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## THE ROLES OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF ORON FEDERAL CONSTITUENCY, AKWA IBOM STATE

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### **Abstract**

*The agricultural sector has continued to be a main contributor to pro-poor growth, poverty reduction and rural development. Women have played key roles in the development of the rural communities through participation in agriculture. This descriptive research examined the role of women in agriculture in the development of Oron Federal Constituency in Akwa Ibom State. Women in Development (WID) theory was adopted by the researcher for the theoretical framework. The study was conducted in selected communities in Oron, Mbo, Okobo, UdungUko and Urue Offong/Oruko Local Government Areas. A total sample of 393 women selected through simple random sampling technique were used for the study. Questionnaire was used for data collection and gathered data were analysed descriptively using simple percentages and presented in tables. Findings of the study showed that women are more involved in agriculture than men in Oron Federal Constituency. Women contribute to the development of Oron Federal Constituency through food production, food exportation, social welfare intervention activities, and many factors like land ownership policies. Gender bias in agriculture, lack of access to grants or loan, lack of access to modern agricultural equipment and resources have impeded the pace of their productivity in Oron Federal Constituency. It was concluded that women contribute to the community development efforts in Oron Federal Constituency. Among others, the researcher recommended government agricultural intervention for women through provision of grants, loans and modern agricultural resources for the rural women in Oron Federal Constituency.*

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**Keywords: Women, Agriculture, Community Development, Culture and Oron**

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### **Introduction**

Agricultural growth is an important step towards economic development and transformation (Diao, Hazell, Resnick, and Thurlow, 2019). Agriculture has been a root factor of economic development especially among developing countries and its production has been culturally divided among gender roles (Wilson, Ekong and Peters, 2023). According to Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (2011), agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction in Africa, but the sector is underperforming in many countries because women who are often a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy are still facing some forms of constraints that reduce their productivity. Agriculture accounts for more than 30 percent of GDP and 60 percent of total employment in Sub-Saharan Africa, excluding South Africa (World Bank 2003). In most parts of the Africa continent, the agricultural sector has continued to be a main contributor to pro-poor growth, poverty reduction and rural development (Torkelsson and Onditi, 2018). The important role of the agricultural sector in contributing to food security is reflected in its prioritization in the development agenda (OECD/FAO, 2016). World Development Report (WDR) (2013) with a special focus on jobs reported that, the majority of low-income developed countries are “agrarian” economies, defined as countries in which 60 per cent or more of the population live in rural areas (Torkelsson and Onditi, 2018). Agriculture constitutes a large share of national output and employs a majority of the labour force in most developing countries, the sector has been integral to any thinking about development (Diao *et. al.* 2019).

According to African Union (2008), Africa is hungry and its agriculture has failed in its first task: that of feeding appropriately the African peoples and shield them against malnutrition. The counter performance of African agriculture has led almost all countries of the Continent to import food in large

quantities to feed the urban and rural peoples, which was, among others, the root cause of the structural and chronic balance of payment deficit of the nations' foreign debts (AU, 2008). Agriculture has been the root of development right from the history of industrial revolution of the western nations. The history of the under-development of Africa and its agriculture is the result of agricultural policies adopted since the early days of independence of the African nations, who encouraged export crops to the detriment of food crops with the only concern of filling the State coffers with foreign exchange (AU, 2008).

Women are known to be the key players in rural or community development through involvement in agriculture. According to Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries, and their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies, making their activities typical to include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes (FAO, 2011).

According to Sharma (2016), women play important and varied roles from home to society to workplace as homemakers, societal wellbeing, job providers and job seekers respectively. Fortunate African women who enjoyed good education have proven their abilities in several walks of life (Benjamin, 2008). They are found among successful doctors, teachers, lawyers, and are found in industry, commerce and public administration. Sharma (2016) posits that women are visible backbone of any civilized society in the role of friends, daughters, daughter-in-laws, sisters, wives, mothers or a role of working woman. Women have facilitated this male dominant society in every aspect, and constitute approximately 50% of the World's population.

Hassan and Silong (2008) posit that women have long been the mainstay of communities and are heavily involved in community initiatives in various forms. They argued that though often the unsung heroes of community action, women's role in community development have become increasingly important, and in some communities, they have established themselves as leaders in community development and acquired the skills that have brought positive changes to their communities. Women leaders play key roles in establishing and maintaining important relationships and networks in their communities (Hassan and Silong, 2008). According to Commission of The European Communities "CEC" (1992), no longer is the importance of women in development recognized only by a minority but neither have women been effectively integrated into development planning. The participation of women in development programmes like agriculture and other forms of developmental activities is well documented in the last two decades in the developed world, but in the developing countries, however, such studies are still very scanty and fragmented as the roles of women in development efforts are hardly acknowledged (Osirike and Egbayabo, 2012).

