

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MARKETING OF MELON SEEDS IN NIGER STATE.

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ABSTRACT

The production of melon (egusi) seeds in Agaei, Bida, Lavun, Paiko, Gbako, Lapai, Chanchaga, Bosso and other local government areas of Niger State is of great economic importance and benefit to the state. These areas revealed that almost every housewife in every household is involved in the production, processing and marketing of melon (egusi) seeds. Melon (egusi) seeds constitute an important source of protein and oil. When cooked it is popularly referred to as 'egusi soup'. The nutritional contributions to the body requirements by melon cannot be overemphasized. Marketing plays a crucial role not only in enhancing production but also in economic development in general. This paper examines the role of women in the marketing of melon (egusi) seeds. Data used was collected from fifty randomly selected women traders in five different markets including Mobil central market, Paiko market, Chanchaga market, Gwadabe market and Bosso market. These areas were picked because of the presence of women who are involved in melon marketing. Descriptive statistics and gross margin analysis were used in analyzing the data. The paper identified that with small quantities of melon seeds which these women buy, particularly in Minna Central Market they incur relatively low cost on transportation, storage, and still go home with relatively high gross margins of N29,890, N29,220 and N30,450, for the years 1999, 2000 and 2001. Traders in paiko markets and Gwadabe markets bought and sold in bags as against those in Minna central market who bought and sold in "mudus". The constraints faced by the traders include inadequate capital, transport and storage facilities.

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

Melon plant (*colocynthis citrullus*) originated from tropical and sub-tropical Africa and is distributed and grown throughout the Mediterranean. It was also introduced into China, most part of East Asia, the Caribbean, Southern States of America (Tindall 1988), and also some parts of Nigeria.

The growth and fruit production in most areas are most rapid during dry sunny periods. Excessive rainfall and high humidity reduce productivity. The large circular fruit, is made up of white fleshy materials inside which are embedded small flat seeds. It is a widely cultivated plant in Niger State and popularly known as 'Egusi'.

In Niger state, the fruit is cultivated mainly for its seeds which form one of the most important sources of protein and oil (Crude protein 34; 48%, true protein 30.91%) (Oyenuga, 1988). Melon seeds make very rich local soups when mixed with other cooking condiments and some green vegetables. It forms the well known 'egusi soup' which is usually eaten with carbohydrates (Oyenuga 1988). This nutritional contribution to the body requirement of melon, cannot be overemphasized.

A look around the markets in Niger state, reveals a great number of women involved in the marketing of melon seeds. These are either sold unprocessed or processed. Women have also been seen to be the main farmers and processors of the melon seeds.

Marketing plays a crucial role, as it enables marketing activities which enhance the provision of more and better food at low prices to increasing number of people. Most often these melon (egusi) seeds are brought into Minna from the neighbouring rural areas/environs by the women. In Nigeria, rural women are actively involved in carrying out agricultural activities and produce about 60 – 80% of agricultural food in the country (Ironkwe and Ekwe 2000). These women combine their roles as wives, mothers, housekeepers with

their invaluable tasks as farmers, farm labourers etc (Saito et al 1994). The responsibilities of getting food for the families lie on the women (Ironkwe and Ekwe 2000) as a result of this, in Niger State, women are seen to be involved intensively in the marketing of melon (egusi) seeds.

Marketing is defined as the performance of all business activities which directs the forward flow of goods and services to consumers in order to accomplish the producers objectives (Olukosi and Isitor 1990). In order to satisfy the growing population, food must be supplied in the form, place and time, the consumer wants them (Adegeye and Dittoh 1992). For this to be achieved, the marketing system must be efficient. An efficient marketing system is that which locates where there are surpluses of produce and brings them to where there are shortages (Kohls and Uhl 1985). Domestic food security is closely related to marketing (FAO 1995). Thus any step or strategies to improve the role of women in marketing of the melon seeds (egusi) in order to increase and sustain agricultural production should be enhanced.

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of women in the marketing of melon.

Specific objectives;

- (i) To estimate the marketing costs and returns of melon marketing using the gross margin approach.
- (ii) To investigate constraints faced by these women in the marketing of melon seeds.
- (iii) To make recommendations based on the findings.

2.0 METHODOLOGY:

The study was carried out in Minna, Niger state capital. Major food crops grown in Niger state include melon, sorghum, yam, maize, rice, okro, cowpea, groundnut and millet. The choice of Niger state as the study area was influenced by the heavy presence of melon cultivation especially around Agaci, Doko, Bida, Gbako, Lapai, Chanchaga, Bosso, Lavun Local Government Areas of the state. The data used for the study were primary data collected by means of structured questionnaire which were administered by trained enumerators (particularly from Niger state Agricultural Development Programme).

