

Selected papers presented at

DAWN's African Regional Meeting

on Food, Energy and Debt Crises in Relation to Women

Institute of African Studies

University of Ibadan

27th-29th September 1988

Effective Integration of Women in Food Production: A
Solution to Nigeria's Food Crisis

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Presented at DAWN'S (Development Alternatives with
Women for a New Era's) - African Regional Meeting,
27th - 29th September, 1988,

At the
Institute of African Studies,
University of Ibadan,
Ibadan.

f. Women's Contribution to Food and Agricultural Production

The female sector in agriculture has generally been responsible for the production of food for consumption. Women have been documented all over Africa and the third world to provide 60-80% of agricultural labour force. They carry out farming operations from planting, weeding, harvesting, threshing or processing transportation, preservation, storage and marketing of farm produce after ensuring the security of family food. In some communities, like the waghavul, from Mangu in Plateau State of Nigeria¹ women also engage in land clearing and preparation or cultivation which are usually carried out by the men since it is difficult for the women. Women also engage in livestock husbandry, keeping and tending small ruminants like sheep goats, and poultry etc to supplement family income and provide protein. Among the Fulbe or pastoral Fulani, women tend calves milk cows, process milk and prepare milk products for home consumption as well as for marketing. The later is carried out for the purpose of earning income to purchase other family food, provisions such as soap, sugar, matches and soup condiments while part of it is retained as the women's independent income.² Women's importance as the key actors in all these agricultural activities has earned Africa the reputation of being a "region of female farming per excellence."³

Women, in addition to agriculture engage in off farm income earning activities, all with the aim of bettering their living standards. Such activities include home based industries such as crafts production, casual or temporary employment as hired labour either on private farms or at other jobs, food preparation for sale, etc. In addition they are solely responsible

for reproductive activities at family level like cooking for the household, looking after the children, the disabled, sick, old and other family members, the gathering of firewood, and supply of water for family use, sometimes from very distant sources. It is estimated that African women spend as much as 16 hours a day on both economic and reproductive activities.

From the advent of colonisation however, while women still retained these responsibilities, their plight changed gradually over the last 80-100 years, ushering in a structural crisis as early as the 1960s, which now affects almost the entire African and third world population especially women. The root cause of these crises is the text of the next section.

II. The Origins of the Third World Development Crises and the Deteriorating position of Women

The genesis of the crises currently afflicting the Third World, and resulting in the worsening socio-economic position of millions of her population especially women are in the legacy of colonial systems of transfer of resources out of the Third World to Europe and the West. Apart from draining resources from the colonies, this systems also established export enclaves in agriculture, mining and other primary sectors thereby transforming otherwise self reliant communities through forced commercialisation and the introduction of private property in land.⁴ This economic and political process resulted in the:

- a) destruction and/or suppression of the manufacturing potentials of colonies and traditional crafts, and artisan production through the importation of manufactured goods;

- b) Large portions of the population lost access to adequate and stable income, resources, or employment. Such basic needs as food, housing, health facilities etc. were almost ignored in pursuit of colonial production interests. Few Third World Countries attempted to rectify this production structure after independence, hence many of the economic/political characteristics of the colonial days have persisted up-to-date. The result of which are:
- a) the manufacturing sectors have not grown much except in a few newly industrialising countries and
 - b) the development of a strong export oriented agriculture with a stagnating food production sector, resulting in the marginalisation of peasants who neither could find jobs nor survive proceeds from their farm holdings. Large numbers of both men and women were affected by the marginalisation, but women were worse hit. It is documented that during the period (colonial rule), the economic position of women worsened as the colonial rulers tended to disfavour women in access to technology, land, employment credit etc⁶ due to their patriarchal ideology, cultural subordination of women on gender and class basis, and the fact that the inherent inequality in the economic and political process itself was poverty generating.

These trends have gradually worsened today to constitute the current crises through the activities of multinational cooperations and supranational bodies like the IMF. Most Third world and African nations are consequently being crushed under

the burden of heavy external debts due to balance of payment problems resulting from the systemic breakdown, collapsed food and agricultural sector resulting in reliance on food importation for survival, and a general fall in the standard of living as countries are subjected to IMF conditionalities to get foreign exchange loans to resolve the crises. We know however that this will only bring about a temporary solution, until major systemic or structural changes are carried out.

