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Gender roles in agricultural production in the middle belt region of Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The study was carried out in Ankpa Local Government Area, Kogi State, Nigeria in 2008. The primary data used for the study were collected from 120 farmers who were randomly selected. The data were on farming activities in which the farmers participated and crops and livestock enterprises grown by the farmers. The data were analysed with the use of descriptive statistics. Results show that men dominated in agricultural production activities and growing of food and cash crops. The degree of gender involvement in agricultural production activities was 58.3% for male and 41.7% for female while the degree of gender involvement in food and cash crop production was 61.1% for male and 38.9% for female. Female dominated livestock production with degree of gender involvement of 100%. Recommendations made to improve agricultural production in the area include designing and production of light farm implements for women to use and training of more women extension workers who can work freely with women farmers.

Key words: Gender, Roles, Agricultural production, Middle belt region, Nigeria.

Introduction.

Gender is used to describe roles, activities, needs and problems of men and women in agricultural production processes (Buckland and Haleegoah, 1996). Gender relations determine household security, well being of the family, planning of agricultural production and many other aspects of rural life (Frishmuth, 1997). It is important to understand gender contribution to agricultural production. This understanding will ensure efficient allocation of scarce resources among competing enterprises in the households (Onyemauwa, et al, 2008). Rural development policies directed at the households may not have the desired effects unless the roles and position of gender in rural households are explicitly taken into account (Odii, 1996). Men and women perform different roles in agricultural production. They also take different decisions regarding ownership of farm inputs and enterprises. These roles vary from place to pace depending on the tribe, culture, religion and geographical location. There is a strong argument with respect to the degree of contributions of men and women to farm production practices and ownership of farm enterprises. Most time, the roles of women are highlighted because it used to be known that farming activities were done by men while women were known with domestic chores and care of children. As a result of this position, most development policies and innovation packages were directed at men. Gone were the good old days when women were seen as full-time housewives. The current dwindling national revenue and its economic consequences has put pressure on the male to the extent that women are no longer permitted to sit at home and adopt the wait-to-be fed attitude (Ogbasuka and Salahu, 2005). As a result, women have been prominent in small farms and non-farm enterprises in rural communities as they provide the resource base for undertaking family responsibilities by means of small-scale production of food for household consumption and home maintenance. Gender and regional specialization exist in agricultural production in Nigeria. In northern Nigeria, men dominated field crop production and animal rearing while the women do the processing and storage because of the *pudah* system which confines married women to the family enclosure in the day time (Audu and Onojah,2005). Middle belt

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women are generally involved in all agricultural production operations such as land clearing, tilling, harvesting and marketing of produce. In the south west, women were more in agricultural produce marketing because of the thick forest which make farming operations such land clearing and cultivation very tedious.In the south east, women perform almost of the farm operations including transportation of farm produce with bicycle.The study was carried out to shed light on the degree of involvement of men and women in agricultural production in the area. The specific objectives of the study are to:

i) describe gender contributions to major farming activities in the area;
ii) describe the cultivation of major food and cash crops based on gender and
iii) describe the rearing of major livestock enterprises in the area based on gender.

Materials and Method

The study was carried out in Ankpa Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria in 2008. Primary data were used for the study. The data were collected from 120 farmers who were randomly selected. The survey instrument was a structured questionnaire. The data collected were on farming activities in which men and women participated. These farming activities were land clearing, land preparation (tilling), planting, weeding, fertilizer application, spraying of herbicides and pesticides. Others were harvesting, processing, storage, transportation and marketing, Data were also collected on cultivation of food and cash crops and livestock enterprises. The food and cash crops on which data were collected were yam, cassava, cocoyam, rice, maize, guinea corn, millet, cowpea, soyabean, ground nut, bambara groundnut and pigeon pea. Others were beniseed, pepper, okro, pawpaw, banana and plantain and leady vegetables (spinach and fluted pumpkin). The livestock enterprises were poultry, sheep and goats. Data collected were on ownership of these enterprises by the respondents. The farmers were asked if they owned any of the crop and livestock enterprises.

Descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency distribution and percentages were used to analyse the data.

Results and Discussion

Table I shows the distribution of the respondents based on gender participation in major farming activities. Out of 12 farming activities studied, 7 representing 58. 3% were dominantly done by male while 5 of the activities representing 41.7% were dominantly done by female. Farming activities in which men dominated were land clearing (70.8%), land preparation or tilling (83.3%), planting (58.3%), fertilizer application (57.5%), spraying of herbicides (78.8%, spraying of pesticides (75.0%), transportation of farm produce (79.2%). Farming activities in which women dominated were weeding (54.2%), harvesting (57.5%) processing (66.7%), storage(58.3%) and marketing of farm produce(74.2%).Men did most of land clearing and preparation because these operations require a lot of energy which is possessed by male. Planting is mostly done by men because they find it easier since the planting is done with the feet in case of seeds. Men wear trouser and so they find it easier to move on the ridges and plant with their feet. Men dominated in fertilizer, herbicide and pesticide application because they are richer and had more access to information on the use of these inputs. This translated to larger farms and higher income for the men. Most of the farm produce were transported by men with the use of motor vehicles, motorcycles and bicycles. These vehicles are operated mostly by men in the area. A few women drive cars and motorcycles in the area. Women don't ride bicycle in the area. The women that transported farm produce did it on their heads.

