

Chapter 11

Provision of Women Farm Labour in Wurno, Sokoto State

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Introduction

The 2006 Nigeria Population Census reveals that there are more males than females. However, a closer examination of the age cohort 15-45 which is usually the most active part of any population, reveal that there are more females than males. Ironically, however, efforts to develop the Nigerian rural sector, where over 60% of the Nigeria population resides, and where the bulk of the female population is found, are still focused on men. In the northern part of Nigeria where Islam is dominant and where women's seclusion is practiced, the absence of women participating in rural endeavour has for long been observed (Iliya, 1988). Furthermore, academics and other professional commentators on African agriculture have too often tended either to ignore studies on female farming, or to assume that they are only found mostly in subsistent non-farming endeavors.

Unlike most other occupations, farming provides the physical, economic and social conditions that coincide with the needs, interests and biological processes of the family. The efficient utilisation of these conditions provided by

farming is however a factor of *farm labour*, a concept which Goddard (1987) explains as a factor of production which depends on the potential stock which is shaped by levels of fertility and mortality and length of time per individual work. It is one of the most important elements of agricultural production process throughout the sub-continent where customary division of labour across gender, and according to farming operations and crop types, are important. This stems from a long-standing socio-biological belief which emphasises a distinction between heavy work such as clearing and preparing of farmlands by men and lighter jobs such as weeding and harvesting by women.

In sub-Sahara Africa, agriculture is the most important economic activity for most women, (Hazel, Barret, Angela and Brown, 1995). Thus, contrary to the general belief that religion and the biology of women are barriers to direct physical involvement in farming, there is evidence that increasingly a large number of women are seen to contribute to agricultural labour (Iliya, 1988). For example, Boserup (1970) had early drawn our attention to the centrality of female labour in African farming system, both in terms of labour force and time spent. She argued that women make a greater contribution to African agriculture than men, hence, the use of the terms "*female farming*" and "*female labour per excellence*" (cited in Swindell, 1985). In the Sokoto region where, of recent, governments have introduced the Islamic Legal System called Sharia this may be expected to have a significant effect on the access to, and provision of, farm labour by women in the study area. This assertion is based on the fact Sharia Legal System clearly calls for seclusion of women.

The Research Problem

There are contrary opinions and findings by many researchers on the role of women in the provision of labour

in agriculture. Despite the predominance of men in Muslim Hausa societies, the extent to which women partake in agriculture has stimulated several debates and arguments. While some believe that women contribute less than 5% principally as a result of their seclusion (Norman, 1972; and Luning, 1967), some have suggested a greater contribution (Boserup, 1970 and Iliya, 1988). Despite these contrasting positions, there is unanimity that there is the problem of identification of the sources of this farm labour inputs by women especially in Wurno. It is at this point assumed that part of the problems of recent apparent labour shortages in rural areas is the lack of a proper understanding of the extent to which women labour can be included in rural labour analysis. The issue of how women gain access to labour and how they in-turn provide labour is only recently being understood. For most part, it has been a rather neglected aspect of the broad issue of the place of women in agriculture.

In examining this problem the following research questions were addressed:

- (i) What are the methods of labour mobilisation by women?
- (ii) What kinds of work do women do on farms?
- (iii) How do women manage their farm labour?
- (iv) What kind of labour is readily available to women?
- (v) What is/are the consequence(s) of women involvement in the provision and sourcing for labour?

The aim of this study was to find out the role of women in the provision of farm labour in the study area. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were pursued;

- (a) find out the exact jobs in which women physically participate in farming as labourers;

- (b) examine the strategies women adopt to cope with farm labour difficulties.
- (c) identify the other limitations of women farmers in the area and finally;
- (d) suggest ways of assisting women in farming.

Justification of the Study

Studies of women in agriculture show that workdays contributed by women on farm have increased from 5% to 12-15 percent (Eicher and Baker 1982, and Iliya, 1980). Thus women present workday contribution represent a threefold increase from the five-percent earlier estimated for parts of Hausa lands (Norman *et al.*, 1972). With the introduction of Sharia, this study would want to find out its impact on the provision of farm labour by women farmers in the study area.