What this section has tried to point out is the theoretical relationship between colonial and neocolonial economic and political processes and the crisis of survival facing the Third World today, and the continued deterioration of all members of the population especially, women's accessibility to resources for the fulfilment of their basic needs. We note that today, building upon the colonial structure, any time reforms on land are being made for example, it is the women who first loose control over land or have reduced access to it as governments take no notice of their traditional use rights. The reforms usually conceded land titled to male households heads, consequently women become landless especially those from the poorest households, hence have no alternative but to take up poorly paid temporary, seasonal and casual jobs as hired labour. In places where food processing and agricultural mechanisation has been effected, women's economic positions are affected most as they either increase their workload while men's are decreased or they reduce their employment and income opportunities. The commercialisation of agriculture also affected women very negatively in most parts of Africa and the Third World. For whereas the introduction of

cash crops enhanced the economic position of men, it resulted in the deterioration of that of women and in addition increased their work load as the task of household food production fell squarely on them alone. Getting other reproductive needs such as water and firewood also become more demanding with development as in many cases communal and waste lands become privatised, with a lot of its vegetation removed for commercial purposes, thereby forcing women to have to walk very long distances from the villages and spending many hours to collect firewood. With these developments women had no choice but to move into other informal sector occupations such as petty trading, food preparation for sale, casual and poorly paid employment as hired labour, handicrafts production etc. The food energy, water and debts crises facing Africa and The Third World Countries are equally detrimental to the basic needs of their people. However, this paper intends to concentrate on the food crisis as it affects Nigeria, using information based on micro researches carried out by the author and scholars in Nigeria.

III. The Food Crises in Nigeria

The decline in food and agricultural production in Nigeria started when it fell from 2.8% between 1965 and 1973 to minus 5% between 1973 and 1984. It has now stagnated at between 1% and 1.5% compared to an estimated population growth rate of 2.5%. As a result of the food deficit created by this trend Nigeria's food import bill has risen from 45 million naira in 1961 to 88 million naira in 1971 and over 2 billion naira in 1981.⁷ In 1985 Nigeria's food deficit stood at a projected 5.5 million metric tonnes of grain equivalent.⁸

It has now been realised that this decline is as a result of the defects inherent in the development planning process inherited from the colonial masters. During the first plan, the emphasis was as taxing the rural sector through the operations and export-oriented strategy that was based on importation of raw materials and technology and thereby destroying cottage industries such as black smithing textiles and weaving and impoverishing the rural peasantry. The bulk of the surpluses that were generated from the expropriation of peasant production were transferred abroad. Thus, this development strategy excluded the reinvestment of part of this surplus in the agricultural sector. Besides, more emphasis has laid on the production of cash rather than food crops whose prices were also made less attractive by the commercialization process. By the end of the first plan as a result, a crisis situation had already begun to develop in the agricultural sector.

The second and third plans in an attempt to revive the sector embarked on and emphasised huge capital expenditure in the form of the World Bank assisted agricultural development project (ADP) the River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA), the establishment ... of the credit institution - Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) to make loans available to small scale farmers, fiscal measures to encourage private sector investment in agriculture such as tax holidays, subsidies on inputs, removal of import duties, an agricultural machinery etc. While these strategies were supposedly meant for the development of peasant farmers who are the backbone of food and some industrial crop production in Nigeria, they failed to achieve their purpose because the benefits accrued to the so-called "progressive farmers" who are mostly absentee upper and middle class farmers whose livelihood is not dependent

on agricultural production. Women were left out almost entirely from these developments. The decline was also unwittingly made worse by the massive importation of cheap food (due to the oil boom) which further depressed production at home, as home produced and more expensive food crops could not compete with the imported ones.

Other strategies adopted to revive agriculture included the launching of the National Accelerated food production programme (NEEPP), the 'Operation Feed the Nation' (OFN) and the Green Revolution Programme. The impact of all these on agriculture was minimal. In fact in addition to not reaping the benefits of these projects, peasant farmers especially in the irrigation project areas lost their lands to the project, and had to either become landless labourers on the schemes or tenants, thus marginalising them even more.

Also contributing to the failure of the policies outlined in the plans was the social and political environment in the rural areas. Strategies for agricultural development in the past had avoided the need for a social reorganisation of the rural sector, into cooperatives though it is clear that agricultural production is socially organised around small and isolated families and small land holdings which are becoming increasingly smaller due to increases in population and other forms of land transfers. These small holdings are not viable for far reaching technical changes and generally leads to the inefficient use of land. Under these circumstances farming families become isolated from each other in both the production and marketing process. Consequent upon this lack of cooperation they fall easy prey to market vagaries, middlemen and other swindlers.

The fourth National Development Plan attempted to resolve this problem but also with limited success. The establishment of the Directorate for Food Roads and Rural Infrastructures which aims at an integrated rural development programme involving women, through its three-tier structure, with moral, social, cultural, economic security and social mobilisation components is also another attempt at a more effective rural development policy. Its strong emphasis on the effective and efficient socio-spatial organisation of all the communities of the nation from the grass roots to the urban areas for increased productivity is indeed a noble step. It has however been pointed out that the Directorate falls short of addressing the issue of the locus of power in the rural areas, which is one of the reasons believed to belie the failure of many development strategies in the past.

