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## FARMERS' WIVES IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT: THE NIGERIA CASE\*

by

A. U. Patel and Q. B. O. Anthonio\*\*

Partly as a result of increasing income, and largely as a result of rapidly increasing population, the demand for agricultural production has been increasing rapidly in Western Nigeria. To meet this great challenge, the efforts of the rural population has to be increased, improved and largely transformed. It is desirable, therefore, to help the rural men and women to perform their role in agricultural production more effectively. To achieve this, it is essential first to know exactly what role they play. Significant systematic studies have not been conducted to investigate the role played by rural women in agriculture in Nigeria. The present study was therefore conducted with the following objectives.

1. To analyse the role played by rural women in agriculture in a selected area of Western Nigeria.
2. To determine how their role is influenced by their characteristics: and
3. On the basis of the first two objectives, to appraise and recommend on necessary machinery to expedite effective increases in agricultural production and simultaneously to enhance the pivotal role of women in the rural sector and rural activities.

This study covers the Yorubas of Western Nigeria with a population of over 15 million, and area as big as the United Kingdom.

### Review of Literature

A prominent characteristic of all societies in tropical Africa is the social inferiority of women (Ransom-Kuti, 1972). However, with economic development and employment opportunities their inferior status is declining. In the earlier village pattern in Nigeria a woman's place was settled and her occupations were clearly defined, but new technical and social developments are changing the conditions of women's lives. Women are coming to think of careers outside the home. Social developments in Nigeria tend towards greater participation of women, including married women, in the economic, political, administrative and cultural activities of the country (Usoro, 1961).

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\*\* Both members of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, University of Ibadan.

Lambo (1969) stated that it would be incorrect to say that the status of women in Nigerian society is low, or that the sole purpose of marriage is procreation. Mabogunje (1961) also observed that the overt subordination of Yoruba women to their husbands hides their economic independence. Most women traders operate on a small scale, but many travel from town to town seeking profitable lines. A young married woman is often tied to her home. She supports her husband's desire for subsequent wives for she will have greater freedom to earn to finance her children's education and to acquire prestige by her affluence.

No reliable figures exist of the degree of polygamy among the Yorubas. One survey, however, suggests that Yoruba men who have reached the stage of marriage have an average of two wives each: one-third have two or more wives (Lloyd, 1965). In their study Doi and Parratt (1968) concluded that more Christians than Muslims were polygamous. Polygamy, however, results more from conformity to Yoruba social pattern than religious dogmas. A wife's seniority in her husband's household is determined by the date of her marriage. She is junior to all men born before this date. Each wife has her own room in the compound, where she sleeps with her young children and keeps her private property. The husband has his own room, where the wives visit him. Husband and wife do not, as a general rule, eat together; she serves his food with bended knees. Most domestic roles are strictly segregated.

Yoruba women do play a prominent role in marketing in urban and rural areas. Retail and wholesale trade in foodstuffs and cloth is mostly confined to women. Lloyd (1965) while describing Yoruba of Nigeria stated that a Yoruba woman expects her husband to give her an initial sum to start her trade or craft; her profits, however, are her own. A woman's public status is determined not so much by that of her husband as by her own position in her market guild or social club. The market women can form powerful pressure groups.

With respect to the role of women in farm work, Lloyd (1965) observed that they do no farm work at all. As housewives they visit their husbands' farms to collect firewood, wild fruits and leaves and, perhaps, to help to harvest the maize. If they help to harvest a crop that is not for domestic consumption - cotton, for instance - they will be given a proportion of it as their wages. The women are usually responsible for the livestock that run in the compound; most of them have poultry and a few sheep and goats. If a woman uses her husband's crop other than for food, she buys it from him; the men do not like their wives to market their surplus without their (the men) having a full share of the revenue.

