

# Women, Agriculture and Socio-Economic Development of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (2010 – 2023)

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## ABSTRACT

The article examined the nexus between women's activities in agriculture and the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Notwithstanding the proportion of women that engage in agriculture, the gender gap has impaired women from having praise and accolades and the fact that food sufficiency and security are farfetched. Both the survey method where a total of 475 women were given questionnaires to respond to, and the historical/descriptive methods were used in eliciting data for the paper. The theory adopted for analysis was the 1953 dualism theory proposed by Julius Herman Bocke of the modernization school. Amongst others, the paper revealed the importance of agriculture to society, the contribution of women to socio-economic development in the areas of employment generation, income and revenues to individual households and governments, the provision of a platform for processing and marketing of agricultural products, and raw materials for industries. However, several challenges such as the gender gap, challenges of access to land, funding, inadequate agricultural infrastructure and productive resources constrain the activities of women in agriculture. Arising from the findings, the paper recommended: a review of land policy to give women more access to land, increase in budgetary allocation and release for agricultural activities, increase investment in R & D and enlightenment of the agropreneurs through regular information dissemination.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic, Development. Agriculture, Food Security, Modernisation

## INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is a salient and indispensable sector of the economies of the world and even more so for the economies of the developing states. This is so as it is the engine of development, growth and poverty alleviation in developing economies where it serves as the main occupation of a large percentage of the population (Raney et al., 2011). Even though agriculture attracts participation from males and females, in developing states the proportion of women who take part in agriculture and related businesses tends to be more (Kanani, 2020).

According to Njobe & Kaaria (2015), the women contribute greatly to agriculture in Africa. As noted by the Scholars, women in Africa constitute over 50 per cent of the people in agriculture; over fifty (50) per cent of farm labour in Africa is provided by women, while between sixty and eighty (60 – 80) per cent of the food supply in Africa is produced by women.

In Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, women are more in agriculture than men as the population of women in agriculture is about 51.4 per cent in terms of labour force. Notwithstanding the critical role the women play in agriculture, the male folks make major management policies and decisions. The dominance of male decision-makers in agriculture has sadly led to the neglect of the female gender in policies relating to agribusinesses (Odubo et al., 2019). In a similar vein, Kanani (2020) has noted a lot of constraints to women's efforts in agriculture such as limited ownership and access to land, limited access to finances as well as gender gap and male chauvinism that shuts women out of decision-making as it pertains to agriculture in Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State.

Within the central thesis of this paper which is that the governance structures of Akwa Ibom State have not done enough to fully recognise and integrate women's potential and capacity in agriculture despite the very significant roles they play in the sector, the paper proposed the following probing questions: what is the role of women in agriculture in Akwa Ibom State? How does the role of women contribute to socio-economic development in Akwa Ibom State? What are the challenges militating against women's contribution to socio-economic development through agriculture? What measures can be adopted to tackle the challenges of women in agriculture?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper relied on both qualitative and quantitative designs where it derived data and information using historical descriptive techniques and the survey design where it sourced data from a set of research questionnaires. In applying the descriptive historical approach, data were sourced from documentary instruments. On the other hand, the survey employed drew data from a purposive sample of 475 as sample size. The questionnaire was administered to the 475 members of Uyo Women Agro-Geo Co-operative Society whose membership cut across the 3 senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State.

### Theoretical Framework

The modernisation theory is the appropriate one for the analysis of this paper. According to Ekpe (2013), modernization theory was the first economic development theory after the Second World War (WW II) employed in the explanation of the lack of development in Africa and the possible measures to achieve development.

In the belly of modernization theory are two issues worth dissecting. As observed by Offiong (1980), one such is that scholars of the modernisation persuasion are addicted to the concepts of modern(ity) and its various elements such as institutional differentiation, westernisation, economic growth, nation-building, development, among others. In sum modernization theorists e.g. W.W. Rostow, David McClelland, Everett Hagen opine that for a state to become developed such must pass through certain stages as well as brandish certain characteristics and behaviour patterns that allude to modernity. The second issue is identified by Dode & Cletus (2019). The duo argued that the factors and elements that either promote or hinder development are not in short supply in the countries concerned.

