

## **GENDER REPRESENTATION IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION WORKFORCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**The purpose of this study was to assess the gender representation in agricultural extension workforce in Delta State, Nigeria and consider its implication for agricultural advisory service. The employment status of Village Extension Agents (VEAs) on gender basis was sourced from the Delta State Agricultural Development Programme (DTADP) office. A sample population (n = 285) of female farmers was selected randomly from the three agricultural zones of the state. Data were collected using structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The study revealed that the male VEAs' contact with female farmers was inadequate; the spouses of the women farmers had negative disposition to their contact with male VEAs. Male VEAs out-numbered the female VEAs. The implication is that the situation created a dearth of information for the women farmers and therefore a hindrance to increased productivity on the part of the women. It was recommended that more female VEAs should be employed; female VEAs to accompany male VEAs on home and farm visits and scholarship be granted to girls to study extension education in order to encourage girls to take up career in agricultural extension delivery service.**

**Key words:** Gender, Agricultural extension, Agricultural Advisory Service

### **INTRODUCTION**

The issue of gender cannot be omitted from the discussion of agriculture in Nigeria, Africa and also over the World (Adisa and Okunade 2005). According to Prakash (2003) there are more male than female's extension agents in Asia. This may also be the case in Nigeria and Delta state in particular.

Agricultural extension serves both male and female clientele. There are some cultural and religious issues that limit the interaction between male and other women farmers. This applies to the interaction or contact between male extension agents and women farmers. For example, in the northern part of Nigeria, moslem women in Pudah are found mainly processing activities of agriculture although some of them have personal farms (Adisa and Okunade 2005). This means that these women can only be reached by females. Again even in the non Moslem areas the culture in most parts of Nigeria only allows open and limited interaction of wives with people of the opposite sex. This has implications for food security as women are more involved in food production than men. Food security means having sufficient food all year round (Meludu *et al.* 1999). It is a concept that has been defined by World bank (1997) as when all

people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Food security is viewed by FAO (1997) not only in terms of access to and availability of food, but also in terms of resources distribution to produce food and purchasing power to buy food where it is not produced.

According to Meludu *et al.* (1999) three million people in Africa currently face food insecurity and their challenges to meet their food and nutrition needs is likely to become greater years ahead. They further postulated that population growth, urbanization and limited potential for increasing production through the expansion of cultivated area imply that for food needs to be met in the future, yields must have to increase.

Elukpo (1991) pointed out that over fifty percent of the rural populations in Nigeria are women, who are both producers and consumers. With the vividly oil revenue and its attendant structural adjustment policy instability in prices of food items and growing family size, the situation no longer permits women to sit at home without having an income generating activity to engage in case studies in African countries showed that women's role in agricultural and domestic duties continue to be

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disproportionately high (FAO 1985). Africa has been described as the region of female farming per excellence, with income, particularly in the rural areas regarded as the hidden productive force in the countryside. According to Prakash (2003) women grow about half of the worlds food, but own hardly any land, have difficulty in attaining credit and are overlooked by agricultural advisors and projects. In Africa and Nigeria in particular three quarters of the agricultural work is done by women, especially in the area of food crops production. In the words of Prakash (2003) in Sub-Sahara Africa and Caribbean, women produce up to 80% of basic food stuffs.

Extension functions to get the farmers into a frame of mind and attitude to acceptance of technological change, dissemination of the results of research to the farmers and to carry the farmer's problems back to the research organization; and to help farmers gain managerial skill to operate in a commercial economy (Williams *et al.* 1984). These perceived roles of women demand that they are reached with new agricultural information through appropriate extension teaching methods for effective communication to take place (Adisa and Okundade 2005). For such a contact to be effective, some socio-cultural issues need to be considered. Hence, this study takes timely action in assessing the gender representation in agricultural extension advisory services. The study gave an overview of the male and female population of village extension workers (VEWs) or field extension agents. It also ascertained the disposition of the female farmers spouse to their interaction with male extension agents. The implications of the findings were discussed. Finally, some recommendations were made for the promotion of favourable conditions that would enable women to effectively benefit from agricultural extension services.

## METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study was conducted in Delta State. Delta State has three (3) agro-ecological zones - Delta north, Delta central and Delta south agricultural zones with Agbor, Effurun and Warri as zonal headquarters respectively of the Delta State Agricultural Development Programme (DTADP) respectively. The DTADP is the agricultural extension agency arters respectively of the Delta State Agricultural of the Delta state government. About 80 percent of the population of Delta are engaged in agriculture with women constituting 60 percent of farmers in Delta state. Delta state is covered by swamp water, fresh water and rain forest and experiences reliable rainfall.

The sample population constituted of 285 female farmers, randomly drawn from the zones Ninety-five (95) females farmers on the basis of 19 per sub zone were selected from the lists in each of

**Table 1: Selection of Respondents per zone/sub zone**

Zone	Sub - zone	Sub - zone	Per sub zone
Delta north	5	Kwale	19
		Akwukwu-igbo	19
		Owa-oyibu	19
		Ogwashi-uku	19
		Obiaruku	19
Delta central	5	Ekuru	19
		Ughelli	19
		Otu-jeremi	19
		Oghara	19
		Orerokpe	19
Delta south	5	Patani	19
		Bomadi	19
		Ogbe-ijaw	19
		Burutu	19
		Koko	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>		<b>285</b>

the zones for equality of representation (Table 1). Data was therefore collected between April and June, 2006 by direct contact and this controlled the threat of non-response. The response rate was 100%.

