

Gender Disparities in Nigeria's Agricultural Sector

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Abstract

Women constitute an essential part of human resource in the agricultural sector and contribute significantly to the sustenance of agriculture in Nigeria. In spite of their immense contribution, women have continued to face formidable barriers in access to agricultural resources. Using data from published articles, reviews and agricultural reports, this paper examined the gender gaps in Nigeria's agricultural sector. Evidence indicating gender disparities in access to and control over agricultural resources are quite overwhelming. When compared with their male counterpart, women face great disparities in the agricultural sector. In particular, women experience disparities in access to land and formal credit facilities. The findings suggest that the Nigerian agricultural sector should be gender sensitive in policies by creating opportunities for women to take part in the agricultural sector and conveniently make genuine inputs in the decision making process. A very important factor in this regard is ensuring improved access of women to agricultural resources. Unhindered access to agricultural resources is essential for effective women's participation in agriculture and rural development. This will further empower women and enhance agricultural development. Women empowerment is of great importance because equality and non-discrimination are indispensable for agricultural development.

Keywords: Gender Disparities, Agriculture, Development, Developing countries and Nigeria

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Background of Study

The prospect of development in most African countries is hinged on the agricultural sector and agriculture remains a major source of employment and a driving force of the gross domestic product and wealth creation programs in most African countries (World Bank 2012a, World Bank 2007). Available evidence indicates that Agriculture remains the leading source of employment in Nigeria. Basically, it creates employment for not less than 70 per cent of the population (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] 2007) and contributes 37.2 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) 2006).

Humans remain a vital tool in the sustenance and development of agricultural resources. In Africa, women constitute an essential part of human resource in the Agricultural sector (DraforAmenyah & Puplampu 2013). Estimates from Nigeria reveal that 54 million of the Nigeria's 78 million women reside in the rural areas and depend on Agriculture for their income (British Council 2012). They engage in the production of food and cash crops. They labour on their own plot and those of others, they labour both as paid or unpaid labourers, employers and employees and as wage-labourers in both off-farm and in-farm enterprises. Hence, the agricultural activity of these women is essential in meeting the challenges of agricultural production and development (Nnadozie & Ibe 1996; Rahman, 2008).

However the immense contributions of these women to agriculture is persistently been confronted with a lot of obstacles. Women continue to face formidable barriers in agriculture, particularly discrimination in access to and rights over vital agricultural resources and inputs; land, labour, fertilizer and formal finance (Doss, 2001). There are also barriers against women's membership in rural organizations and cooperatives, agricultural inputs and technology such as improved seedling, training and extension and marketing services (FAO 2008). Also they are subjected to harsh conditions, live through cultural and policy biases that have little or no recognition for their efforts in agriculture (Jazairy, Alamgir, & Panuccio 1992).

Literatures have documented that most of these constraints women face in agriculture are gender based. Gender is a social construct that distinguish between roles of men and women. It is social and distinct from the physiological constructs of male and female. Gender roles emanate from the socio-political and socio-cultural structures of a given society and thus have far reaching influence in resource allocation and delegation of responsibilities between men and women (Moser, 1989). Gender equality and empowerment is crucial to improving the role of agriculture in development (World Bank, 2011). Cognizant of this, the International Fund for Agriculture and Development (IFAD, 2012) focus her policy programmes on gender equality and emphasised that agricultural development programmes would become more efficient and sustainable if there are opportunities for women and men to take part in the agricultural sector and conveniently make genuine inputs in the decision making process. Bridging the gender gap in Agriculture is crucial to improving the role of women in Agricultural development (FAO, 2011). Therefore, the objective of this paper is to attempt to investigate the gender disparities in the Nigerian Agricultural sector. Basically, the paper examined the gender barriers in access to land and formal finance.

Research Questions

- i). Is there a gender barrier in access to land in Nigeria's Agricultural Sector?
- ii). Is gender a barrier to accessing formal finance by women farmers in Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

Gender equality implies that women have the same opportunities in life just as the men including the ability to effectively participate in public sphere. This argument sufficiently captures the liberal feminist approach on gender issues which states that eradication of gender based barriers enables women to achieve equal status with men. The idea behind liberal feminism is to free women from oppressive gender roles; roles that are used to substantiate the inferior placement or no placement at all in different sectors of the economy (Tong, 2009).