The import of this submission is to argue against the dependencies whose primary focus on explaining underdevelopment is heaped on external factors, (Dode & Cletus, 2019). The central argument of the modernisation school is that Africa and other developing states are poor and backward as a result of the dominance of traditional structures and attitudes that hinder the penetration of market forces that are critical components of economic development (Naanen, 2015).

This paper is anchored on the variant of the modernisation theory known as the theory of dualism. The theory of dualism was proposed by Julius Herman Bocke in 1953 and deployed in the study of the

Indonesian economy and society (Bonatti & Haiduk, 2010). Central to the theory of dualism are two sectors that exist side by side. One is a small urban industrial and the other a big but rural agricultural-driven sector.

The small urban–industrial sector that is largely manufacturing-oriented portrays elements of modern industrial economies, while a primitive mode of production pervades the big agricultural sector with all the sensibilities and features of the traditional sector with the primitive mode of production. The implication is the existence of a split in the labour market and funding. The bulk of the labour force on one hand is the one engaged in subsistence agriculture and poorly paid and with a low morale, the other is the urban well-paid worker who all the same relies on the poorly paid rural workers engaged in subsistence agriculture.

The foregoing prompted Bonatti & Haiduk (2010) to consider the existence of the sheltered and the unsheltered sectors. While the sheltered economy refers to the small industrial sector, the unsheltered economy refers to the big agricultural sector. Bonatti and Haiduk solicited the government and other stakeholders to stimulate growth in the unsheltered sector as this serves as a feeder to the sheltered sector. The mode of stimulation may involve intervention in the unsheltered sector through a reallocation of value added injected through taxes from the sheltered economy which already has demonstrated signs of dynamism and progress, to the unsheltered which tends to remain stagnant as a result of starvation of funds and other necessary infrastructure.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Agriculture and Society

Agriculture as a word is a derivation from two root words of Latin origin: ager representing field (land) and colo which stands for cultivation. Putting ager/colo together means the cultivation of land or fields. It is therefore unarguable from the root words that various definitions of agriculture have emerged. For instance, agriculture is seen as the science and art of cultivating the soil including the allied pursuits of gathering crops and rearing livestock, tillage, husbandry and farming (Akinsanni, 1975).

From whatever way agriculture is explained, the central theme revolves around the provision of food and food-related items as well as the making available elements from such for further use in the things that go to provide succour and comfort for man.

The preceding discourse as to what agriculture means to man makes for the primacy and indispensability of agriculture both for developing and developed economies. There may not be anywhere such importance is better captured than as done by STAN (2014). The body noted that:

*The happiness of a nation is like a tree-agriculture is its roots, while commerce and industry are its branches and leaves. If the roots are cut off, the leaves will fall, the branches will break off and the tree will die. (STAN, 2014:3)*

Having explained the meaning of agriculture and its role in the society, the next task for the paper is to chronicle the role of agriculture in the society.

### Role of Agriculture to Society

#### Food supply and security

The importance of agriculture starts with the supply of food to take care of the nutritional needs of mankind which is needed for his survival. Both food crops such as cassava, plantain, yam, and bananas as well as cash

crops – palm trees, cocoa, cotton and others are directly the products of agriculture.

Man needs essential nutrients which the various classes of foods give to him. Ranging from protein, carbohydrates, fats and oil and vitamin will elude if the activities of agriculture do not make them available (Akinsanmi, 1975; STAN, 2014 and Iwena, 2019). Besides making the various foods available, agriculture makes for the availability of the food items not only in the seasons when they are produced but also off-season. The activities of processing, storage and marketing of these products ensure food availability and security. Food security contributes to human security as no human being can live without food. Udoms et al., (2015) identify human security as central and necessary if a nation must achieve national security.