It is against this background that this study is being undertaken to assess the role of women in the provision of farm labour and identify the various forms of sourcing for labour. The study area is Wurno, a predominantly Muslim settlement, where indigenous practices over-lap with modern farming methods. This no doubt is a perfect setting for such an investigation. The choice of Wurno is as a result of the presence of both a formal system of farming where we have the Wurno Irrigation Scheme and the existence of traditional farming systems. The area further provides another contrast; it has both upland (Tudu) and fadama (lowland) farms outside the area managed by the authorities that take care of the Irrigation Scheme.

Significance of the Study

It is the contention of this study that as long as women contribute a high percentage in the overall farming system there is the need to find out the modalities, methods, problems, and eventual solutions in women's efforts to

increase farm production and to acquire the subsequent advantages therein. In addition, it is hoped that the findings of this study will enrich the existing literature on women in agriculture and the development processes taking place in rural areas. Earlier studies of farm labour in the Sokoto area (Surtherland, 1985., Goddard *et al.*, 1971., Norman *et al.*, 1982 and Iliya, 1988) address women farmers and labourers only tangentially.

Methodology

Study Area

Wurno, the study area, is an old settlement founded by the earlier Jihadists and to date a highly respected settlement within Sokoto State. Wurno town falls within the part of immediate hinterland of Sokoto town and can best be said to fall within the Sokoto closed settled zone (Goddard, 1971). The Sokoto closed settle zone extends to some 120 km north to south and 50 kilometers east to west of Sokoto town. It has the Wurno Irrigation Project (WIP), which is located at about 40 km N. E of Sokoto town and covers an area of about 7,600 hectares surrounded by 13 villages.

Sources from the project office show that Wurno has a dam reservoir covering an area of approximately 200 square kilometers from about 22 km down-stream of Goronyo town (Fig. 1). The project is a small scale irrigation system of Nigeria, which was initially started with 600 hectares in 1956. As the scheme structures deteriorated partly due to some management problems, it became underutilized. The first rehabilitation took place in 1963 – 1964 by Dalbato and Bugialo Consulting Engineers under the authority of then Regional Government. Babura, (1957) stated that “*prior to the establishment of the irrigation scheme at Wurno, the land was owned by the natives under the customary rights.*” With the establishment of the irrigation scheme the area was declared a settlement area in which existing land within was claimed

to belong to the government and farmers are allocated plots of land with right to cultivation for only one season each year.

Wurno town is the headquarters of Wurno Local Government area and is located in the Sudan Savannah zone of Northern Nigeria, about 45-km Northeast of Sokoto, the capital city of Sokoto State. Precisely, it is located on latitude $13^{\circ} 18^1$ N and longitude $05^{\circ} 25^1$ E. Wurno Local Government was created in 1976 and comprises of two districts: Wurno and Achida. By 1991 census result, it has a population of 95,935 people and a projected figure of 96,035 in 2001 (NPC, 1991).

The local government shares a boundary with Kware to the northwest, Goronyo to the north and Rabba local government areas to the south. Within this area, Wurno, Lugu and Tududawa villages were the sites where the samples were actually taken so as to take care of the upland farmers as well as the flood lands farmers in the study area.

Methods

At different stages of the study, specific scientific methods were employed. Firstly, a reconnaissance survey of the study area was undertaken in December, 2000 and January, 2001. This initial survey formed the basis for the selection of the study villages, the sample respondents and the planning of the questionnaires.

Sampling

After the reconnaissance survey study villages were selected. For fear of possible loss of precious information and eventual sacrifice of quality for quantity, a purposive method was employed to identify the villages that had the attributes needed for the study. These include the presence of flood land (Fadama) and upland (tudu) farms. The purposive technique has been used severally in many such

studies around Sokoto (Norman *et al.*, 1976). Similarly, Adams (1983) study of the impact of the Bakolori Irrigation Project adopted a similar technique for choosing study villages, and Iliya's (1988) study of agricultural mechanization in the eastern zone of the then Sokoto Agricultural Development Project also used purposive sampling technique. Despite the fact that a purposive technique was used to sample study villages, respondents were systematically sampled from a list provided by the Wurno Irrigation Project authorities.

