

# Gender Division of Labour and Decision Making Power: Implications for Household Food Security in Abia State, Nigeria

Odoemelam L. E., Onuekwusi, G. C., Alocha, O.C, Njoku, J.U

Department of Rural Sociology and Extension  
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike

## ABSTRACT

Food insecurity which is the cause of child malnutrition is still prevalent in rural communities of Abia State. one of the causes of food insecurity as it has been reported by other is gender inequality. Women, especially in Nigeria have been reported to have high work head in food production compared to men and in decision making power they have often subordinate to men. The aim of this study was to determine gender division of labour in agriculture and decision making power and their impacts on household food security. The study area was Abia State, which is made up of three agricultural zones namely Aba, Umuahia and Ohafia with 17 Local Government Areas. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used in the selection of sample size of 150 respondents of household heads. Data were collected through Focus Group Discussion and use of structured questionnaires. The father and mother were interviewed separately. Data collected were analyzed with the use of simple descriptive statistics like frequency and means. Results of the study indicated both men and women participated in agricultural activities but women more days in the field than men. Women had a median of 53 days (0 – 196), while men had a median of 39 (0 – 164) days. Food insecurity prevalence was high. The result indicated that about 53% of the households were food sufficient while 47% were food insufficient in the last 12 months. In decision making, most decisions were made by father and mother together or father alone. Women make seldom decision alone knowing who does work is essential in policy planning. Women were observed to be responsible for a particular aspect of producing food for household consumptive than men. Therefore food policy needs to be specifically targeted to them and empower them.

**Keywords:** *Gender division of labour, decision making power and participation*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of gender has been considered in agriculture and development where agricultural opportunities are not the same for men and women. What is commonly accepted as a typical attributes of men and women differ among cultures, societies and classes over time. Many studies have shown that women play a predominant role in household security through participatory in agricultural and food production (FAO, 2009, Mehra and Rojas, 2008). They account for between 60 – 80 percent of household food security in sub-Saharan African (FAO, 1999). They ensure household food security through their roles as food producers, processors and income earners. But despite their key role in food production they have less access to land, resources credit, extension services, agricultural inputs and technology (Doss, 2001). They are also trapped in poverty by illiteracy and unwanted high fertility (UNFPA, 2000) and this affects production and food security. There is a link between agriculture and food security. Agriculture is the only source of food both for consumption and as a raw material to redefined foods. It provides a major role in providing food availability and also important sources of income to purchase food.

Therefore rising local productivity makes food more accessible not only to the rural poor but also to all the people. Food accessibility for many developing countries relies mostly on local food production. Agriculture is the major economic sector for developing countries for 75 percent of the employment (FAO, 2009) in Nigeria it is the backbone of the economy and it accounts for about half of the national income.

Recently researchers have put interest and action in the use of gender analysis as a tool for project designs assuming that development projects would result in efficient gain and more successful (Mehra and Rojas, 2008). However researchers proved insufficient as they realized that women were not homogenous group their roles and responsibilities within agriculture were as variable as those of men and gender roles and relationship between men and women were dynamic and changeable (Doss, 2008). The more command women has over the household resources the better the food supply of the household. This is because women were observed and reported to spend more of their time and income to secure food in the household (Holmboe and Wandel, 1991). Several studies have pointed out that men dominate the household decision making power in most places while women have a subordinate position (Hyder *et al.*, 2005). Nigeria study it was found that the level of participation of women in farm management decision making was quite low (Damisa and Yohanna, 2007). World Development Report (2008), stresses the improvement of agricultural growth to reduce poverty and food insecurity (World Bank, 2008). It has also point to the failure to realize women potential led agriculture as one of the contributing factor to low growth in agriculture and food security, as it is observed that majority of the small holder farmers are women. FAO states that unless gender is addressed comprehensively the global community will not achieve the target set by 1996 World Food Summit United Nation Millennium Development Goal (FAO, 2009).

