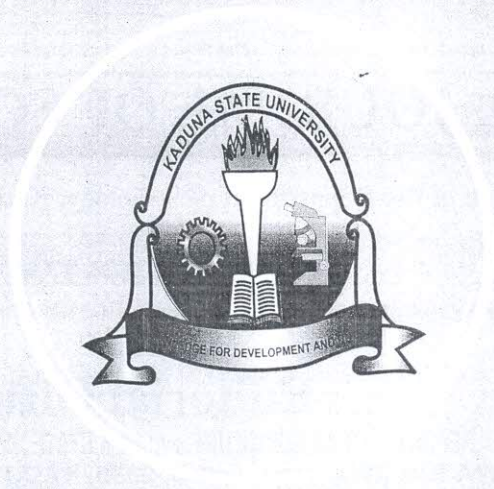


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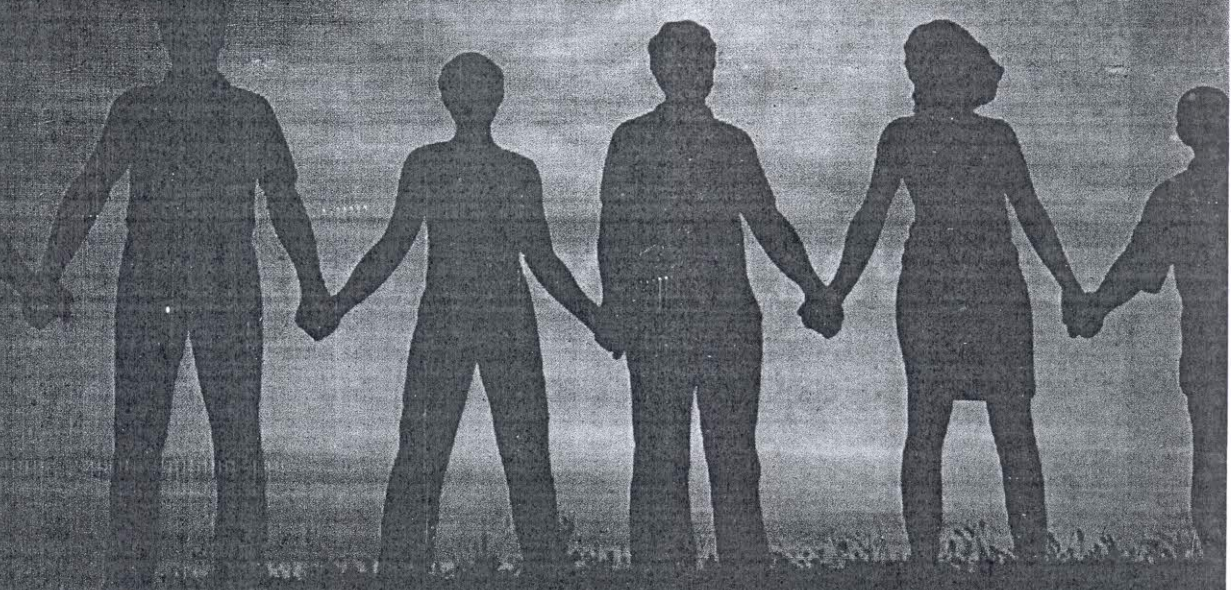
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# Empirical Analysis of Gender Inequality in Agriculture and Rural Development in Nigeria: The Case Study of Women in Kachia Local Government Area of Kaduna State

