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**Farm Labour Problems of Small Scale Farmers:
A Case Study of Some Farming Communities in Plateau State Nigeria**

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Abstract

Farm labour is one of the major production constraints in small scale farming. Compared to land and capital. Tropical agriculture is mostly small scale, thus making farm labour its prime output constrain. Realizing the importance of labour in the attainment of high output or profitable farm production objectives, this paper examines the problems and solution for effective and profitable farm production for small scale farmers. As a way out of the problem, this paper advocates for the introduction of appropriate technology, such as use of herbicides for weed control, tractor and other simple farm equipment such a planter, and harvester. Results show that labour has a positive economic consequence in farm production of small scale farming communities.

INTRODUCTION

Labour is one of the factors of production which involves family and non-Family. Labour includes those that are rated on daily or hourly basis (Panwal 2006). Sometimes, the labour is being negotiated for the work on a specific area of farm and. Labour can also be defined as a continuous input and therefore is available on hourly and daily basis. Hence, it cannot be stored in anticipation of the next job requirement. (Olukosi et al 1988) state that this characteristic emphasizes the need to provide productive year-round work for full-time employees to take advantage of the continuous flow of labour services.

Labour is the group of productive services provided by human physical effort, skill, and mental power. It is the work input of people - not the people themselves. Labour is the tool with which capital and managerial skills are used to extract profit from the land. Labour input is usually measured in man-days or sometimes man-hours, which represent the input of work of an average man in a working day or hour. (Panwal 2006).

Farm labour is considered the most limiting factor of production in the scale farming in Nigeria, because its value accounts for about 75% of total cost of production in most food crop enterprises (Nweke, 1980). The value of farmland, on the other hand, is relatively low and most cases the availability of such land poses little or no problem in major farming communities. Hence, predominance of small-scale production could be attributed to inadequate supply of household labour as well as the relatively poor financial position of the farmers. This therefore, limits the amount of hired labour that could be employed in production.

This article therefore examines household labour requirements and associated problems for the production of food crop enterprises. It also discusses the effects of some recent national policies on farm labour situation in the country.

METHODOLOGY

To critically examine the household labour requirements of small-scale communities and the associated problems, a survey study was carried out. This involved

only the small- scale farmers in Pankshing and Mangu local Government Areas, Plateaus State. The study was conducted between 2012 and 2013 cropping seasons.

a. Sample:

For the sample of this study, five districts were randomly selected from each of the two local Government Areas and five household were also randomly selected from each of the ten (10) districts. This gives a total of fifty (50) household, with twenty- five households from each local Government.

b. Procedure

To enhance efficient collection, some enumerators were carefully selected and trained from the localities. The data collection exercise involved questionnaire and oral interview, and these were administered to both the household heads and their wives on regular basis. The bits of information were collected on labour requirements in relations to crop types, labour utilization and cost by operations, calendar of farm operations, inputs and outputs.

c. Nature of Data

In realizing the objectives of the paper descriptive statistics (mean, mode and frequency distribution) were used. The responses to opinions expressed were used in measuring the desirable labour requirements and associated problems for the production of food crop enterprises.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table I show the calendar of farm operation on sorghum Based Crop Mixture (SBCM), Maize Based Crop Mixture (MBCN) Rice.

Table 1: period of performance of farm operation of Sorghum Based Mixture (SBCM), Maize Based Crop Mixture (MBCM), and Rice.

| S/N FARM OPERATION | PERIOD | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D |
| 1. Land Clearing | | | ← | → | ← | → | ← | → | | | | |
| 2. Seedbed preparation | | | ← | → | ← | → | ← | → | | | | |
| 3. Sowing/Transplanting | | | | ← | → | ← | → | | | | | |
| 4. 1 st fertilizer application | | | | ← | → | ← | → | | | | | |
| 5. 1 st weeding | | | | | ← | → | ← | → | | | | |
| 6. 2 nd fertilizer application | | | | | | ← | → | | | | | |
| 7. earthing up of ridges | | | | | | ← | → | | | | | |
| 8. 2 nd weeding and farm maintenance | | | | | | | | ← | → | | | |
| 9. Harvesting | | | | | | | | | | ← | → | |
| 10. Threshing and Processing | ← | → | | | | | | | | | | ← |