Therefore if a woman has enough say, they will not jeopardize the food security. In Nigeria and Abia in particular, several



studies have pointed out that men dominate the household decision making power in most places while women have subordinate position. Despite all these, gender concerns have not been fully integrated with the overall policies and programmes geared towards achieving sustainable food and nutritional security at the household level. Therefore understanding gender division of labour and decision making power, gender division of labour, and its association to food security is crucial, with the following specific objectives to;

1. ascertain the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents
2. ascertain the gender division of labour in agricultural activities in days.
3. estimate the prevalence of household food security in the study area
4. ascertain decision making power between genders and association to household food security.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study area was Abia State. Abia State is made of 3 Agricultural zones with 17 Local Government Area. Multistage sampling procedure was used in the selection of the sample size. From these agricultural zones namely Aba, Umuahia and Ohafia, two (Aba and Ohafia) were randomly selected because they met the criteria for selection (more agrarian than the other zones). From these zones 5 blocks were selected from each zone, 3 cells and one circle and 10 households heads either male or female bringing the total to 150 respondents. Data were collected through Focus Group Discussion, participatory observation and use of structured questionnaire to elicit necessary information. Data collected were analyzed with the use of simple descriptive like frequency and means.

Objective 1 was realized with the use of simple descriptive statistics like frequency and means. Objective 2 which is food insufficiency status was determined by a single question, which of the following best describe the amount of food eaten in your households in the last 12 months.

- (a) Have enough food to eat?
- (b) Sometimes not enough to eat?
- (c) Often did not have enough?

The later question was drawn from the food sufficiency question developed for the third world. National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES II). In this study, household who respond sometimes or often were categorized as food insufficiency and those who had enough food to eat were categorized as food sufficiency.

Objective 3 which is gender division of labour were developed based on the length of period and frequency of days they went to the field in various agricultural activities in the last agricultural seasons October – November, 2012 – June –

August – 2013. The agricultural period selected for the study was the main agricultural period which everybody is involved. The period was asked in a length of weeks/months/days in each of the agricultural activities. The frequency was asked in number of times, she/he went to the field and was classified into everyday, several times a week, twice a week, once a week and never. The number of days each gender went to the field was calculated by adding the period and frequency.

Every day in a week was given a value of 6 days.

Several times 4 days which is the midpoint between 3 to 5 days a week.

Twice – 2 days

Once – 1 day

Objective 4 was analyzed by documenting husband and wife response about decision for specific activities which are assumed to influence directly or indirectly the food and nutritional situation in the households. The answers were either 'it is husband', it is the wife or both decide for the particular activity. The question were asked separately for privacy.

Objective 5 was realized with the use of 5-point Likert's scale type.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1: Household demographic and socio-economic characteristics**

Number of households heads	N	Percent median range
<b>Household heads</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Father	107	71.33
Mother	33	22.00
Step father	18	5.33
Grand father	2	1.33
Total	150	100
<b>Household Size</b>		
4 – 6	61	40.7
8 – 10	73	48.7
12 – 14	16	10.7
Total	150	100
<b>Education level</b>	Father N = 117	Mother N = 140
Non formal	16 (14)	62 (44)
Primary uncompleted	7 (6)	34 (24)
Completed primary	48 41	41 (29)
Secondary	32 (27)	13 (9)
Higher education	14 (12)	-
<b>Occupation</b>		
Farming	36 67	86 (61)
Paid job	47 (40)	32 (23)
Others	11 (9)	23 (16)
None	3 (3)	-

**Secondary Occupation**

Petting trading	28 (24)	94 (67)
Artisans	41 (35)	24 (17)
Others	37 (32)	38 (27)
None	11 (9)	22 (16)
Worked as paid labour in the last 12 months		
Yes	31 (27)	102 (73)
No	86 (73)	33 (27)

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 1 shows demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the households and household heads. The results show that, out of 150 respondents, 77% were male headed households, 23% were female headed households. Female headed households in this study area, were the households which did not have any man presence at all. The households which the husband have migrated to the other areas for work or employment and still send remittance home were not included in the category of female headed households. The table also revealed that some of the respondents 49% had a large household size of 8 – 10 people living together under the same roof.