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## Abstract

Majority of farmers in Nigeria operate at the subsistence, small level in an extensive agricultural system. They play a tremendous role in food security and agricultural development of the country. Particularly striking, however, is the fact that, rural women, more than their male counterparts, take the lead in agricultural activities, making up to 60-80% of labour force. Therefore, in this study empirical analysis of gender inequality in Agriculture and rural development was carried out in Kachia local government of Kaduna State, Nigeria. One hundred and forty (140) male and female headed farmers were selected and used for the study. Questionnaire, personal interviews and field observation were used to gather information's. The data were analyzed using the descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency tables and computer-based analysis of coded data. The study findings revealed that, the contributions of women to agriculture and rural development are hardly noticed. Furthermore, they have virtually little contributions in decision-making process regarding agricultural development. Gender inequality is therefore glaring in the agricultural sector and this constitutes a great challenge to sustainable growth and development. This paper calls for a review of some government policies on agriculture to all the agents that place rural women farmers at a disadvantage. The Better Life For Rural Women (BLW), Family, Women-In-Agriculture (WIA), the New Agricultural Policy, Agricultural Policy Support Facility (APSF), the Commonwealth Women In Development (WID) and Gender-And-Development (GAD) as well as the ultimate UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) programmed in Nigeria, which were established in realization of the inadequacy of extension services for women farmer should be encouraged to perform more effectively. Many obstacles still exist and would have to be tackled to further improve on their role. Rural women farmers deserve to be commended and greatly appreciated of their tremendous contributions to agriculture, rural development and food security.

**Key Words:** Agriculture; Food security; Gender inequality; Women farmers; Rural development

## Introduction

The Nigerian agricultural sector remains the mainstay of the economy by providing the needed pivot through which a sustainable development is guaranteed. It is the main source of food and

raw material for the populace and the agro-allied industries respectively (World Bank, 1998; Okudawa, 1997). Being largely an agrarian system, the Nigerian manufacturing industrial activities of the urban centers are sustained by the agricultural activities of the rural areas.

Pertinent to the Nigerian agricultural system is gender disparity. With emphasis on rural women, the socio-economic and gender characteristics play a vital role in rural development and sustainability. The contributions of rural women in particular, to agriculture cannot be over-emphasized. Rural women constitute about 70% of the agricultural workers, 80% of food and cash crop producers; and 40% of those who process basic foodstuff, and they also cover over 75% of the rural marketing; Thus, constituting more than two-third of the work force in agricultural production (F.A.O., 1985). This may not be unconnected with the fact that Nigerian women constitute 48% of the population (NBS, 2007) and with a life expectancy of 52 years against 48 years for men (NBS, 2011). Studies suggest that rural women do more farm work than men--- they work 14 hours a day (9 hours in agriculture and 5 in other tasks) compared to a little over 8 hours per day for men. Also, the 2009 NBS/CBN survey revealed that more rural men (52.9%) were unemployed compared to the 47.1% of rural women (NBS, 2011:2) indicating that more women are employed in rural areas than men, thus making them the beacons of support for family, livelihood and national welfare.

The incidence of female-headed and female dominated rural households is conspicuous. Typically, female-headed households are among the poorest, with the lowest level of food security (Damisa et-al, 2007). Women who lose their husbands face both economic and social problems. They carry out farm operations, which are normally done by husbands (weeding, clearing virgin lands, planting, harvesting, etc). Such women feed, educate and maintain children often without assistance from relations and friends (Damisa et-al, 2007). This places rural women as principal actors in pre-and-post-harvest food processes as processors, preservers, preparers and distributors.

Despite the stance of rural women to the economy and the higher chances of agricultural and rural sustainability through rural women, poverty looms and hovers around them. For instance, 65% of female populations in Nigeria are living below the poverty line (NBS 2001:7). And since poverty is generally a rural phenomenon, rural women are at the receiving side. Worse still, the impacting role of rural women in the agricultural sustainability and rural development is not notice and appreciated as well as inadequately supported.

Attempts to improve the situation of rural women in the past focused on agricultural activities by providing credit facilities, farming machines and extension services programme such as Women-In-Agriculture(WIA) in 1990 and Women Farmers' Advancement Network(WOFAN), which focused on extension services by disseminating agricultural innovations and providing women farmers with better access to farm inputs and credit (Ogunlela, et-al 2009:5); Better life for Rural Women (BLW) in 1987 and the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in 1993 which were planned to play critical role in improving the socio-economic status of rural women in Nigeria. In recognition of the failure of the past government efforts, some non-governmental organizations stepped up efforts also to improve the quality of life among the rural women. The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which are the world's time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions – income, poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter. To achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, many countries need to quickly improve their economic growth, education and health systems, their management of environmental resources, and their infrastructure for water, sanitation, telecommunication and transportation – all these in place will improve the quality of life of the people (The World Bank, 2007). However, the benefits of these programmed are still lacking in their inability to improve the rural women socio-economic life. The missing link, however, has been the absence of effective social services for mobilizing and stimulating them into action as well as infrastructure with a view to improving their quality of life. The non-agricultural or non-farm activities, i.e social services and infrastructure, serve as a morale booster and whose impacting depth and breadth could turn around both the agricultural and non-agricultural aspects of the rural women's life for greater rural development and agricultural sustainability.