KEY

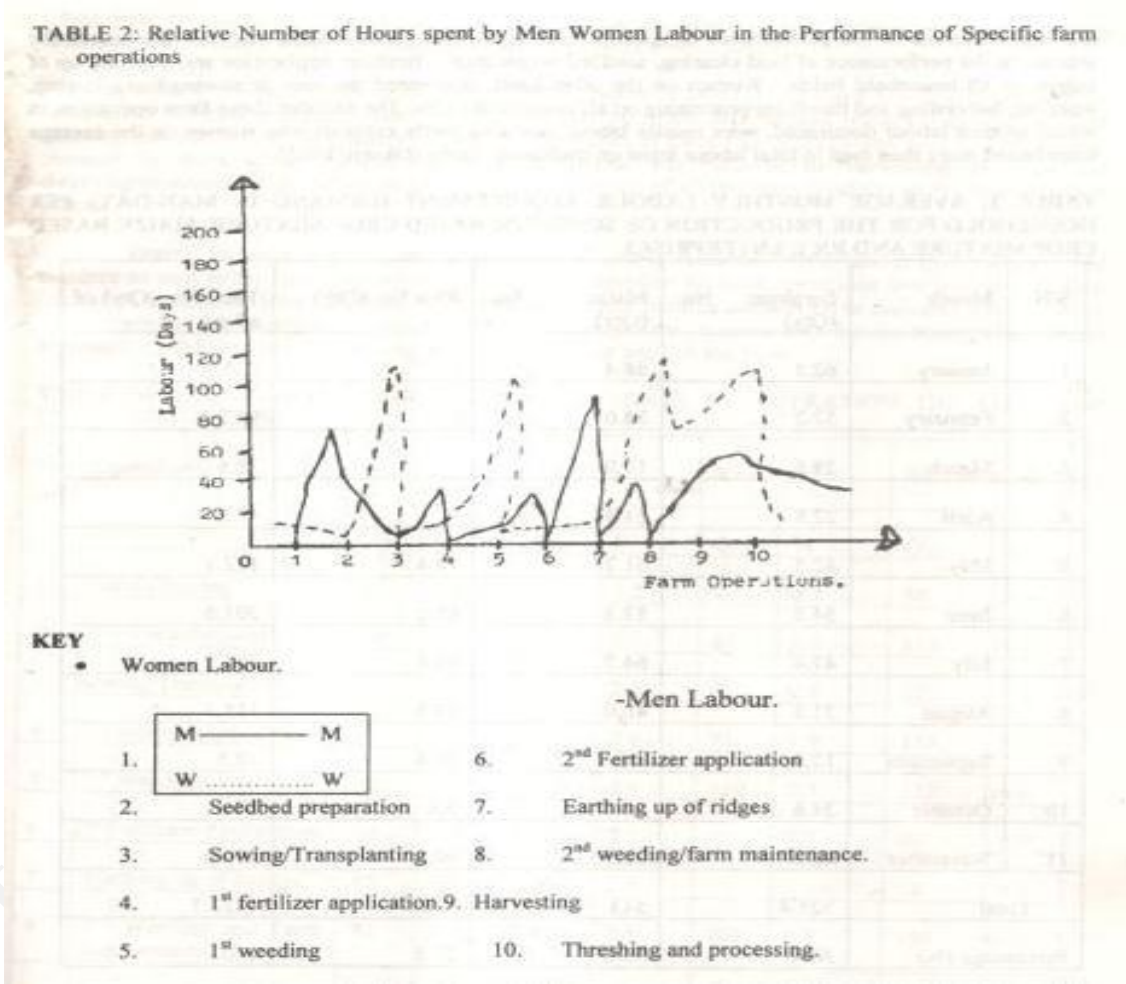
- ← → - Sorghum Based Crop Mixture (SBCM) Fields.
- ← → - Maize Based Crop Mixture (SBCM) Fields.
- - - • - Rice Fields.

