

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH AGRIBUSINESS: A KEY TO REDUCING POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY IN NIGERIA.

ASOGWA, IFEYINWA S. (PhD)
Department of Food Science and Technology.
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

&

OMAH, ESTHER C. (PhD)
Department of Food Science and Technology.
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

&

ASOGWA MAXIMUS (PhD)
Caritas University, Amorji-nike, Enugu

Abstract

Nigeria faces enormous food security challenges. This is as a result of high level of poverty in the country. Statistics reveal that about 70 percent of the population lives on less than US\$1.25 a day, suffering hunger and poverty. Worst hit by hunger and food insecurity are women. Women make up about 50% of the population in Nigeria, majority who are poor and living in the rural areas. This paper asserts that any development process that does not consider the progress of half the population cannot address the problem of poverty and the crisis of sustainability. Currently, discussions in shifting from traditional forms of agriculture to agribusiness have increased. Missing from these discussions and decision points, however, is a commitment to women farmers and resources to strengthen their roles in the agricultural economy. It has been recognized that women help to hunger and food insecurity problems in many ways. To move forward, therefore; women must be recognized as key economic agents of change in rural communities who in their own right contribute to local, national and global food security and economic growth. This paper reviews the important roles women play in agribusiness development. For instance, in Nigeria women produce 60-80% of the agricultural food in the country and more than 60% of the agricultural production is carried out by women in the Nigerian traditional setting. The paper also highlights some challenges women experience in playing those roles. Such challenges include socio-cultural restrictions, poverty and lack of education. Some measures to mitigate those challenges were also suggested. This paper concludes that to significantly reduce poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria, new directions in development assistance' and agricultural investments must recognize and support women's involvement in the full agricultural value chain from production to processing to marketing.

Introduction

Nigeria faces enormous food security challenges. This is as a result of high level of poverty in the country. Statistics reveal that about 70 percent of the population live on less than US\$1.25 a day, suffering hunger and poverty (IF AD, 2012). Worst hit by hunger and food insecurity are women. This is not surprising, since all over the world, women are at the center of poverty. It has been noted that when the yardstick used to measure the degree of people's poverty is their level of well-being, women are traditionally found to be more impoverished than men (Alaye-Ogan, 2008). This situation is worse in developing countries, like Nigeria, where majority of the 70 percent of the population currently living below the poverty line are women (FOS, 2006). The population of women and girls in Nigeria is estimated to be 80.2 million (Gender in Nigeria Report, 2012) making up nearly 50% of the population. These women are concentrated in the rural areas. Any effort therefore, that is targeted at reducing poverty that does not put women at the center may not be successful. In other words, any development process that does not consider the progress of half the population cannot address the problem of poverty and the crisis of sustainability. This is why at this critical juncture of global change, it is a necessity for the development process to fully incorporate an agenda for women's empowerment by including women's realities in the fullest sense. Women have to be fully involved in empowerment and self-responsibility of rural people (Lewu, 2008) in order to significantly reduce poverty and food insecurity.

Food security, poverty reduction and economic development are inter-related and depend critically on improvements in agriculture. This central role of agriculture in economic growth and development in Africa has long been widely recognized. This is the main reason that on a global scale, as well as in Nigeria, agriculture has increasingly become a tool of importance toward the alleviation of poverty and hunger. The need to boost this sector stems from a number of benefit areas. To begin with, agriculture directly addresses food insecurity, regardless of scale. From this activity, farmers are able to feed themselves as well as their families. This in turn leads to increased income generation at household level and directly helps them sustain their livelihoods. Increased rural income provides households with enough purchasing power to access health facilities and educate their children. Sustainable farming methods help in conservation of the environment and foster greater yields (Mumba, 2010). In Nigeria, the agricultural sector provides over 40% of gross domestic product (GDP) with between 60 and 70% of the population productively engaged in farming (Akinsanmi, 2005). Smallholders, mostly subsistence producers account for 80% of all farm holdings (Awoke and Okorji, 2004).

