



## IMPROVING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAIN IN NIGERIA: A GENDER-BALANCED COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE



Mairiga, Juliana\* and Bello, Fatima

National Agricultural Extension & Research Liaison Services, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria

\*Corresponding author: [wawanta4real@gmail.com](mailto:wawanta4real@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** Smallholder agriculture today is very much feminized because young people and men tend to migrate from rural areas to urban areas. While women are engaged in feeding their families and making money, many of them engaged in agri-businesses are not very successful. One of the reasons is most of these women are rural and marginalized through 'generalized' agricultural communications which sometimes 'skewed' their capability and relevance in agricultural value chain. In many cases, agricultural communications merged them as 'special stakeholders' for policy formulation and implementation. In value chain approach to agri-business, women are usually found in planting, harvesting, and post-harvest. There is dearth of strategic information/communications to boost women participation in entire value chain in Nigeria. Therefore, the study sought to examine women participation in Agricultural value chain in Zamfara State, with the following objectives. (i) To identify the constraints of women participation in agricultural value chain. (ii) To examine effective ways of improving women participation in Agricultural value chain in study location. Descriptive survey research was deployed using both questionnaire and in depth interview where 100 copies of questionnaire were retrieved and analyzed from women farmers in Tsafe and Shinkafi local government of Zamfara state. Findings revealed that there is urgent need for improved strategic communications/information on women participation in Agricultural value chain Nigeria. Therefore the paper recommended the development of special agricultural communication framework with the aim of improving women participation in Agricultural value chain for food sufficiency and sustainability in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Gender-balanced communication, empowerment, participation, women

### Introduction

The success and sustainability of Nigeria's economic recovery require the full engagement of all key players in the rural economy – especially women. Across the world and particularly in Africa women play key role in agriculture. Some of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) studies have revealed that 70% of the world work in agriculture is done by women (Doss & Sofa Team 2007). The disaggregated data in these reports is regularly and widely quoted in many academic papers related to gender justice and by practitioners working in rural development (Twin, 2013). In Liberia, women comprise over half of the agriculture labor force, the sector that employs most of the population, predominantly in smallholder agriculture, and about two-thirds of the labor force in trade and commerce (Benfica *et al.*, 2010). It is obvious that gender issues have taken a global dimension in the recent times especially in Nigeria. Women are increasingly being involved in agricultural food value chain which contributes to economic development (Ejike, 2018). In Nigeria particularly, women play a vital role in agricultural food value chain. Nigerian women are reported to produce about 60-80 percent of total agricultural output (Buckland & Haleegoah, 1996; Rahman *et al.*, 2004) while contributing above two-thirds of their production for household maintenance (Ayoola, 1999; Rahman, 2008 in Ejike, 2018).

The place and role of women is becoming more critical in the discourse of value chain and agri-business for combating poverty mostly in rural Nigeria. According to Damisa *et al.* (2007) explain that some studies conducted on the contribution of women to agricultural development in Nigeria reported that women contribution to farm work is as high as between 60 and 90% of the total farm and off-farm task performed ranging from land-clearing, land-tilling, planting, weeding, fertilizer/manure application to harvesting, food processing, threshing, winnowing, milling, transportation and marketing as well as the management of livestock. In the coming years, the agribusiness sector in Nigeria will navigate a rapidly shifting, and, in many ways, an increasingly challenging context. The sector faces increased demand for agricultural products amidst the decline in the availability of

arable land, effects of climate change, a pivot from global to regional value chains, technical advances, and a decline in the traditional labor force. Navigating these complex trends by Nigerian women means seizing new ways to increase the productivity and efficiency of agribusiness value chains. One promising way to contribute to both goals is to apply gender-smart solutions [aided by appropriate gender sensitive communications] (IFC, 2016). Agricultural value chain approach is an important framework for examining change in the global trade commodities and their implications for women producers in Nigeria. Agricultural value chain is a lot of activities ranging from production, processing distribution and marketing of specific traded commodity and identifies the main stakeholders involved at each stage, including research and development. Meanwhile, value chain development reside at the core of high-impact and sustainable initiatives focused on improving women productivity, competitiveness, entrepreneurship, and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) growth (Ejike *et al.*, 2018).

Though, there are various opportunities and constraints for women between regions and value chains; there are common trends and insights. Interestingly, women play significant roles in production and post-harvest processing that are often key determinants of the size and quality of the final commodities produced. An IFC (2016) Report states that these [significant] roles are often informal, unacknowledged, or under-resourced. Conversely, in transportation, marketing, and sales women are underrepresented outside local markets, playing limited roles that keep them from gaining from the most profitable portions of the value chain (IFC, 2016).