Women play a significant role in the agricultural labour force and in agricultural activities, although to a varying degree. Consequently their contribution to agricultural output is undoubtedly extremely significant, although difficult to quantify with any accuracy. Women's role in agriculture supported past development but the failure to recognise or enhance their activities is contributing to current problems with the food supply which can be overcome most effectively by working with rather than against the women.

According to Sibanda (2012), women farmers tend to rely on rain-fed agriculture, and have poor access to inputs (fertilisers, seeds and water), to extension (most extension agents are men), to credit facilities, and to markets for their products. They either own small pieces of land or have no land at all. In Africa, women receive 7 percent of extension services, 1 percent of all agricultural credit and own only 1 percent of the land (Sibanda, 2012). Women also bear the brunt of the burden of providing social protection services both to vulnerable people within the immediate family and those in their community. This limits their potential as agricultural producers. At the same time, by force of circumstance or by culture, women are often highly resilient, able to turn their hands to many different tasks and to find ways of overcoming obstacles (Sibanda, 2012).

Today, the problem of the development of African agriculture surfaces again with the spiralling food prices which characterises the whole world, whose impact is difficult to be contained by the African countries (AU, 2008). Culture of exclusion and lack of data on women involvement in agriculture have played key roles in undermining women's contributions to development through agriculture. Literature like Torkelsson and Onditi (2018) posit that gender gap in agricultural productivity has been associated with women's limited access to factors of production, including factors that affect women in agriculture such as land, labour, fertilizer, irrigation, pesticide and improved seeds. In Oron Federal Constituency, women's contributions to development through agriculture have been brought to the public due to lack of data which forms the gap which the research sought to fill. The research sought to provide scientific data on the roles of women in the development of Oron Federal Constituency through participation in agriculture.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The major objective of this study was to examine the role of women in agriculture and community development of Oron Federal Constituency, Akwa Ibom State. The specific objectives of the study which are considered by the researcher as guide to the work are:

- i. to examine the level of women participation in agriculture in Oron Federal Constituency;
- ii. to identify the roles of women in agriculture and community development of Oron Federal Constituency;
- iii. to identify factors that affect women in agriculture in Oron Federal Constituency.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Women in Development Theory (WID)**

Women in Development (WID) theory calls for the inclusion of women in development planning and decision-making, as well as for the design of policies and programs that address the specific needs and rights of women. It also emphasizes the importance of building women's capacity and empowering them to participate in development. The theory has its root in Ester Boserup's work of 1970. According to the Colombo in Commission of the European Communities (1984), since the Danish economist Ester Boserup published *Women's Role in Economic Development* in 1970, it gradually has become clear that not only is there a women's issue in most Third World countries - since their structure is often founded on a concept of the inferiority of women and a denial of their right to active participation in social life - but there is also a women's issue characteristic of these countries. In other words, under-development has specific and particularly grave implications for the status of women, implications that are being accentuated rather than mitigated by the process of modernization and development.

The term "women in development" came into use in the early 1970s, after the publication of Ester Boserup's *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970). Boserup was the first to systematically delineate on a global level the sexual division of labour that existed in agrarian economies. She analysed the changes that occurred in traditional agricultural practices as societies became modernized and examined the differential impact of those changes on the work done by men and women. She concluded that in sparsely populated regions where shifting agriculture is practiced, women tend to do the majority of agricultural work (Buvinic, 1986).

The term "Women in Development" was initially used by the women's committee of Washington, D.C. Chapter of the Society for International Development as part of a deliberate strategy to bring the new evidence generated by Boserup and others to the attention of American policymakers (Maguire 1984). A set of common concerns, loosely labelled "Women in Development" or WID began to be articulated by American liberal feminists who advocated legal and administrative changes to ensure that women would be better integrated into economic systems (Jaquette, 1982). They placed primary emphasis on egalitarianism and on the development of strategies and action programmes aimed at minimizing the disadvantages of women in the productive sector and ending discrimination against them.

The Women in Development perspective was closely linked with the modernization paradigm which dominated mainstream thinking on international development during the 1960s and into the 1970s. In the 1950s and 1960s, conventional wisdom decreed that "modernization," which was usually equated

with industrialization, would improve the standards of living of the developing countries. It was argued that through massive expansion of education systems, stocks of well-trained workers and managers would emerge; this in turn would enable the evolution of static, essentially agrarian societies into industrialized and modernized ones (Buvinic, 1986).