The result in table 1 shows that the crops have different planting dates, weed control and harvest hence particular farm operations are performed at different times and different enterprise field stretch in the period of performance of most farm operations could be attributed mainly sequential cropping arrangement commonly practiced by the farmers to minimize the effect weather change including variations in timing of the rains and labour requirement.

The labour requirement as well its distribution for farm production in an area depends, among factors, on crop enterprise and calendar of farm operations. The calendar in an

area, instance is influence by climatic oil characteristics as well as certain cultural and practices.

Table 2 shows the source of labour in the performance of specific farm operations, with related between the men and women labour.



During the course of this research, it was found that labour was provided by both males and females, which included both household (family and hired sources) a 1:1 ratio of man-day to woman- day was assumed many farm operations are stereo-typed by sex. In as much as women might not be able o till the soil make long ridges efficiently as men, men on the other hand might not carry out weeding operation efficiently as women (pate, 1973).

While certain farm operations were performed jointly by males and females, there were specific operations performed by specific group in the area. Table II describes the relationship between men and women labour in the performance of specific farm operations. It is evident that men dominated the women in the performance of land clearing, seedbed preparations, fertilizer application and earthing up of ridges on all household fields. Women on the other hand, dominated the men in sowing/ transplanting weeding, harvesting and threshing/processing on all household fields. The fact that those farm operation in which women labour dominated, were mostly labour intensive partly explains why women on the average contributed more farms than men in total labour input on traditional (Okorji, 1984).

TABLE 3: AVERAGE MONTHLY LABOUR REQUIREMENT (DEMAND IN MAN-DAY) PER HOUSEHOLD FOR THE PRODUCTION OF SORGHUM BASED CROP MIXTURE, MAIZE BASED CROP MIXTURE AND RICE ENTERPRISE

| S/NO. | Month | Sorghum No. | Maize No. | Rice No. (Qty) | Total No. (Qty) of allent |
|-----------------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| 1. | January | 62.5 | 58.4 | - | 120.9 |
| 2. | February | 52.2 | 38.0 | - | 90.2 |
| 3. | March | 28.6 | 10.0 | - | 38.6 |
| 4. | April | 22.9 | 24.8 | - | 47.7 |
| 5. | May | 42.5 | 61.2 | 18.4 | 122.1 |
| 6. | June | 54.5 | 83.3 | 65.2 | 203.0 |
| 7. | July | 47.4 | 64.7 | 99.6 | 211.7 |
| 8. | August | 31.8 | 46.0 | 37.5 | 115.3 |
| 9. | September | 12.9 | 4.2 | 20.4 | 37.5 |
| 10. | October | 24.6 | 37.0 | 5.8 | 67.4 |
| 11. | November | 82.3 | 36.5 | 90.2 | 209.0 |
| Total | | 521.4 | 513 | 398.3 | 1432.7 |
| Percentage (%) | | 36.4 | 35.8 | 27.8 | 100 |

Table 3: shows labour requirements in relation to crop types.

Labour needed on the farm virtually all the years round, the seasonality in production of most crops notwithstanding.

The monthly labour demand per household for the production of Sorghum Based- Crop-Mixture (SBCM), Maize Based- Crop Mixture (MBCM) and Rice Enterprises is presented in table III. Above

Weeding constitutes the most labour intensive farm operation in the small scale farming, mainly due to the traditional methods of weed control involving hand pulling or hoeing of weeds.

