

Tyler Reid  
Gwynn Park High School  
Brandywine, MD  
Nigeria, Factor 15: Human Rights

## **Nigeria: The Rights of Women**

In Nigeria the average size of a family is five people, according to the Demographic and Health Surveys Program or DHS Program. Now that number may vary depending on what part of Nigeria is being discussed. In northern Nigeria the average number could increase versus southern Nigeria where the number could decrease. Eighty three percent of households in Nigeria are headed by men and seventeen percent of households are headed by women. The households where the women are the head is found in more urban and rural areas of Nigeria, found more often in urban than rural areas of Nigeria. In the rural areas of Nigeria women produce most of the food. These women may be the head of their household but they may not be as educated as they should be. According to the DHS Program, forty-six percent of women and thirty-one percent of men never got the chance to attend school. Girls ages ten to fourteen are hardest hit with twenty-seven percent unable to attend formal schooling. This percentage increases to eighty-nine percent with women sixty-five and older who do not have a school education. One-third of men have attained some sort of secondary schooling and one-quarter of women have earned some sort of secondary schooling. Educational fulfillment is higher for people in the urban parts than it is for people in the more rural areas. The Northwestern and Northeastern regions of Nigeria have the highest rate of people that have attained no sort of education. Seven out of ten women as well as half of the men in this region never got the chance to attend school. Versus the Southeastern region has the lowest rate, nine percent of men didn't get a education and eighteen percent of women didn't earn their education. Students in Nigeria rarely repeat grades in second through sixth grade less than three percent repeat a grade, the dropout rate is less than two percent. The dropout rate does increase in the sixth grade to seventeen percent, the reason for this increase may be due to some students being unable to move up to the next educational level.

As stated in an article by AgroNigeria Women encompass forty-three percent of the world's agricultural labor force, this number varies depending on the country it could be as high as seventy percent in some countries. In Nigeria women make up more than seventy percent of the labor force in the agricultural sector. Sixty percent of women participate in food processing and fifty percent perform in animal husbandry. Considering all of this involvement from women in the agricultural sector they still face a lot of challenges. These challenges consist of access to land, extension services, finances, and land implements. In an article by The Guardian in twenty thirteen states that less than three percent of women have the access needed to the finances, a little bit over four percent have access to extension services, and a little under five percent of women even have access to land. For women in the rural and urban areas of Nigeria farming is their way of life it's how they make a living and support their family, and sometimes they are taking care of their families by themselves. Christiana Onybe a farmer in the town of Ekuku-Agbor is a single mother of seven due to her husband passing in 2013, she takes care of them through farming and working on a oil palm mill. Charity Ebuniwe is another farmer in the town of Ekuku-Agbor she like many other women in the town assists her husband on the farm. Ebuniwe stated that "Most of us are farmers since there are no other jobs to do apart from farming...". Mary David stated "cocoa farming in Ilutuntun camp in Odigbo Local Government Area, Ondo State, is a way of life and the business is the people's main source of livelihood, as both men and women contribute to the process" .

Ousmane Dore the Nigeria Country Director of African Development Bank stated "women contribute close to seventy percent of the agricultural workforce yet get less of accruing returns". This comment was

made at the launch for the African women in agriculture report, the report is titled “Economic empowerment of African women through equitable participation in agricultural value chains”. Dore stated “In spite of their huge labour investment , productivity is low and they often have limited roles in decision making on the farms”. He acknowledges women aren’t given all the rights that men are given even if the woman are pulling more than their own weight on the farm. Dore also spoke on the purpose behind the report, “Our objective for commissioning the study was for the African development Bank to play a decisive role in contributing to the economic empowerment of African women in agriculture”.

Sunny Echono, the Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of agriculture and rural development stated “women are the cornerstone of agricultural production, processing, marketing, and utilization in the country”. Women don’t make as much as men in this field yet ninety percent of a woman's income goes back into her household, versus a man only putting thirty five percent back into his household. Women don’t normally control how much money they make from the produce they grow. Dore said “This event is a call for all our esteemed stakeholders to join forces in a discussion on how to take this work forward”.

