

GENDER AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA: EMERGING ISSUES

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**GENDER DIFFERENTIATION AND
LIVELIHOOD DIVERSITIES AMONG FARMING
COMMUNITIES IN SOUTH WESTERN NIGERIA:
COMPLEMENTARY ROLES OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

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Abstract

Agriculture, particularly staple food crops production, remains the dominant economic sector in the rural areas in South-Western Nigeria and for some time now has been characterized by low and declining productivity. Over the past few years, some funding initiatives by some Non-governmental Organisations have been specifically targeted at women farmers with a view to improving their overall farm activities, especially in the areas of productivity and income. Quite a number of variables are possible factors that may lead to differences in agricultural productivity between men and women in the farming communities in South-Western Nigeria. Such variables, according to documented research works, include availability of land – land quality and access to water sources – soil quality, topography, farm inputs like fertilizer and seeds, crop choice, labour, roads, and availability of resources and credit facilities to cultivate specific crops, inheritance of assets, particularly land, etc. Gender differences in agricultural productivity are further complicated with reference to some zones coupled with differences in farming systems, social as well as cultural institutions. This paper reviewed theoretical and empirical works on gender differentiation and livelihood diversities in agricultural productivity with particular reference to the determination of households livelihood categories, identification of the choice of some livelihoods and their characteristic features, and identification of the level of technology adoption on farms and level of productivity in relation to gender. The complementary roles and the positive influence of tertiary institutions around such farming communities were also examined. Recommendations in the different areas were given for future policy and practice as well as meaningful gender mainstreaming issues in Nigerian agricultural sector.

Key words: *Gender differentiation, livelihoods, diversity, farming systems, agricultural productivity, households, technology adoption*

**Theoretical and conceptual frameworks
of gender and gender differentiation**

Over the last few decades, the concept of gender and associated issues have crept into human development agenda and have been

widely embraced by local, national and international governmental and non-governmental agencies worldwide. It is **important to clearly understand the conceptual meanings of sex and gender** as the issues have become more mainstreamed

in all our daily interactions.

'Sex' refers to the biological characteristics distinguishing male and female. This definition emphasises male and female differences in chromosomes, anatomy, hormones, reproductive systems, and other physiological components. 'Gender' refers to those social, cultural, and psychological traits linked to males and females through particular social contexts. Sex makes us male or female; gender makes us masculine or feminine. Sex is an ascribed status because a person is born with it, but gender is an achieved status because it must be learned. Gender is about relationships and these relationships change over time, space and circumstances (http://www.pearsonhighered.com/assets/hip/us/hip_us_pearsonhighered/samplechapter/0132448300.pdf).

Gender relationships are different because cultures, religions, ethnicities and classes that men and women belong to are different (AAU, 2006). Gender refers to the attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female, and also represents a social construction of what it means to be of the male or female sex, including cultural, ethnic, economic, religious, and ideological influences.

There are wide variations in the gender roles regarding agricultural productivity and in all areas of farm livelihoods. In many African societies, where polygamous families are common, access to resources and decision making is divided between household members (Dey 1985). While African women play a large role in agricultural production, there is often a gendered division of labour that links women to the production of food crops and men to cash crops (Boserup 1970).

According to **Peterman, Behrman and Quisumbing** (2010), since the 1990s, policymakers and development practitioners have highlighted the critical importance of gender in the implementation, evaluation,

and effectiveness of programmes across a range of social and economic sectors. *Gender and Agriculture*, a recent sourcebook produced by the World Bank and collaborating partners (2009), warns that the "failure to recognize the roles, differences and inequities [between men and women] poses a serious threat to the effectiveness of the agricultural development agenda." Similarly, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) states that although female farmers are primary contributors to the world's food production and security, they are "frequently underestimated and overlooked in development strategies" (UN News Centre, 2010).

