

# Organizational Barriers Limiting Women's Participation in Women-In-Agriculture (Wia) Programme in Umuahia Agricultural Zone of Abia State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

Development literature is replete with evidence of high level of involvement of women in agricultural production and value addition activities in Nigeria. This paper highlights organizational barriers limiting women's participation in Women-in-Agriculture (WIA) program, one of the women's enabling agricultural program in Abia State, Nigeria. Multi-stage random sampling technique was adopted in selecting one hundred and twenty women farmers studied. Simple statistical tools (frequencies and percentages) were used in data analysis. The results show that agency-related and organizational problems accounted for over 80% of the constraints limiting participation in the program. They also differ significantly from client or farmer-related problems. Considering the huge financial investments in the agricultural sector, and the Federal Government's policy thrust on food security, the paper recommends involvement of all stakeholders who must contribute their quota towards sustainable food security in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Gender inequality, Food security, Gender mainstreaming, Farming systems, Extension services.

## Introduction

There is ample research evidence to buttress the argument of women's high level of participation and contribution to agricultural development not only in Nigeria, but in other parts of the world. Overholt *et al.*, (1984) described five patterns of women's involvement in crop production as follows:

- i. Separate crops system, where women undertake the responsibility for producing, processing and marketing subsistence crops, while women handle cash crops,
- ii. Separate fields system, where women and men produce same crops but on different fields,

- iii. Separate tasks system, where much of the work in the cropping cycle are assigned by gender, and while men prepare the ground, women do the planting, weeding and harvesting,
- iv. Shared task system, where men and women undertake same tasks on same crops, especially during labor bottlenecks like weeding and harvesting; and
- v. Women-managed farms with *de facto* situations, where men are away for a period of time and women managed the farm in their absence; and *de jure* situations, where farms are controlled by widowed, divorced, abandoned or never-married women.

However, gender inequality which adversely affects their overall performance and output has persistently manifested in a number of ways: high level of poverty (World Bank, 2001), vulnerability to external and uncontrollable hazards (IDB, 2000), low strength or energy level (Kaul, 1996), low educational attainment (Filmer, 1996), poor anthropometric variables (Kaul, 1996) marginalization by agricultural extension (FAO, 2006), high productive and reproductive work load (Commonwealth, 1992), and restricted access to productive resources (Saito and Spurling, 1992; Saito *et al*, 1994; Quisumbing, 1994; Gray and Kevan, 1996).

These indicators favor the men folk, thus justifying current government efforts to empower women and enhance their productivity. Noteworthy in this regard are such program as the Women-in-Agriculture (WIA), Better Life for Rural Women (BLP) and Family Support Programs (FSP), as well as the activities of Women Development Associations, Women-in-Development Associations, Women-in-Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) Programs. These were targeted at reducing marginalization of women and promoting gender equity and equality.

The current Commonwealth 'Gender Mainstreaming' policy applied to agriculture is a deliberate attempt to consider the different needs and circumstances of male and female farmers, and use same as criteria for fashioning out agricultural and rural development strategies for greater productivity (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003). Gender has been recognized as an essential variable for analyzing the roles, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities, incentives, costs and benefits in Agriculture (Jiggins *et al.*, 1997).

The WIA extension program was established by the Federal Agricultural Coordinating Unit (FACU) in all the Agricultural Development Programs (ADP) of the Federation, and was designed to make the agency (ADP) address gender-specific agricultural production and post-harvest technology issues. Specifically, WIA was designed to;

- Developed innovative gender-specific programs for women farmers in close collaboration with research institutions,
- Promote the development and use of appropriate agricultural technologies which reduce drudgery and meet the needs of women,

- Assist in linking women farmers to sources of credit,
- Support group/individual women activities aimed at increasing the animal protein resources of the country,
- Improve skills of women in food processing, utilization and marketing,
- Organize women into cooperatives to gain credit, information etc, and
- Encourage women farmers to keep livestock to improve their nutritional status (Nonyelu, 1995).

WIA has been able to transfer a number of agricultural technologies to farmers in Abia State. Although the program has recorded great achievements nationwide, women's low participation (Nnyelu, 1995) has been attributed to ignorance, low income, low level of education, lack of input and credit facilities and poor communication. However, the anticipated boost in food production or value addition to food in Nigeria still remains a mirage. This paper is an attempt to review the situation in the past ten years to identify the constraints limiting their women's participation in the program.

### **Historical Perspective**

Agriculture has been the major source of livelihood in Nigeria, primarily because the environment is favorable for agricultural practice. On the basis of climate, topography and vegetation the country is divided into five agricultural zones, namely, dry sub-humid, sub-humid, humid, very humid and swamp/flood. In most cases, farming is a household business, involving men, women and children, with tasks allocated according to gender and age.

The current farming systems research and development which uses the bottom-top approach is aimed at generating through upstream and downstream research, location-specific technologies that are more appropriate than the current practices for farmers. It also suggests improvements on policies and support services for farm production, and raises welfare of farm families in the five agro-ecological zones of the country.

Women engage in a multiplicity of farm activities some of which were hitherto exclusive preserve of men. The increased feminization of agriculture is as a result of men's rural-urban migration in search of paid employment leaving agriculture in the hands of women (FAO, 1998).