Other problems militating against rural development which have been taken up by the Directorate includes the construction of rural infrastructure such as feeder roads, rural banking, credit services, rural telephones, postal services, electricity, housing, storage and processing facilities, tools, implements, spare parts, maintenance and other vital services. The absence of many of these amenities in the rural areas is responsible for rural-urban migration which has increased the number of female headed households in the rural areas, as men move to towns in search of employment in the formal sector, leaving women with the sole responsibility of family maintenance against all odds.

Studies of rural women from four ethnic groups namely, the pastoral Fulani, Kilba, Tiv and Gwari women in the savannah zone also supports the existence of these trends in development.

34 pastoral 'Fulbe' or Fulani households consisting of nomads, semi nomadic, semi settled and settled families were studied in Sorau District of Nubi local government area of Gongola State. The sample of (5% of total households) contained 35 men and 46 women. A preliminary overview of the data collected showed that while both 'Fulbe' men and women are hampered by lack of adequate access to information on improved animal husbandry practices due to seasonal mobility, the women's plight is much worse. The study showed that all extension work was directed at the men alone. None of the 46 women had ever set eyes on either a livestock extension officer or a home economics agent. Hence most knowledge of innovations in livestock management or agriculture (and these were few also for the men) trickled down to the women from their husband's. The husbands were the single most important source of information to the women. While it may be argued that the livestock extension agents may have concentrated on the men because traditionally, livestock management is the men's sphere of operation, there is no doubt that the patriarchal development policies inherited from the colonial masters also contributed to the existence of this situation. One of the steps taken by policy makers in Nigeria in order to sedentarise and improve livestock farming is the establishment of grazing reserves for the cattle owners, which also is supposed to reduce competition between grazing lands and farms. To this effect Kachia grazing reserve in Kaduna State, Sorau and Guyaku in Gongola state, Wase in Plateau State, Wawa da Sango in Bauchi State have already been demarcated, some with minimum infrastructure while many more are expected to be established.¹⁰

However, only the Kachia grazing reserve has so far managed to settle about 34 Fulani households as agro-pastoralists since 1970, with the help of International Livestock Centre for Africa (ILCA)¹⁰. They cultivate crops for their livelihood as well as leguminous fodder crops for their cattle's supplementary feeding. Waters-Bayer¹¹ studied the impact of this settlement programme on 'Fulbe' women in this reserve and found that, the introduction of this innovation (supplementary feeding) would not possibly increase milk of take for family consumption. This was because the innovation was only introduced to men, who usually paid for the feeds from cattle sales. As such men had control over the allocation of feeds to particular animals. Having this control also meant controlling the offtake of milk as well, hence they can channel the grains of increased milk production into producing more animals for beef (their own domain of production), rather than for dairy products which is the women's sphere. Women on their part were constrained from buying the feeds themselves by lack of enough funds and marriage insecurity.

Here we see an example of a development policy directed at men only and resulting also in the taking over by men of women's source of income.

The sample of 30 Kilba households (5% of total households) in Pellas village in Gambia Local Government Area also in Gengola State, consisting of 40 women and 27 men, showed that in spite of a high level of awareness among both men and women of the benefits of adopting agricultural innovations, through the trickle down process from their husbands. Only men benefited from government loans, were members of cooperatives, could have easier access to and afford tractor hiring services and adequate inputs like fertilizers and pesticides. Agricultural extension services was also directed at men alone.

Women from the TIV households sampled in Mballah in Tombo District also had a good knowledge of the agricultural innovation available in their vicinity. A few had come in contact with agricultural and home economics agents, however, financial constraints mitigated against their adopting most of such innovations such as mechanised land preparation especially on their own farms (separate from family farms). Only one of the women responding had access to agricultural loans from a Christian agricultural credit organisation with headquarters in Mkar.

IV. RURAL WOMEN'S STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH THEIR HANDICAPS

To cope with their unequal accessibility and/or inaccessibility to economic resources for the survival and security of themselves and their families, the Kilba and Tiv women have developed some strategies. They engaged in other economic activities to supplement what they can get from agricultural production. The 'Fulbe' women make crafts such as baskets and 'pepe' from certain woods available in their vicinity for sale. They sometimes also plaited hair, for a fee while some, made snacks such as 'fura' for sale. Kibba women engage in marketing and petty trading activities, food preparation for sale for example, bean cakes, groundnut cakes, cassava cakes, etc. for the same purpose. However several general of the belonged to religious associations, which, other than carrying out welfare and religious activities also formed workbees, to work each others farms in turn. They also did this for non-members for a fee which they kept collectively for emergencies. Two types of women's organisation were identified among the sample of Tiv women - the 'Bom' and the christian women's organisation

while the later operated along the same lines as that found among the Kilbas, the "Ban" is a purely rural credit organisation. Members contribute whatever they can afford at the end of every month. From these contributions, members can borrow at a given interest rate for a period of one to twelve months. Hence rural Tiv women acquire their financial needs to pursue economic activities from this type of arrangement. Although there was no incidence of this type of organisation within the sample, rotational credit is also usually another source of credit for carrying out agricultural and other economic activities.

V. SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION OF WOMEN INTO THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION PROCESS

The idea of "integrating" women in the agricultural production process rather than merely involving them, is meant to portray the fact that women have been actively involved in this sector from time immemorial except for the constraints enumerated above. Survival is now the most serious problem facing Nigeria and other third world countries. Very crucial to that survival is the part played by women who constitute more than half the human resources of the country. For a sustainable change in women's access to economic resources however, the existing cultural, economic and political system with its allocative inequality has to be restructured to give wider access to economic and political power. This is in line with the theme of the United Nations decade for women "Equality-Peace and Development." To this end the following suggestions are made :-

1. Women's participation in the planning and implementation of policies and programmes that affect their livelihood should be ensured so that only projects seen to be beneficial could be decided for. This can be made possible by mobilising the rural women through the formation of organisations for collective action to enhance their participation on equal footing with men. The empowerment of women through collective action is necessary for a lasting solution to the crises.

Hitherto project planning has been a top down process.

Monitoring and evaluation of the projects should also be done by popular participation of rural women themselves. Effective institutional links between women's organisation and national planning should be established.

Access to land, water and other natural resources.

2. There is need for institutional and legal changes in land tenure which would result in the redistribution of power, such that equal access to land, water and other natural resources by women especially, and peasant men, would be achieved. This could include imposing limits on the size of private land holdings, giving priority in redistributing land acquired by government for agricultural development purposes to the established tenants, and secondly women farmers; ensuring that none allocated farm land are absentee tenants. In fact the control of land by the community as it was before the colonial days should be restated.

3. Access to credit, inputs and services: Government or any organisation in which input and services distribution is centralised should give women farmers' organisation priority in their activities. Extension work in agriculture, livestock,

husbandry and cooperatives should be emphasised. The restriction of access to inputs and credit for women at this point in time has however been complicated by the Structural Adjustment Programme in Nigeria which emphasises deregulation of the economy. This means that subsidies on agricultural inputs like fertilizer have to be reduced. In fact the Nigerian Government has recently announced the plan to completely remove such subsidies gradually over the next few years.¹² For the same reason also, interest rates on loans have been floated and are as high as 20%. For rural women whose resources we know are very meagre, access to inputs and credit will be more difficult. Policy makers should therefore allow special subsidies and interest rates for women farmers' organisation through rural banking until such a time when they can stand on their own. At the moment, the establishment of rural banks is one of the objectives of the Directorate for Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure.

4. Marketing Services: Marketing, pricing, transportation and storage of farm products particularly those of small scale farmers should be improved. This can also be done through the use of cooperatives, local markets, or government agencies. Generally the success of marketing services will depend on the development of rural infrastructure such as feeder roads and communication systems.

5. Educational Opportunities: It is most essential that rural women be equipped with some training, whether formal or informal if their integration into agricultural production is to succeed. Universal primary education is a basic need for all rural people especially women. Thereafter, similar opportunities and equality of education and also content must be ensured for both men and women. Special incentives must be offered to

girls and women to increase school enrolment. The Federal Government of Nigeria in 1986 launched the Blue Print which is planned to enhance female education. This is a welcome strategy. Informal education through agents of change like the agricultural, livestock, and home economics extension and adult illiteracy class should be emphasised for those women who are already too old for formal education. To make this possible it is imperative to train more of such female agents. The dearth of this calibre of intermediate staff is one of the reasons propounded for the slow rate of agricultural transformation in Nigeria.

6. Rural non-farm activities should also be taught to women by more home economics extension workers so as to provide opportunities to earn off-farm income to supplement their proceeds from agricultural activities. Such activities include home-based industries like weaving, food preparation, etc.

7. Access to appropriate technology: Policy makers should also embark on the modification of the currently used farming tools, by local engineers reduce drudgery and enhance efficiency of agricultural production. When this reduces women's labour input, it can then be transferred to other productive activities. Such technology should be cheap so that they would be within reach of rural women.

8. Research: Last but not the least, government should increase allocation of fund to research generally especially research and rural women. This will increase the amount of information on women's activities, the peculiar problems they encounter, and aid in the formulation of more relevant policies for their integration into agricultural production in Nigeria.

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