Traditional agricultural programmes in Africa have mainly focused on increasing agricultural productivity on the farm. Notable among such traditional agricultural programmes in Nigeria is the Operation Feed the Nation Program promoted by the first Obasanjo regime in the late 1980s. A key failing of past efforts to reduce hunger and increase rural incomes has been the lack of attention paid to women as farmers, producers and farm workers and also focusing mainly on increasing agricultural productivity on the farm rather than promoting value addition activities of farm produce. Hence, the need to focus on agribusiness development, especially among women. Agribusiness or agro-industries include the post-harvest activities involved in the transformation, preservation and preparation of agricultural production for intermediary or final consumption. These post-harvest can go a long way towards reducing poverty, hunger and food insecurity in the developing countries (Wilkinson and Rocha, 2008).

Agriculture and agribusiness together are projected to be a US\$1 trillion industry in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) by 2030 (compared to US\$ 313 billion in 2010), and they should therefore be at the top of the agenda for economic transformation and development (World Bank, 2013). Consequent, discussion is increasingly shifting from traditional forms of agriculture to agribusiness. Missing from these discussions and decision points, however, is a commitment to women farmers and resources to strengthen their roles in the agricultural economy. It has been recognized that women help answer the hunger and food insecurity problems in every way possible. They grow food, sell food, buy food, prepare food, and increasingly they are involved in agricultural businesses that help build the economies of many developing countries (UNIDO, 2011). To move forward, therefore, the world community must make a significant shift in its thinking about women, food security, agriculture and the global marketplace to see women as key economic agents of change in rural communities who in their own right contribute to local, national and global food security and economic growth (ICRW, 2008b).

The Case for Agribusiness

Agribusiness is a complex enterprise that integrates agricultural cultivation, value-added processing and packing, packaging, and delivery activities. To function smoothly, agribusiness enterprises depend on a mix of technology, physical infrastructure and labour. As global demand for agribusiness products increases, demands for these inputs will also increase-including demand for women's labor. To maximize future agribusiness productivity, producers now should examine current inefficiencies, including the differential treatment of women and men workers (USAID, 1999). This was way it was defined as a broad concept that covers input suppliers, agro-processors, traders, exporters and retailers. Agribusiness provides inputs to farmers and connects them to consumers through the financing, handling, processing, storage, transportation, marketing and distribution of agro-industry products (UNIDO, 2011).

A resume of these is that agribusiness can play a critical role in jump-starting economic transformation through the development of agro-based industries that bring much-needed jobs and incomes. Successful agribusiness investments in turn, stimulate agricultural growth through the provision of new markets and the development of a vibrant input supply sector (World Bank, 2013). Fully functional agribusinesses (a) reduce postharvest losses through proper storage and preservation, (b) balance supply with demand on both a time and place basis, (c) stimulate the production of the highest value and type of products by the prices they pay, and (d) efficiently and effectively import food when there is an anticipated shortfall or when net prices are lower from another source due to comparative advantage. Agribusinesses can also improve the nutritional value of the food that is available through proper storage and supplementation, and by processing foods to reduce the labor required in their preparation and thus release that labor for other pursuits, including employment (USAID, 1997).

The rural economy in Nigeria is heavily dependent on smallholders, whose primary need is household subsistence. While improvements in subsistence agriculture are crucial to ensure food security for millions of people in rural areas, investments in agriculture that raise incomes and overall economic growth are essential for longer-term food security and improved well-being (ICRW, 2008b). One strategy is for rural poor people to move beyond subsistence agriculture into commercial high-value agriculture and become more diversified

producers who are competitive in wider regional and global agricultural markets (World Bank, 2007). The contemporary policy thrust therefore seeks to promote agri-business along the value chain. Many African countries as in Nigeria are blessed with huge agricultural resources yet poverty has remained prevalent in these countries. This trend shows that prosperity is not only due to resource endowments, and that poverty is no due to the la of resources but due largely to lack of diversification on sources of growth. It is critical to bark on a vigorous course of value addition to Africa's huge reservoir of agricultural resource in order to harness growth for development. Seizing emerging opportunities for promoting agribusiness in the new global context is imperative for Africa's prosperity (UNIDO, 2011).

In the light of the above, Nigeria has adopted an innovative framework for transforming the agri-sector, called the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA). The vision of the Transformation Agenda as established by the FMARD to achieve a hunger-free Nigeria through agricultural sector that drives income growth, accelerates achievement of food and nutritional security, generates employment and transforms. Nigeria into a leading player in global food markets to grow wealth for millions of farmers. Key to the Program is treating agriculture not as a development project, but as business (UNDP, 2013). In Nigeria, the current Agriculture Transformation Action Plan seeks to develop the value chain of five key commodities. i.e. rice, cassava, sorghum cacao and cotton. This entails reforming the input supply regime, a targeted region-specific in ease in the output of the five priority commodities, post-harvest systems development, a strong orientation towards agri-business and promoting value-addition in the product chain. Commendable as this initiative is, it may go the way f previous agricultural development programmes if the role of women is not appreciated an encouraged.

