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## Gender disparity in cassava production in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State Nigeria

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**Abstract.** The study dwelt on the implication of gender disparity on cassava production in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. The inadequate documentation of gender roles and responsibilities with particular reference to cassava production necessitated the study. The objectives were to ascertain the level of involvement of men and women in cassava production; determine the relationship between men and women in the planting of cassava stem cuttings; examine the role of men and women in the harvesting of cassava; evaluate the role of men and women in weeding operations for cassava production; and investigate the relationship in the ownership of separate plots between men and women. Multi stage, stratified and simple random sampling procedures were used in selection of respondents. Five percent (5%) of the total population of farm families which corresponded to 81 cassava farmers were sampled. The findings showed that there was no statistically significant relationship in the involvement of men and women in land preparation for cassava production ( $\chi^2 = 1.58$ ;  $P > 0.05$ ). However, women were significantly more likely to be involved in; the planting of cassava stem cuttings ( $\chi^2 = 65.89$   $P < 0.05$ ); the harvesting of cassava ( $\chi^2 = 11.77$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ); and the weeding operation for cassava production ( $\chi^2 = 62.47$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). There was also a statistically significant relationship in the ownership of separate farm plots between men and women ( $\chi^2 = 48.57$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). Extension services should be directed more to the women folk than men especially with regards to cassava production in the study area because they have more of a role in the production and harvesting of Cassava.

**Key words:** Gender, disparity, cassava production, agricultural extension, gender responsibilities and roles.

### Introduction

Apparently, gender disparity is conterminous with man's evolution. Historically, the roles and responsibilities of men and women were differentiated to a large extent in every human society. Oakley, as cited by Ekong (2003), concluded that no tasks were gender specific except child bearing. Ekong (2003) further noted that the anatomical and physiological differences in the make up of males and females was indisputable. The major concern to sociologists was how these differences had shaped the social relationship between sexes. According to Buckland and Halegoah (1996) men and women had certain inevitable roles and responsibilities which they performed in the society. Russo et al. (1989) as cited by Olawoye (1993) defined gender as a socio-economic variable which assisted the researcher to analyse the roles, responsibilities, constraints and opportunities of both men and women.

Gender issues ramify into virtually every aspect of human endeavour and agricultural production is not an exception. Even in developed countries where mechanised farming is greatly practiced, gender disparity manifests in the marketing, processing, and picking of fruits, nuts and seeds. Gender disparity is more extant in rural income generating activities in developing countries where culture appears to dictate every step taken by the individual in their development efforts.

Ekong (2003) found that rural women in Nigeria play triple roles in socio-economic activities. These activities were summarised as productive, reproductive and community services. These roles included land preparation for farming, planting of crops and vegetables for household consumption, weeding, harvesting, processing of harvested crops and storage, transportation of farm produce by head portage, fishing, fish processing and marketing of sea foods, processing and sale of dairy products, homestead livestock husbandry, small-scale trading, carrying concrete at building sites, fetchers of fire wood, pot making, weaving and dyeing of traditional clothing materials, sewing and beautification, religious activities and festivals community development, teaching, food preparation and home management leadership and support of political parties, child care and reproduction of new members of the society.

Cassava is an important crop produced by almost every farm family in Delta State. Ovwigho (2000), and Oyaide (1999) reported that 92% and 80% of farm families in Delta State and Shell Petroleum Development Company areas of operation in Delta State grew cassava as a major

crop. Cassava is a major crop in the study area because of the suitable productive factors and ease of cultivation coupled with the fact that the crop constitutes a major staple food crop which is processed into *garri*. *Garri* made into *eba* is the most popular food eaten by adults and children in the study area. The foregoing underscores the importance of cassava production in the study area hence the need to analyse the gender specific roles with a view to developing a proper extension delivery system that will increase the production of the crop in the study area.

