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## Gender Dimensions of Agriculture, Poverty, Nutrition, and Food Security in Nigeria

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In Nigeria, women are often marginalized in their access to economic, political, and social resources compared to men, rendering them relatively poorer than their male counterparts. Important differences also exist between women and men in their contributions to agriculture, and in poverty, nutrition and food security levels.

This review aims to provide insights into the performance of agricultural activities by gender, and provide a gender analysis of poverty, nutrition, and food security. Gender awareness in these areas is critical in planning programs that seek to reduce poverty and malnutrition, and attain food security in Nigeria.

### Gender Dimensions of Nigerian Agriculture

#### *Inequality in Decisionmaking and Access to Capital Assets*

Studies have revealed that women contribute significantly to food production, processing, and marketing, but men control farm decisions and productive resources. There is evidence of unequal rights between men and women to natural and physical resources, resulting in inadequate and inappropriate use of resources, limited alternatives, low income, poor diets, and low living standards. Women particularly lack direct access to land and are bound to a large extent by the decision of land owners. Furthermore, wage discrimination in favor of men undermines women's participation in the agricultural labor force. For instance, the marginal product of one day of agricultural labor for women is only 75 percent of the wages of men.

#### *Women's Participation in Food Production and Agricultural Labor Utilization*

Women have been found to participate actively in all subsectors of agriculture, namely crops, livestock, fisheries and agro forestry, and particularly in subsistence food production, where they contribute an estimated 60 to 80 percent of the total labor used. Research has shown that Nigerian women play major roles in key farming operations such as planting, weeding, and harvesting, to the extent that certain crops are designated as "female" crops in some areas. For instance, in southeastern Nigeria, yam is the traditional male prestige crop while cassava and other ephemeral crops like melon, cocoyam are female crops.

In spite of women's enormous contributions to food production, their access to needed farm resources has been very low, due to marital and religious factors. Other reasons include a low literacy rate, lack of ownership and control of assets, lack of sufficient and substantive collateral, and

inadequate knowledge and training in the use of improved technologies.

### ***Women, Appropriate Technology for Food Production, and Extension Services***

Nigerian women produce a substantial amount of food consumed in the household and are also engaged in food processing and utilization; yet they lack access to improved technologies due to their poor educational and financial background. In addition, women's farms are scattered and in small parcels, preventing any form of mechanized farming. Other factors that hinder women's use of technologies include high cost of technology adoption, low technological know-how, and poor adaptability.

In Nigeria, gender also affects women farmers' participation in agricultural extension services. Time constraints on women farmers due to their multiple roles as homemakers and income earners, coupled with poor access to transportation systems in the rural areas, limit their levels of participation in agricultural extension activities.

### **Gender Analysis of Poverty, Nutrition, and Food Security**

According to a gender analysis of poverty in Nigeria, poverty has a feminine face. Women lag behind men in most indicators of socio-economic development. Women constitute the majority of the poor, the unemployed and the socially disadvantaged, and they are the hardest hit by the current economic recession, with about 52 percent of rural women living below the poverty line. Unfortunately, most poverty alleviation policies of the government lack special provisions for women. Gender inequality in disfavor of women features prominently in access to and control of land, credit facilities, technologies, education and health, and as a result, women are more vulnerable to poverty than men.

Diet and nutrition are important factors in the promotion and maintenance of good health. In Nigeria, 60 percent of child deaths are related to protein energy malnutrition (PEM), making it the greatest single cause of child mortality. Despite

government efforts, the health of women is undermined by multiple factors, such as lack of access to health services, poor sanitation and nutrition, and low levels of education and information. Harmful traditional practices continue to plague the health of women, compounded by violence. Essential obstetrics care remains insufficient, with maternal mortality rates as unacceptably high as 704 per 100,000 live births.

Similarly, women are more food insecure than men. Studies have shown that the incidence of food insecurity is higher for female-headed households (0.49) than for male-headed households (0.38). Women (more than men) spend their income on food thereby improving household food and nutrition security, especially in the development of children.

### **Identified Literature Gaps**

There are important information gaps that were identified in the review. Gender issues were found to be excluded from the design and planning of empirical research and data collection both at the micro and macro levels. Also, the conceptual understanding of gender in the body of literature is poor. The meaning of "gender" should go beyond women and children's studies to include a balanced analysis of women's roles, responsibilities, constraints and opportunities in different activities in relation to those of men.

### **Key Recommendations**

***Women deserve unlimited access to capital assets, and full participation in decisionmaking.***

Full participation of women is necessary for increased agricultural output and productivity, reduced poverty, and enhanced food security. Policymakers should be more sensitive in formulating policies that position women as central to development so as to enhance their access to land, education, information, credit, technology, and decisionmaking forums.

**Women need appropriate agricultural technologies and access to extension services.**

For women to fully adopt and reap the benefits of improved agricultural technologies, local engineers need to fabricate appropriate farm tools and equipment that are less costly, well suited to their

scale of operation and are both time and labor saving. Specially packaged technologies should be targeted at women through effective and appropriate extension services.

*This brief is intended to promote discussion; it has not been formally peer reviewed, but it has been reviewed by at least one internal and/or external reviewer.*

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