Training was given to the interviewers on how to administer the instrument. The questionnaire was written in English and the interviewers were trained on how to translate it into Pidgin English which is the second *lingua franca* of the people of Delta state and then, record female farmer's responses in English. For the fact that the interviewers were highly competent in both English and pidgin English reduced any possible error of language to the barest minimum. Reliability and validity problems were addressed by a group of senior academic colleagues and pilot-testing of the instruments.

Data on employment status were accessed from the zonal offices of the DTADP. Analysis of collected data was done using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software version 11.5 for windows. Descriptive statistics was applied to summarize the data. Four-point Likert's scale with midpoint of 2.5 was also utilized.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Employment status

Table 2 shows that majority (70%) of the village extension workers in Delta State were males; while female VEAs represented 30% of the total VEAs.

This indicates a wide gap between the number of male and female VEAs.

As a result of the difficult terrain of the Delta South Zone, being a riverine area, much farming does not take place there, the farmers; apart from

**Table 2: Employment status by gender of Village Extension Agents**

Zones	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Total
Delta North	57	69.5	25	30.5	82
Delta Central Zone	54	70.0	23	30.0	77
Delta South	17	71.0	7	29.0	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>128 (70)</b>		<b>55 (30)</b>		<b>183</b>

Source: Zonal Offices of DTADP, 2005.

\* Figures in parenthesis are total percentages from the state.

the fisher folks are few. Hence the least number of VEAs compared to the Delta North and South Zones.

### Socio-economic characteristics of female farmers

Majority (34.0%) of the female farmers who were in the age bracket of 41 - 50 constituted 20%.

**Table 3: Socio-economic characteristics of female farmers**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age (years)</b>		
Under 20	2	0.70
20 - 30	53	18.5
31 - 35	31	10.8
36 - 40	45	16.0
41 - 50	96	34.0
Over 50	57	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Educational status</b>		
No formal education	3	1.0
Primary education	68	23.8
Secondary education	126	44.2
Tertiary education	88	31.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	273	95.8
Single	12	4.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Farming experience (year)</b>		
1 - 5	3	1.1
6 - 10	31	10.9
11 - 15	55	19.3
16 - 20	46	16.1
21 - 25	52	18.2
26 - 30	57	20.0
Above 30	41	14.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field survey, 2006

Those between the ages of 20 - 40 made up 45% of them (Table 3). This implies that most of them were matured. Most (99%) of the female farmers had one form of formal education or the other.

### Spouses' Disposition/Reaction to Contact with Male Village Extension Agents

Table 4 reveals that the husbands of the female farmers were not positively disposed to the contact between their wives and male extension agents. Their reactions to frequent visit by the male extension agents or by their wives to male extension agent were always negative. According to Ayichi (1999) noticeable advances in agricultural technologies have been made but most of these new practices have not been tried by the women farmers because of the ignorance of effective/appropriate communication channels best suited to them. It is the responsibility of the village extension workers to inform, advise and educate the farmers in a practical manner (Mgbada 2006). In the absence of this, much information is lost and the full impact of their services cannot be felt. This is one of the reasons for partial or non adoption of new practices. The result will be a lag between research and extension and women farmers will not be getting the full benefits of the research institutes. The reaction of men to frequent contact between their wives and male VEAs is negative. In the African culture, there is a limit to the association of males and females who are not couples, particularly when the female is somebody else's wife. Frequent association between a male and a married woman always breeds suspicion of infidelity or adultery in a typical rural setting in Africa.

The Nigerian societies especially among the tribes of Urhobo, Yoruba, Ukwuani, Bini and Igbo, communities have strong socio-economic and cultural values which tend to regulate the behavioural pattern and expectations of couples. Situations like this have led to break-up of marriage

**Table 4: Mean responses of female farmers on their spouses' disposition to male Village Extension Workers Contact**

Disposition reaction	Mean	Remark
Positive / cordial	0.73	Rejected
Negative / not cordial	2.87	Accepted
Indifferent	0.12	Rejected

Mid point = 2.5; if mean  $\geq$  2.50 accepted, if mean < 2.50 rejected.

and spouse abuse in many farm families. In Nigeria, incidence of spouse abuse involving wife beating by the husband has been reported (Okorodudu and Okobiah 2004). Factors like

these have some extension implications.

### Implication for Extension Service Delivery

According to Mgbada (2006) access to adequate information is very essential to increased agricultural productivity. The problem facing Nigeria today is not lack of techniques needed for increased agricultural productivity, but that of delivering them into productive use. Unfortunately, much of these new technologies have not reached the women farmers, most of who are still applying the traditional practices, which are in most cases incapable of high yields (Idachaba 1980).

Negative disposition of the spouses of the women farmers to frequent contact with the male VEAs has fuelled this problem mentioned above. In the presence of this unfriendly behaviour on the part of the spouses of the female farmers, there is no more adequate contact with VEAs and much information is lost and full impact of their services cannot be felt. More so when women form the bulk of the farmers we have today. According to FAO (1997), 80 - 90 percent of women lives and work in the rural areas, and 60 - 90 percent of them perform one form of agricultural duty or the other. There is therefore the need for agricultural advisory service to go back to the drawing board.

### CONCLUSION

The study revealed that of all the Village Extension Workers / Agents in Delta State, the male VEAs outnumber the female VEAs. Extension contact with majority of the female farmers was grossly inadequate for meaningful extension service delivery. The reason being that the spouses of the female farmers are negatively disposed to their wives (female farmers) contact with male extension workers.

In view of the above, it is recommended that;

More female extension workers should be employed. These ones will then work with the female farmers.

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