

## The Role of Women in Cassava Production in Awgu L.G.A, of Enugu State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This research work explores the role of women in cassava processing in Agwu Local Government Area of Enugu State. A total of 60 questionnaires were collected after the field survey. The data collected were analyzed based on the objectives of the research work using tables and percentages. The 60 respondents were women, however the questionnaires and oral interview helped to ascertain their role, that of their children and husbands in cassava production. The marital status of the women shows that 58.3% of the women are married, 25% are singles while 16.7% are widows. The response from the women also showed that most of them had large households to feed. The three major cassava products in Agwu include the following: Akpu (foofoo), garri and tapioca (abacha). In the production of cassava it was discovered that more than 50% of the production was carried out by the women. The men only made their contribution during land preparation. The processing of cassava into the three major products was dominated by the women. The dominant role of women in cassava production has paid off in the long run; this is because it has brought about an increase in their income and family nutrition. This has also reduced the rate at which the wives depend on their husband for upkeep. The challenges faced by the women were inadequate labour and difficulties in accessing the markets. To overcome these challenges the women were encouraged to form groups to aid them in accomplishing great tasks and saving money for future needs.

**Key words:** Cassava production • Women • Abacha • Foofoo • Garri and Family nutrition

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### INTRODUCTION

**Background of the Study:** The invention of agriculture is the most fundamental of human discoveries. It marked the watershed between the hazardous wandering life of the hunter and collector of wild edible plants to a settled and more comfortable life, which in turn made the development of further skills possible. In the Igbo context, the fundamental discovery was that of yam cultivation. The discovery formed the economic basis of Igbo civilization. It was of supreme importance and was given ritual and symbolic expression in many areas of Igbo life. Other food crops such as cocoyam, banana, plantain, okro, egusi, rice, tomatoes, maize, pepper and cassava were introduced later in Igbo land [1].

In Nigeria, women are very much involved in agricultural practices especially in the area of cassava

production. Agriculture is undoubtedly the principal form of production in Africa and according to accounts of existing census data; women make large proportion of the agricultural labour force. In the past, research has tended to obscure the sexual division of labour and socio-economic factors underlying the production process. Recently, studies have begun to consider the special roles played by women in different stages of agricultural production [2].

Women are key, not a marginal part of agricultural production of the food system of third world. About one third to one half of the total labour contribution to agriculture is made by women [3].

It is becoming increasingly realized by national government and international agencies that there is need to integrate women more fully in the aspiration and goals being pursued in the different countries.

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Cassava is the third most important source of calories in the tropics, after rice and maize. Millions of people depend on cassava in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is grown by poor farmers, many of them women, often on marginal land. For those people and their families, cassava is vital for both food security and income generation.

Cassava is one of the most important crops in Nigeria. It is the most widely cultivated crop in the southern part of the country in terms of area devoted to it and number of farmers growing it. Indeed, it is grown by almost every household. Cassava has also increased in importance in the Middle Belt in recent years. In all places, cassava has become very popular as a food and cash crop and is fast replacing yam and other traditional staples of the area. In all, over four-fifths of the cultivable land area is suitable for cassava growing.

Nigeria is currently the largest producer of cassava in the world with an annual output of over 34 million tonnes of tuberous roots. Cassava production has been increasing for the past 20 or more years in area cultivated and in yield per hectare. On average, the harvested land area was over 80 percent higher during 1990-1993 than during 1974-1977.

Cassava is important, not just as a food crop but even more so as major source of cash income for producing households. As a cash crop, cassava generates cash income for the largest number of households, in comparison with other staples, contributing positively to poverty alleviation.

Women play a central role in cassava production, processing and marketing, contributing about 58 percent of the total agriculture labour in the southwest, 67 percent in the southeast and 58 percent in the central zones. They are almost entirely responsible for virtually all activities like hoeing, weeding, harvesting, transporting, storing, processing, marketing and domestic chores which provides them with additional income-earning opportunity and enhances their ability to contribute to household food security [4].

**Objectives of the Study:** The main purpose of this study was to find out the role of women in carrying out cassava production in Agwu Local Government Area. Some of the specific objectives were:

- Examining the socio-economic characteristics of women involved in cassava production in Agwu Local Government Area.

- Identifying the functions performed by women on the farm in relation to cassava production.
- Examining the constraints faced by women in carrying out cassava production.
- Making suggestion for improvement based on the results of the study.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

**Area of the Study:** The study was carried out in Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu State. Awgu Local Government Area is one of the Local Government areas in Enugu state and it is made up of seventeen communities namely; Ituku, Agbogugu, Ihe, Owelli, Isuawaa, Agbudu, Ogbaku, Mgbowo, Ogugu, Amoli, Ugwueme, Mgbidi, Mmaku, Awgnta, Ngeneugbo, Ugbo and Ugbonabo.