### **Literature Review**

Generally, the term agriculture includes field and homestead crops and livestock. Rural development means sustained improvement in the well-being of rural people. Low productivity, environmental degradation, low capitalization, unsustainable population growth, inadequate infrastructure, communal conflicts, health pandemic and poor economic policies are some of the factors responsible for underdevelopment of rural areas (World Bank, 2001). In addition to the above factors, rural development is constrained by neglect of the rural non-farm sector, urban

bias in public and private investments, unfavorable geographical (spatial dispersion settlement), social and financial institutions (Ali, 1997). These often increase the cost and difficulty of providing rural goods and services, resulting to fewer opportunities than in rural areas. Therefore, rural non-farm sectors necessarily play complementary roles in the process of rural development.

Rural development is a multi-dimensional, encompassing improved provision of services, enhanced opportunities for income generation and local economic development, improved physical infrastructure, social cohesion and physical security within rural communities, active representation in local political processes, and effective provision for the vulnerable. Thus, rural development is broader than poverty reduction through social programs and transfers. The concept places emphasis on facilitating change in rural environments to enable poor people to earn more, invest in themselves and their communities, contribute toward maintenance of the infrastructure as well as to identify opportunities and to act accordingly; therefore, rural sustainability implies better life for the engines of growth --- women.

Gender can be defined as a set of characteristics, roles and behavior patterns that distinguishes women from men. In other words, *gender* describes the socially determined attributes of men and women, including male and female roles. These features are constructed not biologically but socially and culturally which are products of nurturing, conditioning, and socio-cultural norms and expectations. Hence, gender is relative to time, place and people. Gender has proven to be an essential variable for analyzing the roles, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities and incentives in agriculture. Development projects and programmes have indicated severally that the improvement of women's access to agricultural packages and extension services must recognize sex dimensions in agriculture and household.(Ogunlela et-al, 2009).

Women are at the heart of development as they control most of the non monetary economy (subsistence, agriculture, bearing children, domestic labour etc.) and play an important role in the monetary economy (trading, wage labour, employment, etc (Uwakwe, .M.O 2004). Everywhere in the world, women work both around the home and outside the home. The most topical issue in international developmental programme is women. The woman as a person is an agent of reproduction of life itself. This places her in the position of the life blood of the entire humanity. She is the first teacher, the sustained and maintainer of the home, the peace maker,

the symbol of beauty and major molder of the character of the child. She is a mother of the human race. As mothers and wives, women do exert considerable impact on the productivity of male workers. As workers in their own rights, they can conveniently be linked to the rejected stone in the Bible which has become the cornerstone of the house. By their sheer psychological, physiological and intellectual make up, they do perform more than mere complimentary roles in the production process (Ukinze, et-al 2010).

Most of these contributions by women had not been recognized until recently when the United Nations declared the Decade for Women (1976-1985) making it mandatory on governments to focus on issue of women as an integral component of national development. In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Consequently, subsequent conferences on women were held in Copenhagen, Denmark 1980, Nairobi in Kenya 1985 and Beijing in China 1995. However, an international news magazine 'Africa Today' reported in July 1995 that the full implementation of all the strategies and recommendations of the various conferences on women issues had still not been achieved and enthusiasm was waning. According to the magazine, the UN itself reported that only six out of the 184 ambassadors to UN are women and only four out of the 32 UN specialized agencies and programmes are headed by women.

Coming home in Nigeria, the 1995 constitutional conference in Nigeria had only eight women out of a total of 369 delegates. Much of women's work remains invisible, unremunerated and unrecognized. But women are now challenging the status quo. Mechanisms to right the so called "Cultures wrong" are being put in place. Women's voices are now being heard clamoring for an improvement in their socio-economic status and for the recognition of their immense contributions to national development (Ali, 1998).

