 80% of all rural women in sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria are economically active in one agricultural activity or the other (Onyenechere, 2008). The agricultural activities of women go beyond crop production to other agricultural aspects like fisheries, rabbitry, poultry and as well as sheep and goat rearing (Ironkwe and Ekwe, 1998). Despite the dominant and important role women play in agricultural activities in the country, they are hardly given any attention in the area of training and/or visitation by extension agents with improved technologies. Banks hardly grant them loans and they are hardly reached with improved seeds, fertilizer and other inputs (Damisa, Samndi and Yohanna, 2007) citing (Saito and Surling, 1993). These conditions have placed the women in a vicious cycle of poverty that places them at a less advantageous vantage of income and resource empowerment. There is also urgent need to put in place systematic and comprehensive strategies to empower women in rural areas to maximize their potential which has a tendency of combating extreme poverty and hunger, and help them facilitate sustainable development in their communities (Enete, Nweke and Tollens, 2004).

According to Lawanson (2008) Nigerian women have worked side by side with men in agriculture with some marked division of labour between them. The man performed the tedious tasks of felling trees, gathering and burning of bush and making ridge while women were involved in planting of seeds particularly food crops, harvesting, transportation, processing and selling of farm products. Sharon (2008) viewed that both women and men play critical roles in agriculture throughout the world, producing, processing and providing the food we eat. Fabiyi, Danladi, Akande, and Mahmood (2007) quoting Folsade (1991) on the role of women in food production. Said "that the lack of separate land for women and inadequate contact with extension agents are serious constraints faced by women farmers". Women very rarely own land in Nigeria, despite their involvement in agriculture. Because women generally do not own land or other assets it has traditionally been difficult for women to obtain bank loans or other forms of credit through the banking system. Land tenure system is largely by inheritance. This lack of title to land prevents women from exercising or improving their expertise in crop production and animal husbandry because of security of tenure. Majority of them use low yielding and unimproved planting materials, primitive and labour intensive farm implements, and traditional farming practices which adversely affect agricultural production.

### 1.1. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to determine the role of women in agricultural activities in Abua-Odual Local Government Area (L.G.A) of Rivers State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are;

1. To determine the extent of role played by women in agricultural activities in Abua Odual L.G.A of Rivers State.
2. To identify the socio-economic characteristics of women in Abua-Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.
3. Identify the constraint militating against women in agricultural activities in Abua-Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

### 2.0. Literature Review

Thelma, Alamgiri and Manik (2004) reported that women should be empowered through equal access as men in training and extension programs in such areas as seed management and other improved methods of rice cultivation. Chayal, Dhaka and Suwalka (2010) said that policy intervention could enhance women activities in actual farm work to as high as 70%. Also land holding, age and family

income greatly influence women activities in agriculture.

Kishor et al (1999) reported that women farmers are heavily involved in agriculture in Nigeria but the level of their participation in farm management decision making are quite low attributable to their age, education, land tenancy and the wealth status. Smith-Sreen and Smith Sreen (1991) reported that there is need for training women in animal health care, nutrition and book keeping in order to improve their dairy management efficiency.

Saito and Spurling (1993) reported that women do not have adequate access to agricultural information and innovations. Kolapo (1991) and Folashade (1991) emphasized that lack of separate land for women and inadequate contact with extension agents are serious constraints faced by women farmers.

Ipingbemi and Aloba (2005) observed that women perform close to 90% of works associated with processing of food crops; 80% of hoeing and weeding; 80% of efforts relating to food storage and transportation from farm to village as well as 60% of the harvesting and marketing work.