The main occupation of the people of Awgu Local Government Area is crop farming and animal rearing. Other non-farm occupations of the people are trading, crop processing (Garri), soap making, weaving, palm oil production, hair dressing and plaiting, tailoring, raffia works, teaching, nursing and many more.

**Sampling Technique:** The sample frame for the survey was taken from the entire cassava producing communities and respondents of Awgu Local Government Area. A simple random sampling method was used to obtain the representative sample of the population.

**Method of Data Collection:** The data for this research was gotten from two sources, the primary source and the secondary source being structured questionnaires and oral interview using selected rural women in Awgu and collection of already existing literature on the topic.

**Method of Data Analysis:** Data were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics such as; frequency tables and percentages to measure the strength of agreement or disagreement of certain parameters.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Data Analysis:** This chapter deals with the analysis of data collected from respondents based on the role of women in cassava processing in Awgu Local Government Area, Enugu State. A total of 60 questionnaires were collected after the field survey. The data collected were analyzed based on the objectives of the research work.

**Socio-Economic Characteristics of Women Farmers:**

This was analyzed with the use of percentage table.

From table 1 all the respondents were women.

Data in table 2 reveals that 75.1% of the women in the area who engage seriously in farming are between the age of 31-50, while 16.7% were women farmers whose age falls between 51 and above. The younger women in the area don't participate more in agriculture due to the labour involved in it. The introduction of agricultural mechanization will encourage the younger women to participate in agriculture.

Table 3 shows that 58.3% of the women are married; 25% are singles while 16.7% are widows.

The data in the table above reveals that 25% of the women have between 1 to 5 members in their household, 66.7% have between 6-10 while 16.7% have between 11 and above. This shows that the women have many mouths to feed.

Fifty percent of the women farmers as represented on the percentage table 5 had no formal education, 33% had primary education, 16.6% had secondary education while none of the respondents had tertiary education.

The data in table above reveals that 8.3% of the women are housewives, 33.3% are traders, 8.3% are civil servants, while 50% are farmers. This shows that most of the women in the area are farmers.

All the respondents were Christians. This reveals that other religions were not commonly practiced in the study area.

**Women Involvement in Production and Processing of Cassava:**

In the session the rate of women involvement in cassava production, processing and marketing were analyzed.

The above table shows that more than 50% of the production processes are carried out by the women.

**Processing Cassava into Products:** The three major cassava products in Awgu includes the following: Akpu (foofoo), garri and tapioca (abacha).

In the table above it is obvious that the processing of akpu is mostly carried out by the women. Peeling is the only stage that the men were found rendering their little assistance.

In garri production the men played a major role in the stage of grinding. However, the other stages of production were dominated by the women and their children. This is clearly illustrated in table 10.

Table 1: Analysis Based on Gender

Sex	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	-	-
Female	60	100
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Table 2: Analysis Based on Age

Age Range (years)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
20-30	5	8.3
31-40	25	41.6
41-50	20	33.5
51 and above	10	16.7
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Table 3: Analysis Based on Marital Status

Marital Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Single	15	25
Married	35	58.3
Widowed	10	16.7
Divorced	-	-
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Table 4: Analysis Based on Household Size

Household Size	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1-5	15	25
6-10	40	66.7
11 and above	10	16.7
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Table 5: Analysis Based on Educational Level

Educational Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
None	30	50
Primary	20	33.3
Secondary	10	16.6
Tertiary	-	-
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Table 6: Analysis Based on Primary Occupation

Primary Education	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Housewife	5	8.3
Trader	20	33.3
Civil servant	5	8.3
Farmer	30	50
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Table 7: Analysis Based on Religion

Religion	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Christianity	60	100
Islam	-	-
African traditional religion	-	-
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Table 8: Level of women involvement in production of cassava

Stages of Production	Men	Women
Land preparation	1	2
Planting	3	1
Weeding	3	1
Harvesting	3	1
Processing	3	1

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Ranking 1-4; where 1=mostly affected, 2=moderately affected, 3=less affected and 4=not affected

Table 9: Level of Women Participation in Akpu (foofoo) Production

Stages of Production	Men	Women
Peeling	3	1
Washing	4	1
Soaking for fermentation	4	1
Sieving	4	1
Cooking	4	1
Pounding	3	1

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Ranking 1-4; where 1=mostly affected, 2=moderately affected, 3=less affected and 4=not affected.

Table 10: Level of Women Participation in Garri Production

Stages of Production	Men	Women
Peeling	3	1
Washing	4	1
Grinding	1	3
Sieving	4	1
Frying	4	1

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Table 11: Level of Women Participation in Tapioca Production

Stages of Production	Men	Women
peeling	3	1
Washing	4	1
Boiling	4	1
Slicing or grating	4	1
Soaking for fermentation	4	1
Drying	4	1

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Ranking 1-4; where 1=mostly affected, 2=moderately affected, 3=less affected and 4=not affected.