This recent and renewed interest in gender and agriculture has produced several new initiatives, calls for action, and commitments from the international development community since 2005 (see, for example, IFAD 2003; IFPRI, 2007; World Bank, 2007). In addition, guides, toolkits, and other resources on theory and practice of gender integration and promising programmatic approaches have been developed to streamline gender-specific agricultural development initiatives (Doss, 1999; Mehra and Rojas, 2009; Quisumbing and Pandolfelli, 2010; UN-HABITAT, 2006; World Bank, 2009).

Despite these advancements, there is a lack of consensus on actual magnitude and effects of gender differences in access to agricultural inputs. Where information is available, it is generally focused on access to land or based on dated and region-specific research. A body of rigorous and significant literature from the 1980s and 1990s has provided empirical evidence on gender differences in access to inputs but most have been limited by data availability (Quisumbing, 1994, 1996; Schultz, 2001; Kevane, 2004). In Latin and South America, where the monogamous family structure is dominant, there is a gender division of labour

in both industrialized crop production and peasant farming (Ashby, 1985).

In general, women's agricultural participation in family farming systems is much more important in the Andean countries and Central America than in the southern region of South America (Deere and Leon, 1987). The essence of women active participation in agriculture is to improve their sustainable livelihoods and reduce poverty among the various households that are involved in several activities in and out of the farm. Extensive literatures have noted the labour or skills deficits of women in agriculture, which are a factor in the small sizes of their farms and their lower levels of productivity. Imbalances in the intra-household division of labour which lead to women contributing high levels of unpaid labour to crop production, are also identified as being partly responsible for their higher levels of poverty.

Distinguishing between different types of 'capital assets' draws attention to the variety of resources, which are often used in combination that people rely on for making a living. As Scoones (1998) explained, '...identifying what livelihood resources (or combinations of 'capitals') are required for different livelihood strategy combinations is a key step in the process of analysis'. Livelihood strategies themselves must also be subject to analysis, and they often consist of combinations of activities which Scoones calls 'livelihood portfolios'. A portfolio may be highly specialised and concentrate on one or a few activities, or it may be quite diverse, therefore, unravelling the factors behind a strategy combination is important.

Development agencies and governments have not helped significantly in the bridging of gender differences and inequities in agricultural production through their various policies and actions either. A clear case is concerned with the contents and purposes of the Millennium Development Goals.

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aim to support human capital development and poverty reduction. However, even though gender inequality exacerbates poverty and vulnerability, gender is explicit in only two of the goals. MDG3 – to promote gender equality and empower women – includes targets on gender parity in education, the share of women in wage employments, and the proportion of seats held by women in national legislatures. MDG5 – to improve maternal health – focuses on maternal mortality and, since 2005, universal access to reproductive health. This explicit inclusion in just two MDGs is too narrow: gender dynamics cut across all the goals but have been relatively invisible in policy dialogues, sidelining other gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities, roles and responsibilities, and power relations (Jones et al., 2008).

Some studies, while not taking a gender perspective, have nevertheless provided insights into the integral linkages between land and labour relations and drawn attention to broad patterns in livelihood trajectories (Chimhowu and Woodhouse, 2006; Bebbington, 1999; Scoones, 1998). Economists have been concerned with women's lower productivity compared with that of men farming the same sized plots with the same crops. This has been attributed to the higher levels of tenure insecurities experienced by women (Morrison *et al.*, 2008), without fully accounting for their labour obligations, particularly the importance of household labour in agriculture (Mbilyi, 1997; Tsikata, 2003; Whitehead, 2002). Studies of cocoa growing areas in Ghana for example, have found that while women's participation in cocoa production varied, in general they were less securely established in cocoa farming, operated smaller farms and were less able to mobilise unpaid labour for their farms than men (Hill, 1963; Okali, 1983).

