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TRADITIONAL ROLES OF WOMEN IN FARM OPERATIONS IN SAGAMU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA , OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated women's roles in soil management in Sagamu Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria. Using a random sampling technique, 90 women farmers were selected from 619 registered women farmers in Sagamu Local Government Area. The results indicate that majority (68.9%) of the women were married, and in their active ages (25 - 45 years). Majority (97.6%) adopted multiple cropping system, while weeding as well as pest and disease control were manually done (92.8%). Also, 53.3% of them used resistant crop varieties. The use of cover crop for maintenance of soil-fertility was widespread (61.1%). Between 49.9% and 94.4% of the women had control over their farming operations while 45.6% - 46.7% indicated that their spouses took decisions on land and related issues. Water logging was a major problem (57%) on women's farmlands.

It is suggested that regular soil management programmes be organized for women in Sagamu LGA by extension and related organizations to enable the women solve soil problems on their farms and increase productivity. The establishment of soil management centres in the study area will help disseminate relevant information on soil management practices to the women.

INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in agricultural production makes them daily managers of environmental resources. This role as managers of the environment according to Sigot (1995) is by virtue of their direct and heavy dependence on primary natural systems such as soil, water and forest for survival which invariably are their major production inputs. This may partially explain women's vested interest in environmental protection and its sustainability.

Reporting on women's relation with the natural environment, FAO (1989) claims that women in the tropics have greater and more decisive roles and responsibilities in the interest of the tropics' fragile ecosystem. Women, thus have a central role to maintain the delicate balance between utilization and conservation or destruction of the natural resource base (soil, water and forest) in order to sustain the environment during their agricultural production

activities and household tasks. The same can be said of women farmers in Sagamu Local Government Area (LGA) and their environment because they engage in year-round subsistence agricultural production of food crops and a mix of local vegetables. Tropical soils including those of Sagamu LGA, are fragile and quickly lose texture, nutrients, organisms and organic matter (Agboola, 1993). Increased demand for local food crops in such areas requires intensification of land-use. This places extreme demands on soil nutrients. Therefore maintaining soil natural fertility alone may not guarantee sustainable increased crop production. Hence increased output of food crops may only be achieved if nutrients removed from the farm with harvests are continuously replaced (Spore, 1994). This study investigated the roles of women farmers in the management of their farmlands in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria with a view to answering the following questions: What are the crop production activities of women farmers? What are the decision-making roles of women in their production activities? What are the soil conservation methods adopted by women? What are the constraints encountered in soil conservation practices? Do these women farmers differ in their profiles?

Based on the issues identified above, the specific objectives of this study were to: investigate the profile of women farmers, determine their crop production activities ascertain the decision-making roles of women in crop production activities, identify soil conservation methods adopted by women farmers and investigate the constraints they encountered in soil conservation practices.

Materials and Method

Sagamu Local Government Area, one of the 4 cells in Simawa Block in Ikenne Extension Zone, under Ogun State Agricultural Development Project (OGADEP), was selected for this study because majority of the women-farmers in the area cultivated food crops all-year round. Essentially soil management practices constitute a significant component of the area's farming system and it is representative of other farming areas of Ogun State (Ojanuga *et al.* 1999).

Sampling

A random sampling technique was used to select respondents from the list of registered women-farmers in the Women-in-Agriculture (WIA) programme of Sagamu Local Government Area Cell of Ogun State Agricultural Development Project (OGADEP).

This procedure resulted in the selection of 90 from the 615 registered women farmers representing 14 percent of the population. Each selected woman-farmer was then interviewed using an interview schedule. The interview schedule contained questions that elicited responses related to women's profile, crop production activities, decision making

roles of women, types of soil management practices adopted and constraints encountered in soil management.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the results of a descriptive analysis of respondents' profile variables investigated in the study.