Furthermore, the report pointed out that across the entirety stream of the value chain, women face limited access to information, hired labor, technology, assets, and networks. More worrisome is the fact that there are many businesses in Nigeria which depend heavily on agricultural commodities while the gender gaps persistently exist as barriers to their growth, profitability, and sustainability. For instance, gender gaps in inputs and production can reduce the quantity and quality of the harvest; in post-harvest processing and storage they can lead to post-harvest losses; and in transportation, marketing, and sales, these gaps can build up fragmented and

inefficient markets. In a rapidly changing global economy (where women farmers continue to face a range of challenges, affecting the agricultural sector's productivity) local agribusiness would need to strengthen their value chains by closing gaps between men and women. On closer inspection, it was revealed that many challenges faced by agribusiness value chain especially in the area of labor, supply chain management, market access, or sustainability and performance are associated with hidden gender gaps (IFC, 2016).

Some comparative studies have espoused that improvements in gender equality and economic growth is mutually reinforcing, while gender inequalities is costly and inefficient (World Bank, 2001; World Bank, IFAD and FAO, 2009). Therefore, closing the 'gender gap' in agriculture can result in major production gains (FAO, 2016). The FAO Report on 'The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011' suggested that women's yields could grow by 20–30 percent if the gender gap in accessing agricultural inputs were closed, an increase that could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4 percent, which could in turn reduce the number of food insecure people in the world by 12 to 17 percent (FAO, 2011). Within this context, integrating gender considerations into the development of agribusiness value chains [and communications] is not only necessary from a human rights perspective but it is a prerequisite to ensuring sustainable growth in areas of development intervention. This article interrogates and critically examines extensive body of literatures on value chain development and gender, presenting key entry points for gender sensitive communication in order to close the gaps between men and women farmers in Nigeria.

#### **Objectives of the study**

The study was to ascertain the extent of women participation in agricultural value chain in Zamfara State. The specific objectives that guided the study were to

- i. To identify and examine the role of women participation in Agricultural value chain
- ii. To ascertain the contributions of women in Agricultural value chain
- iii. To identify constraints to effective women participation in agricultural value chain
- iv. Identify strategies for improved women participation.

#### **Purpose of the study**

With all the potential of women to participate and speed up national development in Nigeria, their contributions continue to be underestimated, while men remain the central of attention. Women are often sole focus of [critical assessment and] attention Fabiyi *et al.* (2007). In Nigerian agricultural extension services have traditionally been focused on men and their farm production needs with fractional attention to women who are socially at the center of family development strata; even though, there are huge extension efforts of women on child care and family nutrition, these efforts have not translated to more recognition of women in the agricultural value chain. Agriculture provides jobs for about 1.3 billion smallholder and landless workers worldwide (at the rural areas), this is currently nearly half of the humanity (estimated at 7 billion), and of these rural inhabitants about 1.5 billion are small holder households (Agbam, 2006). Since year 2000, the Nigeria government has intensify efforts to mobilize women for more and effective participation in the agricultural value chain through many development programmes including the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) and the Green Revolution. One of the aims was to make the Nigeria agriculture a business for creating sustainable wealth for all stakeholders (including women) along the agricultural value chain rather than an occupation ideologically reserved for men and the 'poor'. To achieve this, special

communication framework with emphasis on the potentials of women to participate meaningfully in agriculture and agricultural development programs is inevitable. Specialized and improved feminist perception of agriculture as a business is needed to change some traditional mind sets about what and how far women can perform effectively in the agri-business value chain. Apart from many literatures on women participation in rural traditional agriculture, there is dearth of strong advocacy framework for national special agricultural communication for women. Therefore, this paper is increasing and strengthening the search for improved communications and mobilization of Nigerian women in all the processes of value chain production of agricultural production, and not just passive participant. This advocacy paper also hopes to spur on non-government organization and agricultural communication experts design agricultural communications to empower women for participation beyond the "normal women farm work" in Nigeria. Finally, the findings, discussions and recommendations from this paper is expected to enhance extension workers and other development partners initiative to intensify communication for women participation in agriculture in Nigeria not only as a right but as an obligations and duties to break away from poverty.

#### **Materials and Methods**

This paper relies on the logical choices available in research methodologies. These choices are influenced by research paradigms. The application of these paradigms enabled the researchers to draw appropriate inferences from reviewed journals and other relevant publications consulted in this study. The publications were assumed to be the empirical templates to discuss the various studies' problem which is 'the ineffective communication of women participation in agriculture in Nigeria'.

The paper deployed the descriptive survey design, using both qualitative and quantitative approach to examine women participation in Agricultural value chain. The study was conducted in Zamfara State with women farmers groups in Tsafe and Shinkafi local government areas. Simple random sampling was used to select respondent women farmers. The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire and the in-depth interview. The qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed with descriptive statistics of frequency and percentages. The paper also consulted more than 30 research journal articles on agriculture and women participation especially along the value chain and agri-business

Some thematic issues were used in the interrogation of the relevant literatures from which strong inferences were drawn. The thematic issues were:

- i. Women in agribusiness
- ii. Women contribution in agricultural value chain
- iii. Women empowerment
- iv. Constraints to women participation in agricultural value chain and information about women in agriculture.