Intensive structural changes in economic and social set-up lead to changes in the role played by women. In Poland increasing non-farm employment of the male heads of peasant families appears to be causing structural changes in the role and status of peasant women who are assuming greater significance in all decision-making relating to production on the family holding. The changing role of these women is not often accompanied by parallel developments in their personality, largely because of the burden of both domestic and farming duties (Tryfan, 1966).

### Methodology of Study:

1. Sampling. The women included in the sample were the wives of tobacco farmers from 46 villages of Oshun and Oyo divisions of Western Nigeria. A two stage stratified sample of 131 farmers was selected. The strata were defined along two stages, namely, the yield of tobacco in the previous four years (1966-69) and the size of business groups of tobacco farmers. Tobacco is the most important cash crop in these divisions and most of the farmers grow it.

The data were collected from 128 women. When a farmer had more than one wife, only his senior wife was included in the sample. In this way the sample under study included 128 women, of whom 79 (62 per cent) were senior wives and 49 (38 per cent) who were the only wife of their husbands.

2. The Concept of Role and Its Measurement. A social role is an expected pattern of behaviour that goes with a certain position in the social order (Sutherland, et al. 1956). Roles represent the ordering of human relationships by the assignment of rights and duties. Linton (1936) distinguished between "ascribed" and "prescribed" roles. Some are inevitable and some can be selected. Recent analysis has shown that roles have several components, such as their goals, their norms and their relations to other roles (Goode, 1960). In all societies roles are continuously crystallizing and being created; the relative emphasis on a role's different components will vary according to the different situations and forces that impinge on it.

A study of role should, therefore, include investigation of the expected units of social behaviour, its goals, norms and components and changes taking place in it over time. However, all these aspects were not included in this study. This investigation was restricted to studying the role played by women in agriculture at present with respect to three components: physical activities (work done on the farm), mental activities (participation in decision-making process for farm operations) and the financial support given by women for agricultural production. It was assumed that activities performed by women at present in the three components reflect what is their goals and expected pattern of behaviour in agriculture.

It was found that 93 per cent women helped in the physical work for the important crops such as yams, maize, tobacco and cassava. However, for the detailed study of their farm activities only the tobacco crop was selected because it is the farmers' most important cash crop and, moreover, they take more care of those fields. A list of eight important farm operations for tobacco production was prepared and the women were asked whether they performed them "usually", "sometimes" or "never"; a "usually" reply was scored as two points, "sometimes" was scored one point and "never" was scored a zero point. A respondent could thus get to a maximum of sixteen points for her physical activities in tobacco production. From the responses thus received the "physical activities index" (total points received) was calculated for each woman. The data regarding the number of women who participated in different farm operations for tobacco are summarised in Table I.

The role performed by women in decision-making process relating to farm operations was also studied, especially with respect to the steps in the decision-making process. Systematic study of decision-making process started after Dewey (1910) outlined the stages of problem-solving. Later, Good et al. (1941) listed steps in the process of scientific thinking.

Table I.      Distribution of Women According to Farm Work Done by Them  
for Tobacco Crop

Name of operation	Per cent of Women who worked		
	"Usually"	"Sometimes"	"Never"
1. Clearing bush	2.3	0.0	97.7
2. Preparing land for planting	0.8	3.9	95.3
3. Transplanting	77.3	7.0	15.7
4. Distributing fertilizers on plants	71.2	8.0	20.8
5. Weeding	3.9	0.0	96.1
6. Topping and removing suckers	87.5	2.4	10.1
7. Harvesting	93.8	0.0	6.2
8. Marketing (including grading and transporting)	59.2	2.4	38.4

Johnson and Haver (1953), cited by Rogers, 1965, p.78) listed the following steps in decision-making process: observing the problem, making an analysis of it; deciding the available courses of action; taking the course; and accepting the consequences of the decision-making. According to Litchfield (1956) rational decision-making process consists of similar five steps: definition of the issue, analysis of the existing situation, calculation and deliniation of alternatives, deliberation, and making the choice. Alaxender (1958) listed nine steps and Singh and Sinha (1968) listed 11 steps; however, they are all based on the common theory of decision-making.