Role of Nigerian Women in Agribusiness Development

Rural women farmers play a vital role in advancing agricultural development and hence food security Literature abounds on the varied and crucial responsibilities that women hold in agriculture and the value of their contributions, both economic and social. They account for 70%of agricultural workers, 80% of food producers, 100% of those who process basic foodstuffs and they undertake from 60% to 90% of the marketing (Mgbada 2002; Rahman, 2004). According to FAO, 2011, women comprise, on average, 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, ranging from 20 percent in Latin America to 50 percent in Eastern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, 2011). Women grow or raise much of the world's food. They could be doing much more, if they had access to needed resources and had a voice in the decisions that have an impact on their lives and the lives of their families. In developing countries, rural women produce between 60 percent and 80 percent of food crops (FAO, 1997). Women also are more likely than men to spend their income on the well-being of their families, including more nutritious foods, school fees for children and health care (Schultz, 2003). Yet agricultural investments do not reflect these facts. Women in forestry, fishing and agriculture received just 7 percent of total aid for all sectors (OECD, 2008).

It has been reported that 80% of the work done on the farm in Nigeria, especially in food production, harvesting and processing are carried out mainly by women (Olawoye, 1989). Yahaya (2002) recorded that 76% of women from Oyo and Bauchi State are actively involved in farming activities or are engaged in their husband's farms. A survey by Fabiyi *et al.* (2007) confirmed that women carried out more than 80% of the weeding, harvesting, processing and

marketing activities (Table 1). The United Nations had also declared that four often agricultural workers in the world are women (U.N., 1986). In Nigeria women produce 60-80% of the agricultural food in the country (Ogunbameru and Pandey, 1992; Buckland and Haleegoah, 1996). According to Ironkwe and Ekwe (1998) more than 60% of the agricultural production is carried out by women in the Nigerian traditional setting. The agricultural activities of women go beyond crop production to other agricultural aspects like fisheries, rabbitry, poultry and as well as sheep and goat rearing. *Fabiya et al.*, (2007) noted that more than 70% of women farmers in Biliri Local Government Area, Gombe State, Nigeria were involved in rearing of pigs and goats, about 20% produce sheep and poultry.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to farm operations engaged by women
 Operations Frequency Percentage (%)

Operations	Frequency	Percentage
Land clearing	35	58.30
Sowing	43	71.76
Weeding	48	80.00
Harvesting	56	93.30
Transporting of products	49	82.00
Processing	56	93.30
Marketing	53	88.30
Others	10	16.70

Source: *Fabiya et al.*, (2007)

According to the 2006 census, almost 50% of the total populations of Nigerian population are women. The Federal Office of Statistics (2006) reports that 70% of this population reside and work in the rural areas, where they are playing major roles in food production and processing. Despite these roles, many of these women have not made the transition from producing for the household (subsistence level) to producing as a significant source of income (i.e., running an agribusiness). This is an important point because the progression from subsistence farming to agribusiness, especially if it is coupled with value-addition, opens the door to more significant and long-term increases in the standard of living (AGRA, 2012). Increasing opportunities for women can have a powerful impact on productivity and agriculture-led growth. Women are just as efficient agricultural producers as men and can achieve similar yields when given equal access to resources, including training and services. For example, in Kenya, researchers found that women could increase their crop yields by approximately 20 percent if given the same access to the same resources as men (*Saito et al.*, 1994). In Burkina Faso, it has been estimated that overall household production could increase by about six percent by more equitably distributing fertilizer and labor between male and female-farmed plots (Udry, 1996).

On the basis of available evidence and statistics, the role of women in agricultural production and development in Nigeria cannot be trivialized. They perform crucial roles in the domestic and economic life of the society. Rural and national development can hardly be achieved with the neglect of this important and substantial segment of the society (Damisa and Yohanna, 2007). Bolstering women's role in agriculture through agricultural investments and entrepreneurial opportunities promises to reap a double dividend of both better food security and nutrition, and greater economic growth (ICRW, 2008a). Unfortunately, women in Nigeria are harder-hit than men by poverty due to the non-challant emphasis placed on female education, and the prevalence of early marriage which tend to further impoverish the womenfolk, and subject them to statutory discrimination (Ojo 2002). Women therefore face more challenges in agricultural productivity and the growing agricultural businesses than their male counterparts.