### **Raw materials**

The products of agriculture have dual usage at the least. While the products may serve as food, same may also serve manufacturing industries at home and abroad as essential raw materials. For instance, from animals, hides and skins may serve industries that produce bags, belts, shoes etc. Cotton is also essential for textile industries, malina trees are very good sources for tyres and related items as latex are important raw material; cocoa serves the beverage and dairy industries.

Other agro-allied industries rely on the produce from agriculture for a variety of its production. For instance, most of the medicines needed by man to stay alive and to revive ailing tissues are derivatives of plants grown by farmers (Akinsanmi, 1975; Iwena, 2018).

#### *(i) Generation of Employment Opportunities*

In developing states such as Nigeria, agriculture employs a large percentage of the people. Directly, agriculture employs farmers and other agriculturalists who earn their living from such engagements. Indirectly, agriculture also provides job opportunities for those selling the products of agriculture, some deal in the processing and marketing of such products.

#### *(ii) Generation of Incomes and Revenues*

Agriculture generates incomes for individuals who are engaged in agriculture, and those engaged in the transportation business that move agricultural products from one point to the other.

In another dimension, agriculture generates revenue for governments through taxes and other levels of levies on agricultural produce. All the identified four important functions of agriculture have women as critical stakeholders. Women are involved at every point of agriculture and the process to transform the produce from it.

### **Socio-economic development**

#### *(i) Development*

As a social, economic, and political concept, development commands diverse definitions. However, for this paper, the Dudley Seers meaning is adopted. According to Dudley Seers, a state is developed when three fundamental questions are answered in a way that suggests a decline in them. The questions are: what is happening to poverty? What is happening to inequality? And what is happening to unemployment? (Udoms et al., 2017). Development is simply a situation that avers to the improvement in the quality of life of a large number of members of society.

Further advancing the element of a qualitative life for members of society Jhingan (2007), introduced social

indicators that are indispensable to development. These are quality health, education, food, safe water, sanitation and housing. The availability of these indicators at the reach and affordability of the people makes living worthwhile.

(ii) *Economic Development*

Economic development speaks to the improvement in the various aspects of the life of the population inhabiting a given space. It points to the availability of jobs for a greater number of employable persons; higher real incomes, better health conditions, better housing, better levels of education, better government services, better agricultural and industrial skills and techniques, higher production and lower personal and regional socio-economic inequalities (Kalu, 2001 cited in Udoms, Atakpa and Ekanem, 2017). According to Lipset (in Udoms and Ibiyanu, 2012), there are four important indices of economic development: wealth, industrialization, urbanization and education.

From the foregoing, economic development exists where the state develops the capacity to produce the material and non-material needs of the people in a way that is consistent with the environmental circumstances of the people. Again, in such a state, citizens are engaged in various levels of occupation that enable them to enjoy an appreciable level of livelihood as well as fulfil life goals while there is equity in the state.

(iii) *Socio-economic Development*

Socio-economic development refers to the positive transformation of the state in social and economic dimensions. The indices that measure socioeconomic development are Gross Domestic Product (GDP), life expectancy, literacy levels, and employment levels in the state. Other factors that measure socio-economic development are personal dignity, personal safety, freedom of association, freedom from fear of physical harm and the extent of participation in civil society (Ijere, 2014).

For additional understanding of the concept of socio-economic development, the invitation is extended to Chrisman (2014) and Ijere (2014). While Chrisman samples the understanding of the concept to mean the process of advancement in the improvement of the welfare of the people engineered through the interaction between all the sectors of the national economy and corporate bodies, Ijere is concerned with the factors that trigger socio-economic development which he gave as changes in technology and government policies and law. The implication of the social intercourse between the two scholars is to the effect that for socioeconomic development to occur in any given state, there must be a conscious effort between the public and private sectors.