Women work in agriculture as farmers on their own account as unpaid workers on family farms and as paid or unpaid labourers on other farms and agricultural enterprises (Ahmed and Maitra, 2010). Women are involved in both crops and livestock production at subsistence and commercial levels. They produce food and cash crops and manage mixed agricultural operations, involving crops, livestock and fish farming and are considered as part of the agricultural labour-force (FAO, 2011). Also FAO (2011) found that women comprise an average of 43% of the agricultural labour force of developing countries. The female share of the agricultural labour force ranges from about 20% in Latin America to almost 50% in Eastern and South eastern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. According to Fabiyi et al (2007) women farmers have contributed immensely to food production, processing and preservation of food.

One of the rationales for improving women participation in agriculture is that when a woman is educated, her children tend to be better fed and healthier. As a woman earns income, she is more likely than the man to spend it on improving the well-being of the family. This scenario can build women self esteem and lead to a more participatory role in both public and family decision making (FAO, 2011). Mijindadi (1993) estimated that women are responsible for 70% of actual farm work and constitute up to 60% of the farming population.

### 3.0. Methodology

The study area was Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. Abua/Odual Local Government Area is among the 23 LGAs of Rivers State. Abua land area is 704km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 282, 988 at the 2006 census. The council was created from the former Ahoada Local Government Area of Rivers State. The Local Government Area is located within the Rivers West Senatorial District and has both riverine and upland communities. Its people are of Abua and Odual tribes and speak Abua and Odual Dialects which are among the minor dialects of people in Rivers State. The LGA is bounded in the north by the Ekpeyes of Ahoada East and Ahoada West Local Government Areas, west by Bayelsa State, east by the Ikwerre (Emohua Local Government Area) and south by the Kalabari's (Degema Local Government Area). It is located geographically between latitudes 4.5<sup>oN</sup> and 6.5<sup>oN</sup> degrees North of the equator and longitudes 6.0<sup>oE</sup> and 7.0<sup>oE</sup> degrees. Abua has a tropical rain forest. The people are mostly farmers and fishermen. It has 44 communities.

Simple random sampling technique was used to select 5 communities namely Emoh, Odaga, Otari, Omelema and Ogbema and 150 women farmers were selected 30 from each community. Interview schedule was used to collect data on socio-economic characteristics, agricultural activities, farm production and farming constraints. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics involving frequency, percentage and mean.

### 4.0. Results and Discussion.

**Table 1: Distribution of women farmers according to agricultural activities**

n = 150

Variables/ activities	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Land clearing	90	60.0
Planting	102	68.0
Harvesting	135	90.0
Weeding	111	74.0
Processing	141	94.0
Marketing	129	86.0
Storage	114	76
Transportation of products	120	80

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 1 shows that 94% of the respondents were involved in processing of agricultural products, 90% were involved in harvesting of produce and 86% in marketing of farm produce. Majority of the women

farmers were engaged in most post harvest agricultural activities. This is in line with the findings of Lawanson (2008) and Mybada (2000) that women were fully involved in all farming operations farming including planting, thinning, weeding, fertilizer application, harvesting, storing, marketing and processing of farm products.

Table 2 shows that the responsibility for getting food for the families lies on the women (Onwubike, 1990). They were heavily involved in food crop production. In the area of study, 80% of the respondents planted pineapple, about 60% planted orange and plantain respectively, 40% planted palm fruit and pepper, 50% planted cassava and groundnut, 34% planted vegetables. This indicated that women tend to produce crops for family consumption as well as crops that generate income within their locality so as to enable them take care of themselves, their children and entire family. The activities of these women go beyond crop production, as about 36% of the women were involved in rearing goats, 30% were involved in fishing, while 20% were involved in poultry keeping. This is in line with the position of Ironkwe and Ekwe 1998 that the agricultural activities of women go beyond crop production and span into other agricultural production areas like fishing, rabbitry, poultry and as well as sheep and goat rearing. Few women were involved in poultry production because it is tedious and capital intensive and also there is need for some level of education. Most of the women farmers in Abua/Odual LGA depended on farming as the only source of income and livelihood.