Women dominated in farming activities such as weeding and harvesting because these activities require less energy and light implements. For instance, small hoes are usually used for weeding, women dominated in the processing and storage because these activities are related. Processing is carried out in order to transform the produce to more acceptable and storable forms. Small Scale agro-processing is a technology that is particularly suitable for women (Akinola et al, 2007), because it builds on indigenous knowledge, requires few inputs and can be carried out in the home thus enabling women to fully participate while maintaining their various other roles as home makers (chambers and Jethro petit, 2001). Women dominated in the marketing of farm produce in the area because there are more women in the food market as a result of those who come to buy farm produce for their domestic uses. Woman-to-woman interactions result in better transaction and as such most men often consign their farm produce to their wives to sell.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the respondents based on cultivation and ownership of food and cash crop enterprises. Out of the 18 food and cash crop enterprises studied, men dominated in the cultivation and ownership of 11 of them while women dominated in 7 enterprises. Men dominated in the cultivation and ownership of yam (85.5%), cassava (52.5%), rice (91.7%) maize (59.2%, guinea corn (67.5%), millet (62.5%), cowpea (66.7%), soyabean (54.2%), groundnut (55.0%) and bambara groundnut (65.0%) while women dominated in the cultivation and ownership of cocoyam (66.7%), beniseed (65.8%), pepper (83.3%), okro

(84.2), pawpaw (66.7%) banana / plantain (58.3) and leafy vegetables (75.0%). Men dominated in the cultivation of yam and cassava because they are basic food for every home. No home is food-secured without sufficient yam and cassava. Men also dominated in the cultivation of the cereals and the leguminous crops because they are used principally as food for the households as well as sources of income. Since men are the household heads, they are expected to grow more of these crops so that they can have surplus from which they can have money to take care of the financial needs of their families. Women dominated in the cultivation of cocoyam because it is a backyard crop that is grown near the compound mostly for its fresh leaves which are used as vegetable. Women also dominated in the production of beniseed, pepper, okro, spinach and fluted pumpkin because they use them as condiments and vegetables. Women are responsible for soup ingredients in the area. They women extend the area of cultivation of these crops so as to have surplus from which they can make money. Pawpaw and banana /plantain are mostly owned by women because these crops are grown around the compounds. The fertilizer needs of these crops are taken care of with compound wastes.These crops are not grown in large plantations in the area.

Table 3 shows the distribution of the respondents based on the types of animals reared. Women dominated in the rearing of animals representing 100%. Women were dominant in the rearing of poultry (82.5%), sheep (68.3%) and goats (70.8). These animals are reared on free range with or without accommodation in the night. Women provide accommodation for these animals especially fowls in their kitchen- huts which are separate buildings situated beside their own buildings in the compound.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents based on gender participations in major farming activities.

Farming activities	male		female	dominant gender	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage	
1. Land clearing	85	70.8	35	29.2	male
2. Land preparation (tilling)	100	83.3	20	16.7	male
3. Planting	70	58.3	50	41.7	Male
4. Weeding	55	45.8	65	54.2	female
5. Fertilizer application	69	57.5	51	42.5	male
6. Spraying of herbicide	91	78.8	29	24.2	male
7. Spraying of pesticides	90	75.0	30	25.0	male
8. Harvesting	51	42.5	69	57.5	female
9. Processing	40	33.3	80	66.7	female
10 Storage	50	41.7	70	58.3	female
11 Transportation	95	79.2	25	20.8	male
12. Marketing	31	25.8	89	74.2	female
Degree of gender involvement		58.3		41.7	

Source:Field survey, 2008.

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents based on ownership of major food and cash crop enterprises.

Types of crops	male		female	dominant gender	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage	
1. Yam	105	85.5	15	14.5	male
2. Cassava	63	52.5	59	47.5	male
3. Cocoyam	40	33.3	80	66.7	female
4. Rice	110	91.7	10	8.3	male
5. Maize	71	59.2	49	40.8	male
6. Guinea corn	81	67.5	39	32.	5male
7. Millet	75	62.2	45	37.5	male
8. Cowpea	80	66.7	40	33.3	male
9. Soyabean	65	54.2	55	45.8	male
10. Groundnut	66	55.0	54	45.0	male
11. Bambara groundnut	78	65.0	42	35.0	male
12. Pigeon pea	86	71.7	34	28.3	male
13. Beniseed	41	34.2	79	65.8	female
14. Pepper	20	16.7	80	83.3	female
15. Okro	19	15.8	101	84.2	female
16. Pawpaw	40	33.3	80	66.7	female
17. Banana /Plantain	50	41.7	70	58.3	female
18. Leafy Vegetable (Spinach and fluted pumpkin)	30	25.0	90	75.0	female
Degree of gender involvement		61.1		38.9	

Source: Field Survey, 2008.

Table 3: Distribution of the respondents based on ownership of livestock enterprises.

Types of animal	male		female	dominant gender	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage	
Poultry	21	17.5	99	82.5	female
Sheep	38	31.7	82	68.3	female
Goats	35	29.2	85	70.8	female
Degree of gender Involvement		00.00		100.00	

Source: Field Survey, 2008.

Conclusion

Men and women have important roles to play in agricultural production. Women trailed behind men in their participations in farming activities and production of food and cash crops. However, women dominated in the production of fruits, vegetables and livestock. There is a need to encourage women to grow more food and cash crops as a way of increasing the food security of farm households and the nation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are necessary y to boost agricultural production in the area.

Light implements that women can use to carry out hard tasks like land clearing and cultivation should be designed and constructed so that more women can participate in such farm activities.

More women should be encouraged to grow food and cash crops so that they can play prominent roles in food and financial requirements of their families.

Men should be encouraged to diversify their agricultural production by rearing animals so that their income can be augmented by revenue from the animals.

Female extension agents should be trained in large number and posted to the rural areas so that they can work freely with the female farmers.

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