### **Women, Agriculture and Socio-economic Development of Akwa Ibom State**

Women's contribution to agriculture is phenomenal. Njobe & Kaaria (2015) aver that women are engaged in agriculture as farmers, owners of agro-businesses, livestock owners and paid workers. Corroborating this position Abiala & Ojo (2019) noted that the roles of women in agriculture come in three different dimensions: as paid workers, cultivators of farms, and managers of agricultural processes and productions. In specific terms, women's contribution to socio-economic development through agriculture comes in the form of the provision of a labour force to agriculture. Here women provide varieties of labour to the agricultural sector. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development notes that women account for 75% of the farming population in Nigeria. Women also are 'agripreneurs' as they provide critical decision-making and handling of various agricultural activities.

Another area where women make a mark in agriculture is in the area of distribution of agricultural products.



This is an important economic activity for the state. As noted by Odubo et al (2019), this function enables agricultural products to get to various categories of users including urban dwellers and professionals who concentrate on their careers while they get the food supply and other needs depending on agriculture. Women also get involved in the processing and marketing of the products of agriculture. In all of these, value chains are created and the multiplier effect is noticed visibly in the economy.

### **Challenges Faced by Women Agriculturists**

The important roles women play in agriculture and socio-economic development cannot be wished away. The limiting factors to women are the impediments to their contribution. These challenges are the results of gender gap issues. Some are socio-cultural, some are economic, and some are political.

It is to these limiting factors the paper now turns.

#### **(i) Access to land**

The land is a factor of production. It forms a very strong sort of capital in agricultural production. Given the important role, the duo of Njobe & Kaaria (2015) saw in land, they aver that land accessibility, allocation, and transfer and use is a fundamental consideration in socio-economic policies.

In Akwa Ibom State as in other parts of Nigeria, women have unequal access to land compared to the male folks. The statutes, religious practices, customs and traditional norms put women at a very disadvantageous situation in issues relating to land ownership and control. The situation seems so gory that Njobe & Kaaria (2015) opined that it is only a paltry 15 per cent of land in Africa used for agriculture that is under the control of women.

#### **(ii) Limited access to finances**

Nigerian women in agriculture encounter serious challenges in accessing finances and financial-related services for purposes of starting or growing their agro-businesses. This is not unconnected with at least three issues. The first is that the nature of agricultural business like any other business is undertaken in a very risky environment and with the small size of their businesses, women can hardly muster fit collateral securities to get loans and other financial services. The next is that most women lack the managerial skills to run a successful agricultural business. The third is the location of their agricultural outfits, which most times are in an environment with very difficult terrain that makes access herculean task.

#### **(iii) Difficulty in accessing infrastructure**

Infrastructure in agriculture is used to mean the range of services and another enabling environment that enhances agricultural production, aids procurement processing preservation, and trade. According to FAO (2011), this range of enhancers is insignificant for such purposes in Nigeria and other African States.

Agricultural infrastructure falls into four categories. One is input-based infrastructure e.g. agricultural non-durables such as seedlings, fertilisers, pesticides, fishing gears, (canoes, nets, hooks etc.), farm equipment and machinery. The second category is resource-based infrastructure e.g. farm power and energy, water irrigation, extension services, among others.

The third category of agricultural infrastructure is the soft and hard infrastructure. While soft infrastructure refers to input devices such as processing facilities, storage facilities and efficient transportation systems, hard infrastructure refers to amenities such as good road networks. Abiala & Ojo (2019) noted that the

above infrastructure noted from input, resource-based, to soft and hard infrastructure are salient assets to agricultural production yet these are either lacking or impeding operational efficiency and effectiveness.

The fourth category of infrastructure is the institutional infrastructure. This speaks to governmental structures and instruments such as agencies and policies of government with impact on agriculture information and communication services, technology, R & D extension services, technology disposition, among others. As noted by Abiala & Ojo (2019), the disposition of these institutions is either largely inefficient or ineffective and is not accessible to the women for deployment in their agro-allied businesses.

## **Escaping the Traps of Agricultural Constraints and Women Contribution to Socio-Economic Development**

Challenges to agricultural production are by no means unresolvable. The tackling of these problems needs a change of attitude to ways of life and political will on the part of government. The under-listed are sketches of resolving constraints in the agricultural sector.