The sampling frame was a list of all women farmers provided by the Wurno Irrigation Project during the reconnaissance survey. The list was collected earlier and as such it had to be updated. It was earlier discovered that some names could not be found. About 36 women who own farms on the project were not recorded. There were women who rented farm without the knowledge of the project officials, and these were not recorded as this was not allowed by the authorities. The researchers chose a class interval of two, such that after every two names the next was taken as part of the sample. Thus, the method used was a systematic random sampling. At the end of the day, 26 women farmers (72.22%) made up the sample. This size will no doubt allow for a generalisation and the formulation of viable policies. To identify women labourers who do not own farms on both the project and off the project, a purposive sampling technique was used, where both male and female farm owners gave the names and addresses of their female hired labourers. This examination took three weeks. A total of 20 women farm labourers were traced and interviewed. Interestingly, these cut across age and socio-economic differentiations. Inter-personal interviews were also carried out while on visit to the staff of Wurno irrigation project and the District head of Wurno and one of the ward heads to get first hand information on the position of tradition on women farmer. Furthermore, husbands of those

women sampled were also interviewed to get their views as to why their wives do work on farms. Finally, during the course of this study, secondary data sources including official statistics, maps, journals, library books and recent relevant surveys including those by the Wurno Irrigation Scheme were used to gather a number of information. Data collected were analyzed using simple statistical techniques such as frequency, percentages and ratios, while graphs are plotted to show the flow of phenomena.

Result and Discussion

Some General Characteristics

In all, a total of 46 respondents were interviewed out of which 26 formed the sample of women farmers while 20 were the women farm labourers.

Table 11.1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristics	Categories	Women Farmers	%	Women Farm Labourers	%
Age (Years)	20 – 30	0	0.00	12	60
	30 – 40	22	84.62	6	30
	40 +	4	15.40	2	10
Place of Birth	Wurno	6	23.07	12	60
	Lugu	3	11.54	4	20
	Tududawa	1	3.85	3	15
	Outsider	16	61.54	1	5
Marital Status	Single	0	0.0	2	10
	Married	20	76.92	11	55
	Divorced	0	0.00	5	25
	Widowed	6	23.08	2	10
No. of Children	None	6	23.08	2	10
	1-4	6	23.08	14	70
	4-7	8	30.77	2	10
	7+	6	23.08	2	10
	Qur'anic	26	100.00	20	100

Level of Education	Primary	2	7.70	2	10
	Post Primary	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Others	4	15.38	2	10
Major Occupation	Farming	20	76.92	19	95
	Non-Farm Work	6	23.08	1	5

Source: Fieldwork, 2001

Age of Respondents

Age provides a lead for the understanding of who gets involved in farming in the study area. About 14 percent of sample women farmers/labourers interviewed are well over 40 years of age, 60.87 percent fall within 30-40 years age cohort while 26.08 percent are between 20-30 years of age. This explains that very young women (below 20 years) are not involved in either commercial farm labour provision (farm labourers) or farm ownership (women farmers). This does not however mean that there is no evidence of girl-child labour in the area. But it constitutes an insignificant component of the population.

Table 11.2: Involvement of Women in Farm Production by Age

Age (years)	No.	%
Less than 20	0.0	0.0
20 – 30	12	26.08
30 – 40	28	60.87
40+	6	13.04

Source: Fieldwork, 2001

Marital Status

From the data collected, about 67% said they are married, 17% are widowed while only 4 percent are single. Of the 67 percent married women interviewed, about 44 percent only own farms but do not really get involved in the farming physically. This according to a respondent is attributable to the fact that most of those women farmers that own farms in the study area do not necessarily reside in the area either as a result of marriage, or out migration in search of livelihood. It was also observed that seclusion is practiced in the area. This, as stressed by Staudt (1975), puts a ceiling on the women's opportunities and horizons; it does affect the ability of such secluded women to engage in income-generating activities. About 17 percent of the respondents said they are widows, most of who are well over 50 years of age, and engage in almost all activities on the farm, except land clearing and weeding.

Literacy

All those sampled are illiterate in roman script. This could be attributed to the fact that Western education did not extend to these areas until late 1920s. And according to the village head of Wurno, there is also the presence of Islam, which saw literacy in roman script as an incursion of Christianity into Muslim Hausa-Fulani tradition.