### Methodology

Survey research method was adopted for this study because the research study covers a large population and a complex study area. Simple random sampling method was used for the purpose of selecting study participants. The study area is Oron Federal Constituency in Akwa Ibom state. Oron Federal Constituency consists of 5 local government areas which include; Oron, Mbo, Okobo, Udung Uko, and Urue Offong/Oruko local government areas. Oron Federal Constituency is part of Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District in Akwa Ibom State. The targeted population of this study was the female population who engage in agriculture in Oron Federal Constituency, which is also, referred to as Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District with Oron 130,259, Mbo 152,610, Udung Uko 105, 660, Okobo 153, 476, and Urue Offong/Oruko 79,253. The projected female population of Oron Federal Constituency, according to the Akwa Ibom State Demographic Dividend Profile (2018), as derived from the 2006 national population census (NPC, 2006) was 621,481. The projected female population of the constituency was those who engage in agriculture in one way or the other were 621, 481 as at 2018.

In determining the sample size, the researcher used Alien Taro Yamane method. Yamane (1967) provides a simplified formula to calculate sample size. Therefore, the sample size of this study was 400, and was randomly selected from each of the local government area within Oron Federal Constituency. The headquarters of each of the local government areas was chosen by the researcher purposively due to the high settlement of women in agriculture and women from other communities who come in to sell their farm produce. The study participants 393 (*n*) were finally adopted as sample size based on the retrieved questionnaire. Questionnaire was adopted as tool for data collection because it provided closed-ended options that were easy to choose by the participants. The data collected in this study were analysed descriptively using simple analysis through the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for the findings of the study.

### Findings

#### Level of Women Participation in Agriculture in Oron Federal Constituency

**Table 1: Distribution of responses from study participants of participation of women in agriculture in Oron Federal Constituency**

| Statement  | Yes          | No         | Total        |
|--|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Women engaged more in agriculture than men                               | 286          | 107        | 393          |
| Women are key players in farm cultivation than men                       | 209          | 184        | 393          |
| Women are more involved in processing farm produce than men              | 212          | 181        | 393          |
| Women are more engaged in marketing farm produce than men                | 291          | 102        | 393          |
| Women are involved in agricultural activities to care for their families | 278          | 115        | 393          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>1,276</b> | <b>689</b> | <b>1,965</b> |

Source: Samuel (2023)

Table 1 demonstrates that within Oron Federal Constituency, women exhibit a higher level of involvement in agriculture compared to men. This conclusion was drawn from the responses provided by the participants of the study through the use of questionnaires. Upon analyzing Table 1, it was observed that out of the 393 study participants, 286 individuals chose the "Yes" option in agreement with the statement that women are more engaged in agriculture than men, while 107 participants selected the "No" option. Regarding the statement that women are key players in farm cultivation, 209 participants agreed while 184 disagreed. Furthermore, 212 participants believed that women are more involved in processing farm produce, whereas 181 participants held a contrary opinion. In terms of marketing farm produce, 291 participants agreed that women are more engaged in this aspect compared to men, while 102 participants

disagreed. Lastly, with regards to the statement that women engage in agricultural activities to care for their families, 278 participants were in favor of this notion, while 115 participants were not.

### **Role of women in agriculture in community development of Oron Federal Constituency**

**Table 2: Responses on role of women in agriculture in the development of Oron Federal Constituency**

| <b>Role of Women in Agriculture in Community Development</b> | <b>Yes</b>   | <b>No</b>  |
|--|--------------|------------|
| Farm cultivation   | 308          | 85         |
| Food production  | 357          | 36         |
| Food export to other constituencies and states               | 363          | 30         |
| Women Empowerment Intervention                               | 354          | 39         |
| Political Activities   | 279          | 174        |
| Community Development Decision Making                        | 193          | 200        |
| Social Welfare intervention                                  | 308          | 85         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>2,162</b> | <b>649</b> |

Source: Samuel (2023)

Table 2 illustrates the data regarding women's involvement in community development activities in Oron Federal Constituency. It reveals that out of the total respondents, 308 individuals agreed that women participate in community development through farm cultivation for agricultural activities, while 85 individuals disagreed. Similarly, 357 individuals agreed that women contribute to community development through food production, whereas 36 individuals disagreed. Furthermore, 363 respondents acknowledged that women play a role in community development through food export to other constituencies within the state and other states. In terms of women empowerment intervention programs, 354 individuals expressed their agreement, while 39 individuals disagreed. Additionally, 279 respondents agreed that women contribute to community development through political activities engagement, whereas 174 individuals disagreed. Moreover, 193 individuals agreed that women contribute to community development through decision making at the community level, while 200 individuals disagreed. Lastly, 308 individuals agreed that women participate in community development through social welfare intervention programs/projects, compared to 85 individuals who disagreed. These findings indicate that the proportion of positive responses ("Yes") outweighs the negative responses ("No") in all the questions addressed in this section.