Religion in Nigeria is just as diverse as the people that make up the population. According to the World Atlas People in Nigeria are either Christian or Muslim a small percentage of the population practices indigenous religions. Moreover, forty eight point eight percent of the population is Muslim, while forty nine point three percent of the population is Christian, the leftover one point nine percent goes to indigenous religions. Religion could also play a role in some of the obstacles that women face in agriculture. In some religions the man is seen to hold more power or have a louder voice than women. Considering this aspect it could propose even bigger mountains to overcome in order for women to be treated just as equal as men in the field of agriculture.

Crops such as cassava, cocoa, rice, millet and more are grown in Nigeria. Nigeria happens to be the top producer of cassava in the world, in 2013 fifty three million tons of cassava was produced. In Nigeria there are six million smallholder cassava farmers. Nigerian woman make up a quarter of those smallholder farmers. The only thing is that women earn only seventeen percent of what their male peers earn. This low amount of income is due to their productivity being lower than men. In the report it states the five major restrictions women are having that not only limits their incorporation in the agricultural economy but also their level of productivity. The restrictions listed were limited training, government policies, lack of access to resources, limited access to finances and time constraints due to all the domestic responsibilities.

The report does contain pieces of information that they plan to use as the action to help women get rid of some of these restrictions. One thing they want to do is provide training on the basic business skills so that the women can have a better understanding on how to run a farm. They also would like to increase the number of large-scale agribusiness entrepreneurs, by improving market links globally and regionally and providing financing. Another area they would like to improve in is in women’s direct connections to markets which will allow more access for selling their products.

The Nigerian government had put together the Agriculture Promotion Policy to begin renovating the agriculture sector in Nigeria. The Agricultural Transformation Agenda or ATA for short is the new approach that the Nigerian government is taking to advance their agriculture sector. The intent of this new policy is to progress toward a agribusiness ecosystem. The Nigerian government is beginning to reform and develop new policies for their agriculture sector. Their government is strengthening foundation for everyone involved in their agriculture sector. This will not only have it affect on female farmers but male

farmers as well. There are also organizations around Nigeria founded to help advance and support women in the endeavors. The African Women Power Network or AWP Network helps to build a foundation for African entrepreneurs, this network was founded by Mary Olushoga. AWP Network has a training program that aids women farmers in sharpening their entrepreneurial techniques, that program is called the AWP Network Agropreneur Project. Another organization is She Leads Africa which was founded by Yasmin Belo-Osagie and Afua Osei. The purpose of this organization is to build and empower the rising generations of African women entrepreneurs. They also host a entrepreneur showcase the participants have the chance to win a fifty thousand dollar cash prize as well as media features and private meetings with some top investors. The Nigerian Women Agro Allied Farmer Association or NIWAAFA for short is a organization founded by eight female farmer in Nigeria in two thousand six. The purpose of this group is to reach out to female farmers bring them together across the country. As well as to help give them more of a voice in the agriculture sector in Nigeria. Organizations like these presented provide the needed resources and opportunities that women need to be pushed toward success. Partnerships between the Nigerian Government and these organizations could be apart of the solution to provide female farmers with more support, opportunities as well as training. Organizations could also be started that are specifically dedicated to women in agriculture and their needs.