Liberal feminism has its root in the work of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Harriet Taylor Mill (1807 -1858). The Liberal feminist holds that gender differences have no foundation in the biological component of both sex, hence there is no difference between men and women because they are equally human and that is more important than their procreative differentiation (Lorber, 2000). In his exposition, Wollstonecraft (1797) argued that most of the assumed differences between men and women were either constructed or exaggerated hence it should not be used as the basis for assigning rights and roles thus the state should treat men and women equally. Women should not be treated inferior; they should have the same right as men and should not be discriminated against in any field of endeavour. Mill (1869) was later to buttress the argument of Wollstonecraft, when he observed that sex roles could be likened to a caste system of stratification that assigns lower status to women and impose several restrictions on them mainly because of their sex even in the absence of a significant difference between the sexes that supports such discrimination.

Gender based discrimination impacts negatively on the moral development of women and prevents them from deriving self-fulfilment that accompanies freedom in pursuing set goals. The liberal feminist therefore stressed that providing equal opportunities for women demands that policies and legislation must focus on measures to increase women participation in the public sphere (Reeves & Baden 2000).

However, the liberal feminist focus of achieving equality for women through legal means and social reforms alone is deficient especially within the context of a patriarchal society. This therefore suggests the need to bring in the radical feminist approach to augment the theories upon which this research is built. Radical Feminism has its root in the work of Kate Millet (1970). The central argument of the theory is that gender disparity in access to resources is a consequence of the patriarchal gender relation as opposed to legal system (stated in liberal feminism). The theory denotes that the society is a patriarchy in which the class of women are oppressed by the class of men. Patriarchy engenders a situation where women are seen as inferior to men and this accounts for the systematic oppression and marginalisation of women in the society. By and large, depriving women access to resources is a deliberate strategy to perpetuate dependence on men. Hence radical Feminist argues that men use the social system and other control mechanism to suppress the women (Millet, 1970). Patriarchal relationship is characterised by dominance of one group against the other. Therefore in order to put an end to gender based inequalities in access to resources, the radical feminist suggests that there must be a radical restructuring of the society that will eliminate male supremacy in all social and economic sphere.

Methodology

The method that was used to undertake the research is as follows. The central research question was broken down into a series of keywords. The keywords were ‘gender’, ‘disparities’, ‘agriculture’, ‘development’, ‘developing countries’ and ‘Nigeria’. Afterwards, the keywords were combined using Boolean search logic and used to mine the main electronic databases (Google Scholar & EBSCO Host) for relevant articles. The abstracts of the papers were scrutinised to determine relevance for the paper. Following the initial exploration, snowballing techniques were used to identify other relevant sources.

Results and Discussion

Gender Inequalities in access to Land

Land is indisputable an essential factor of agricultural production yet the distribution of land by gender in Africa (including Nigeria) is lopsided and highly skewed in favour of the men (World Bank, 2011; FAO, 2011; Doss, 2005). Men’s landholding is not only more than those of women (Doss, 2005); they are also more fertile than those of women (Barnes, 1983; Jackson, 1985). The African Union (2009b) stated that though the effort of women in agricultural production and preservation of land resources is immense, the problem of access to land resources has persisted. Women farmers constitute a significant proportion of the rural poor populations in most developing countries hence to attain optimal performance; strategies aimed at agricultural development must focus on these populations. Kongolo (2012) stressed the importance of land to the survival of rural women and noted that providing access to land for women is crucial to the eradication of poverty and food insecurity.

Socio-cultural norms determine access to land in Nigeria. These norms are rooted in customs that are constructs of social differentiation and inequality (Amanor, 2012). The Nigeria Land Use Act of 1978 nationalised all land and vested the authority of custody in the state Governor. However, land administration varies from place to place in Nigeria and is often governed by a combination of traditional Islamic Sharia and local customs (Mabogunje, 2010). The patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society discriminates against women ownership of land. In most Nigerian communities women are prohibited by culture from inheriting land (Ololade & Olagunju, 2013). Ezumah and Domenco (1995) stressed that women in Nigeria do not have direct access to land; their desire to own a land can only be achieved through their male relatives thereby perpetuating the hegemony of men. Aluko and Amidu (2006) buttressed that women’s right of access to land is regarded as secondary to those of men. In such situation access to land can be gained only through marriage (Soetan, 2002; Pallas, 2010; Milmo, 1991). However such right is easily lost when she is widowed or divorced.