### **Statement of the problem**

Gender responsibilities and differences have not been clearly defined for the purpose of channeling development incentives, particularly agricultural extension packages in the study area. Agricultural production incentives appear to be distributed to the men at the expense of the women farmers. Samanta (1994) noted that agricultural extension services still did not attach much importance to reaching women farmers or women on the farm. Policy makers and administrators typically assume, in the face of empirical data, that men were the farmers and women played only a "supportive role" as farmers' wives.

Olawoye (1983) cautioned that sweeping generalisations were not advisable as far as gender issues in agriculture were concerned. She stated that studies in Nigeria revealed differences in gender relationships even in ethnically similar communities just kilometres apart. Akor (1990) found that 92% of northern rural women gave farming as their primary and secondary occupation. Of these, 75% owned or worked their own separate plots whereas the official definition of a farmer in Nigeria is gender biased in favour of men. The changing gender roles and responsibilities in agriculture in Nigeria are traceable to the discovery of crude oil at Oloibiri Bayelsa State in 1958. Aderibigbe (2001) explained that before the discovery of crude oil, the nation flourished on agriculture. At that time the public policy changed relegating agriculture and other natural resources to the background. Consequently, most men left the rural areas for urban areas in search of jobs in crude companies. Farming, especially the production of food crops, was left in the hands of the women producers. This led to a drastic reduction in the production of food and cash crops in Nigeria.

The continual changes in man's social roles and responsibilities call for documentation and appraisal of gender roles in crop production so that development intervention agencies could target the right beneficiaries when production incentives and resources are to be delivered to cassava farmers.

### **Objectives of the study**

The general objective of the study was to investigate the gender roles and responsibilities in cassava production in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

1. Ascertain the level of involvement of men and women in land preparation for cassava production.
2. Determine the relationship between men and women in the planting of cassava stem cutting.
3. Examine the role of men and women in the harvesting of cassava.
4. Evaluate the role of men and women in weeding operation for cassava production.
5. Investigate the relationship in the ownership of cassava plots between men and women.

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested:

- Ho<sub>1</sub> There was no significant relationship in the involvement of men and women in land preparation for cassava production.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: There was no significant relationship between the role of men and women in the planting of cassava stem cuttings.
- Ho<sub>3</sub>: There was no significant relationship between the roles of men and women in the harvesting of cassava.
- Ho<sub>4</sub>: There was no significant relationship in the participation of men and women in cassava weeding operation.
- Ho<sub>5</sub>: There was no significant relationship in the ownership of cassava farm plots between men and women.

## Methodology

### **Sampling procedure and method of data analysis**

Multi-stage, stratified and simple random sampling procedures were used to select the respondents as well as the towns and villages. The Local Government Area is made up of four sub-clans namely Orhowhe, Ohwawha, Ukpédi and Uhurie. The total population of cassava farmers including males and females was 1,622. Five percent of farmers in each sub clan were selected to constitute the sample. Thus the sample was made up of a total of 81 cassava farmers comprising 47 females and 34 males. Data were collected by means of well structured interview schedules and analysed by the use of Chi square ( $X^2$ ) test.

## Results and discussion

**Hypotheses one:** There is no significant relationship in the involvement of men and women in land preparation for cassava.

The responses of males and females to land preparation were dichotomised and subjected to Chi square test (Table 1). There was no statistically significant relationship ( $p > 0.05$ ) in the involvement of men and women in land preparation for cassava. The null hypothesis was therefore up-held. In the past, land preparation was predominantly performed by men. Nowadays women play an almost equal role, if not more in land preparation for cassava production. This findings agreed with Uzokwe and Ofuoku (2006) that in the last decade women in Delta State were more involved in bush/land clearing, stumping, stubble burning, tilling and fertilizer application.

**Table 1. Responses of men and women to land preparation for cassava**

Gender Responses	Men	Women	Total
Not involved	14 (17)	26 (23)	40
Involved	20 (17)	21 (24)	41
Total	34	47	81

$$(X^2 = 1.58; P > 0.05)$$

Parenthesis = Expected frequencies.

**Hypothesis two:** There was no significant relationship between the role of men and women in the planting of cassava stem cuttings.