The Nigerian rural women have played significant roles in agricultural sustainability and rural development. WOFAN (2003) confirms this and suggested that rural women's role be identified, appreciated and maintained via adequate rural development policies. Comparing agricultural roles, Anete and Amusa (2010) observed that women are responsible for food crop production activities, while men, with dominance in farm management decisions, are more involved in cash crop (cocoa) production. Men's dominance in farm decision-making and management may not be unconnected with the gender characteristics of women (Damisa and Yohanna, 2007); Anete and Amusa 2010 and Uwakwe, 2004). As a result, education of the rural



women as well as the harmonization of their role will encourage greater outputs. After observing that the competency of south-eastern Nigeria WIA in processing cocoyam into flour and chips is marginal, Ukinze and Olaitan (2010) also confirmed education as a sine qua non for improving the rural women worth agriculturally.

### **The Issue of Gender in National Development**

Development means different things to different people. Ogunlela et-al (2009) identify them to be economic, growth, modernization distributive justice, socio-economic transformation and spatial reorganization. Some people however stressed material prosperity as the ultimate objectives of development efforts. For example, Ogunlela et-al (2009) went further to describe development as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced within a social system to produce higher per capital incomes and levels of living through more production, methods and improved social organizations. In their belief development should mean "a widely participatory process of social changes in society intended to bring about social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities) for the majority of people through gaining control over their environment". Women predominate among the poor in the world today and they are more in the rural areas. Their annual incomes throughout the world have declined so sharply in recent years that they had fallen below poverty line. Rural women are getting poorer and further marginalized both in the utilization of available resources and access to development resources. Although, male chauvinists may be right in saying that women are affected by poverty, it is clear to the most simplistic analyst that women are far more disadvantaged and more vulnerable.

In terms of sectional allocation, agriculture appears to be the occupation of 70.3% of Nigeria rural women. It is known that agriculture has the largest chunk of the poor for women, the poverty is compounded by the fact that only 8% of women hold title to the land they work on. The data enumerated so far are mere tips of the ice berg and seem to suggest that women are grossly disadvantaged. This therefore raises the issue of women participation in development process. If development is about people and there are evidences that a group of those people are disadvantaged, it has implications about their level and degree of participation.(Ogunlela et-al, 2009).

## **Women and Development in Nigeria**

Some people have identified some areas of development where women are active in Nigeria. Ogunlela et-al, (2009) identified the eight cardinal elements of sustainable development as they affect women, e.g. education, health, culture politics, economy, agriculture, enhanced environment, quality and peaceful co-existence. Nigerian women take active part in agriculture. In a study of women's participation in agricultural production in Northern Nigeria's rural area, they found that women were active participants in the process. According to them, about 90% of the women interviewed had farming as their main occupation (both arable and pastoral) including those in purdah. The general patrilineal system of inheritance enabled most women in Northern Nigeria to have access to land through their husbands who acquire it through inheritance. Women in this part of the country who had farms of their own had half the sizes of the men's farm. They planted the same type of crops like the men but they (women) were hardly physically involved in land preparation and molding but they were involved in fertilizer application, punting, thinning, weeding and harvesting. In some parts of Nigeria e.g. the south eastern state however, women are involved in land preparation and moulding. They have full control in their contribution to agricultural development. Though, there are traces of division of labour based on sex, the functions of women could not possibly be dispensed with if maximum production is to be attained

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted in Kachia Local Government Area of Kaduna State. It is located in the southern Senatorial District of the State. Created in 1976 with a landmass of 16,016 sq km, it is the largest, after Birnin Gwari in Kaduna State. The 2006 census revealed that Kachia's population stands at 244,274 with 124,655 males and 119,619 females (NBS, 2007). Kachia LGA is the hub of Nigeria's ginger production. Ecologically, it falls within the savannah rain forest zone. Majority of the women farmers cultivate many types of crops such as ginger, maize, rice, guinea corn, fruits, vegetables and onions and some tree crops. Out of the twelve councils/wards, seven were chosen for the study, in view of their population density and agricultural activities.

