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**1ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
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**GENDER INVOLVEMENT IN RICE
PRODUCTION IN EKITI WEST LOCAL
GOVERNMENT AREA OF EKITI STATE, NIGERIA**

S.A. Tijani and G.T. Babalola

ABSTRACT

The study examined gender involvement in rice production and processing in Ekiti West Local Government Area of Ekiti State. Four communities were purposively selected and a total of 320 respondents were randomly sampled. Focus Group Discussions and In-depth Interviews were used to elicit information from the respondents. The result revealed that 80% of the respondents were indigenes, 40% of adult male occasionally participated in farm clearing while a greater percentage of adult participated in bush burning. Females rarely participated in pre-planting activities. Both adult and young male (50%) occasionally participated in fertilizer application while adult and young female regularly participated in planting operations of rice. Planting and post harvest operations of rice were not considered to be male activities. Seventy percent of adult male were involved in milling against 30% of young male. Bird scaring was done by both young male and young female. Parboiling, winnowing and selling were performed mainly by adult female. Using problem tree analysis, respondents identified lack of extension services, high cost of labour, birds, contamination of rice with stones and late rain as major problems. The causes/constraints listed were high moisture content, inadequate processing technology, lack of labour and unpredictable weather. Hence, involvement of male is not the same with that of female in all the activities of rice production and processing. Provision of planter to prevent back-breaking during planting by women and chemicals at low rates to curb pest activities are very essential.

Keywords: Gender, Rice, Production, Involvement, Ekiti-west

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is a major activity in rural areas. Even the people who engage in non-agricultural occupation such as trading and craft work, still supplement their livelihoods from farming (Olubanjo, 2001). Meanwhile, most of these income generating and livelihood activities are along gender lines in the rural areas in Nigeria. The term "gender" according to Jigging, Samanta and Olawoye (1997) is the socially determined, maintained and

enforced roles of men, women on the basis of sex. Similarly, Pereira (2001) describes gender as the network of socially defined functions and attributes of being a woman or a man in a given society at a particular time.

Men and women play prominent roles in agricultural production, household welfare, other production activities and economic growth. Yet women's substantial contribution continues to be undervalued in conventional agricultural and economic

analyses as well as policies, while that of men remains the central, often the sole focus of attention. Men and women throughout the world engage in a range of production and processing activities essential to household, and to the economic development of the society. For instance, rice has been cultivated, gathered, and consumed by women and men worldwide for more than 10,000 years (Kenmore, 2003), longer than any other crop.

Moreover, rice is the most economically important food crop in many developing countries (FAO, 2002). It is relatively easy to produce and it is grown for sale and consumption. With the increased availability of rice, it has become part of the everyday diet of people in Nigeria. Meanwhile, Nigeria has tremendous potentials for increasing its rice production and rapidly moving to self-sufficiency in rice production, which would save the country the huge foreign exchange currently worth US \$90 million annually spent on importing rice (CBN, 2010). It is worth noting, however, that the crop is still relatively not performing very well in the nation's farming system. Recent observations of the stagnant or even declining yields, land degradation and environmental pollution in some irrigated areas have raised concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of such production and productivity. Also, farmers are still growing varieties which were released several years ago and the production increase is insufficient to match the consumption increase with rice imports making up the shortfall. As a result, the threat to local rice production by imported cheap rice is rising and according to a paper released by the CBN in 2011, Nigeria spent over ₦1 billion on rice importation in the year 2010.

Meanwhile, there are potentials in Nigeria to produce nutritious rice at lower price but a comprehensive and up-to-date

picture of the rice sector in general and rice production and processing in particular is lacking (Akpokodje *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, the promotion of appropriate processing technology and varieties will go a long way in keeping rice farmers in business (Selbut,

2003). Thus, any study that will identify important factors that are crucial to prospects of rice production and processing, taking into cognizance the gender roles therefore becomes imperative. Below are the specific objectives addressed in the study:

- (1) To investigate the level of participation at pre-planting and planting activities by each gender.
- (2) To determine the level of participation at post-planting activities by each gender.
- (3) To identify the gender-related constraints to involvement in the cultivation of rice in the study area.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was done in Ekiti west local government area of Ekiti state, South-West, Nigeria. Ekiti State is mainly an upland zone, rising over 250 metres above sea level. It enjoys tropical climate with two distinct seasons; rainy season (April- October) and dry season (November- March). The state is made up of sixteen (16) local government areas. Ekiti west consists of considerably large number of rice-producing villages which include Ajindo, Asagba, Lagurudu, Epinrin, Ayimodo. The population of the study comprised all rice farmers in Ekiti west local government area of Ekiti State. The study made use of multi-stage sampling technique. At first, Ekiti west local government area was purposively selected based on the fact that it is characterised by a high number of rice-producing villages. Secondly, four communities (Ajindo, Asagba, Efon, Epinrin) were randomly selected. Then, four rice farmers' groups

were finally used in each community comprising at least 20 respondents in each group based on gender (adult male, adult female, young male and young female) making a total of 320 farmers from the four communities. Data was collected using Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and In-Depth Interviews (IDI) while analysis was mainly by descriptive statistics.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Participation by Gender in Pre-planting Operations of Rice

From Focus Group Discussions, farmers explain that bush clearing is a pre-planting activity in rice, it is done by cutting grasses, removing stumps and leaving the grasses on

the farm to burn later after they are dried. It is also stated that land needs to be sprayed with chemical known as atrazine after burning to stop pre- and post-emergence broadleaf and grassy weeds. These activities are done by adult males and young males in all the communities. However, 40% of adult males occasionally participate in farm clearing, while young males (60%) regularly participate in farm clearing. This means that farm clearing is a male activity, mainly done by young males as they are more energetic and industrious. Bush burning, also a male activity, is done regularly by adult males (90%), which probably is due to the fact that it requires the exertion of less energy. However, both adult and young males evenly participate in chemical application as both age groups can conveniently engage in the activity.

Table 1: Participation of different Gender in Pre-planting Operations of Rice

Farm activities	Adult male	Adult female	Young male	Young female
1. Farm clearing	40%	-	60%	-
2. Bush burning	90%	-	10%	-
3. Chemical app.	50%	-	50%	-

Source: FGD, 2011.

3.2 Participation Across Gender in Planting and Post-Planting Operations of Rice

The result indicates that rice planting period starts from March to May and harvesting from July to September. It is observed that both adult and young females are involved in the planting of rice, implying that rice planting is a female activity in the area

probably because it requires the exertion of less energy and more care. Similar to the pre-planting activity, fertilizer application is performed by males but only adult males so as not to destroy/damage the crop plant. Weeding is carried out equally across gender (25%). It is discovered that effect of bird attacks on rice is so enormous that it usually results in wastage and huge loss of rice yield

at the end of production. Therefore, farmers must chase birds away from their rice fields and the method is known as bird scaring. Panicle (2009) states that farmers consider the various ways of chasing away hungry birds as soon as rice grains start to ripen, i.e. when the panicles appear. Bird scaring is usually done by young males and young

females across the communities by using scarecrows, catapults etc. It is stated that youths are often sent to the field to guard against birds. But this has a serious consequence because it keeps youths away from school since they will have to spend the whole day chasing birds by using catapult.

Table 2: Participation by Gender in Planting and Post-Planting Operations of Rice

Farm activities	Adult male	Adult female	Young male	Young female
1.Planting	-	50%	-	50%
2.Fertilizer app	100%	-	-	-
3.Weeding	25%	25%	25%	25%
4.Bird scaring	-	-	50%	50%

Source: FGD, 2011.

3.3 Roles Played by Each Gender in Harvest and Post-harvest Operations of Rice

The study reveals that rice-harvesting is mainly the responsibility of women in the study area and both adult females and young females participate in the activity in all the communities. It is also stated that farmers often hire labour to harvest rice in the absence of family labour. Harvesting of rice, according to respondents, has several steps which are: cutting the plants, moving the crop to another location before threshing (separating the grains from the rest of the

plant), and storage. Respondents affirm that majority of the activities in post-harvesting of rice are carried out by adult females. Post-harvest activities such as threshing, parboiling, drying, winnowing, grading, and selling are done only by adult females. Milling is the only post-harvest activity strictly carried out by the males: 70% of adult males and 30% of young males. It implies that those other activities are more suited to females probably because they are less laborious and thus require less energy.