### **1. Institutional reforms and transformation**

This will require several policy adjustments, changes and strengthening in some areas. For instance, there is a need for adjustment in land policy and rules and regulations that make for gender responsiveness.

Budgetary allocation and release and actual spending should be increased. This is given the recognised fact that public spending is a catalyst to socio-economic development. Other areas of reforms under institutional reforms and transformation are the areas relating to access to supplies of agricultural input; policies on trade to stimulate modern practices to oust outdated and inefficient trade policies with particular reference to paying attention to the relationship between domestic regulatory framework and external agricultural trade.

### **2. Reforms in the areas of productive resources**

Reforms in this area are expected to stimulate, among others, Agriculture Value Chain Finance and Access (AVCF); small and medium enterprises value chain; innovative financing mechanisms, R&D, productive facilities e.g. migration from the use of outdated farming methods that are manual to modern sophisticated technology-driven agricultural methods.

**3. Increase investment in soft and hard infrastructures**, for instance, good road networks; robust and efficient transportation systems, increased access to information, access to markets etc. For the context of this study, infrastructure refers to the various facilities, structures, equipment, services as well as institutional arrangements that aid the flow of agricultural goods, services and ideas. Infrastructure in agriculture can be categorized under:

(i) Enabling infrastructure e.g. public utilities, public works, transportation and research facilities for the development of agriculture

(ii) Customs and under-management concerns, safety and security along trade corridors. Women who cross the borders for trade-related activities are unduly stigmatized, suffer from violence and harassment etc. To this extent, there is a need for a safe, secure, and efficient environment that is transparent for economic activities along Africa's trade transit corridors.

(iii) Access to markets and trade-related constraints

(iv) Increased access to information

(v) Export promotion

(vi) Production and scientific centres.

4. In Nigeria as in other African states women are largely discriminated against in terms of land ownership. Adopting gender-responsive land reforms is therefore of essence. It is to this extent that Njobe & Kaaria (2015) call on governments of African countries to implement policies that ensure that women are given equal access to land as well as control of such lands. To make such policies workable in a participatory model women group, and civic society advocacy groups should be involved in the formulation and implementation when women are given security and title to lands, unarguably the incentive to get involved in agriculture becomes higher.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section of the paper evaluates the research questions raised in the introduction vis-à-vis the survey data and documentary evidence.

**Research Question 1:** What is the role of women in agriculture in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 1: Role of Women in Agriculture in Akwa Ibom State

S /N	ITEMS & ISSUES OF INVESTIGATION	SA	A	SD	D	U
1	Women play roles in agriculture ranging from planting, weeding, harvesting good processing, marketing etc.	437	13			
		100%				
2	Women are owners of farms, and other allied businesses in the agriculture sector.	400	50			
		100%				

Source: Field Survey 2003

From Table 1, out of the 450 respondents who filled and returned the questionnaire, 437 of them strongly agreed, while 13 agreed to the fact that women play such roles as planting, weeding, harvesting farm produce, food processing as well as marketing the produce of agriculture.

The literature review also lent credence to the fact that about 75 per cent of the farming population is made up of women and this, according to Febiyi et al. (2007) serves as employment generating. The women are also engaged in the distribution of agricultural products. The second item of the questionnaire in Table 1 affirms that women own agro-businesses in terms of ownership of farming/fishing/livestock businesses, distribution outfits, and processing and marketing of agricultural businesses. 450 of the respondents representing 100% think that women own businesses in the agricultural sector.

According to Obot et al., (2022), women make significant contributions in the areas of food supply and security. The scholars noted rightly that the world would have experienced a severe food crisis but for the activities of the women agriculturists and businesses operated by the female folk. It is noted that female farmers cultivate between 50 and 74 per cent of food produced in the state. Even with this enormous contribution to agriculture, women are not recognised. For Nigeria to achieve the zero-hunger mandate of the United Nations by the year 2030, it becomes imperative that the role and contribution of women be recognised and adequate support extended to women in the agricultural sector (Obot et al., 2022).