The sampling Method involved a multistage process. From each of the seven wards, 20 women farmers were randomly selected ( $n=140$ ). Primary data were collected using a well structured questionnaire survey, personal interviews and direct field observations. Data generated from the assessment survey were collated, screened and coded for computer-based analysis. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency tables were used for analysis and interpretations.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **a. Socio-economic and Demographic Characteristics of Rural Women in Kachia, Kaduna State**

The socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the rural women are presented in Table 1. A relative study of the data indicates that 89.3% of the rural women were within 16 and 45 years, while 6.4% are from 46 years and above, signifying a relatively small proportion of the rural women available for farming.

Similarly, 77.9% of the respondents were married, while 15% were single. This implies that family life in the locality is rampant and could be attributed to early marriage. Also the 50% female-head household against the 41.4% for male confirms the fact that women are the pillars

**Table 1: Distribution of Rural Women by Socio-economic and Demographic Characteristics**

| Variable                                | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| <b>Age</b>                              |           |            |
| 16-30                                   | 57        | 40.7       |
| 31-45                                   | 68        | 48.6       |
| 46 and above                            | 9         | 6.4        |
| No Response                             | 6         | 4.3        |
| Total                                   | 140       | 100        |
| <b>Marital Status</b>                   |           |            |
| Single                                  | 21        | 15         |
| Married                                 | 109       | 77.9       |
| No Response                             | 10        | 7.1        |
| Total                                   | 140       | 100        |
| <b>Household head</b>                   |           |            |
| Male Head                               | 58        | 41.4       |
| Female Head                             | 70        | 50         |
| No Response                             | 12        | 8.6        |
| Total                                   | 140       | 100        |
| <b>Household size</b>                   |           |            |
| <2                                      | 3         | 2.1        |
| 3 to 4                                  | 63        | 45         |
| 5 and above                             | 62        | 44.3       |
| No Response                             | 12        | 8.6        |
| Total                                   | 140       | 100        |
| <b>Years of agricultural experience</b> |           |            |
| <10                                     | 29        | 20.7       |
| 11 to 20                                | 42        | 30         |
| 21 and above                            | 59        | 42.1       |
| No Response                             | 40        | 28.6       |
| Total                                   | 140       | 100        |
| <b>Level of education</b>               |           |            |
| No Education                            | 29        | 20.7       |
| Primary                                 | 18        | 12.9       |
| Secondary                               | 15        | 10.7       |
| Special Education and Others            | 38        | 27.1       |
| OND/NCE                                 | 12        | 8.6        |
| HND                                     | 8         | 5.7        |
| University Degree                       | 7         | 5          |
| No Response                             | 13        | 9.2        |
| Total                                   | 140       | 100        |
| <b>Local Government wards</b>           |           |            |
| Gumel(Mafon Fadia)                      | 20        | 14.3       |
| Kachia-Urban(Ung. Patauchi)             | 16        | 11.4       |
| Sabon Sarki(Fai)                        | 15        | 10.7       |
| Ankwa(Ankwa)                            | 17        | 12.1       |
| Awon(Ariko)                             | 20        | 14.3       |
| Bishini(Doka)                           | 19        | 13.6       |
| Kateri(Jere)                            | 18        | 12.9       |
| Agunu(Wake)                             | 14        | 10         |
| No Response                             | 1         | 0.7        |
| Total                                   | 140       | 100        |

*Source: Field Survey, September 2012*

of rural sustainability and welfare as well as their life longevity of women over men. The large chunk of 89.3% for the three and above family size probably necessitated the rural women working hard to sustain their households. The educational levels of the respondents indicate that, a very low proportion had tertiary education, and that 20.7% were not educated. The fact that 27.1% of the rural women in this study were beneficiaries of special education such as extension programmes. This further shows that the packages through agricultural policies had some positive impacts. Most respondents also have had many years of practical experience on farming. For example, 42.1% had 21 years and above farming experience, while 30% had 11 to 20 years of farming experience. The 20.7% of less than 10 years farming experience shows the role of another segment of rural women, i.e the rural girls, who constitute the researchers envisaged 15% singled marital status.