Table 1: Profile of Women Crop Farmers in Sagamu Local Government Area

| Variables | Frequency | Percentage (N=90) |
|--------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Age (years) | | |
| Less than 25 | 2 | 2.2 |
| 26-35 | 12 | 13.3 |
| 36-45 | 40 | 44.5 |
| 46-55 | 6 | 30.0 |
| 56 and above | 3 | 3.3 |
| Marital Status | | |
| Married | 62 | 68.8 |
| Widowed | 14 | 15.6 |
| Single parent | 9 | 10.0 |
| Divorced | 5 | 5.6 |
| Educational level | | |
| No formal education | 33 | 36.7 |
| Primary education | 26 | 28.9 |
| Adult literacy | 24 | 26.6 |
| Secondary education | 7 | 3.3 |

Majority (60.0%) of the women farmers were between 26 and 45 years of age. This indicates that the bulk of food crop farming population consisted of productive and active women farmers. Adeleke (2002) obtained similar results for women farmers in Oriire Local Government Area of Oyo State. Table 1 also reveals majority of the women (68.9%) were married while others were widowed, divorced or single parents. Furthermore, 63.3% of the women had formal education, with majority having only primary education. Olowu *et al.* (1990) reported similar results for farmers in Ohaji Local Government Area of Imo state.

Crop Production Activities

All the women in the study area engaged in food crop production. The food crops grown included cassava (Tropical Manihot Selection), maize; and local vegetables such as *Amaranthus spp*, *Cochorous spp*, *Celosia spp*, pepper and tomatoes.

Cropping Pattern

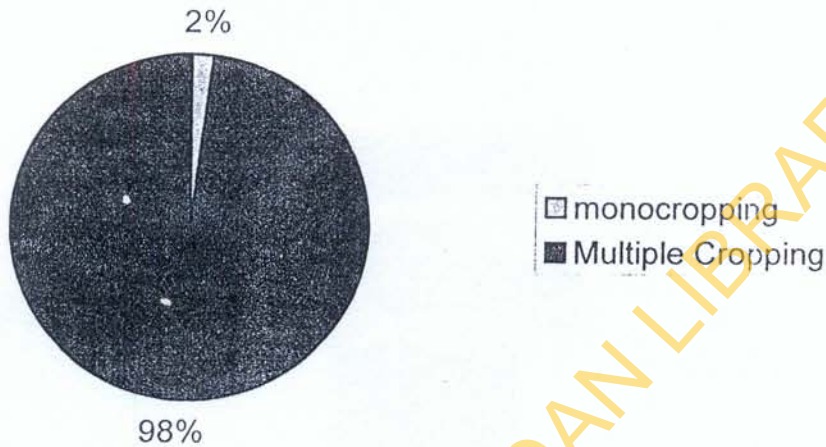


Figure 1: Distribution of women farmers by cropping pattern adopted

Fig. 1 shows that multiple cropping pattern was predominantly (97.6%) adopted by the women farmers in the study area. Oladipo and Tseayo (1992) in a similar study reported that Yoruba women in the west and Igbo women in the eastern states of Nigeria, plant yams (*Dioscorea* spp), cassava (TMS, *Manihot* spp), cocoyam (*Xantosomonas* spp), beans (*Vigna unguiculata*) and okra (*Hibiscus* spp.) on their farms. According to Amubode and Okali (1993), crop production by women is usually in a mixed cropping system which is geared towards land productivity and at the same time making available a range of foods.

