

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE MARKETING AND GENDER
EMPOWERMENT: A CASE OF WOMEN'S CROSS BORDER
TRADE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE MARKETING AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: A CASE OF WOMEN'S CROSS BORDER TRADE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined agricultural produce marketing in relation to gender empowerment in cross border along Nigeria-Niger border with the aim of identifying the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, identifying characteristics of respondents' cross border trade and the constraints faced by the respondents. One hundred respondents were selected with the use of systematic random technique. Primary data were collected from the respondents with the aid of interview guide structured in form of questionnaire and focus group discussion with other stakeholders like custom officials, as well as agriculture quarantine officers was performed. Univariate analysis like percentages, tables and pie charts and 3 point Likert scale were used to achieve the stated objectives. The study revealed that the respondents averagely made between ₦10,000 to ₦40,000 on monthly basis which helped in meeting family needs. About 78% indicated that one of their constraints was absence of modern financial institutions, inadequate storage facilities and about 82% signified that their major constraint was poor transport system while all affirmed that they experienced inadequate security among others. The study recommended that adequate security, global mass media facilities and adequate storage facilities should be provided to promote cross border trade.

Keywords: Produce marketing, Gender empowerment, Cross border trader, northern Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

One of the most contemporary issues in social relationship and interaction is that women are been assumed to play second fiddle in economic matters and access to resources in our traditional society. This traditional understanding place female folks at less access to better condition of living and economic empowerment. Recent studies confirmed that women are involved in many activities that can empowerment and improve their well being and families (Ajiboye, 2002; Hashim, 2002). Agricultural products marketing which is women vocation, takes place along the borders of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger Republic. Borders or borderland are dynamic sites where boundaries of different countries become pronounced and pass by one another in the processes of migration, integration and exchange. Although rooted in physical space international borderlands are fluid, and are often the sites of constant motion of individuals, ideas and goods that travel among nations and communities (Marltine, 1997). Nigerian northern states (Kaduna, Kano, Katsina Sokoto Bornu) share common boundaries with neighboring Chad, Cameroon and Niger. The existing international boundaries separating Nigeria, Chad and Niger share almost homogeneous attributes like religion, languages and other affinities. According to Olukoshi and Obi (1996), Nigeria is yet to fully pursue economic integration with the countries it shares boundaries with, even though it has been the financial pillar of Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS). Integration of economies of trade relations of these countries would involve the integration and expansion of trade relations as a mutually beneficial interaction between them and also empower women who partake in this cross border trade to be able to meet their own need and also that of their families. This is a symbiotic relationship with a win- win outcome. It is well known that increase in agricultural output stimulate the demand for other goods like fertilizers and farm implements as well as expand the supply of agricultural goods for non agricultural production, all these linkages have multiplier

effects on rural household consumptions. Also, increasing and sustaining agricultural productivity is a means of attaining overall growth, poverty reduction and promotion of food security (Morris and Saul, 2000) which could translate agriculture potentials of the border regions into actual or concrete tools for regional development. Lower opportunities portend lower productivity which leads to lesser commitment to agricultural productivity by women but these days, women continue to play an important role in development processes

This study therefore examines agricultural produce marketing in relation to gender empowerment in cross border along Nigeria-Niger border with the aim of identifying the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, identifying characteristics of respondents' cross border trade and the constraints faced by the respondents in transactional processes.

METHODOLOGY

The scope of this study applies to some selected States of the 10 States of the core North and 9 States of the North central region. The zones shares borders with Niger and Chad Republics to the North and Cameroon to the East. The Northern zone is by no means homogenous with significant religion, cultural, livelihood and linguistic differences shaping the North east and west and central areas. There are however, binding factors in this region making the states more closely connected to each other than to any other region in the country. Binding factors include the prevalence of an Islamic culture even amongst non-Muslims, the dominance of Hausa as the language of communication and commerce, the agricultural nature of the economies, low population density, the communal nature of civil society organizations and the preponderance of rural settlements within a wider context of rural poverty (Walker, 1999).