#### **b. Effectiveness and Efficiency of Agricultural Policies and Packages**

The fact that all the indices are non-zero or non-negative, rural welfare has been improved over the years. However, the percentages still indicate a wide margin. Gender equality, for instance, the male dominance is still confirmed here. This may not be unconnected to the socio-cultural factors where even in female-head household, a male from the extended family, has influence. Electricity indicated a terrible situation which makes the plight of the rural women worsen. Despite the presence of Gurara Dam in the locality, the agricultural packages are yet to utilize it.

**Table 2: The impact of agricultural policies as perceived by the rural women**

| Variable   | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Enhance Poverty Reduction                          | 35        | 25         |
| Guarantee Gender Equality                          | 20        | 14.3       |
| Create Employment Opportunities                    | 43        | 30.7       |
| Social Networking and Integration                  | 61        | 43.6       |
| Market Activities and Institutions                 | 16        | 11.4       |
| Provision of good Health facilities                | 34        | 24.3       |
| Farm Management and Decision-making of rural women | 39        | 27.9       |
| Influence of Education                             | 44        | 31.4       |
| Provision of Electricity and Energy                | 2         | 1.4        |
| Social Security and Safety Nets                    | 22        | 15.7       |

Source: Field Survey, September 2012

**Table 3: Extent of the participation of women in decision-making in agriculture in Kachia, Kaduna State, Nigeria**

| Decision-making area                            | Nil        | Only consulted | Opinion considered | Final decision |
|---|------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Land preparation                                | 140 (88.0) | 20 (10.5)      | 3 (1.5)            | 0 (0.0)        |
| Time of sowing                                  | 121 (78.0) | 31 (17.0)      | 6 (40.0)           | 2 (1.0)        |
| Manure/Fertilizer types and time of application | 127 (81.0) | 17 (9.5)       | 113 (7.5)          | 3 (2.0)        |
| Time of weeding                                 | 134 (94.5) | 8 (4.5)        | 2 (1.0)            | 0 (0.0)        |
| Number of hired labourers and wages to be paid  | 100 (67.5) | 36 (19.5)      | 15 (18.5)          | 8 (4.5)        |
| Time of harvesting                              | 75 (55.5)  | 33 (18.5)      | 46 (14.5)          | 3 (1.5)        |
| Storage and marketing of farm produce           | 28 (11.5)  | 34 (18.5)      | 90 (46.0)          | 46 (24.0)      |
| Purchase and sale of farming implements         | 125 (73.0) | 27 (14.5)      | 11 (6.5)           | 2 (1.0)        |
| Purchase and sale of farmlands                  | 123 (80.5) | 22 (11.5)      | 11 (5.5)           | 6 (2.5)        |
| Farm credit                                     | 82 (58.5)  | 55 (28.5)      | 23(13.0)           | 0 (0.0)        |

\* Figures in parenthesis are the percentages Source: Field survey September 2012

## **Nigerian Women in Agriculture and National Development**

The Nigerian woman has proved to be more than a mere "bench-warming" spectator, even in the midst of the male-dominated professional congregation. If given the opportunity, women can effectively participate in policy-making and governance. They can hold their own in very difficult and stressful circumstances and can do as well, if not better, than men. The steady advancement of women in contributing to the nation's economic development and their progressive prominence in the national scheme of affairs have, to a large extent, impacted on the Federal government and government has responded positively in diverse ways. On the basis of available evidence and statistics, the role of women in agricultural production in Nigeria cannot be trivialized. They perform crucial roles in the domestic and economic life of the society. Rural and national development can hardly be achieved with the neglect of this important and substantial segment of the society. In recognition of the importance of women in national building, the Nigerian government, more than ever before, is keen on rural poverty alleviation as a way of improving the economy. Focus is on planned and desirable change in the rural societies in the form of agricultural development. The success of these planned change programmes is hinged largely on the rational decision making process of the women.