**Research Question 2:** How does the role of women in agriculture contribute to socio-economic



development?

Table 2: Role of Women and Socio-economic Development

S/N	Items & Issues of Investigation	SA	A	SD	D	U	% A	% D
1.	Women’s contributions to agriculture generate employment and incomes.	400	400	–	7	3	97.8	1.56
2.	Activities of women in agriculture produce raw materials for local and foreign industries.	300	70	31	27	22	82.22	12.89
3.	One of the greatest contributions of women is in the area of food supply and security.	350	79	–	11	10	95.32	2.14
4.	Foreign exchange and trade balance is an aspect of development triggered through women in agriculture.	303	50	19	50	46	78.44	15.33

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The survey carried out to gather information on how the activities of women lead to socio-economic development is presented in Table 2. Survey items 1, 2, 3 and 4 points to the fact that women’s activities generate employment – 97.8% agreed while 1.56% disagreed. In the area of production of raw materials for local and foreign industries, a total of 300 out of 450 respondents strongly agreed, 70 agreed to make a total of 370, with a percentage of 82.22% who agreed to the fact that women contribute to the production of raw materials; 31 out of the 450 respondents strongly disagreed while 27 disagreed, giving a total of 58, with 12.89% disagreeing. 22 of the respondents were undecided (4.89%).

Does the activity of women in agriculture produce raw materials? Iwena (2018) and other scholars noted that the activities of agriculture in which women are an indispensable part produce goods that have dual or multiple purposes. While they provide food for the nutrient needs of the man, they also serve the needs of industries e.g. cash crops such as cocoa, cotton, and others that are used for beverage, plastic, textile and tyre production industries.

The other areas where women in agriculture contribute to socio-economic development as highlighted by the survey are food supply and security and foreign exchange and trade balance (Table 2; items 3 & 4). A significant area of discourse on the role of women in agriculture and socio-economic development is to invite Abiala & Ojo (2019) and Njobe & Kaaria, (2015). Njobe & Kaaria noted that women make up fifty-two per cent (52%) of the population in agriculture and are responsible for about fifty-two per cent (52%) of labour in the farm operations in Africa while also producing not less than Sixty and Eighty per cent of food in Africa. According to the scholars, women are farmers, owners of businesses in the agricultural sector, livestock owners as well as workers (Njobe & Kaaria, 2015). In the same vein, Abiala & Ojo (2019) averred that the role of women in agriculture comes in these different dimensions as paid workers, cultivators of farms, and managers of agricultural processes and production. In specific terms, women’s activities in agriculture include sowing, weeding, harvesting, storing, processing and distribution among others.

The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has noted that women account for 75 per cent of the farming population in Nigeria. The bulk of this percentage is culled from women as they form the bulk of the labour force in farming and other areas of agricultural production which they are also managers and entrepreneurs providing initial decision-making and handling of various aspects of agricultural activities. The women, especially at the rural level, sell their labour power and skills to service agricultural producing processes from the clearing of the farm site, tilling of the ground and planting. They also engage in weeding and harvesting processes.

Women play very important roles in the distribution process in the agricultural sector. After harvest the farm and other agricultural produce have to get to the end users. Elementary commerce has averred that consumers are the last on the chain of production. The chain of production cannot be complete until the production gets to the end users. The vehicle through which the production in agriculture gets to the consumers is through the efforts of the women who engage in distribution. In Nigeria, the women are the bulk of distributors of agricultural products. They go to the farm sites or the villages to collect the produce and transport same to markets and the consumers. A lot of value chain is created through the process. Distribution of agricultural products enables certain categories of urban dwellers and professionals to concentrate on their careers while they can get their food supply and nutrient needs. (Odubo, et al 2019).

The provision of labour power serves as an employment-generating process where the women earn either on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. With this, the women are either able to support their husbands where they are support-oriented or can take care of the family where they serve as breadwinners in the family. (Febiyi et al., 2007).

