

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Coverage of gender roles in agriculture in four Nigerian newspapers (2000-2004)

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Increasing roles of women in agricultural activities has made provision of gender responsive information imperative. This study investigated coverage of gender roles in agriculture in four selected Nigerian newspapers. Ninety-two articles representing the media coverage from four newspapers were coded for this study. Results indicated that the tabloids covered more non-gender stories (67.3%) than gender stories (32.6%), male roles enjoyed more prominence than female roles; and total amount of space allotted to females (51.3%) was more compared to male roles (48.7%). However, male roles (33.3%) in agricultural news coverage enjoyed more strategic placement as compared to female roles (23.3%), though space allotted ( $t = -0.16$ ,  $p = 0.872$ ) and placement ( $t = 0.94$ ;  $p = 0.94$ ) of male and female related stories were not significantly different. Civil society groups with mandates for agriculture and gender development should mount advocacy, mobilization and sensitization for media executives on the importance of gender responsive reporting of agricultural news.

**Key words:** Agricultural news coverage, gender roles, newspapers.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background information and problem statement

The mass media is a very important communication outlet and has been found to play a greater role in the process of positive change, hence, Van den Ban and Hawkins (1996) opined that the mass media does this in variety of ways including setting agenda for important discussion, topics, transferring knowledge, forming and changing opinions and behaviour. The media is also believed to create awareness and diffuse a personal value system favorable to innovations, mobility, achievement and consumption (Mc quail, 1987) as Lenner (1958) and Wessler and Brinkman (2002) asserted that mass media helps to clear the mist of traditionalism, which is inimical to modernity.

Consequent to the pervasive role of the mass media and several appeals of prints media over electronic based media, it becomes pertinent to focus on the print media as an important source of agro-information to

farmers (Padre and Tripp, 2003). Newspapers are enduring and very popular print media organ. This is because it can be read and re-read at convenience, thus, allowing for a fuller and better understanding of mass media contents. Newspapers also help the process of information exchange between those searching for information and also support new behaviors (Albrecht et al., 1989; Lightfoot, 2003). In essence, the newspapers are potent and fundamental tools for technology transfer in the aid of agricultural and rural development. Thus, Aina (1990) with reference to USA and Canada and Fett (1972) with reference to Brazil; attributed successes recorded in agricultural production in these nations, to farmers' ready access to agro-information, as contained in newspapers.

This is however not the case in Nigeria, where there is a concurrence of research results (Agumagu, 1988; Olowu, 1990; Mundy and Sultan, 1999) on the very poor level of reportage of agro and rural developments news by the newspapers, despite the importance of agriculture to the Nigerian economy. Reasons adduced for the poor performance of the print media in this regard include; financial and space constraints, illiteracy and language

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barrier, lack of participation, poor revenue generating potential, personal values and the belief of the editor, advertisers and media owners (Ozowa, 1995; Van den Ban and Hawkins, 1996; Mundy and Sultan, 1999; Nwachukwu, 2005). In spite of these enormous challenges, print media especially, newspapers in Nigeria still devote spaces for reportage of rural and agricultural based news. However, reportage of gender roles in agriculture by Nigerian newspapers had been given little attention over the years, despite the increasing roles of women in agriculture and in rural households. The position and policies of the newspaper is understandable as they have competing demand for many news worthiness issues and even paid advertorial to fulfill the commercial purpose of the prints media. Even at this, there are laudable programmes on gender related issues in the media though men's contributions remain the central, often the sole focus of attention in Nigerian Newspapers (Lightfoot, 2003).

Nwachukwu (2005) reveals that in spite of the sensitivity of researchers and extension agencies to gender roles in agriculture, as typified in many reference to their contributions to Nigerian agriculture and economy as it increases, yet, their roles are invisible in the Nigerian dailies. Some rural women in Nigeria have become the heads of their families since they single-handedly carried out most of the responsibilities that are expected of their husbands, while the husband is alive and healthy (Adufe, 2005). Still, they are under-valued in the print media context.

Increasing rate of women involvement in felling of trees in the forest, clearing of land and ploughing, sowing and planting of crops have made women themselves to erroneously believe that those roles and responsibilities are theirs, and Nigerian newspapers that are supposed to correct these wrong beliefs under report these developments. However, the little attention given to women's role in Nigerian dailies is not properly reported as important as that of men (Ramirez and Quarry, 2004). In other words, the society as a whole sees the vibrant roles of women as being normal, since Nigerian newspapers traditionally charged with setting agenda around development issues give no meaningful attention to them.