The study covered selected respondents in Jibia and Kwangwalam (Katsina state) Illiela and Birnin Koni (Sokoto State) along Nigeria –Niger border whose means of livelihood depended on agricultural production and borderland trade. One hundred (100) respondents were selected with the use of systematic random technique by selecting tenth person in the long list provided by border custom officers. Primary data were collected from the respondents with the aid of interview guide structured in form of questionnaire and focus group discussion with other stakeholders like custom officials, as well as agriculture quarantine officers was performed. The data were analyzed by means of 3 point Likert scale and univariate analysis in form of descriptive statistics like percentages, tables and pie charts in order to examine agricultural produce marketing in relation to gender empowerment in cross border along Nigeria-Niger border with the aim of identifying the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, identifying characteristics of respondents' cross border trade and the constraints faced by the respondents in their transactions.

The respondents were interviewed with the use of interview guide structured in form of questionnaire at the border markets in Nigeria-Niger (Kwangwalam, Jiibia, Birnin Koni and Illela). Interviews were held with women cross-border traders, customs officials, freight forwarders and transporters, government officials, and members of commodity associations. Women cross-border traders were interviewed individually at their business locations or in groups at regional markets and public places. Officials, freight forwarders, and transporters were interviewed on the job.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As shown on Table 1, the age of the respondents involved in border trade was between 20 and 50 years, Nigeria women were dominant (66%)in nationality, the remaining being from other nationalities while about 44 percent were married 20% were widow. Also, about 78% traveled by road while 15% used camel for their source of transport while 7%trekked through the bush. According to the study, 60% of the respondents indicated that farming was their major occupation while another 40% indicated that theirs was trading. Majority (60%) of the respondents attended Koranic School, 15% had primary school education while 20% did not have any education.

Table 1: Socio – Economic Characteristics of the Respondents and cross border trade

VARIABLE	PERCENTAGE
Age:	
Below 20	15
20 – 29	21
30 – 39	40
40 – 49	18
Above 50	06
Marital Status:	
Single	24
Married	44
Divorced	12
Widowed	20
Major Occupation:	
Farming/Fishing	60
Trading	40
Household Size:	
1 – 4	12
5 – 9	22
10-14	56
Above 14	10
Education Status:	
None	20
Primary School	15
Koranic	60
Post – primary	5
Income Level:	
< 10000	13
10000-20000	34
20000-30000	36
30000-40000	10
Above-40000	07
Source of Finance:	
Bank Loan	04
Family	21
Cooperative/Abaci	40
Self saving	36
Source of transport	
Road	78
Camel/donkey	15
Trekking	7
Source of information	
Price behavior	10
Speculations	10
Verbal communication	20
Market signal	60
Commodities traded	
Agricultural produce	70
Agricultural processed goods	20
Agricultural by-product	10

The amount of income accruing to the respondents ranged between less than ₦10,000 and above ₦40,000 monthly. This value as reiterated by the respondents is quite substantial to support family income. About 56% of the respondents indicated that they had up to about 10-14 individuals in their household. This may imply the reason for partaking in cross border trade in order to cater for the teeming and large family size.

Information about markets is very essential for smooth running of any market, methods of acquiring such market information is also important. It was revealed during the study that information was gotten through many forms, which include market prices behavior (10%), speculation (10%), verbal communication(20%) and market signal(60%).these may not be a good way to get information especially now that the world market is placed on information technological window. Types of agricultural produce marketed in the border region of Sokoto and Katsina are numerous, the study revealed that all the three categories of respondents (retailer or wholesale) engaged in trading agricultural produce(70%), agricultural processed goods(20%), or agricultural by products goods(10%). The study also showed that some rural wholesalers who traded in agricultural commodities transacted with a sizable amount of working capital comparable to the wholesalers who travel into these neighbouring countries to import manufactured goods. Seasonal price fluctuations for agricultural commodities increase profit margins for traders who store crops immediately after harvest and sell them later in the season.

As shown in Figure 1, four different categories of respondents were involved in cross border trade. These are:

A. Retailers.

The study indicated that 48percent of the respondents were retailer. This result show that most women in Jibia, Kwangwalam, Birnin Koni and Illela (border towns) go into the cross-border trading as retailers, by establishing their own small businesses or by working on commission to sell basically agricultural goods (Cereals, legumes, livestock, vegetables, fruits, seeds, nuts, fisheries). This kind of trade requires little working capital and can be carried out on a flexible schedule. Many retailers are young women with children.