Constraints to Women's Participation in Agribusiness and the Way Forward

These constraints can broadly be divided into:

Socio cultural restrictions: Like in other patriarchal societies, Nigerian women are oppressed and marginalized by socio-cultural norms. Cultural norms in many African societies traditionally dictate that women do not own land or that even if they do, men may have the right to sell that land (Doss, 1999). The situation in Nigeria is the same; women very rarely own land, despite their heavy involvement in agriculture. The women seem to be completely relegated to the background and made to depend entirely on the piece that the men folk may 'benevolently give to them. Women make up 60-79% of the rural work force but men are five times more likely to own land. In Nigeria, women own 4% of land in the North-East, and just over 10% in the South-East and South-South (Gender in Nigeria Report, 2012). Because women generally do not own land or other assets it has traditionally been difficult for women to obtain bank loans or other forms of credit through the banking system. Land tenure system is largely by inheritance. This lack of title to land, according to (Famoriyo, 1979) prevents women from exercising or improving their expertise in crop production and animal husbandry because of security of tenure.

While land is a pre-requisite for farming, it is possible to run a successful agribusiness without it (e.g., many value-added products do not require land *per se*). However, one necessary pre-requisite for any business is capital, and capital in the form of loans usually requires collateral, such as land and other forms of assets. Therefore, women who do not own land are at a disadvantage when it comes to financing their business (AGRA, 2012). FAO, 2011 reported that in Nigeria, for example, 14 percent of males and only 5 percent of females obtain formal credit, while in Kenya the percentages are 14 and 4 for males and females, respectively (Saito *et al.*, 1994).

Due to the conventional land ownership structures, in which men become the major decision makers and control the productive resources, it is very difficult for women to accumulate the collateral and have the time to develop and manage an agribusiness. Fig 1 shows extent of the participation of women in decision-making in agriculture in parts of Kaduna State, Nigeria. It is evident that women are left in the background as far as farm decisions are concerned, except for decisions on storage and marketing of the farm produce.

Exporters also tend to sign contracts with the male family member rather than with the female (World Bank, 2013). Women farmers have less contact with extension services than men, especially where male-female contact is culturally restricted. Extension is often provided by men agents to men farmers on the erroneous assumption that the message will trickle "across" to women. In fact, agricultural knowledge is transferred inefficiently or not at all from husband to wife (ICRW, 2008b). Due to socio-cultural restrictions, women face far greater time and mobility constraints than men. They may spend less time on farm work but work longer total hours on household and child care duties. These duties in addition restrict the mobility of women.

During the 56th Special Session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations, New York, United States, it was stressed that all the structural, cultural, social and economic barriers that prevent rural women from participating fully in the economic and political life of their countries must be eliminated (UN, 2012). Less discriminatory laws and policies must replace legislation and customs that constrain women's access to factors of production such as land, credit, inputs, information and technology. The interventions must be situation-specific. Actions must be technically relevant and be suited to the socio-cultural and religious precepts of the farming community and the resources of the community (UNEP, undated). Governmental and non-governmental agencies must get involved in aggressive public awareness campaign to enlighten people especially men on the evils of socio-cultural restrictions against women. Programmmes to help women to be self-confident and to discover their potentials and roles in national development should be put in place.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has estimated that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20-30 percent. This increase could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4 percent and reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17 percent, up to 150 million people (FAO, 2011).

Poverty - Over 66% of the world's 1.2 billion poor people are women. This situation is disheartening and confirms a strong correlation between gender and poverty (Mumba, 2010). Nigeria's population is estimated at 108 million and of this number nearly 54 million are women, thus representing about 49% of the total population (Ubek, 2010). It is estimated that since the 1970s, the percentage of rural women below the poverty line has increased by 50 percent, whereas that of men: 30 percent - the so called "feminization of poverty" (World Bank, 2002; Alaye-Ogan, 2008). Majority of these women are poor rural dwellers whose contributions are often limited by poor access to resources as a result of cultural, economic and sociological factors and so they can only operate on a small scale. Majority of them use low yielding and unimproved planting materials, primitive and labour intensive farm implements, traditional farming practices, which have adversely affected agricultural production (Fabiya et al, 2007). Since, most of the female farmers operate on a small scale; they are unable to meet the demand for large quantities by buyers. They are not also able to meet standards for product quality, such as health, sanitation, environment, safe use of chemicals, and food and worker safety. Standards in export markets are set high by governments and by particular industries in response to market demand. Small-scale women farmers may lack information about these standards, and even those who have the information may be unable to meet standards because they require substantial investments in equipment or other

resources. There is a need to focus on gender-based poverty interventions (UNDP, 2005), especially among female-headed households in Nigeria.