Weeds, Insect and Disease Control

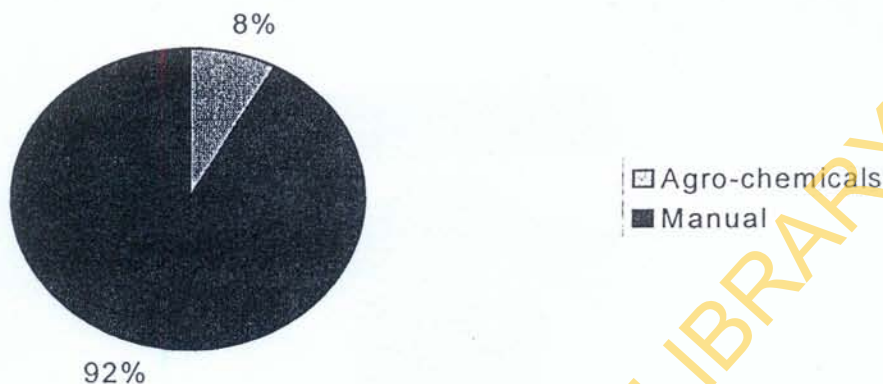


Figure 2: Distribution pattern of weed control

Figure 2 indicates that manual weed control (92.8%) was widespread among women farmers in the study area. Methods of manual weed control included the use of hoe, cutlass and hand-picking. The predominance of manual weed control methods might be linked to the poverty level of women particularly farmers involved in agricultural production. Research findings have shown that women encounter this constraint more severely because of their low income status. Consequently they are less able to purchase inputs such as improved seed varieties, fertilizer and herbicides that could improve their yield (Buckland and Halegoah, 1996 and Dey, 1984). Figure 3 presents pests and disease control distribution pattern among women farmers in the study area.

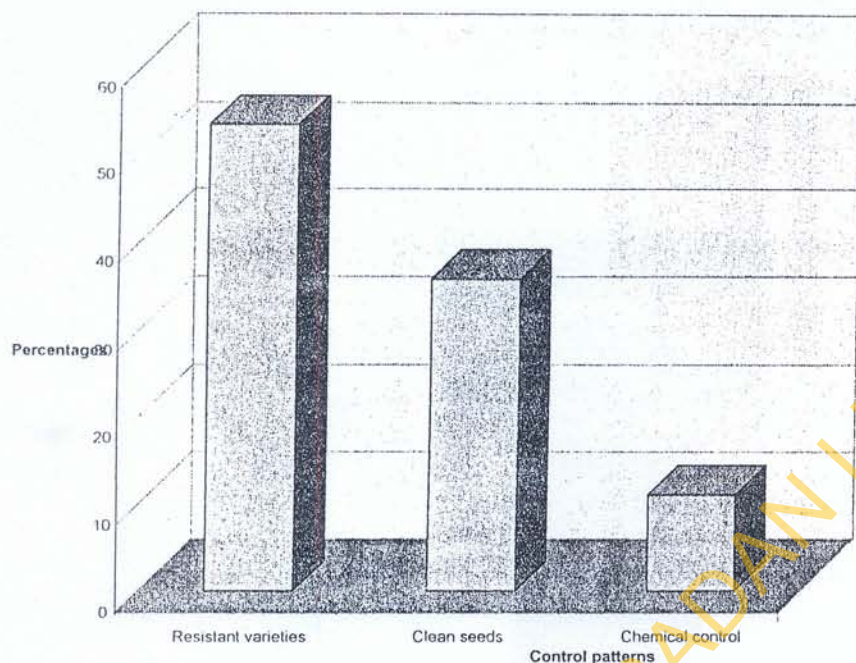


Figure 3 Disease control distribution patterns

Figure 3, shows that the adoption of resistant crop varieties (53.3%) and clean seeds (35.6%) were the common pest and disease control methods. These methods attracted relatively low cost. In addition the adoption of these relatively cheap methods of control was in accordance with the low income status of the women (Buckland and Haleegoan, 1996). This view corroborates an earlier report by Dey (1984), that women farmers' inability to acquire or purchase technologies to eliminate or control pests affecting crops, even where they exist, is related to their lack of financial resources.

Figure 4 indicates the distribution of soil management practices adopted by the women farmers.