Table 12: Distribution According to Socio-Economic Costs of Women Participation in Cassava Production Based on Intra-Household Dynamics

Socio-economic costs	Men	Women	Boys	Girls
Increased workload	2	1	1	1
Decreased decision making power	1	4	3	3
Less time for productive functions	4	1	3	2
Less time for education	4	4	2	1
Decreased leisure time	3	1	2	2
Less time for social activities	4	2	4	4
Higher dependency	1	4	3	2

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Ranking 1-4; where 1=mostly affected, 2=moderately affected, 3=less affected and 4=not affected.

Table 13: Distribution According to Socio-Economic Benefits of Women Involvement in Cassava Production on Intra-Household Dynamics

Socio-economic costs	Men	Women	Boys	Girls
Increased income	1	3	3	4
Improved household food and nutrition security	1	1	1	1
Enhance educational opportunity	4	4	4	1
Increased purchasing power	1	4	4	4
Enhance decision making	1	4	4	4
High self reliance	1	4	4	4
Access to health facilities	2	3	2	2
Socialization	1	4	4	4
Fulfill household responsibility	1	4	4	4
Offer better clothing	1	3	2	2

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Ranking 1-4; where 1=mostly affected, 2=moderately affected, 3=less affected and 4=not affected.

The above table shows that the women are dominant when it comes to tapioca production.

Table 12 shows the distribution according to socio-economic cost of women participation in cassava production based on intra-household dynamic.

This is in recognition of the fact that these children help out either in the processing or marketing activities of the products. It decreased decision power of men especially with respect to use of productive resources and allocation of income realized through cassava production. In addition, higher dependency of men on their wives for economic support was recorded as a result of women involvement in cassava production. These have lowered men's self esteem and have often led to shift in gender roles and family squabbles.

Table 14: Challenges Faced By Women In Cassava Production

Barrier indicators	Percentage Ratings		
	Very serious	Serious	Not Serious
Lack of capital and credit	73.52	20.21	6.27
Lack of labour operation	34.41	56.26	9.33
Husband's negative influence	12.43	35.25	52.32
Lack of access to land	84.72	14.24	1.04
Non-membership of women's group	79.36	13.42	7.22
High cost of agricultural inputs for processing limits the profit	54.31	35.54	10.25
High level of extension agents turnover	67.42	24.16	8.41
Limited information outlet and market situation of processed products limit their spread and profitability	12.81	41.03	46.16
Time consuming and tedious nature of the processing methods	66.43	27.32	6.25
Non-centrality in the location of the processing equipment	51.31	14.35	34.34
WIA agents on agricultural production technologies	87.24	11.27	1.16
High cost of adequate processing and storage equipment	63.24	23.53	13.23
Ineffective extension services and coverage	73.35	18.42	8.23

Source: Field Survey, 2009

**Socio-Economic Benefits of Women Participation in Cassava Production Based on Intra Household Dynamics:** From the analysis below, the positive effects of women involvement in cassava production where most of the women than the men and the children were involved in the process. In the aspect of ensuring family food security, it impacted equally on all household members who attested that this has resulted to varied family menu.

The result implies that the fight against hunger can be achieved by women involvement in cassava production since they are responsible for meeting family food needs. Therefore the husbands should give more assistance to their wives.

**Challenges Faced by Women in Cassava Production:** The women counted their challenges as lack of access to land, lack of capital and credit facilities, inaccessibility to markets, non membership of women's group as major hindrances to their impact in cassava production.

One of the greatest constraints facing women in cassava production is the time consuming and tedious nature of processing. Lack of adequate labour was also complained of all these are outlined in the table.

**Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation Summary:** This research analyzed the role of women in cassava production in Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu State. Data were collected from 60 women farmers in the study area; the data was analyzed based on the objectives.

The data reveals that 25% of the women have between 1-5 members in their household, 66.7% have between 6-10 while 16.7% have between 11 and above. This shows that the women have many mouths to feed.

The data in table above reveals that 8.3% of the women are housewives, 33.3% are traders, 8.3% are civil servants, while 30% are farmers. The major phases of cassava production were also discovered to be dominant by the women with the men playing a major role in land preparation. In the processing stage women still had lead.

## CONCLUSION

The role of women in cassava production in Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu State is a dominant one indeed, most especially in the processing of cassava into fofoo, gari and tapioca. This ultimately results in an increase in the economic power for the wives and children. This is also a viable source of food in the family. This is because most men within the area prefer fofoo to other forms of food.

### Recommendation:

- Government should ensure prompt payment of Extension staff salary and better working condition to take care of the problem of high level of extension agent's turnover.
- Agricultural production inputs as improved planting materials, fertilizers, agro-chemicals should

be made available to the rural farmers through the agro-services centers and farm-centers instead of consigning them to local government officials and state ministry of agriculture.

- Women can also for themselves into groups in order to work on their farms quickly. They can also save and contribute as a group in order to make funds available.

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