Women-in-Agriculture (WIA) project followed the realization that female farmers in Nigeria were marginalized in research and extension services delivery in Nigeria. This is in spite of the critical roles they play in agricultural production, processing and marketing; household commitments including childcare; and farm and home decision making etc. For instance,

gender analysis of loan disbursement by the Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative Bank in 1995 showed that female farmers were marginalized in Umuahia Zone, with females in Umuahia local government getting (32.6%), Ikwuano (4%) and Isiala Ngwa North and South (19.2%). Very often, the anticipated trickledown effect of such messages, transmitted from men to women, is hardly guaranteed.

## Methodology

The population comprised of all the women participating in WIA program in Umuahia agricultural zone of Abia State. Umuahia, one of the three agricultural zones in Abia State, Nigeria, was purposively selected because of its agricultural potentials. Umuahia agricultural zone covers five (5) Local Government Areas of Abia State, namely, Ikwuano, Isiala Ngwa North, Isiala Ngwa South, Umuahia North and Umuahia South. The presence of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, National Root Crops Research Institute, Umudike, and National Cereals Research Institute, Amakama, among others, in the zone has impacted positively on agricultural activities in the zone.

Multi-stage random sampling technique was adopted in selecting one hundred and twenty farmers to whom structured questionnaire was administered to ascertain their perception of influence of identified factors on their participation in WIA programs. Simple statistical tools (frequencies and percentages) were used in data analysis, while results are presented in tables.

## Results And Discussion

Data in Table 1 shows that organizational factors account for over 80 percent of the constraints limiting women's participation in WIA programs. These are lack of adoption incentives (32%), lack of commitment by WIA officials (29%), as well as irregularity of extension visits/meetings (14%) as well as favoritism/partiality in input distribution (11%). They differ significantly from client or farmer-related problems.

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Major Problems Hindering Participation in WIA Activities.**

	<b>Constraint</b>	<b>Frequency N=120</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1.	Lack of adoption incentives (subsidy, loan etc)	38	31.67	1
2.	Lack of commitment by WIA Officials	35	29.17	2
3.	Irregularity of meetings	17	14.17	3
4.	Favoritism in input distribution	13	10.83	4
5.	Technologies difficult to understand	8	6.67	5
6.	Long distance to meeting venue	5	4.16	6
7.	Technologies expensive to use	4	3.33	7

Source: Field Survey, 2010.

Whereas agent-related variables that affect participation in extension programs include such factors as quality of training received, teaching behavior or ability to communicate, attitude to extension work and field responsibilities and satisfaction with the job, client or farmer-related factors refer generally to economic, psychological and socio-cultural patterns of behavior of the rural people (Uwakah, 1983).

Previous studies have identified constraints affecting rural women's access to extension services as women's legal status (Olawoye, 1989), property rights and inheritance laws (Jiggins, 1989), ecological factors (Horenstan, 1989), and extension staffing and management (FAO, 1993; Saito and Weidemann, 1990). Others are lack of land, lack of capital and credit facilities and ineffective extension services (Okwum, 2008); lack of encouragement, lack of commitment by WIA officials (Nwaoha, 2008); and high cost of labor, lack of credit and storage facilities (Nwogu, 2008).

The result obtained in this study is worrisome because it raises two major questions. The first issue is about the credibility of the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) as a source of agricultural innovations. Extension adopts the persuasion approach in disseminating information, and the relative success of the persuasion process depends on the credibility rating of the source of information. As argued by Rogers (1973), high credibility sources are perceived by receivers as less likely to have selfish or manipulative intentions, just as friendly disposition of an agent will encourage receivers to respond positively to extension message on account of perceived trustworthiness of the agent. There is, therefore, urgent need to improve on the competence and safety credibility of the present crop of extension personnel engaged in WIA program in Abia State.

The study showed the second major problem as lack of commitment on the part of WIA Officials. This casts doubts on the psychological and organizational climate of the extension agency. Organizational effectiveness is strongly linked to employee's commitment, job satisfaction and motivation. Again, the determinants of job satisfaction include organizational leadership, employee's work load and reward structure. Appropriate agricultural extension programs such as WIA will not yield positive results unless they are executed by energetic and motivated work force. Dearth of skilled field extension staff, as reflected by the unfavorable extension worker to farm family ratio in Abia State, makes the issue of incentives and motivation more critical. World Bank Assistance to State ADPs was withdrawn in 1995. It is almost certain that inadequate funding and poor logistic support were contributory to low staff morale and low commitment.

## **Conclusion**

The toll of gender inequality on agricultural productivity is high just as the scope is ramified. The ADP was a World Bank-funded project, and World Bank (1995) report shows that about \$508.1 million was invested in agricultural and environmental projects in Nigeria between 1987 and 1995. Considering these huge financial investments in the agricultural sector, and the Federal Government's policy thrust on food security, all stakeholders must contribute their

quota towards sustainable food security in Nigeria. This includes the ADPs whose statutory responsibility is to transfer agro-technologies to farmers and in the process enhance food production in the county. Organizational problems of the ADPs must have to be solved to enhance their contributions.

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