Therefore, the pattern of reporting men and women's role, space allotted, placement and frequency of agricultural news in the Nigerian newspapers were investigated with the view to empirically validate series of concerns emanating from this trend and consequently chart ways to improving the current level of reportage of gender roles in Nigerian print media. The study therefore, investigated the coverage of gender roles in agriculture in four Nigerian newspapers namely; Nigerian Tribune, Guardian, Vanguard and Punch. The following research questions became pertinent to achieve the intents of the study and the questions are highlighted thus:

1. What is the frequency of gender and non-gender stories in agricultural news?

2. What is the frequency of reportage of male and female roles in agricultural news?

3. What space is allotted for male and female roles in agricultural news?

4. How male and female roles are placed in agricultural news in the selected Nigerian newspapers?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study population

All agricultural and related stories in selected Nigerian tabloids namely: Nigerian Tribune, Guardian, Vanguard and Punch in continuous publication between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2004 constituted the population of this study. One hundred and four agro-based articles and stories were obtained from Nigerian Tribune while 66, 23 and 70 articles were obtained from Guardian, Vanguard and Punch respectively.

### Sampling procedure and sampling size

A total of 263 articles drawn from the four Nigerian tabloids constituted the population of this study. To draw a representative sample, quota sampling method was used in the selection of the articles that constituted the sample size. This was due to small amount (23 articles) of agricultural related news found in the Vanguard. All of the 23 articles from the tabloid (Vanguard) were analyzed for the study, while equal number (23 articles) was randomly chosen from Nigerian Tribune, Guardian and Punch. In all, Ninety-two articles representing the media coverage from the four newspapers were coded for this study. Four content categories: male, female, male and female and neutral were developed for news related to males only, females only, both male and female and neutral for both sexes respectively. Also, inter-coder reliability coefficient of 0.95 using Holstis (1985) reliability method was obtained when all gathered articles (23 each from each tabloid) were subjected to inter-coder reliability test. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to run the data gathered while descriptive (frequency counts and percentages) and inferential statistic (t-test) were used for analysis of data collected.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Coverage of gender and non-gender stories in agricultural news in the selected Nigerian newspapers

Four selected Nigerian newspapers reported more non-gender stories (67.3%) than gender stories (32.6%) in their coverage of the agricultural news over the study time frame as shown in Table 1. Of this, Punch (16.3%) reported most of the gender roles related stories as compared to 7.6, 6.5 and 2.1% reported by the Nigerian Tribune, Vanguard and Guardian newspapers respectively. The total percentage of gender stories reported by the four selected Nigerian newspapers showed that print media were not very responsive to the coverage of gender stories in agricultural news they covered. Agumagu (1988) and Olowu (1990) had laid credence to the fact that news reportage in Nigeria's

**Table 1.** Agricultural gender and non-gender stories in the selected newspapers.

Items	Nigerian tribune	Guardian	Vanguard	Punch	Total
Gender roles related stories	7 (7.6)*	2 (2.1)	6 (6.5)	15 (16.3)	30 (32.6)
Non-gender roles related Stories	16 (17.3)	21 (22.8)	17 (18.4)	8 (8.7)	62 (67.3)
Total	23	23	23	23	92

\*Percentages are in parentheses.

**Table 2.** Reported male and female agricultural roles.

Newspapers	Gender stories	
	Male roles	Female roles
Nigerian Tribune	4 (57.0)*	3 (43.0)
Guardian	1 (50.0)	1 (50.0)
Vanguard	4 (67.0)	2 (33.0)
Punch	8 (53.0)	7 (47.0)
Total	17	13

\*Percentages are in parentheses.

**Table 3.** Space allotted to male and female roles.

Newspapers	Amount of Space Allotted in cm <sup>2</sup>	
	Male roles	Female roles
Nigerian tribune	714 (59.0)*	490 (41.0)
Guardian	104 (28.0)	264 (72.0)
Vanguard	110 (40.0)	166 (60.0)
Punch	718 (47.0)	814 (53.0)
Total	1646 (48.7)	1734 (51.3%)

\*Percentages are in parentheses.

media is negatively skewed against agricultural news in general. While this has not improved significantly over the years (Nwachukwu, 2005), introduction of gender dimension may sound premature. This however negates the recent attention given to gender sensitivity in all climes especially, amongst researchers who recognized the importance of gender issues in the development milieu. However, it can also be taken as confirmation of low priority accorded gender related issues in the nation's life as many government policies that are supposedly designed to promote gender related issues ended being at best paying lip-service to issues that are germane to gender development.