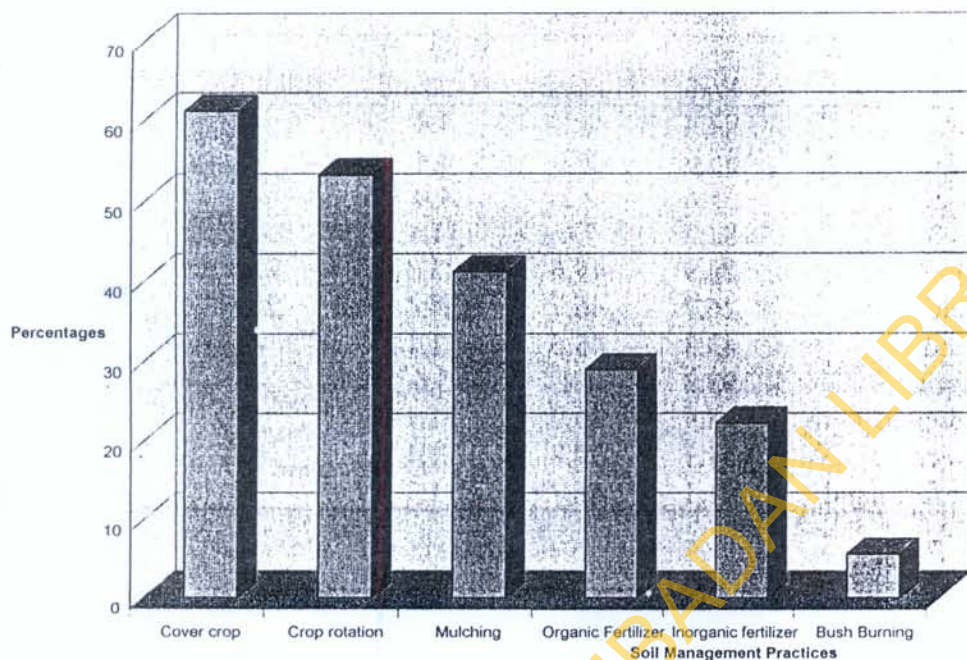


Figure 4: Soil Management Practices Adopted by Women-Farmers

The figure shows that the use of cover crop in maintaining soil fertility was widespread among the women-farmers (61.1%) in the study area. They planted cover crops such as melon (*Cucumeropsis mannii*) and cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata*) along side major crops like cassava (TMS) and maize. Amubode and Okali (1993) reported a similar result in Oboto, Ondo State Nigeria. However, only few women-farmers (5.6%) used bush burning as a management practice in the study area.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of Women's participation in decision making

| Agricultural Activities | Decision Making | | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|---------|----------------|-----------|--------|
| | Wife | Husband | Wife & Husband | Relations | Others |
| Types of crop grown | 94.4 | 1.1 | 4.4 | - | - |
| Fertilizer types used | 55.6 | 2.2 | 4.4 | - | 30.0 |
| Time to apply fertilizer | 55.6 | 2.2 | 4.4 | - | 30.0 |
| Time to harvest | 82.2 | 7.6 | 11.1 | - | - |
| Choice of farmland | 28.9 | 45.6 | 23.3 | 2.2 | - |
| Farmland acquisition | 26.7 | 46.7 | 24.4 | 2.2 | - |
| Time to cultivate land | 43.3 | 45.6 | 11.1 | - | - |
| Departure time to farm | 93.3 | 1.1 | 5.6 | - | - |
| Cropping pattern adopted | 48.9 | 40.0 | 11.1 | - | - |
| Time and how to weed | 51.1 | 37.8 | 11.1 | - | - |
| Duration of hold on farmland | 41.1 | 46.7 | 11.1 | - | - |

Table 2 reveals that a majority of the women-farmers (46.9% - 94.4%) in the study area had control over their farming operations. This is consistent with Dey (1984) who reported that African women traditionally have considerable decision-making and managerial powers in their spheres of food production, storage, marketing, preparation and budgeting. Similarly, between 45.6% and 46.7% of the women, also indicated that decisions on land and land-related matters (choice of farmland, duration on farmland, and adopted cropping pattern) laid with their husbands. Earlier reports (Dey, 1984; Oladipo and Tseyayo, 1992) had indicated that land ownership and inheritance rights under the customary land tenure systems, are registered in the name of husbands or their first sons. Such traditions may have "carry over effects" on decisions relating to land matters. Hence it is only natural for the women to follow the dictates of tradition and culture by entrusting decisions pertaining to land matters to their husbands. This study confirms such a pattern.