Ethnic groups

The people in the study area are typical of most Hausa speaking villages in Northern Nigeria. They are predominately Hausa, Fulani or simply Hausanized Fulani due to intermarriages after the Jihad and post Jihad brought about a blend of Islam with Hausa beliefs, where orthodox Islam fused with Hausa culture, as evident in marriage formalities, land inheritance and education. Out of the 46

respondents, about 83% said they are Hausa, 15% said they are Fulani, while only 2% is Taureg from Niger Republic (Table 11.3).

Table 11.3: Ethnicity of Sample Women Farmers and Women Farm Labourers

Ethnicity	Women Farmers	Farm Labourer	Total	%
Hausa	22	16	38	82.61
Fulani	4	3	7	15.22
Others	0	1	1	2.17
Total	26	20	46	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2001

Several studies around Sokoto and its environs revealed the predominance of Hausa in rural areas. Goddard *et al.*, (1971) found 63 percent, 21.4 percent and 15.4 percent of Hausa, Fulani and others, respectively. More recently, Iliya (1985) also found in his study of eastern zone of the Sokoto Agricultural Development Project, 85 percent and 15 percent Hausa and Fulani, respectively. But unlike the reason adduced by Iliya (1988) for the absence of other ethnic groups in the area of study, in this case it is not unconnected with the total absence of other job opportunities that would have complimented the proceeds from farm labour.

Major Occupation

Farming forms the major occupation of the bulk of the respondents, either as farm labourers or as small-scale farmers or both. These farmers are involved in both the fadama (lowland) and tudu (upland) farm cultivation. A total of 93.7 percent claim to have farming as the major and only occupation, the remaining 6.3 percent, apart from

farming, are civil servants. From the data analysis, women provide a little above men in terms of overall labour input. The only difference is that, farm jobs that demand direct physical involvement (for example weeding and land clearing) are done by men, even though women too attempt such jobs.

Table 11.4 Division of Labour by Gender on Women’s Farms

Activities	Men	%	Women	%
Land clearing	26	100.00	21	80.77
Planting	14	53.85	26	100.00
Fertilizer application	26	100.00	14	53.85
Weeding	18	69.23	24	92.31
Harvesting	26	100.00	26	100.00
Threshing	0	0.0	26	100.00

Source: *Fieldwork, 2001*

Looking at the jobs specifically, the respondents claim to have specific farm jobs for different sex. Majority however maintained that hired labour is readily available and accessible. Women, they argue, do almost all farm jobs. Asked whether they would not bother if women farm labourers ceased to exist, the respondents argued that their farm produce would decline. Sampled respondents stated that farm labour is easily accessible because women are involved. Our data also revealed that both men and women get involved in some jobs, such as planting, weeding and harvesting at the same time/rate. Our respondents however revealed that the men are faster in most farm operations but also charge more than the women for similar jobs.

The general belief that Muslim Hausa women participate little in outdoor activities has made their contributions in many endeavours unpopular. Norman *et al.*, (1982) for

example, have emphasised the predominance of men in Muslim Hausa-people areas, particularly in farm jobs. This according to them is principally as a result of the religious seclusion of women (Kulle). Several other studies have however proved some points contrary to this, as more women even in the so-called Hausa Muslim communities are getting involved in many outdoor activities. It was found that women in our study area participate in all forms of farm jobs including land preparation, as against the findings of Iliya (1988), where women, then, were not involved in land clearing. Field data also show that more women were involved in planting, harvesting and sometimes weeding of legumes. This is in conformity with earlier findings (Mortimore and Adams, 1988) that women are contributing a high percentage of labour particularly during planting, weeding/thinning and harvesting in Northern Nigeria.

In terms of patterns of ownership and labour responsibilities on farms, in the yam cultivation zone from Ivory Coast to eastern Nigeria for example, it is common to find a man carry out the bulk of the work on the main crop (white yam). Women only own and are responsible for subsidiary intercrops such as maize, cocoyam, cassava, and vegetable (Richards, 1983). Due to relatively low population densities and recent selective loss of young people through rural out-migration, Zachariah and Conde (1981) observed that it is common for farmers in many parts of West Africa to suffer from labour shortages. Even where labour is not in short supply, over all, therefore it is helpful to be able to arrange the farms so that tasks present themselves in a steadily manageable way over the duration of the farming season. This could serve as an explanation to the gradual but steady increasing number of women farm labourers, in addition to the economic demands.