Table 4: shows that 323 quality of labour was used for weeding and 272 quantity of labour was used for threshing/processing of all crops. It also shows that weeding involves the highest labour input of all the farm operations performed.

Table 5: Average cost of household labour (man-day) for operation on farm and nonfarm enterprises

| S/NO | HOUSEHOLD LABOUR | Cost of farm labour in Rural areas (₦) | Cost of nonfarm labour in Urban areas |
|--------------|------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. | Male | 120 | 250 |
| 2. | Female | 100 | 200 |
| 3. | Child(youth) | 100 | 200 |
| Total | | 320 | 650 |

Table 5 shows the average cost of labour (man- day) for operation on farm and non-farm enterprises and also the comparison of cost on daily wage rates for man –day and household operations on farm and nonfarm enterprise. The high pay for labour in the urban areas grossly effects the availability of farm labour in the rural areas, thereby making the labour wages to be comparatively low and to the extent that farming is becoming a secondary occupation. This therefore forces full time farmers to equally seek for alternative jobs in the urban centers in order to sustain their households.

The youth also migrate from areas to urban centers in search for white collar jobs due to low remuneration from labour cost farms poor or non-availability of infrastructures such as pipe borne water, electricity and recreation centers to mention but few in the rural areas.

The people left in the rural area are haggard and advanced in age (from 50yrs and above), hence they cannot put-up many farm hours to increase their production. The reduction in production level is even more likely because of present decrease in level of utilization of school children's labour on the farm. The continuous assessment system of the present 6:3:3:4 educational scheme in the country necessitates, among other things, regularity in school attendance by the pupils. Whereas, in the past school children were literally withdrawn from school to assist on household farms at the peak periods, this time such prolonged absence could result in failure of the pupil. Non-availability of this source of household labour has a reasonable adverse impact on household labour problems to small-scale farmer.

Suggestion for Alleviating Farm Labour Problems

The persistent nature of farm labour problems and their adverse effects on farm productivity calls for a permanent solution, if increased farm production is to be sustained in Nigeria.

1. The rural- urban drift can be drastically reduced by the provision vision of rural electrification, pipe borne water or bore hold water, construction of feeder roads, and the enblishment of schools and health centers. The project already embarked upon by many communities should attract governments support as a priority issues. This will make labour force available in rural areas for farm production.
2. Effort should be directed primarily at reducing labour input for weeding through introduction of appropriate technology Akorhe (1981), suggests that the use of the herbicides for weed control reduce labour input on the farm.

3. The increased cultivation of leguminous cover crops in the preferred crop mixture adopted by small –scale farmers may also help in reducing labour input for weeding through their smothering effect on weeds.
4. The provision of improved storage and marketing facilities will increase farm returns and may indirectly increase availability of farm labour. This is because it has been shown that poor returns from the farm enterprise is largely responsible for the situation in which some farmers engage in no- farm activities even at peak period of labour demand on the farm, since returns are presently higher in Non-farm activities.
5. Increasing farm return through effective pricing policy to a comparable level will attract the farmers and some migrated labour from urban centers to the rural areas for use on the farm in order to assist the aged people.

CONCLUSION

Some form of farm labour problems are likely to exist under the small-scale cropping system because of the nature, size and location of fields which limit the extent to which certain modern labour saving technologies could be applied. There are also certain exogenous factors that could constrain labour problems could be considerably reduced so as to have minimum impact on the farming enterprise.

Permanent solution lies in adoption of both long-term measures. Long term and short term measures aim at the development of the rural areas through the provision of such basic welfare amenities as obtainable as obtainable in the urban centers to discourage migration of rural labour forces, while the short- term measure are adoption of herbicide technology for weeding improvement it credits, storage and marketing facilities will go a long way in solving the problems of farm labour and encourage increase production and farm returns. Hence, make the farming business more attractive and not only retain available labour but also attract more labour to provide the much needed hands on the farms for efficient productivity.

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