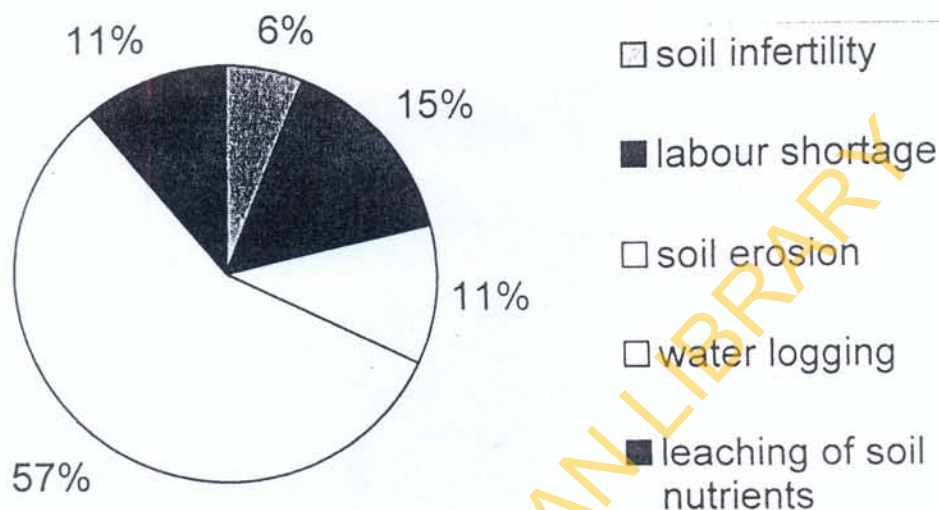


Figure 5: Soil management constraints encountered by women in Sagamu Local Government Area.

Figure 5 shows that women-farmers' major constraint was water-logging (57%) of farms. Others were labour shortage (15%), leaching of soil nutrients; soil erosion (11% respectively) and soil infertility (6%). Apart from shortage of labour, other constraints could be related to extensive soil degradation in tropical Africa, caused by removal of soil surface through erosion as reported by Agboola (1993).

Table 3: Results of Chi – square analysis showing relationships between socio-economic indices and adopted soil maintenance methods

| Variables | X ² | df | p |
|-------------------|----------------|----|--------|
| Age | 24.99 | 24 | > 0.05 |
| Educational level | 14.10 | 24 | > 0.05 |
| Marital status | 14.46 | | > 0.05 |

Table 3 shows the results of Chi – square analysis of relationships between socio-economic indices and adopted soil maintenance methods. No significant relationship was recorded for

the three variables. This shows that the socio-economic indices tested did not influence the adoption of soil maintenance practices.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study reveals that a large proportion (87.5%) of the women farmers were between 26 and 55 years of age, 68.8% were married and 36.7% had no formal education. Common soil fertility maintenance method adopted was the use of cover crops (61.1%). Crop rotation, mulching and use of organic fertilizer were the other soil management practices adopted. Most of the respondents agreed that they had control over their agricultural operations while decision relating to land acquisition matters was taken by their spouses. Soil infertility, erosion, leaching of soil nutrients, water-logging of farm-land and labour shortage were constraints encountered by respondents in soil maintenance process. Soil management programmes should be established by extension organizations operating in the area, since the women indicated one form of soil degradation problem or the other.

Current extension trend emphasizes the use of information technologies in disseminating information to rural farmers. It is suggested that relevant soil information with local content is disseminated to these women through radio, television and entertainment education programmes. There is a need to establish soil management information centres for scientists, extensionists, soil conservationists, agribusiness practitioners and farmers associations to act as clearing houses for information on soil management practices at the local government level. Such centres should organize refresher courses on soil management for village extension workers to enable them help farmers with soil problems on their farms.

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