The business of processing agricultural products is at two levels: the informal and the formal levels. The informal level is also the small-scale level. At this level, the bulk of the business is in the hands of women. Farm produce and other agricultural products are harvested on the farm that may not be ready for immediate consumption. Processing gives form to most of the products. For instance, fishermen after fishing expeditions do not have the luxury of time to smoke the fish to get dry for preservation so that it can be taken to distant consumers. The role of drying the fishing is mostly undertaken by the women. After harvesting, the women process them into forms that can be eaten e.g. foofoo, garri, starch, tapioca etc. The processing also makes for durability and storage. While harvested cassava cannot be stored for more than a few days the processed products can be stored in various forms and for months.

In Nigeria, women are the ones visibly involved in the access of market and trading agricultural products of various kinds. From Upenekan Beach, Oron Beach markets in Akwa Ibom States women are involved in the selling and reselling of fresh products and other sea goods. From palm oil and other products from the farms needed for consumption and even the industries as raw materials the women play a lot of roles in ferrying those products across.

Notwithstanding the statistics generated from the survey and literature, Nigeria still spends a huge proportion of foreign exchange on the importation of food. This goes to say that Nigeria is far from food sufficiency and security. Table 3 gives food import statistics.

**Research Question 3:** What are the challenges militating against women’s contribution to socio-economic development through agriculture?

Table 3: Challenges faced by women in agriculture in Akwa Ibom State

S/N	Items & Issues of Investigation	SA	A	SD	D	U	% A	% D
1.	Lock of support for women in agriculture is contributing to food insecurity.	406	40	—	3	1	99.11	0.22
2.	Women limit themselves to production of subsistence levels because of challenges.	381	18	10	23	18	88.67	7.33

Source: Field Survey 2023

Table 4 highlights areas of challenges to women’s participation in agriculture as they impact socio-economic development. items 1 & 2 of the table speak to the fact that women hardly get support and as a

result affects good supply and security as well as the fact that women resign to the subsistence level of agriculture owing to the various constraints they face.

Other challenges are as highlighted by Lokpobiri (2019) contained in Table 4.

Table 4: Challenges of Agricultural Promotion Policies

S/N	Nature of Challenge	Description of Challenges	Remarks/Panacea
1.	Policy framework	Nigeria suffers from policy instability as a result of numerous policies. This is followed by policy accountability, transparency, absence of due process, and violation of the constitution and rules and regulations as they pertain to the agricultural sector. Consequently, the business environment becomes unpredictable and discourages agricultural investors.	Need for a suitable and enduring policy framework to revive agriculture
2.	Political commitment	Non-implementation of international protocols or conventions on agricultural development agreed to with other members of the international community. An instance of this is Nigeria's failure to achieve targets in the Maputo Declaration: States allocation of at least 10% of annual budgets to the agricultural sector. At the state levels, there are also infractions to this.	Nigeria should honour international treaties entered into
3.	Agricultural research & technology	Failure to generate and commercialize new agricultural technologies that meet local needs through Agricultural Research System (NARS). There is also the handicap at making available to farmers technologies they have already known especially in areas such as improved varieties of seedlings, breeds of livestock and aquatic species.	A robust extension delivery system, NARS as well as public and private sector supplies of agricultural inputs
4.	Infrastructure deficit	Post-harvest waste due to infrastructure challenges. Infrastructure such as roads, rail lines, irrigation, dams are insufficient or unavailable, not cost effective etc.	Need for a re-think of the business and operating models for agriculture infrastructure in Nigeria.
5.	Finance & Risk management	<p>a. Poor access to financial services that can help farmers and other producers in the agricultural sector to adopt new technologies, improve market linkages and increase resilience to economic shocks.</p> <p>b. Inability of federal and state agricultural institutions to positively influence agricultural activities in the local/rural areas where a large chunk of agricultural activities take place.</p>	<p>a. Need to streamline, clarification of mandates to ensure accountability for institutional results.</p> <p>b. Boost capacity of agricultural institutions so that they can deliver on mandates</p> <p>c. Need for more extension workers</p> <p>d. Need for more operational synergy between federal and state governments.</p>

Source: Adopted from Lokpobiri (2019)

**Research Question 4:** What measures can be adopted to tackle challenges facing agriculture?

Table 5: Measures at tackling agricultural challenges.