African women have been recognized as major players in agriculture and food production. This is because they not only involved in food production but also in food preparation especially at the household level. Yet due to poverty, many African women have not made the transition from producing for the household (subsistence level) to producing as a significant source of income (i.e., running an agribusiness). This is an important point because the progression from subsistence farming to agribusiness, especially if it is coupled with value-adding, opens the door to more significant and long-term increases in the standard of living. In short, helping women move from subsistence agriculture to agribusiness should be an important goal of development interventions (AGRA, 2012).

In the past there had been some poverty alleviation programmes supposedly targeted at rural women. For instance the Better life for Rural Women (BLW), the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), the Family Support Programme (FSP), many microcredit schemes for women among others. Unfortunately, these past rural development programmes have not been able to transform rural development for rural women to benefit from. This manifests itself in the failure of the development and poverty alleviation strategies to create a synergy between rural poverty alleviation and rural agricultural development. Situations where the change agents or policy makers do not know the people they make the policy for, especially their felt needs, they are want to either overestimate or underestimate the problems of such people and are also likely to misplace priorities (Ovie, 2011)

Since women are always the worst hit by poverty, there is need to focus various poverty alleviation efforts and policies on Nigerian women. In this respect, poverty alleviation measures should be hinged on women' economic, socio-political, structural and cultural context, as well as other milieu (Johnny, 2012). Poverty alleviation programmes are economic policies that should be directed at women, especially the rural women most affected by poverty. Policies and programmes on agriculture should create positive economic impact on the rural poor, which include rural women. Governmental and non-governmental agencies should be able to increase the women farmers' access to improved seeds, tools and equipment that will reduce drudgery and time spent on the agricultural process. Improving water and electricity supply, communication, roads, schools and health facilities will encourage women participation in agribusiness. Developing agricultural markets and increasing market access for women farmers including small to medium scale agro processors must be embarked on.

Education: Although in many African countries girls' (and women's) education has seen significant improvements over the past decades, it is still the case that women in general have lower levels of education and training than their male counterparts (AGRA, 2012). Of the world's more than 800 million illiterates, some 60 percent are women, a major handicap given the increased level of technical competence required of farmers in poor countries to double their production over the next four decades. The scenario in Nigeria is not different, According to the United Nations Human Development Report (2005), Nigeria was classified as a low development country in respect of equality in educational accessibility. Table two shows the wide gap between female and male education. While the literacy rate of men in Nigeria is 65.1 that of females is 50.6. This fact has wide-ranging implications. For example,

studies have found that due to unequal access to education and land, women have lower productivity than men (FAO, 2011).

Reflecting the difference in education levels, women have also been found to be less able to access and benefit from technological advances; research shows that technological advances can be best utilized by those with existing education/training, i.e., a foundation to build upon (Doss, 1999). In most of the developing world, lack of education all too often prevents women from achieving their full potential, in agriculture as in other sectors.

Education is a veritable tool to use to break the cycle of poverty among women. Education will empower women to rise above socio-cultural norms against them and provide a level playing ground for them to fit into the complex system of agribusiness. In Nigeria however, educational facilities are generally believed to be inadequate, and access, limited for many, especially girls and women (Uku 1992). Governments should focus on increasing school enrolment for girls and on promoting women's participation in adult literacy programmes. Initiatives offering women or girls financial incentives to attend schools or join courses should be promoted. Aja-Okorie, (2013) suggested that policy makers in education need to develop practical oriented mechanisms targeted at ensuring equal access to education for women (in all types of schools and at all levels) and taking particular account of the situation in rural areas. They must also ensure that women who dropped out of school because of family responsibilities are provided with opportunity to complete their education.