Kinds of Labour Provided

Female farm labourers claim to provide only hired labour. There is no evidence of co-operative labour. They said only the men engage in such venture. From our survey it was found out that there exists no formal association (Kungiya) of farm labourers. What this means is that women hired labourers engage in labour provision individually and independent of any group or association. From the 20 continuously studied women farm labourers, only 20 percent provide family kind of labour while none of the respondents engage in co-operative kind of labour provision. All the respondents engage in hired labour. By inference, women provision of farm labour in the study area is basically economically induced. That is, women farm labourers only engage in the venture to raise their economic status. Table 3.8 provides a statistical picture of the findings.

Table 11.5: Kinds of Labour Provided by Women Farm Labourers

Labour	Respondents	%
Family	4	20
Hired	20	100
Co-operative	0	0.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2001

Nature of Work Done

Majority of our respondents claim to be better in planting and transplanting. Thus in line with the earlier findings (Carney and Watts 1996), people are expecting a lot more from women than men.

Table 11.6: Nature of Work Done

Job	Farm Loburers (No)	%
Land clearing	16	80
Planting	20	100
Transplanting	20	100
Weeding	20	100
Harvesting	14	70
Threshing	20	100

Source: Fieldwork 2001

According to Carney and Watts (pg. 223) women are better than men as far as transplanting is concerned and they are also better than men as far as working in the water, they further argued that quite *“a lot of labour is to be expected from women, more so than-from men”*. All our respondents indicated that their major occupation is farming. Only 4 (20%) out of the 20 respondents claim to have personal farms but off the Wurno Irrigation Project.

Table 11.7: Time Spent on Farms per Job/Day

Work	1-2 hrs	%	2-3 hrs	%	3-4 hrs	%	4-5 hrs	%
Land clearing	-		4	20	10	50	6	30
Planting	10	50	8	40	2	10		
Weeding	12	60	6	30	2	10		
Harvesting	4	20	12	60	4	20		
Threshing					2	10	18	90

Source: Fieldwork, 2001

Therefore, the sampled respondents have enough time to work on farms as providers of labour. The problem here, which is also global, is whether the remuneration is commensurate to the labour provided. Time spent on farm is

also an attribute of how much a labourer can take home at the end of the day. Our respondents get between ₦200.00 – ₦500.00 for spending an average of 4 hours on the field as labourers. The periods of farm work is divided into morning (7:30 am – 1.00 pm) and evening (2:30 pm – 6:30 pm). Most works are however done in the early hours of the morning or late hours of the evening due to the intensity of the sun.

Factors Affecting Provision of Labour by Women

Contrary to our earlier assumption that the recent introduction of the Islamic Legal System (Sharia Law) by the Sokoto State Government might bring a set-back to women in farming, field data analysis revealed that this has not been the case. Our sampled farmers maintained that labour, particularly the hired, is not a problem, because it is readily available and accessible. What is evidently the problem is that most women farmers in our study area have no direct access to loans.

Although both women and men small farmers have problems acquiring credit in developing countries, the situation facing women is more serious. As observed in our study area, because women lack collateral, 75% of our women farmers claim not to have had any kind of loan for agriculture. The remaining 25% that have access to such credit facilities said such funds are gotten from banks that give customers loans. Prominent among these banks is the Union Bank of Nigeria Plc, through its seasonal agricultural loan scheme for its customers. Another reason, according to our respondents for women not having access to credit is the widespread female illiteracy that makes them often incapable of following application procedures and the fact that many of the women farmers and farm labourers are not normally involved in the development and extension programmes, or structures that act as interface with lending institutions.

Community Banks and Peoples Banks have long been set up to assist in such efforts to enhance self reliance. But the impact of these along with most women-based programs (better life, family support, family economic advancement and perhaps the current poverty eradication) have been limited. They are more of political statement than programs. The whole of our married respondents maintained that their husbands do not go against their act of farming but they also do not contribute anything. Credit and capital are basic requisites to increase agricultural production. Women and men farmers need short term credit to buy improved seeds, fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides and to hire farm labourers to work the fields and help with post harvest operations. And they need long-term credit to invest in more efficient technologies such as irrigation and labour saving tools.