Organizations like the AWP Network, She Leads Africa, and NIWAAFA are becoming apart of the solution to granting female farmers the equality they deserve in the field of agriculture. These groups are providing sturdy foundations for women like Christiana Onybe, Charity Ebuniwe, and Mary David who were previously mentioned. Especially for women like Christiana Onybe who live off of one income with their families and that income isn't as great as it could be. Ms. David did say that "... is a way of life and the business is the people's main source of livelihood, as both men and women contribute to the process". Farming is how some of these women make their living for their families and for most women it's the only thing they know how to do. Ms. David made a very important point that "...both men and women contribute to the process" she made the point that it is a collective effort of both genders. Providing these women with resources that they can use to not only improve their farmers but it could also improve the economy as a whole. Giving them trainings on agriculture business and entrepreneurship while developing business and social skills. Moreover, getting women connected to groups like AWP Networks so that can be apart of the AWP Network Agropreneur Project where they could gain these entrepreneurial skills. Establishing some partnerships with banks and other government agencies and organizations that would be willing to provide these women with financial support when needed. Gaining and building these relationships and groups will put female farmers in a better position for success. Also starting an organization that could teach women how to improving their public speaking skills if that is an area that they need help in. This will put women in a position to use their voice to advocate for their needs and to become more active in government. So that they are more aware of the policies and bills that are being passed in their government and how it directly affects them and the livelihood of their families. This will also put them in a spot to voice the inequalities that they face in the field of agriculture. Then action can be taken to make these inequalities right so that women have the same shot at success that men do in this field.

In closing, women play a vital role in the agricultural sector in Nigeria, Echono said it best when stating "women are the cornerstone to agricultural production...". Women deserve to be given the same opportunities and abilities that a man has in this field of work. If training is needed to help the women better their skills and their crafts then training should be given to them. Helping to make women's farms more productive will not only benefit them, but also the Nigerian economy. The more money made from their hard work on their farms, the better their families will be supported and the more contributions they could make to their community. More opportunities are being provided for women and the number of these opportunities should continue to grow over time. Michelle Bachelet the Under -Secretary-General,

Executive Director of the United Nations Women and Incumbent President of Chile made a very variable statement pertaining to women in agriculture. Bachelet statement was “When women are empowered and can claim their rights and access to land, leadership, opportunities, and choices, economies grow, food security is enhanced and prospects are improved for current and future generations”. The statement that she made is more than true if women are empowered and supported the same way men are supported. Many problems would be solved. Many women in the rural areas of Nigeria are farmers. It important to continue to educate on this group with all the new techniques and opportunities that agriculture can hold for them. When educated women are educated and given the rights that they deserve then not only are families lifted but communities and societies will improve.. Women are the backbone to society, they are the leaders and mothers to the community, when you help them you are not only helping yourself, you're helping the community in more ways than one.

## Works Cited

- AfDB unveils plan to empower Nigerian women in agriculture - African Development Bank. (2015, October 28). Retrieved from <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/afdb-unveils-plan-to-empower-nigerian-women-in-agriculture-14890/>
- AgroNigeria. (2016, June 23). THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE - AgroNigeria. Retrieved from <https://agronigeria.com.ng/role-women-agriculture/>
- Emmanual Osodi. (n.d.). The Pains Of Female Farmers In Nigeria (SEE PHOTOS) ▷ NAIJ.COM. Retrieved from <https://www.naij.com/380359-the-pains-of-female-farmers-in-nigeria-see-photos.html>
- Household population and housing characteristics. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR148/02Chapter02.pdf>
- Joke Falaju. (2014, December 2). Nigeria: Eliminating Gender Disparities in Agricultural Sector - all Africa.com. Retrieved from <http://allafrica.com/stories/201412020593.html>
- 14 Leading Organizations Changing the Lives of Nigerian Women and Girls. (2015, October 13). Retrieved July 21, 2017, from <https://awpnetwork.com/2015/10/13/14-leading-organizations-changing-the-lives-of-nigerian-women-and-girls/>
- Nigeria, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, FMARD. (n.d.). The Agriculture Promotion Policy. Retrieved July 14, 2017, from [http://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/2016-nigeria-agric-sector-policy-roadmap\\_june-15-2016\\_final1.pdf](http://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/2016-nigeria-agric-sector-policy-roadmap_june-15-2016_final1.pdf)