For the purpose of this study it was decided to delineate the decision-making process into six phases. It was limited to six with the thought that too many steps, while not improving the result, might confuse the illiterate women of the traditional society. A projective technique, the situation test, was used for measuring the role of women in our six steps in the decision-making process, particularly with respect to agricultural production. A hypothetical situation was developed depicting the desirable role played by a woman in decision-making for agricultural production. After narrating the situation each respondent was asked to project herself in the place of that woman and reply whether her own behaviour in different steps was "like her", "undecided" or "unlike her". A "like her" reply indicated desirable role played by the woman and was scored one point. "Undecided" and "unlike her" replies were scored zero point. Thus a respondent could get to the maximum six points

for her desirable role in decision making at the rate of one point for each step.

From the responses thus received the "mental activities index" (total points received) was calculated for each respondent. The Hypothetical situation was as follows: "Mrs. 'A' is the wife of a farmer of a neighbouring village. She observes on the farm whether anything is wrong with the growth of crops or livestock. She likes to know about new ideas for improving crops and livestock from relatives and agricultural officers. She discusses with her husband and relatives how far new ideas differ from old ideas. She tries to understand the advantages and disadvantages of new ideas. Then she gives her opinion to her husband on whether a new idea is superior or not. If she thinks that a new idea is worth adopting she encourages her husband to try it on the farm and to continue its adoption if found suitable. Do you behave like Mrs. 'A' in the following aspects?" (Six steps were listed) The data regarding the responses of woman for different steps in decision making are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Women According to Their Participation in Decision-Making Process.

Steps in Decision-Making Process	Per cent of women who participated
1. Finding out what is wrong with crops and livestock on farm	85.6
2. Finding new ideas for improving crops and livestock from relatives and agricultural Officers	64.8
3. Finding advantages and disadvantages of new ideas	73.4
4. Giving opinion to husband on superiority of new ideas	84.4
5. Encouraging husband to try new ideas	89.1
6. Encouraging husband to continue or reject ideas in the successive years	48.0

The financial support given by women to their husbands for agricultural purpose was also measured in terms of the number of times they gave money to their husbands. It was found that 84 per cent of the women under study gave money to their husbands for agricultural purpose; 61 per cent gave once and the remaining gave more than once. Most of the

women, 79 per cent, gave money for paying farm labourers.

### 3. Selection of Characteristics.

The characteristics of women selected for this study were as follows:  
 (1) three situational characteristics - conducting trading as her independent economic activity, land operated by husband and earning wages from farm work;  
 (2) three personal characteristics - age, educational level and number of children; and (3) two social characteristics - religion and number of wives husband had.

The data on certain of these characteristics that are not significant are not presented in the tables concerning their relationship with the role in agriculture. These characteristics are as follows: educational level (92 per cent had no schooling), maintenance of farm livestock (90 and 80 per cent maintained poultry and goats or sheep respectively) and earning wages from farm work (83 per cent did).

### Results Analysis

The information concerning selected characteristics of women for physical and mental activities is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of Women with Respect to their Characteristics and Role in Agriculture

Role/Characteristics	Per cent of Women (N= 128)
1. <u>Role in Agriculture:</u>	
(i) Physical activities index	
(a) 0 - 6	22.7
(b) 7 - 11	43.0
(c) 12 - 16	34.3
(ii) Mental activities index	
(a) 0 - 2	14.8
(b) 3 - 4	30.5
(c) 5 - 6	54.7
(iii) Financial support: Number of times money given to husband:	
(a) Never	15.6
(b) Once	60.9
(c) More than once	23.5
2. <u>Situational Characteristics:</u>	
(i) Conducting trading	57.8
(ii) Maintained poultry	85.9
(iii) Earning wages from farm work	82.8
(iv) Land operated by husband	
(a) Up to 5 acres	30.4
(b) 6 - 10 acres	43.8
(c) More than 10 acres	25.8