The data on involvement of men and women in the planting of cassava stem cuttings were subjected to Chi square test (Table 2). A statistically significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the participation of men and women in the planting of cassava stem cuttings was found. From the observed frequencies women have a bigger role than men in the planting of cassava stem cuttings.

**Table 2. Responses of men and women to the planting of cassava stem cuttings**

Gender Responses	Men	Women	Total
Not involved	30 (13)	0 (17)	30
Involved	4 (21)	47 (30)	51
Total	34	47	81

$$(X^2 = 65.89; P < 0.05)$$

Parenthesis = Expected frequencies

**Hypothesis three:** There was no significant relationship between the roles of men and women in cassava harvesting.

The data on the role of men and women in cassava harvesting was analysed by the use of Chi square test (Table 3). A statistically significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the role of men and women in the harvesting of cassava was found with women being more likely to be involved.

**Table 3. Responses of men and women to harvesting of cassava**

Gender Responses	Men	Women	Total
Not involved	19 (12)	9 (16)	28
Involved	15 (22)	38 (31)	53
Total	34	47	81

$$(X^2 = 11.77; P < 0.05)$$

Parenthesis = Expected frequency

**Hypothesis four:** There was no significant relationship in the participation of men and women in cassava weeding operation.

The data on the participation of men and women in weeding for cassava production were analysed by the use of Chi square test (Table 4). There was a statistically significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the role of men and women in cassava weeding operation. More women were involved than men in the cassava weeding operation.

**Table 4. Participation of men and women in cassava weeding operation**

Gender Responses	Men	Women	Total
Not involved	29 (12)	0 (17)	29
Involved	5 (22)	47 (30)	52
Total	34	47	81

$$(X^2 = 62.47; P < 0.05)$$

Parenthesis –Expected frequencies

**Hypothesis five:** There was no significant relationship in the ownership of cassava farm plots between men and women.

The data on ownership of cassava farm plots by men and women were analysed by the use of Chi square test (Table 5). There was a statistically significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ) between men and women in the ownership of cassava farm plots. Most men own their separate plots while a good number of the women farm on their husband's plots. Traditionally, women have no control over land in the study area. However they have access to their husband's family land. Another form of access was share cropping which could be arranged with any landlord or land owning family. In this arrangement part of the proceeds are given to the landlord after harvest. Men and women appear to be about equally involved in share cropping.

**Table 5. Distribution of men and women according to ownership of cassava farm plots**

Gender Responses	Men	Women	Total
Own separate plot	30 (16)	7 (21)	37
Farm on husband's plot	0 (15)	35 (20)	35
Share cropping	4 (4)	5 (5)	9
Total	34	47	81

$$(X^2 = 48.57; P < 0.05)$$

Parenthesis = Expected frequencies

## Principal findings

1. Both men and women were involved in land preparation for cassava production
2. Women play a greater role in the planting of cassava stem cuttings
3. Women play a greater role in the harvesting of cassava
4. More women were involved in the weeding operation for cassava production
5. Most men have separate cassava plots while majority of the women farm their husband's plots

These findings support the views of Ahmad and Ismail (1998) that women were more involved in agricultural tasks than their husbands and Saito and Weidemann (1990) that women were responsible for at least seventy percent of staple food production in Africa. The latter authors suggest that most men were involved in cash crop production like rubber and oil palm. Uzokwe and Ofuoku (2006) remarked that the ever changing economic conditions in Nigeria have altered the culture of societies in Delta State. Women have resorted to combining male designated tasks with their traditional female tasks due to unfavourable economic conditions. Nowadays no task is gender specific (Ekong, 2003).

## Conclusion and recommendations

The women were the active cassava farmers while men were the passive cassava farmers in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State. This means that extension services should be directed more to the women folk than the men. The distribution of inputs and extension information services concerning planting materials and agro-chemicals should be channelled to the female farmers instead of the men that hitherto received this service. Financial incentives through cooperative societies, governments and non-governmental organizations should be given to the women folk to procure their separate plots in order to increase production and enjoy maximum satisfaction from their labour.

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