B. Wholesalers/Retailers.

This categories represents the status to which many retailers aspire to promote their businesses, they have not really graduated to the level of a full wholesalers. The study indicated that 32percent of the respondents claimed that they bought agricultural produce goods close to the origin(farms) of the goods and sold them in border markets. This helped them to expand their businesses and graduate them to the wholesaler/retailer category.

C. Middlemen

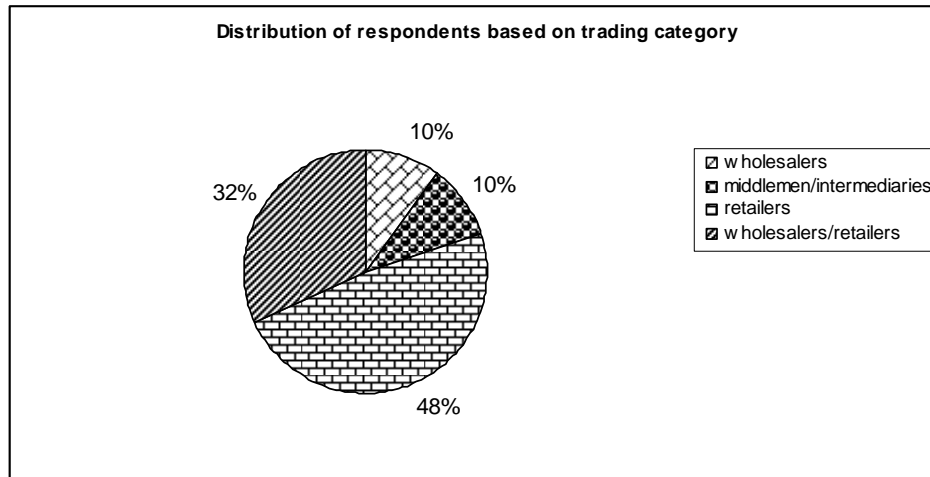
This category (10%) are the ones that served as 'go between' between the wholesalers, retailers and final consumers and as complained by the respondents, these group where the ones who reaped most of the gains that was supposed to have accrued by the other categories. This categories were neither sellers nor buyers but they, as reiterated by other categories created nuisance and made the prices on goods more exorbitant than it ought to.

D. Wholesalers.

As indicated by the study 10percent of the respondents claim that they were wholesalers and they usually imported agriculture goods directly from producers in the region (e.g. Cereals, legumes, livestock, vegetables, fruits, seeds, nuts, and fisheries). Wholesalers often increase their profit margin by avoiding middlemen/intermediaries. They then sell the imported goods to wholesalers/retailers in smaller lots or sometimes sell directly to consumers who were willing to pay high prices. Wholesalers and wholesalers/retailers traveled frequently across the border. These businesses is also attractive to the traders because of the availability of services facilitated by import/export agents, including French

interpretation, currency exchange, freight forwarding, and container storage or warehouse. These women traders who travel often outside the region are though illiterate but acquired some numeric skills and can deal with international trade regulations.

Figure 1: Distribution of respondents trading category.



Constraints to Cross-Border Trade

As shown on Table 2, the constraints faced by respondents at Nigeria-Niger cross border trade as revealed by the study include:

1. Poor transportation system

The respondents use public and private transportation, camel and donkeys and their heads to transfer their goods across the borders to local and regional markets. Private transportation included animal-drawn carts, cars, small trucks and vans, and large trucks. Majority (82%) of the respondents indicated that inadequate transportation disproportionately affects women who trade in small volumes. Wholesalers and some wholesalers/retailers who trade in large volumes often use their own small trucks and vans to transport their goods across the borders. Due to this, they face frequent delays, forcing them to miss regional market days and causing consumable items such as agricultural goods and processed food to spoil. Respondents(68%) who trade in grains, rice, yams, dried fish, and other goods often organize themselves into convoys and negotiated the transportation of their goods using freight forwarders and for those who trekked through the bush, they were always attacked by armed men who laid ambush for them.