Table 3 (Cont'd)

Role/Characteristics	Per cent of Women (N = 128)
<b>3. <u>Personal Characteristics</u></b>	
(i) Age	
(a) Up to 30 years	18.0
(b) 31 - 40 "	52.0
(c) More than 40 years	30.0
(ii) Number of children	
(a) Up to 2	29.3
(b) 3 - 4	36.3
(c) More than 4	34.4
(iii) No Schooling	92.2
<b>4. <u>Social Characteristics</u></b>	
(i) Religion	
(a) Muslim	31.3
(b) Christian	65.6
(c) Others	3.1
(ii) Number of wives to husband	
(1) One	38.0
(2) Two	38.0
(3) Three or more	24.0

The data were further analysed to see what type of women took more part in physical activities on the farm. These data are in Table 4. For certain information such as area of land operated by husband, earning wages from farm work, number of children she had, her religion and number of wives her husband had, were not significantly associated with the index of physical activities. Therefore, the data on these characteristics are not supplied. On the other hand a few characteristics were found significantly associated with the index of physical activities. These are, her index of mental activities, number of times she gave money to her husband, her age and her involvement in trading as an independent economic activity.

The data in Table 4 indicate that most of the women who had high index of physical activities also (1) had high index of mental activities, (2) had given money to their husbands, (3) had not been involved in trading as an independent economic activity, and (4) were more than 40 years old.

The data regarding the relationship between characteristics of women and their index of mental activities are presented in Table 5. It was found that factors such as earning of wages from farm work, religion and number of wives husband had were not significantly related to the index of mental activities. On the other hand, factors such as number of times money was given to husband, area of land operated by husband, her age, number of children and

her involvement in independent activities like trading were significantly associated with her index of mental activities.

Table 4. Relationship Between Characteristics and Index of Physical Activities of Women

Characteristics	Per cent of Women with Index of Physical Activities:			$\chi^2$ Value
	0 - 6 (Low)	7 - 11 (Medium)	12 - 18 (High)	
1. Index of Mental Activities				
(i) 0 - 2	52.6	36.8	10.6	27.4**
(ii) 3 - 4	23.1	61.5	15.4	
(iii) 5 - 6	14.3	34.3	51.4	
2. Number of times money given to husband				
(i) Never	25.0	40.0	35.0	9.9*
(ii) Once	26.9	47.4	25.7	
(iii) More than once	10.0	33.3	56.7	
3. (i) Had trading	33.8	52.7	13.5	31.5**
(ii) Had no trading	7.4	29.6	63.0	
4. Age				
(i) Up to 40 years	25.6	51.1	23.3	15.9**
(ii) More than 40 years	15.8	23.7	60.5	
* significant to 0.05 level				
** significant to 0.01 level				

The data in Table 5 indicate that most of the women who had a high index of mental activities were those who: (1) gave money to their husbands, (2) had husbands who operated less than 10 acres of land, (3) were more than 40 years old, (4) did not engage in trading as an independent economic activity, and (5) had more than two children.

The data regarding the relationship between characteristics of the women and the financial support given by them to their husbands for agricultural purpose are given in Table 6. It was found that factors such as area of land operated by their husbands, earning wages from farm work and her religion were not significantly related to the financial support given by her to her husband. But factors such as her involvement in trading as an independent economic activity, her age, number of children she had and the number of wives her husband had were significantly related to the financial support given by her to her husband.