A lot of literature has shown that the various contributions of women to agricultural production in Nigeria. The role of women in decision-making process in agriculture has however not been widely explored. Evidence from Kachia in Kaduna State of Nigeria shows that, women participation in decision making was quite minimal (Table 3). In each of the farm operations, less than 20% of the women were consulted, except in the sourcing of farm credit, where about 28% were consulted; about 13% or less of the women had their opinion considered in each of the farm operations. However, only between 1.0 and 2.5% took the final decision in all of the farm operations. Women's participation in farm management decision-making process is said to increase with age, older women participating more in decision-making in the different areas of agriculture than their younger age group counterparts. The high level of knowledge and experience about improved farm practices acquired by the educated women farmer had positive influence in that regard. Wealth status of women is also another major determinant of the role of the women in farm management decision-making; richer women being more involved than their poorer counterparts. Women in Kachia, Kaduna State of Nigeria contribute more than the men in terms of labour input in farming and are solely responsible for household management duties. A

survey of peasant agricultural women in the study area also revealed that rural women take part in income-generating activities, particularly in the processing of agricultural produce.

### Constraints of the Rural Women

The constraints commonly cited by the rural women as limiting their being noticed, appreciated and adequately supported are Unemployment, Financial and Credit Facilities, Market/Exchange structure(prices, cost, taxes), Environmental and soil, Limited Access to Productive Resources(land Tenure), Inadequate Orientation and Extension Services as well as Socio-cultural and discriminatory practices. The 6.4% rate of unemployment indicates that unemployment among rural women is far from common. Finance and credit facilities, market as well as socio-economic practices with 92.1%, 96.4% and 92.1% respectively, shows that inadequacy of capital rules, while market ---- the only factor to complement credit---- worsen the situation. According to the respondents, market days are always unfavourable. Fluctuations of product prices, high cost of transport, non-accessibility of markets, taxes, and manipulative and strategic games of middlemen demoralizes them.

**Table 4: Distribution of Rural Women by Their Constraints**

| Constraints   | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Unemployment  | 9         | 6.4        |
| Financial and Credit Facilities                     | 129       | 92.1       |
| Market/Exchange(prices, cost, taxes)                | 135       | 96.4       |
| Environmental and soil                              | 75        | 53.6       |
| Limited Access to Productive Resources(land Tenure) | 94        | 67.1       |
| Inadequate Orientation and Extension Services       | 84        | 60.0       |
| Socio-cultural and discriminatory practices         | 129       | 92.1       |

Source: Field Survey, September 2013

### Conclusion and Policy Options

The contribution made by rural women to agricultural production and rural development in Nigeria is grossly underappreciated in spite of the dominant role women play in the sector. That women compete more favorably with their men folks in terms of their over-participation in



agricultural activities and contribution to household economy and food security would be an understatement. The survival and sustenance of agriculture and rural development in Nigeria, as well as in many sub-Saharan Africa countries, rest squarely on the rural women. They therefore deserve to be given due recognition as far as decision-making process in agriculture is concerned.

Nigeria's urban economy is service-based, while the rural is production-based. The rural activities are basically subsistence in nature. Poverty remains, predominantly, a rural (village) phenomenon. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the agricultural policies and packages targeted to rural women had a fairly positive impact on agricultural development and rural sustainability. Since rural development means sustained improvement in the sustenance of rural people, the challenge of sustainable development will involve transition from rural poverty. Thus, an improvement in distribution of production resources and income through relaxation of socio-cultural norms as well as increased investment in human capital of the poor via provision of social services (guidance/counseling, legal, etc) and infrastructure (hospitals, roads, credit, technology, market structure, etc). This must take into account gender issues. An inclusive gender policy to capture the rural women is necessary since they are the center-stage of poverty yet the hub of agricultural development and rural sustainability.

There should be improvement in women's access to basic economic resources such as land (as owners), labour-saving machines, food processing machines, and agricultural innovations. Rural women's productive role in agriculture continues to be underestimated in many countries as unpaid workers are frequently excluded from national statistics and/or farm women are considered housewives in agricultural statistics. Such underestimation must be addressed in order to clearly demonstrate the importance of rural women-in-agricultural production. Creating feedback channels between all parties in the development equation would bring about the necessary equalization to the full participation of African female farmers in the economic benefits of African agriculture. Empowering African women for participation in agricultural decision-making and leadership in Africa represents the most appropriate and effective way forward. Support systems for women farmers within a holistic gender-sensitive framework are urgently needed to form a policy development, project design and implementation

agenda. Women must be directly involved with the development and implementation of the new technology.

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