S/N	Items & Issues of Investigation	SA	A	SD	D	U	% A	% DA
1.	Reforms and transformation of essential institutions and structures are capable of arresting challenges in agriculture.	433	17	–	–	–	100	–
2.	Availability and access of women to productive resources are likely to enhance production.	420	29	–	1	–	–	99.78
3.	Government and other stakeholders need to invest in hard and soft infrastructure.	440	10	–	–	–	100	–
4.	Finance and financing women in agriculture will boost socio-economic development.	438	12	–	–	–	100	–

Source: Field Survey 2023

Items 1, 2, 3 and 4 of Table 5 deal with some of the measures that are expected will tackle constraints faced by women in the agricultural sector. Item 1 is about institutional reform where 433 of the respondents expressed strong agreement and 17 respondents agreed – all making 100% that institutional reforms and transformation are capable of tackling constraints. These institutional reforms, according to Njobe & Kaaria (2015) involve reforms regarding land ownership and control, public spending in agriculture, and reforms on policies that make for more access to supplies of agriculture inputs. Lokpobiri (2019) adds reforms of policies on agricultural trade in favour of modern and effective ones that deal with the domestic regulatory framework and the demands of intra-African agricultural and food trade.

Other areas are accessibility to productive resources which includes accessibility to agricultural value chain finance; value chain in small and medium enterprises; innovative financing mechanism; and increased investment in R & D which should be targeted at making information available to the agricultural practitioners as to modern approach and technology; more investment in hard and soft infrastructure.

Most of the measures mentioned above will have the input of government at the local, state and federal levels to achieve. Okene et al., (2016) have noted that the government at the grassroots, because of their closeness to the people must be involved in whatever policies and programmes are needed to transform the socio-economic and political circumstances of the state. They noted that part of the problems of Nigerian developmental trajectory is that both the state and federal governments, in defiance of constitutional provisions of local government as the third level of government, treat local government as administrative outposts of the states.

Items 2, 3 and 4 of the survey questionnaires deal with productive resources, hard and soft infrastructures and finance respectively. These have to do with both policy formulation and implementation as well as procurement.

It is germane to state that most government policies fail as a result of governance deficit where issues of ethnicity, embezzlement of public funds, abuse of the rule of law, lack of transparency and accountability, preference for mediocrity are promoted above competence and merit in the handling of public office (Udoms & Ibiamu, 2012, Udoms & Atakpa, 2021, Atakpa & Udoms, 2015).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper interrogated the nexus between women's participation in agricultural activities and the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Amongst others, the paper revealed the important roles agriculture plays in the life of society as well as the contributions women make towards socio-economic development in the agricultural sector notwithstanding, the enormous challenges due to a plethora of factors. Based on the findings of the paper the following recommendations were made:

1. Land policies should be reviewed to make access, ownership and control of land to be flexible, accessible and affordable to all who need land for agricultural purposes and related services. At the local level, traditional norms and practices should be reviewed to end discrimination against women.
2. Budgetary allocation, release and spending in the agricultural sector should be increased. To this extent, financial institutions should also design financial products to help small-scale 'agri-entrepreneurs'.
3. Key agricultural infrastructure should be made available for ease of agricultural operations. The government should concentrate on making good road networks, security of lives and property as well as other infrastructures needed by farmers and other operators in the agricultural sector.
4. Government should invest considerably, in R & D. Increasing investment in R & D is salient to agricultural practices as this will help discover new technologies and approaches to modern agricultural practices.
5. Women and other agricultural practitioners should be given the necessary information necessary in their business. To this extent, the extension services of the Ministry of Agriculture and other MDAs of government responsible for such services should be revitalized.
6. Anti-graft agencies, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) should be alive to their responsibilities as this will serve as a deterrent to those who tend to embezzle public resources voted for socio-economic development of the society.

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