Livelihood diversities and variables of differences in agricultural productivity

Livelihoods are activities we involve in to earn a living on a regular basis. It is through these that we can have our economic survival guaranteed and sustained. In agriculture, it is diverse and of different forms. Scoones (1998), defines livelihood resources as the basic material and social, tangible, and intangible assets that people use for constructing their livelihoods which are conceptualised as different types of 'capital' to stress their role as a resource base '...from which different productive streams are derived and from which livelihoods are constructed' (Scoones 1998:7). Four types of capital are identified in the IDS framework (which does not pretend to be an exhaustive list):

- **Natural capital** – the natural resource stocks (soil, water, air, genetic resources, etc.) and environmental services (hydrological cycle, pollution sinks, etc.) from which resource flows and services useful for livelihoods are derived.
- **Economic or financial capital** – the capital base (cash, credit/debt, savings, and other economic assets, including basic infrastructure and production equipment and technologies) which are essential for the pursuit of any livelihood strategy.
- **Human capital** – the skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health and physical capability important for the successful pursuit of different livelihood strategies.
- **Social capital** – the social resources (networks, social claims, social relations, affiliations, associations) upon which people draw when pursuing different livelihood strategies requiring co-ordinated actions.

In a classic 1992 paper, 'Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21st Century', Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway proposed the following composite definition of a sustainable rural livelihood: *A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living; a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation, and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term.*

Women are often found in the poorer quality jobs in this sector and are often poorly paid, with longer hours of work, poor conditions of service and no social protection, while facing numerous health hazards (Razavi, 2007a). If tackling gender discrimination 'makes development and economic sense' as the World Bank suggests why is social protection so often gender-blind? Social protection may be high on the policy agenda in international development circles, but the way it plays out in practice at national and local levels is deeply political, with significant consequences for gender relations and gender related outcomes (Molyneux, 2007; Kabeer, 20008). While there is a robust body of evidence on the different ways in which women and men experience poverty and vulnerability (e.g. Chant, 2010), this is seldom reflected systematically in social protection strategies, policies or programmes (Holmes and Jones, 2010).

Quoting from DFID's core SL principles, Ashley and Carney (1999) explained that poverty-focused development activities should be **people-centred, responsive and participatory, multi-level, conducted in partnership, sustainable and dynamic**. SL approaches must be underpinned by a **commitment to**

poverty eradication. Although they can, in theory, be applied to work with any stakeholder group, an implicit principle for DFID is that activities should be designed to maximize livelihood benefits for the poor.

While there is general agreement that women and girls do the most housework and therefore experience the associated time deficits, Sen (2008) has argued that the burden of care is a function of poverty status, location (rural or urban) and the household's status in relation to land. For poorer women, care work is critical for sustaining consumption but, at the same time, it limits their choice of compatible income generation activities and their ability to participate in government programmes, social exchanges, rest, leisure, health care, and recuperation.

In South Western Nigeria, women are predominantly engaged in subsistence agriculture, processing and marketing of the finished farm products. Though the statistics are not reliable, evidences from literatures indicate a greater percentage of the number of women in processing, marketing and distribution than in the on-farm activities involving use of energy. This could be attributed to the nature of women as they combine other domestic chores with their livelihoods and opportunities. According to Mosse (1994), part of the problem is that such exercises (including training) tend to be organised in a way that does not suit the time requirements and other practical constraints of women. But another problem is that, by their very nature, public events tend to attract only certain types of 'public knowledge' that, by social definition, is generated by men and not by women.

Complementary roles of tertiary institutions in gender and agricultural productivity

In a changing development context of awareness, education, empowerment, poverty reduction, erratic climate change

etc, the links between women's overall empowerment and development, livelihoods and food security are vital but are constantly not adequately recognised. Tertiary institutions have a vital role to play in bridging this gap in the overall development process with special attention to areas of integration and communication between research institutes on one hand and the end users (farmers) on the other. Bureaucratic and hierarchical traditions contribute to the reluctance to change and special emphasis needs to be put on strategies of converting vertical top-down relationships into more horizontal ones particularly among the farmers themselves. This can be done by:

- A centralised database that facilitates coordinated care and service access for programme participants and provides links to complementary services (e.g. access to micro-credit and micro-entrepreneurial training for women); and
- Training staff in participatory approaches and allowing time for this complex process between the institutions/research institutes on one hand and the farmers on the other.
- Providing the training managers with improved skills in implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and in communication with other bureaucracies, with employees and with trainees and rural client groups;
- Creating an avenue to ensure that equal wages are for men and women, and ensuring that women have access to their own income. They should be well protected against all forms of domestic violence.
- Ensuring that the required skills, knowledge, ability to participate in labour, good health and physical capability important for the successful pursuit of different livelihood strategies, are continuously improved through research results.