Table 3: Participation By Gender in the Harvest and Post-Harvest Operations of Rice

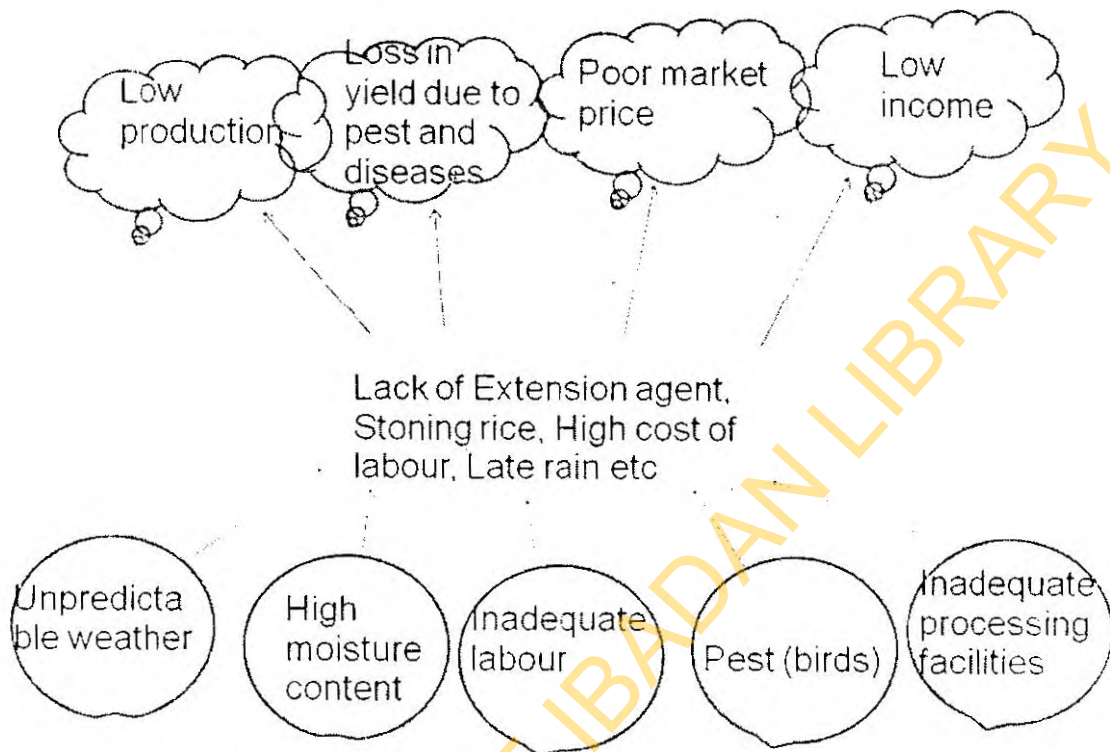
Post Harvest	Adult male	Adult female	Young male	Young female
1. Harvesting	-	50%	-	50%
2. Threshing	-	100%	-	-
3. Parboiling	-	100%	-	-
4. Drying	-	100%	-	-
5. Milling	70%	-	30%	-
6. Winnowing	-	100%	-	-
7. Grading	-	100%	-	-
8. Selling	-	100%	-	-

Source: FGD, 2011.

3.4 Gender Related Constraints (Problem Tree Analysis)

Olawoye (2004) opines that problem tree visualisation will encourage participants to understand effects of a problem in terms of the causes, and proffer solutions or activities to overcome the problem by tackling the root of the problem. The participatory tool employed was the FGD and the analysis identified the major problems, causes and consequences. Irrespective of gender, respondents in all the communities complained of the devastating effects of birds, grass-cutters (*Thryonomis*

swindarianus) and the attack of diseases on rice farms. It was also revealed that high cost of labour, contamination by stones and late rain were the major problems in rice production and processing in the area. The predisposing factors of these problems were identified to be high moisture content of rice plant, inadequate processing technology, shortage of labour and unpredictable weather. These then led to reduction in yield, poor market value of crop as a result of attack by pests and diseases, eventually translating to low income/returns.



4. CONCLUSION

Information gathered from the respondents showed that the involvement of the males was not the same as that of the females in all the activities of rice production and processing. While males were responsible for pre-planting operations, all post-harvest activities were performed by females, except milling. Both genders were involved in rice cultivation and irrespective of gender; bird attacks, high cost of labour, contamination by stones and late rain were the major problems and constraints of rice production and processing in the area.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Availability of incentives such as resistant seedling would help to encourage the rice farmers to stay in rice production and processing notwithstanding the challenges they face. Provision of planters would prevent the issue of backbreaking or backache during planting by women. Also, chemicals at low rates to curb pest activities are very essential.

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