**Table 2: Distribution of respondent according to farm productions**

n=150

Crops	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Pineapple	120	80.0
Orange	90	60.0
Plantain	90	60.0
Palm fruit	60	40.0
Cassava	75	50.0
Groundnut	75	50.0
Pepper	60	40.0
Vegetables	51	34.0
Livestock		
Goat	54	36.0
Fishing	45	30.0
Poultry	30	20.0

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 3 shows the socio-economic characteristics of women farmers which reveal that about 50% of them fall between the age range of 41-

60years. It also revealed that majority of the respondents were in their active years. The table also showed that about 60% of the respondents were married while most of them (40%) had Primary Education. About 80% of women said they do not have access to land, they depended on rented, leased or borrowed land for farming, because women do not own land in Abua/Odual LGA. About 70% of the women farmers reported that they lacked extension services. This is in line with Saito and Spurling (1993) that women do not have adequate access to agricultural information and innovations.

**Table 3: Socio-Economic Characteristic of women farmers in Abua/Odual LGA.**  
n = 150

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>		
Below 20 years	24	16
21 – 40	30	20
41 – 60	75	50
Above 60	21	14
<b>Educational Status</b>		
Illiterates	45	30
Primary Education	60	40
Secondary Education	30	20
Tertiary	15	10
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	30	20
Married	90	60
Widow	15	10
Divorced	15	10
<b>Land Tenure Rights</b>		
Own personal farm	30	20
Don't own any personal farm	120	80
<b>Contact with extension agent</b>		
Regularly	30	20
Occasionally	105	70
Never	15	10
<b>Secondary occupation</b>		
Trading in non agric product	30	20
Marketing of crops/fish	75	50
Others	45	30

*Source: Field Survey, 2013*

From table 4 it was observed that the most serious constraint which faced the women farmers in Abua/Odual LGA was finance with 30%. Looking at the socio-economic status of the women, majority of them were house wives without a steady income. Also there was lack of government support.

**Table 4: Constraint Faced by Women in Agricultural Production in Abua/Odual**

S/N	Types of Constraints Faced	No. of Respondent	Percentage (%)
1.	Financial constraints	45	30.0
2.	Lack of Gov. Support	6	4.0
3.	Lack of farm input	15	10.0
4.	Unfavourable weather conditions and diseases	15	10.0
5.	Inaccessibility to modern production technology	21	14.0
6.	Use of crude implements and poor farming methods	18	12.0
7.	Poor Transportation network	15	10.0
8.	Poor and weak farmers groups and co-operative unions	15	10.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2013*

### 5.0. Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, 60% of the women are engaged in agriculture. Women undertake most farming activities including land preparation, planting, weeding and crop tending, harvesting and sale of harvested farm produce. They also sourced for high yielding seedlings. The women are fully involved in agriculture despite the fact that they are wives and mothers. There is need to encourage women farmers by providing them access to loans, either by establishing women centred co-operative societies that would aid easy access to loan by these low-income and resource poor women. Land tenure system should be reviewed. Also credit facilities and farm inputs such as fertilizers and improved seeds should be made available to them. Government should try and establish agro-processing industries including fruit juice, cassava and palm fruit mills as a way of empowering the women in Abua/Odual LGA. Insecticides and Pesticides should be made available to reduce pest and disease attack. Also government

should try through the Abua/Odual Local Government Areas to promote aqua farms, livestock and poultry farming. Extension agents should be sent to the rural areas to educate the women on latest modern farming techniques. Also machineries should be introduced to alleviate the suffering of the women and to promote mechanized agriculture. Basic amenities like good road should be provided in the communities in the LGA for easy transportation of agricultural products.

#### Correspondence to:

Emeya Salome  
Department of Agricultural Science,  
Faculty of Vocational and Technical Education  
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Ndele  
Campus,  
P.M.B 5047, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers  
State, Nigeria  
Tel.: +2348036723436.  
Email – [salo\\_gee@yahoo.com](mailto:salo_gee@yahoo.com)

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