**Table 5: Relationship Between Characteristics of Women and Index of Mental Activities of Women.**

Characteristics	Per cent of Women with Index of Mental Activities			$\chi^2$ Value
	0 - 2 (Low)	3 - 4 (Medium)	5 - 6 (High)	
1. No of times money given to husband				
(i) Never	15.0	10.0	75.0	19.3**
(ii) Once	17.9	42.3	39.8	
(iii) More than once	6.7	13.3	80.0	
2. (i) Had trading	18.9	44.6	36.5	25.6**
(ii) Had no trading	9.3	11.1	79.6	
3. Land operated by husband				
(i) Up to 5 acres	7.7	17.9	74.4	9.8*
(ii) 6 - 10 acres	16.1	33.9	50.0	
(iii) More than 10 acres	21.2	39.4	39.4	
4. Age				
(i) Up to 40 years	18.9	38.9	42.2	17.0**
(ii) More than 40 years	5.3	10.6	84.1	
5. Number of children				
(i) Up to 2	32.4	37.8	29.8	18.4**
(ii) 3 - 4	10.6	25.6	63.8	
(iii) More than 4	4.5	29.6	65.9	
* Significant to 0.05 level				
** Significant to 0.01 level				

The data in Table 6 show that more women who gave money for agricultural purpose to their husbands at least once; (1) were younger in age, (2) had up to two children, and (3) had husbands with more than one wife. With respect to trading it is interesting to note that more of the women who gave money more than once to their husbands had no trading as their independent economic activity. It can be argued that investing in their husbands farm work will pay dividends later when the husband has to supply capital for the wife's trading activity. It is important also to note that, as revealed in Tables 4 and 5, more of the women who gave money to their husbands had high indices of physical and mental activities.

Involvement of women in trading as their independent economic activity seems to be a very important characteristic which influences her role in family. It was decided, therefore, to analyse the relationship between trading as their economic activity and the other characteristics. The data in this respect are presented in Table 7.

Table 6. Relationship Between Characteristics of Women and Financial Support Given by Them to Their Husbands

Characteristics	Per cent of Women who gave money to husband			$\chi^2$ Value
	Never	Once	More than once	
1. (i) Had trading	13.5	71.6	14.9	9.1*
(ii) Had no trading	18.3	46.5	35.2	
2. Age				6.6*
(i) Up to 40 years	14.4	67.8	17.8	
(ii) More than 40 years	18.4	44.8	36.8	
3. Number of children				7.8*
(i) Up to 2	8.1	78.4	13.5	
(ii) 3-4	21.3	55.3	23.4	
(iii) More than 4	15.9	52.3	31.8	
4. Number of wives of husband				12.5*
(i) One	22.4	59.2	18.4	
(ii) Two	12.5	50.0	37.5	
(iii) More than two	12.5	75.0	12.5	

\* Significant at 0.05 level.

The data in Table 7 indicate that there was no significant relationship between a woman's involvement in trading and number of her children or the number of wives her husband had. However, her age and area of land operated by her husband were significantly related to her involvement in trading. Most of the women involved in trading were up to 40 years of age and their husbands operated more than 5 acres of land. It is important to note from the data in Tables 4, 5 and 6 that most of the women not involved in trading had high indices of Physical and mental activities, and more of the women who gave money more than once had no trading activity. It can be assumed that those who had trading had less money to offer as such.

### Discussion

Contrary to the observation by Lloyd (1965) that Yoruba women do little work on farm, it was found that 93 per cent of the sample women worked on farms for crops such as yams, maize, tobacco and cassava. Most of the women did not help in the heavy farm operations such as clearing bush, preparing land for planting and weeding. This may be because those operations required heavy labour and are considered too difficult for women. In spite of the fact that marketing of tobacco is well organised by the tobacco companies, 59 per cent women were involved in its marketing largely with sorting, grading and transporting.

Table 7. Relationship Between Involvement of Women in Trading as an Independent Economic Activity and their other Characteristics.