Through education, farmers are able to acquire new improved and effective written materials. Educated farmers are able to acquire more information in the form of written material such as magazines, newsletters and farming instruction pamphlets, booklets, and on packaged hybrid seeds, pesticides, fertilizers and many more (Penin, 1999). Educated women farmers adopt farm technologies at a higher rate than less educated people who continue to use more rudimentary technology (Ani *et al.*, 2004). Anselm *et al.* (2010), also noted that education plays a significant role in positively influencing the status of women in farm decision-making. He states that highly educated women are likely to make a higher contribution to farm decision-making than uneducated ones. The impact of schooling on farm output was found to be greater for women than for men because men with more schooling tend to seek off-farm employment and are more likely to be successful in finding and keeping a job. Women, on the other hand, are seldom able to find off-farm work (UNEP, undated).

Female education can also contribute to agribusiness promotion through a. increasing their participation in all stages of agribusiness, b. increasing their income c. reducing maternal and child mortality, d. reducing women's fertility rate (Benwari and Igwesi, 2009). Education of women is therefore one of the major keys to ensure their progressive participation in sustainable agribusiness development.

Table 2: Adult Literacy Rate by Sex

Adult	Male	Female	Both sexes
English	65.1	50.6	57.9
Any language	79.3	63.7	71.6

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, (2010)

Underexploited agribusiness opportunity: A case for shear butter

A typical example of an underexploited agribusiness opportunity in Nigeria is the shear butter agribusiness. The shear butter processing in Nigeria is mostly done traditionally by women in the rural area. Shear butter has high economic value since it has a wide range of applications both locally and internationally. Shear butter is processed into a wide range of food products including chocolate and it is also used in the cosmetic and pharmaceutical industries (Schreckenber, 2004). The shear trees a unique resource for poverty alleviation and employment generation for both rural women and youths (*Olife et al.*, 2013). It is unfortunate that despite being one of the largest producers of shear butter in the world, shear butter value chain is grossly undeveloped. Table three reveals the very poor state of shear butter agribusiness in Nigeria. Nigeria is not only at the bottom of the ladder in terms of export but worse still all the exports are in form of kernels and not the butter.

Shear butter processing is very laborious and time consuming taking as much as 12 days or more since all the processing are done using the traditional methods. There are no shear butter extraction facilities and shear butter oil refineries in Nigeria (*Olife et al.*, 2013). To improve yield, quality and reduce drudgery, there is need for improvement of the traditional methods. Mills that crush the seeds could be provided instead of traditional pounding. Mechanical or hydraulic press could be used for butter extraction instead of using hand. Manually turned roaster could replace the traditional pot (*Olife et al.*, 2013). These rural women should be encouraged by providing training, equipment, infrastructure (water, electricity, roads etc), and facilitating linkage with international buyers.

Table: 4 Level of shear butter production and export in West African countries

	Est. total Potential production	Est. Actual Collection (tonnes)	Estimated Consumption (tonnes)	Total Exports (tonnes)	Exports as Shea kernels (tonnes)	Exports as Shea butter (tonnes)
Benin	80,000	50,000	14,900	35,100	35,000	100
Burkina Faso	150,000	75,000	35,000	40,000	37,000	3,000
Cote D'Ivoire	150,000	40,000	15,000	25,000	15,000	10,000
Ghana	200,000	130,000	70,000	60,000	45,000	15,000
Mali	220,000	150,000	97,000	53,000	50,000	3,000
Nigeria	250,000	100,000	80,000	20,000	20,000	0
Togo	50,000	40,000	10,000	30,000	15,000	15,000
WATH Major exporters sub-total	1,130,000	585,000	321,900	263,100	217,000	46,100

Source: Lovett, (2004)

Conclusion

Traditional gender divisions of labor often consign women farmers to subsistence production for household consumption. Policies and interventions that accept this and assume commercial production and agribusiness is the province of men will miss many opportunities to tap into women's tremendous productive potential. They also will pay a heavy price in terms of their diminished impact on rural poverty and food insecurity (World Bank, 2008). To tap into this great potential, governmental, non-governmental bodies and indeed all stake holders in agricultural and agribusiness development must put in place gender-sensitive measures to break the age long cultural beliefs and norms against women, promote women education and establish poverty alleviation programmes that would address the needs of women especially the rural women. We therefore conclude that investment in agribusiness will only achieve the expected goals if the contribution of women farmers and their enormous present and future potentials are recognized and encouraged.

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