- Giving appropriate social protections in areas of the social resources (networks, social claims, social relations, affiliations, associations) for the vulnerable groups.
- Providing viable alternatives for poor farmers to assist in pursuing different livelihood strategies with lesser shocks.

Conclusion

There is growing recognition that poverty is not only about income, but about social risks such as discrimination, unequal distribution of resources and power in households and limited citizenship (CPRC, 2008). Gender inequality cuts across economic and social risks, influencing how poverty and vulnerability are experienced.

Women are less likely to participate in the labour force than men and, despite new job opportunities in some countries, they are still represented disproportionately in low-skill, low-wage casual employment, receiving lower salaries than men for the same jobs. Employment and income for rural women tend to be seasonal, and women are often held back by traditional views of what is seen as 'acceptable' work for women and lack of satisfactory childcare. Labour studies have analysed women's predominance in the lower levels of formal and informal labour markets as a result of discriminatory employment practices and the extensive gender segregation and segmentation of labour markets (Mupedziswa and Gumbo, 2001; Hansen and Vaa, 2004; Tsikata, 2009).

It is therefore not surprising over the years that there are severe limitations on

gender issues concerning decisions and ultimate uses of the natural resource stocks (soil, water, air, genetic resources etc.) as well as economic or financial capital including basic infrastructure and productive equipment and technologies which are essential for the pursuit of any livelihood strategy. The sustainability is also affected by how intelligently the opportunities are maximised by the farmers and farming households.

It should be finally noted that gender roles are often designed for males and others designed for females and this dichotomy promotes a pattern of inter-sex competition, rejection, and emotional segregation in the society. This pattern is reinforced when we routinely refer to those of the *other* sex (gender) as the *opposite* sex. Men and women label each other as opposite to who they are, and then behave according to that label. The behaviour serves to separate rather than connect the genders. Tertiary institutions have a role to play in mobilising resources to bridge these and ensure social equity in all areas of human endeavours.

Recommendations

Creating the conducive learning and interactive environment within and beyond the walls of the various tertiary institutions in the country will guarantee a virile agricultural education needed for the overall development. The approaches should be characterised by readiness of tertiary institutions to:

- Recognise indigenous knowledge systems to inculcate participatory approaches and have a centralised database that facilitates coordinated

care and service access for programme participants and provide links to complementary services (e.g. access to micro-credit and micro-entrepreneurial training for women).

- Provide the students with improved skills in implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and in communication with other bureaucracies, with employees and with trainees and rural client groups. The Student Industrial Work Experience should be held within the institution's neighbourhood to facilitate these.
- Promote institution linkages, such as access to agricultural extension and rural financial services and in-service and continuous training for extensionists in the government parastatals.
- Link teaching and learning initiatives with rural communities; specific examples of these abound in some communities around the South Western Nigeria. At the Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun,

Ogun State, there is an ongoing plan to initiate training programme for the local farmers in the neighbouring communities on bee farming. At Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, several neighbouring communities are benefitting from the extension service delivery by the University.

- Work in conjunction with farmers groups and cooperatives and they should organise networking and regional workshops, conferences, seminars and learning from, and working with, NGOs. For the prospective farmers yearning for better education, sandwich training and linkages, distance learning, part-time courses etc. should be encouraged.
- Encourage interdisciplinary approaches so as to link the people more closely and to appreciate local values in the development of curricula in the agricultural disciplines.

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