#### **Results and Discussion**

Table 1 presents the relevant socio- economic characteristics of the women respondents. The results on the table shows that most (36%) of the respondents (Women) were within the age range of 29 – 39 years, which indicates that majority were in their prime or productive age, and as such can actively participate in the processes of agricultural value chain which can enhance productivity. Educational level has been seen as a factor influencing the personality of an individual. As shown in Table 1 most (39%) of the respondents had primary education, 26% had Secondary education and 35% never attended primary school. Fabiyi and Akande (2015) reported that women in most rural areas of Nigeria are less educated.

The study also revealed that 67% of the respondents were into farming, 20% of the respondents were housewives, 8% involved in businesses.

**Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of respondents**

Parameter	Characteristic	Frequency	%
<b>Age</b>	18-28	22	22
	29-39	36	36
	40-50	30	30
	50 and above	12	12
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Educational Qualification</b>	Never attended primary school	35	35
	Primary school	39	39
	Secondary School	26	26
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Occupation</b>	Civil servant	5	5
	Business	8	8
	House wife	20	20
	Farming	67	67
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

From Table 2, 67% of the respondents agreed to existence of Agricultural cooperative societies in their locality, while 33% said there is no existence of any form of women cooperative in the locality.

**Table 2: Existence of women agricultural cooperative in your locality**

S/N	Responses	Number of Respondents	%
1.	Yes	67	67
2.	No	33	33
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3: Women access to agricultural credit**

S/N	Responses	Number of Respondents	%
1.	Yes	29	29
2.	No	71	71
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 reveals that 29% had access to agricultural credit, while most of the respondent 71% do not have access to agricultural credit. This suggests the inability of most rural women to delve into large scale agriculture because of financial constraints. This is in agreement with the report of Fletscher and Kenney (2011) that Women are less likely to access agricultural credit because of Men still own assets that are more valuable in terms of money and valuable (collateral). Table 4 shows the extent of accessibility to credit with 70% of the respondents said they have low access. This is a challenge that has development implications. This result implies that respondents may not be able to achieve greater participation in agricultural value chain which requires financial responsibilities and also can limit them from opportunities that will enable them move from subsistence agriculture to higher value chain. Ebenehi *et al.* (2018) reported that inadequate fund hinders farmers from getting the necessary resources and technologies which assist in higher productivity of farmers.

**Table 4: Extent of women accessibility to agricultural credit**

S/N	Responses	Number Respondents	%
1.	Very high	5	5
2.	High	10	10
3.	Very low	15	15
4.	Low	70	70
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 5: Constraints to women participation in agricultural value chain**

S/N	Responses	Number of Respondents	%
1.	Cultural barriers	32	32
2.	Financial barriers	36	36
3.	Information barriers	38	38
4.	Religious barriers	24	24
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Data in table 5 show various constraints to women participation in agricultural value chain as indicated by respondents. The major constraints identified were information barrier with 38%. Inadequate agricultural information on new improved innovations and technologies has posed a challenge to improved women participation. Ayoade (2011) remarked that women face information discrimination of a sort in agricultural communication and extension practices in Nigeria. Listed among the major constraints is financial barrier with is also capable of posing effective participation of women. Again cultural barrier with 32% and religious barrier with 24% was a constraint which needed to be tackled if women participation in agricultural value chain is to be improved. This implies that under such constraints if nothing is done, women will likely be sidelined in processes of agricultural value chain. This is similar to Mahmud (2012) findings, which identified cultural and religious as a constraint to women farmers in northern Nigeria.

**Table 6: Strategies for improving women participation in agricultural value chain**

S/N	Responses	No. of respondent	%
1	Adequate agricultural information and communication	42	42
2	Easy accessibility to agricultural loans and grants	39	39
3	Women friendly cultural laws	19	19
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 6 reveals that 42% of respondents agreed that prompt and adequate information to farmers can improve their participation. Access to information is often said to bring about awareness which is an ingredient for participation in any developmental programme. According to Edoa (2012), information is a critical resource necessary for socio-economic development that enables people to make informed choices towards improving their agricultural production. In the same way, having access to agricultural related information improves farmer's knowledge on agricultural innovations which in turn enable them make wise decisions that will improve their livelihood. Also 39% identified easy accessibility to credit as a strategy for improving participation and productivity. Again 19% reveals that coming up with cultural laws that are friendly towards women in agricultural practices can improve their participation.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Agricultural value chains face enormous challenges in general, but paying attention to women's constraints is particularly important for attaining real food security in Nigeria.

Findings revealed that women face constraints in participation of Agricultural value chain which ranges from information constraints, financial, cultural and religious. There should be an increase in extension contact with women farmers, so as to keep them abreast with adequate information on new and improved agricultural innovations and practices which can improve women participation in agricultural value chain. Also easy access to credit facilities should be made available

to women farmers so that they can venture into large scale agricultural practices which can bring about improved women participation in all process of Agricultural value chain in Nigeria.

#### **Conflict of Interest**

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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