Another factor that aids women access to and provision of labour in the study area is the nature of crops grown. The crops grown here are mostly leguminous not tree crops, whose production process therefore requires little physical involvement, compared to rocky and forest areas. The argument here is that, what is required to grow crops in the study area is not beyond the available power of the womenfolk. Limiting factors to women provision of farm labour, as gathered by our study also include access to modern mechanization and improved technologies. This is because most innovations and technological improvement are directed at cash crop which men control (Zachariah and Conde, 1981).

It is worthy of note that our entire respondents maintained that the lack of adequate capital impinges on the possibility of improvement on the current level of agricultural production. These limiting factors, therefore, go a long way in reducing the potential products by women in agriculture. The husbands and the societal values in our study area have not had any significant negative impact on

the women in agriculture. The women in our study area have tried in several ways to solve these problems through things like getting involved in so many off farm activities, and/or getting financial support from distant relations.

Women Workers in Men's Field

Mortimore and Adams (1988) found a high percentage of labour being contributed by women particularly during planting, weeding, thinning and harvesting. Our field work reveals that 90 percent of the 20 women farm labourers interviewed maintained that they also work as hired labours on men's farms. However, women farm labourers that work on men's farms only engage in lighter jobs. This according to our respondents is not because they cannot do heavy farm work but because male farmers believe that such jobs are better done by their male counterparts. Most male farmers do themselves engage in the act of farming, unlike the women farmers that do not go to the fields.

Inferences

The so-called male dominance in the agricultural labour force which is related to highly structured land distribution, to export agriculture, to wage labour and female urban migration, is partially characteristic of the study area. Despite their substantial role, women have less access to land than men. The rural women farmers/labourers also have less access to credit, which limits their ability to purchase seeds, fertilizers and other inputs to adopt new farming techniques. The study further reveals that, there is evidently a weak and underdeveloped official support or recognition for farm and agricultural development with a women's focus. There is, as observed, the non-existence of any formal female farmers association and a limited women's participation in male dominated farmers'

association/co-operatives. This has reduced their access to credit and affected their performance in agriculture.

There is also the fact that the age of a woman determines the type of job she participates in. Where our women farmers are old (40 years and above) claim to be too old or too weak to participate in farm jobs, they are into things like scaring of birds, picking and negligible weeding. Younger women however form the bulk of the women farm labourers; they are engaged in virtually all forms of farm jobs.

Recommendations

There is the need for a strategy of action, and a framework to assist policy makers develop appropriate methods for collecting and analyzing data on the economic and social contributions made by women farmers. This will clear the gender biases that have led to neglect in the evaluation of women's work which have affected the way information is gathered and interpreted. Secondly, for a practicable agricultural development policy, government at all levels must recognize the role women play in agricultural production. Thirdly, government and other organisations alike should also ensure that their activities are both cost-effective and relevant to the needs of all the farming community. Government agricultural research centers and training services should take gender issues fully into account. Fourthly, government should acknowledge the constraints and discriminatory practices facing many women in rural areas. Their participation in agricultural organisations and related institutions must be ensured. Agricultural extension services should also be geared towards subsistent/small scale farming where the bulk involved is women.

Finally, an enormous amount of work still needs to be done in order to put women's needs squarely into rural development programming.

Conclusion

Field data analysis and discussion of women in agriculture in and around Wurno shows that the system of male control in workplace is rooted in ideas of male supremacy in society. While many of those ideas derive from and are endorsed by religion and tradition, they cannot be reduced to religious ideology alone. Economic realities following Structural Adjustment Programme and Globalisation that are sweeping across Sub-Saharan Africa in general and northwest Nigeria in particular is making it difficult for men to meet the needs of their family. Women in polygamous household have been the most hit. They have been forced to, in addition to the array of non-farm activities they engage in, get involved in physical farm labour, both on their farms and as hired labourers within close proximity of their settlements. They have their needs and they have to take care of their needs. Governments and development agents therefore must appreciate their plight and respond both positively and timely to reduce their hardship and push them above the poverty line.

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