The foregoing suggests an acute gender asymmetry in access to land in Nigeria. British Council (2012) reported that men in Nigeria are five times more likely than women to own a land. Data generated by the Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire (CWIQ, 2006) on distribution of land ownership by gender also shows that only 7.2% of women own the land they farm (See table 1). Although there are regional differences in access to land by women; women in the South are more likely to own and access land than women in the North, the general estimate reveals that gender disparities in access to land is overwhelming.

Table I: Distribution of land ownership by gender in Nigeria

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		
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: CWIQ (2006)

Problems of access to land by women are compounded by the land tenure system which has an adverse effect on agricultural production and intensifies poverty and exclusion for women (Ravazi, 2007). Generally, statutory and customary land tenure system is unfavourable to women and this weakens their right to property, land, and other resources (Agarwal, 2011). However, even where there are laws that grants women rights to own property, ignorance of such laws and poor implementation impact on women's ability to bring to bear such rights (Quisumbing & Pandolfelli, 2010).

Gender Inequalities in access to credit facilities

Agricultural literatures are overwhelmed with the benefits of ensuring equity and guaranteed access to credit facilities for women. The availability and accessibility of credit facilities, insurance and other financial services are crucial to improve agricultural productivity. Farmers who cannot immediately afford the cost of a desired product or agricultural service can conveniently depend on a functional credit scheme. When there is no access to credit facilities farmers will find it difficult to shoulder the economic burden associated with agricultural innovations and investments that could improve their farm output and wellbeing (FAO, 2011). Over the years, Non Governmental Organisations (NGO) and donor agencies have demonstrated significant support to women in agriculture through the provision of credits using either the minimalist approach (mainly

the provision of credit) or the credit surplus approach (provision of credit in addition to training and technical assistance) (Berger, 1989). Credit could be administered either in cash or in kind. In kind credit is provided in the form of skill transfer, provision of equipment, provision of factor(s) of production or the provision of livestock (Terfera, 2007; Berger, 1989).

Evidence abounds of acute gender disparities in access to credit facilities. Credits are disbursed under the prevailing societal modes of distribution (Manig, 1990). A major problem here is that access to credit is influenced by ownership of a fixed asset like land. However, because of the gender issues in access to land tenure women are disadvantaged in this regard, given that they find it difficult to provide land titles as collateral for formal credits (World Bank 2011). A gender comparison of utilization of credit would reveal that women do not access credit as much as men do and even when they access credit, they do not have control over the credits granted to them (Abedi, Allahyari & Khodamoradi, 2011). The World Bank, FAO & IFAD (2009) reported that women in sub-Saharan Africa receive only 1 percent of the total agriculture credits and less than 10 percent of all loans provided for small scale farmers. Saito, Mekonnen and Spurling (1994) observed that while 14 percent of male farmer in Nigeria obtained formal credit only 5 percent of females were able to obtain formal credit. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2009) added that in comparison with women, men in Nigeria are twice as likely to secure finance. NBS (2009) further stressed that while 20,098 men gained access to loan in 2007 only 8550 women benefitted from the loan (NBS, 2009). Inability to provide collateral, exorbitant cost of transaction, low level of education, socio-cultural barriers, irregular employment and the type of business women engage in, impact on their ability to access credit (Quisumbing & Pandolfelli, 2010). Also the public and private lending institutions reinforce the already existing gender inequalities in access to credit either by completely shunning out the women or granting women smaller loans than that which was granted to their male counterpart for the same activity (Fletschner, 2009). By and large, inability to overcome credit constraints impact negatively not only on women themselves, but also on the family and communities (UN Women, 2012).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The immense contribution of women to agricultural development in Nigeria is undermined by gender inequalities. Women's access to resources is hindered by several gender related barriers. There are acute gender disparities in access to land and formal finance in Nigeria and such disparities limit the ability of the sector to optimally contribute to the development of the economy.

Unequal access to the means of production limits women's capacity to contribute efficiently to national development. Land ownership among women in Nigeria is abysmally low and this impacts negatively on agricultural productivity. By extension, gender inequality in the distribution of land limits their access to formal finance especially when land is demanded as collateral. The cumulative effect of these barriers impacts not only on the women farmers but also the entire agricultural sector.

Therefore, in order to enhance the agricultural productivity of women, agricultural policies must be designed to address the constraints women face. The ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development should adopt a gender balanced approach in her agricultural policies and programmes that will focus on eradicating socio-cultural and legislative barriers which impact on women's access to land and formal finance. The government should partner with the entire community (men and women) and educate the men on the overwhelming benefits of gender

equality in agriculture because this would also help to eradicate the socio-cultural barriers in agricultural production.

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