Educational level shows a significant difference between men and women. Illiteracy level was higher among the women 44% and 16% for men. In terms of occupation, there was significantly more women 61% than men 47% who reported farming as their major economic activities compared to their male counterparts. In addition to their major economic activity, about 67% of the women had other income generating activities compared to the male counterparts who were just 24% that were engaged in other income generating activities. Further, women 73% were more involved in working as paid labour in other people's farm to earn some money compared 27% of men who occasionally worked as a paid labour in other peoples' farm.

**Table 2: Gender division of labour in Agricultural activities**

Activities	Man days Median (range)	Women days Median (range)	P-value N
Land clearing	6 (0 – 30)	85 (0 – 36)	0.001*
Ploughing	6.5 (0 – 52)	0 (0)	0.000*
Hoeing	14.5 ( 0 – 26)	17 (4 – 26)	0.592
Planting	6 (0 – 32)	6 (0 – 36)	0.361
Weeding	12 (0 – 64)	24 (0 – 98)	0.000*
Harvesting	6 (0 – 50)	9 (0 – 55)	0.044*
Total days	39 (0 – 164)	53 (0 – 196)	0.007*

Source: Field data, 2013

Table 2 shows the whole agricultural period which included all crops grown by households. Female headed households were excluded from the analysis and only households were both father and mother mentioned farming as their main economic activity (n=107) were included in this analysis so as to give indication which were considered including.

The table shows that all the activities were done by both sex except ploughing. The result indicated that women worked longer in most activities than their male counterparts. In land clearing, women had a median days of 1.5 days more than men in hoeing and planting. Men and women were contributing the same without any significant difference. In weeding, women had a median days of 12 days more than the men with a high significant difference. For harvesting, women had a median days of 2 days more than men with a significant difference at 1% level.

Taking the whole agricultural period into account, the table shows that women worked more days than men, women had a median of 53 days (0 – 196), while men had a median of 39 (0 – 164) days. Thus on average woman worked 14 more days than men and the difference was significant at  $P = 0.007^*$ .

For Mann test

\* Significant at  $P < 0.01$

\*\* Significant at  $P < 0.05$

**Table 3: Frequency distribution of food insufficiency in the area**

Food Insufficiency	Frequency	Percentage
Sufficient food to eat in the last 12 months	79	53
Food sufficient sometimes not have enough to eat	56	37
Often do not have enough food to eat	15	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field survey, 2013

Perceptions of food insufficiency were used as a proxy for food insecurity. From the table, about 53% of the responses were food sufficient while 47% were food insufficient in the last 12 months. The prevalence of food insufficiency was high in female household heads. Recent studies have also shown that female headed households are inappropriately among the poorest of the poor in rural communities (Won, 2008) and that sudden increase in food price have negative repercussions, partly because they tend to spend proportionally more on food than male headed households and therefore are harder hit by higher food price.



**Table 4: Decision making power related to selected activity by gender**

Who Decides Activity		Wife's Answer			Husband's Answer		
		h %	w%	b%	h %	w%	b%
Preparation of land		35	5	60	52.6	1.5	45.9
What crops to grow		40	3	57	17.2	1.5	81.3
When to plant and harvest		31	6	64	47.7	1.5	51.9
When to sell stocks		32	5.6	63.6	3.6	96.4	0
When to cook & what to eat		0.9	98.1	0.9	33.6	18.3	48.1
To buy food		19.8	19.8	52.0	4.6	69.2	26.2
To buy clothes		15.5	19.7	64.8	18.7	6.7	74.6
To buy livestock		36.6	4.5	59	32.1	1.5	66.4
Children's schooling		17.1	6.0	76.9	13.3	3.7	83
Children's medical test		7.7	12.7	79.6	19.5	1.8	78.8
Keep money after sales		48.5	40.8	10.8	6.7	91.1	22

Source: Field survey, 2013

### Decision making power in households

Husbands and wife were asked separately about decision making in relation to different activities which were assumed to directly or indirectly influence the food and nutritional. Situation in the households. Table 4 shows decision making power related to certain activities.