Characteristics	Per cent of Women Involved in Trading		$\chi^2$ Value
	Yes	No	
1. Age			
(i) Up to 40 years	71.3	28.7	14.7**
(ii) More than 40 years	29.3	70.7	
2. Land operated by husband			
(i) Up to 5 acres	35.9	64.1	13.9**
(ii) 6 - 10 acres	76.8	23.2	
(iii) More than 10 acres	51.5	48.5	
3. Number of children			
(i) Up to 2	64.9	35.1	NS
(ii) 3 - 4	53.2	46.8	
(iii) More than 4	59.1	40.9	
4. Number of wives to husband			
(i) One	49.0	51.0	NS
(ii) Two	58.3	41.7	
(iii) More than two	71.0	29.0	

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level.

NS Not Significant

Eighty-nine per cent of the women also participated in the mental activities involved in decision making. However, the two steps in decision-making process<sup>4</sup> which relatively fewer women participated were "to find new ideas for improving crops and livestock from relatives and agricultural officers" (in 64 per cent of cases), and "encouraging the husband to continue or reject the new ideas" (in 48 per cent of cases). One reason why the women could not help to find new ideas might be that they had less opportunities to contact the extension personnel, nearly all of whom are men and whose training was geared mainly to men farmers.

Age of the women seems to play an important role in her physical and mental activities. Most of the women over 40 years of age had high indices of mental and physical activities, but were not involved in trading. Younger women have to take care of young children at home and therefore might not have much time to go to the farm to help in farm work. Younger women also need more money to take care of children, which might be forcing them to become involved in trading and thus have less to give to husbands. Moreover, older women might be finding it difficult to compete with younger women in trading in rural areas since trading in rural areas involves a lot of travelling about. Younger people in traditional societies are often not consulted or listened to in taking decisions affecting home or farm. It is understandable, therefore, that older women also who are invariably consulted tend to have a high index of mental activities.

Though there is significant relationship between age and financial support given by women, the data are not so sharply distributed as to permit clear-cut interpretation.

Involvement of women in trading is another characteristic which greatly influences their role in agriculture. As discussed earlier the women who were involved in trading had low indices of physical and mental activities and were younger in age. Moreover most of the women involved in trading had husbands who operated more than 5 acres of land, that is they were above average farmers in respect of size. It might be inferred from these findings that the younger wives of these above average farmers are more likely to be involved in trading. Above average farmers have higher income and therefore might be able to give some money to their wives for investment in trading. It might, however, be worth further investigating how far husbands help their wives in trading.

### Conclusion

Clearly, it can be asserted that Yoruba women play an important role in agriculture. They work on farms, help their husbands in the decision-making process affecting the farm, and give money to their husbands for agricultural purposes. Their contribution in terms of working on the farm and in the decision-making process is by far greater than giving money for agricultural purposes. They work on the farm for operations such as planting, applying fertilizers, harvesting and marketing which require relatively less physical power. They, however, do not help in the operations such as clearing the bush, preparing the land, heap making and weeding which require relatively more physical power.

Age of the woman and their involvement in trading as an independent economic activity are the two main characteristics which influence the nature of the role played by them in agriculture. Most of the women above the age of 40 work more on the farm and help more in decision-making process than the younger women. Most of the younger women are however involved in trading. The husbands of most of the women involved in trading invariably belong to the group of above average farmers in respect of size.

In essence, planners for agricultural development should take into consideration the role played by women in agriculture. Since women greatly help in farm operations and participate in the decision-making process it is desirable to assist them in performing these jobs more effectively by imparting to them needed informal education. It might be desirable for the tobacco companies and government to appoint special women extension workers to help the rural women. The majority of the women are also involved in the marketing of tobacco. It might be worth suggesting that these women, along with the men, should be given the necessary training in correct grading, packing and transporting tobacco from farms and villages to buying depots of the tobacco company.

Finally, it has to be reiterated that development efforts to improve and transform traditional agriculture should emphasize the training and education of women in the rural sector. Their contribution to agricultural productivity no longer need to be undervalued or disregarded. It is significant !!

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