2. International trade restrictions and Payments

The study revealed that all respondents affirmed that they pay customs fees at several legal and illegal roadblocks set within the borders irrespective of the value or the volume of goods they transport. Frequent inspections at roadblocks delay women in reaching their destinations on time in order to meet the teeming market. Many of these problems result from the slow implementation of regional trade agreements that were intended to eliminate tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade.

3. Lack of modern financial facilities

As revealed from the study, inefficient operations of the West African commercial banking system affect all the respondents. Money transfers between banks in different countries take months before accounts are credited. In addition, the absence of banks in rural areas makes traders' access to financial services impossible. About 20percent had little access to formal financial services, including savings and credit. In time of need, they turn to relatives and other traditional sources of lending to get only small amount of credit, with short-term repayment requirements. Sometimes, respondents

acquire credit in-kind (tradable goods) from reliable sources so as to pay back with exorbitant interest after the goods are sold, usually within 30 days.

4. Poor Security

All the respondents indicated that they were subjected to increased incidents of physical assaults and robbery in bushes and buses and at junctions and bus stations en route to markets across borders. The lack of effective police presence at strategic places increases the incidence of crime against the respondents. Although some respondents traveled in groups to protect themselves, others have stopped traveling to some specific markets because of armed robbery and increased level of violence they experience at these locations.

5. Lack of Business and Managerial Skills

The respondents (82%) are less educated than their male counter-parts and lack business management skills. Limited literacy and numeric skills often are major constraints for cross-border traders. Many respondents acquire their business skills through traditional means— that is, they are passed down from mother to daughter or learned through years of hands-on experience.

6. Poor storage facilities

About 88percent of the respondents indicated that where they would store both perishable and non perishable farm produce was a major problem and this causes a lot of damage both in monetary and material terms.

7. Presence of middlemen/intermediaries

All the respondents perceived that if there were no presence of middlemen/intermediaries in the market, more gain would be accrued to them and this would empower them more.

Table 2 respondents perceived constraints of cross border trade.

Constraints	Major constraints	Minor constraints	Not a constraint
Poor transportation system	82	16	2
International trade restrictions/policies	90	9	1
Lack of modern financial facilities	78	20	2
Poor security	100	0	0
Lack of business and managerial skills	89	10	1
Presence of middlemen/intermediaries	100	0	0
Inadequate storage facilities	78	18	4
Poor storage facilities	88	12	0
Inadequate dissemination of market information	62	25	13

Note: all figures are in percentages

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study observed that women contribute to increasing food security by producing and marketing food products from areas of surplus to areas of deficit. These ventures engages a large number of people, formally (by using the services of other people, such as public and private transportation) and informally

(by employing family members), this has multiplier effects on household incomes and rural livelihood. It also empowers these women to be useful to themselves and their community more especially when it is known that women in that part of the region hardly engage in any venture that will take them beyond the limit of their immediate environment.

The examination of women's cross-border trade confirms the importance of addressing constraints women face by fortifying their business ventures and their institutional networks, as well as by improving the environment in which they transact. It is therefore recommended that

- Dialogue and programs at the regional and national levels, including the standardization of customs rules and tariffs should be promoted to eradicate trade restrictions in the regions.
- the capacity of women who engage in cross-border trade should be enhanced by providing business and managerial skills and training so as to be able to handle any business difficulties that might come their way.
- adequate transportation systems should be provided in order to hasten the transportation of perishable goods to and from the markets.
- adequate security to lives and properties must be adequately provided by the government concerned so as to protect these women from being attacked en route markets
- Now that the whole world is a global market through the advent of improved information technology, increase access to local, regional, and international market information systems and trade policy and customs information through mass media and other means is a must for these types of regional markets so as to enhance sales and to know what is happening at the other global markets in order not to short change themselves.
- With the buoyant reformation and healthy competition going on between financial institutions in Nigeria, border banking systems should be established so that money could be easily transferred and exchanged. This would eradicate dubious money doublers and money changers.
- Strengthen organizations in which women have high memberships so they can voice gender-based concerns and negotiate better terms with local, national, and regional institutions to support their businesses and push forward policies that would favor them in their various cross border transactions.
- Good storage facilities should be provided to lessen loss of goods and this will also reduce the burden of carrying heavy loads to and from the markets across the borders.
- There should be an agreement between all the categories of traders so that the issue of one category exploiting the other would be lessened or totally eradicated.

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