### Reported male and female agricultural roles

A disaggregation of news items reported by the tabloids in the study time frame into male and female related stories as it concern roles played by both gender is presented in Table 2. Whereas, Nigerian Tribune (57.0%) and Vanguard (67.0%) as shown in Table 2 gave

prominence to the coverage of male roles than female roles in all agricultural news that featured in these tabloids, Guardian gave equal attention to both gender roles in its coverage of the agricultural news while Punch devoted almost equal coverage for males (53.0%) and females (47.0%) related agricultural stories. This is consistent with argument that female roles are relegated and often neglected (Aina, 1990), a situation that has lend credence to non-reference of female gender's contributions to Nigerian agriculture and by extension its economy, though such roles increase (Adufe, 2005), yet, deserved prominence are invisible in the Nigerian dailies.

### Space allotted to male and female roles in the reported gender stories in agricultural news

The total amount of space allotted to female roles (51.3%) is more than amount of space allotted to male roles (48.7%) in the reported gender stories in agricultural news in the entire study period as found in Table 3.

Guardian (72.0%) and Vanguard (60.0%) devoted more

**Table 4.** Placement of male and female agricultural roles in the selected Nigerian newspapers.

Newspapers	Placement pattern			
	Front page		Other page	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Nigerian tribune	2 (33.0)*	1 (17.0)	2 (25.0)	2 (25.0)
Guardian	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (50.0)	1 (50.0)
Vanguard	3(37.5)	1(12.5)	1 (25)	1 (25.0)
Punch	5 (25.0)	5 (25.0)	3 (30.0)	2 (20.0)
Total	10(33.3)	7(23.3)	7 (23.3)	6 (20.0)

\*Percentage in parentheses.

**Table 5.** T-test table showing differences in frequency of gender and non-gender, space allotted and placement to male and female stories in agricultural news in the selected Nigerian newspapers.

Variable	Df	t – value	P – value	Decision
Gender and non-gender	90	- 7.97	0.001	Significant
Space allotted	20	- 0.16	0.872	Not significant
Placement	20	0.08	0.940	Not significant

spaces to female gender roles for the period investigated.

This result is a departure from what was reported in Table 2 in which more male roles were reported by the tabloids. GOI (2001) argues that total amount of space allotted to an issue is one of the criteria for evaluating the importance editors attach to such issues. Therefore, the total amount of space allotted to female roles in the four selected Nigerian newspapers corroborates the position that female gender roles be given quintessential priority in the scheme of things in the Nigerian print media.

#### Placement of male and female roles in agricultural news in the selected Nigerian newspapers

More male (33.3%) agricultural roles were reported in the front page which is considered prominent as compared to female roles (23.3%) in the selected tabloids as shown in Table 4. Of all the selected tabloids, Vanguard (37.5%) and the Nigerian Tribune (33.0%) placed more male related stories in front pages as compared to female roles that enjoyed 17.0 and 12.5% front page placement by Tribune and Vanguard respectively. The Guardian placed neither male nor female roles in its front page, although, it devoted appreciable spaces to these news items (Table 3). This finding is consistent with the result by Anyanwu (2011) that implicated Guardian as not responsive to key development issues as germane as climate change, how much more of gender issues. A news item not strategically placed risks being skipped by an average Nigerian reader who glances through tabloids with attention to politics, sports and advert placement for job

opportunities.

Available statistics in Table 5 revealed that, whereas there was a significant difference ( $t = - 7.97$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) between gender and non-gender stories covered by the selected tabloids, there were no significant differences in space allotted ( $t = -0.16$ ,  $p = 0.872$ ) and placement ( $t = 0.94$ ;  $p = 0.94$ ) of male and female related stories in the agricultural news covered by the selected tabloids. These results imply that perhaps the editorial management team of the selected newspapers were not responsive enough to gender roles in agriculture. While the editorial team generally are not responsive to gender related issues in their coverage of the agricultural news and the amount of space allotted to the stories were marginal and not prominently placed.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study established that Nigerian newspapers reported more non-gender stories than gender stories in their coverage of the agricultural news. It also affirmed that there is disparity in the prominence given to gender related stories and in amount of space allotted to these stories, though such disparity is insignificant. It is therefore, concluded that the selected newspapers confer low priority to reportage of agro-related news along gender line. Perhaps if editorial managements of tabloids are educated about the importance of gender disaggregated reporting, they may likely accord desired relevance to coverage of agricultural related news along gender line as evident in non-disparity in the space and prominence

given to the male and female related stories. Therefore, it is suggested that:

1. Civil society groups with mandates for agriculture and gender development should mount advocacy, mobilization and sensitization for media executives on the importance of gender sensitive reporting of agricultural news.
2. Capacity building workshops should be organized for Agricultural columnists in Nigerian newspapers on gender reporting of agro-information.
3. Media executives should also be mobilized to employ agricultural graduates as line reporters for agro-based and gender sensitive news.

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