### **Factors that Affect Women in Agriculture in Oron Federal Constituency**

**Table 3: Factors affecting women in Agriculture in Oron Federal Constituency**

|   | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |
|---|------------|-----------|
| Land ownership                          | 311        | 82        |
| Lack of access to grant/loan            | 347        | 46        |
| Family roles                            | 287        | 106       |
| Lack of access to modern farm equipment | 331        | 62        |
| Gender bias                             | 289        | 104       |
| Cultural belief                         | 327        | 66        |

Source: Samuel (2023)

Table 3 displays the data regarding the various factors influencing women in agriculture within Oron Federal Constituency. In terms of land ownership, individuals responding with "Yes" constitute the majority with 311 responses, whereas those responding with "No" total 82. Concerning the lack of access to grants/loans, respondents answering "Yes" represent the highest proportion with 347 responses, while those answering "No" amount to 46. Regarding family roles, those responding with "Yes" make up the largest portion with 287 responses, while those responding with "No" total 106. In terms of the lack of access to modern farm equipment, respondents answering "Yes" constitute the majority with 331 responses, while those answering "No" total 62. When considering gender bias as a factor affecting women

in agriculture in Oron Federal Constituency, 289 respondents agreed that gender bias impacts women's participation in agriculture, while 104 disagreed. Lastly, in relation to cultural beliefs, 327 respondents answered "Yes", while those answering "No" amounted to 66.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Emerging from the findings of the study is the fact that women's roles in agriculture have contributed to community development in Oron Federal Constituency. Findings of the study indicated that women are more involved in agriculture than men. Women in agriculture have contributed to the development of their respective communities within the local government areas in Oron Federal Constituency in Akwa Ibom State. Despite the role of Oron Federal Constituency women in agriculture, no statistical data have provided documented record of the women's role in community development through participation in agriculture. Findings further showed that within the 5 local government areas in Oron Federal Constituency, women contributed to economic development of the constituency through food production and marketing of farm produce. Analysis of gathered data revealed that through food production and food exportation, women in agriculture have contributed to the development of their respective communities within the local government areas in Oron Federal Constituency in Akwa Ibom State. This finding gives credence to Hassan and Silong (2008) who posit that women have long been the mainstay of communities and are heavily involved in community initiatives in various forms. The results indicated that women who participate in agriculture in Oron Federal Constituency engage in various community development programmes like; food production/availability, women empowerment intervention, political activities, decision making, and social welfare intervention programmes to bring about development in their different communities. Findings support the position of Osirike and Egbayabo (2012) that the participation of women in development programmes like agriculture and other forms of developmental activities is well documented in the last two decades in the developed world, but in the developing countries, however, such studies are still very scanty and fragmented as the roles of women in development efforts are hardly acknowledged.

Results of the study also showed that there are factors that affect women in agriculture. Factors such as land ownership, lack of access to grant/loan, family roles, lack of access to modern farm equipment, gender bias, and cultural belief, poverty affect women in agriculture in Oron Federal Constituency. This finding gives credence to Torkelsson and Onditi (2018) who posit that gender gap in agricultural productivity has been associated with women's limited access to factors of production, including land, labour, fertilizer, irrigation, pesticide and improved seeds.

### **Conclusion**

Agriculture plays great role in the development of Oron Federal Constituency especially in the rural areas across the 5 local government areas. Women participation in agriculture has brought development to the communities in the local government areas of the constituency. Factors like lack of access to grants or loans, lack of access to modern farming equipment, and gender bias especially in the land ownership policy, have affected the pace of attaining development in many communities across the 5 local government areas in Oron Federal Constituency. Women in agriculture have contributed to the development of Oron Federal Constituency through food production, export of food productions like crayfish, fishes, and other sea food to other local government areas within Akwa Ibom State and other states, social welfare interventions and participation in political activities. Despite the various barriers facing women in agriculture, the majority of women are in agriculture to feed their families and the world within their reach, which have contributed to the development of the federal constituency.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis of data, the researcher proposed the following recommendations:

- i. Cultural practice of women exclusion should be abolished from among the people of Oron Federal Constituency and Akwa Ibom State as a whole.
- ii. Government should see how to encourage women in agriculture through grants and loans in order to contribute to the development of their local government areas.
- iii. Government should make available modern equipment, hybrid seedlings and fertilizer to the women in agriculture.

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