The data showed that decisions were taken jointly by father and mother or by the father alone. In the activities concerning cultivation especially the preparation of land, when to planted when to harvest, it was observed that most husbands seem to be deciding alone in these activities though in deciding what crops to grow 40% of women mentioned it is the husbands who decides while 81% were of the opinion that it is of both in activities of food preparation, it was observed to be mostly of women alone, decision to buy food was found to be rarely of women alone. As indicated in the table the decision was mostly taken by both husband and wife. Regarding the selling of stock most decision was mostly taken by both husband and wife jointly together, though 21% of men that decides alone while 32.4 of the women mentioned that they are the one who decides. There was a difference between father and mother answer on who keeps the money after selling stock. Most men (91%) were more like to answer that it is their wives while 49% of the wives reported it is the husband. Child medical treatment and schooling were observed to be mostly by both together.

Women are mainly responsible for managing, producing and processing food within the households, holding significant important for intra-household security. According to Quisumbing and Pandolfelli (2008) women education and nutritional knowledge and status within the households

contribute more than 50% to the reduction of child malnutrition. There women capacity to make decision within male headed household is critical for household nutrition. From the result, the women have limited power in decision making and bargaining power within the household.

The implication is less expenditure on health, nutrition and education and power income for family members. Men who lack knowledge of food precipitation may not be able to translate availability into nutritional security in their households (World Bank, 2008).

## 4. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

### Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that both men and women participate in agricultural activities, however women work more days than men. Women were observed to spend more days in the field especially weeding which is one of the largest and tiring agricultural activities. Prevalence of food insecurity was high in the study area, concerning decision making power, the findings reveals that there was gender inequality in decision making power among the household. Most decisions were taken jointly or by men. Women seldom make decision alone. This may have impact on food security.

### Recommendation

Knowing who does what work is essential in policy planning. Women were observed to be responsible for a particular aspect of producing food for household consumption than men. Therefore food policy needs to be specifically target to the women and empower them in terms of education capacity building to reduce gender inequality and also provide them with nutritive education.

## REFERENCES

- Damisa, M. A. and Yohanna, M. (2007). Role of women in farm management decision making process: *Oxford Probit Analysis World Journal of Agricultural Science*.
- Discourse Journal of Agriculture and Food Security. [www.resjournals.org/JAFS](http://www.resjournals.org/JAFS)
- Doss, C. R. (2001). Designing Agricultural Technology for African women farmers: Lessons from 25 years of Experience. World Development.
- FAO (1997). FAO Focus; Women and Food Security. Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations.
- FAO (2009). Gender Equity in Agriculture and Rural Development; A Quick Guide to Gender Mainstreaming in FAO's New Strategic Framework. Food and Agricultural Organization of United Nation.



Holmboe-ottesen, P. Wandel, M. (1991). *Gender and Food, Women Bargaining Power and Agricultural Change in Developing Countries*. Oxford University Press.

Hyder, A. A., MamanSusain, Nyoni, J. E. and Khaslani, S. (2005). *The Pervasive Triad of Food Security, Gender Inequity and Women's Healthy Exploratory Research from Sub-Saharan Africa*. African Health Science.

Mehra R. and Rojas, M. H. (2008). *Women, Food Security and Agriculture in a Global Market Place: A Significant Shift*. International Centre for Research in Women.

Quisumbing A. and Pandolfelli, L. (2008). *Promising approaches to address the needs for poor female farmers*. IFPRI Discussion Paper 00 882. Washington DC: *International Food Policy and Research Institute*.

UNFPA (2002). *World Food Summit on Food Security . Reducing Hunger and Poverty: Women hold the key*. United Nation Population Funds.

World Bank (2008). *World Development Report; Agriculture for Development*. Washington DC.