A sample of 10 women traders were selected randomly from each of Paiko market, Mobil central market, Gwadabe market, Chanchaga market, and Bosso markets to make total of 50 respondents, who provided information used for the study.

Descriptive statistics, and gross margin analysis were employed in analysing data from the administered questionnaire.

The gross margin was computed as follows:

Gross Margin = gross income – total cost

The gross income was computed by multiplying the unit price of melon seeds by the total amount in mudus/bags that was sold. The total cost was the sum total of producer price (farmgate price/the cost price).

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio economic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1. Shows that age distribution of women which ranged from 31 – 40 years. It also revealed that ninety two percent (92%) of the women were married. Most of the women (92%) had no formal education.

Table 1: Age Distribution, Marital Status and Educational Status of the Respondents.

	No	Percentage
<u>Age Distribution (yrs):</u>		
30 or less	8	16
31-40	39	78
41-50	3	6
Total	50	100
<u>Marital Status:</u>		
Single	4	8
Married	46	92
Total	50	100
<u>Educational Status:</u>		
No formal education	46	92
Primary education	4	8
Total	50	100

Source: Market Survey Data, 2002.

Reasons for Marketing Melon.

The study revealed that most of the women (90%) were interested in melon marketing because its turnover/profit was high while 10% revealed that it was much easier to sell and quicker to sell than other food commodities.

Purchase of Melon (Egusi) seeds

Table 2 shows that 76% percent of the women bought their melon immediately after harvest. The data revealed that (38%) of the women bought the melon (egusi) in July. The women went further to disclose that they bought at this time because it was usually cheaper. Almost half of the women (46%) bought the unprocessed or unshelled form of melon. Forty-two percent of the women travel down to rural neighbouring markets to buy the melon seeds. This reveals that the purchase from middlemen was eliminated by the women.

Table 2. Period, Time, Form and Place of Purchase:

	No	Percentage
A. Period of Purchase		
Immediately after harvest	38	76.0
Before harvest	12	24.0
B. Time of Purchase		
March	11	22.0
June	13	26.0
July	19	38.0
August	6	12.0
September	1	2.0
C. Form of Purchase		
Unprocessed form	23	46.0
Processed form	10	20.0
Both processed & unprocessed	17	34.0
D. Place of Purchase		
From rural neighbouring market	21	42.0
Buy directly from farmers	5	10.0
Wait for farmers to bring them down from rural areas		
To urban markets	18	36.0
Buy through middlemen	6	12.0
Total	50	100

Source: Market Survey Data, 2002

Unit of Purchase:

Table 3 shows that 86% of the respondents bought the melon egusi seeds per "mudu" as the unit of measure.

Table 3 Unit of Measure	No	Percentage
Units	43	86
Per mudu	-	-
Per bag i. Small bag	7	14
ii. Big bag	-	-
Lorry load	-	-
Others specify	50	100
Total		

Source: Market Survey Data.

Marketing Experience

Table 4 reveals that forty-four percent of the women (44%) had been in this business for a long time. This was between the range of 11-20 years. Most of the women revealed they had picked up the business from their mothers. As young girls, they had been involved in the farming, processing and marketing of egusi seeds.

Table 4 Trading Experience	No	Percentage
No of Years	14	28.0
10 or less	22	44.0
11-20	14	28.0
21 and above	50	100.0
Total		

Source: Market Survey Data.

Cost And Income Analysis Of Melon Marketing 1999-2001.

Table 5 shows the cost, income and gross margin analysis. The traders in Minna Central market revealed gross margins of N29, 890, N29,220 and N30,450 respectively in the years 1999, 2000 and year 2001. This market, realized a high gross margin per trader due to the fact that the Minna market is a central location and easily accessible by residents. The market day which is held specifically on Thursday for melon marketing is very much highly patronized. Paiko market and Gwadabe market showed gross margins of N35,711 = 50 and 31,147 =50 per trader in 1999, N29,342 and N24,450 in the year 2000, N32890 and N26,986 in the year 2001. The high gross margin revealed per trader in both Paiko and Gwadabe market is basically due to the number of traders who buy in bags other than the mudu unit of measure. The markets also revealed a high traffic of egusi melon marketing particularly on the specific market days, which is Friday for the Paiko market and Wednesday for the Gwadabe market. See Appendix 1.

Storage and Sale of Melon

The study revealed that 56% of the respondents usually store the egusi melon before selling. The study went further to show that the traders sold the melon seeds between December to February, 32% sold the stored egusi between December to January, while 24% sold between January to February. These group revealed that they sell at these periods because there is usually a scarcity and the returns are higher. The remaining 44% revealed that they sell immediately after purchase particularly because they want to recoup their profit immediately, they stated that they trade with minimum credit thus cannot afford to tie down their money for very long periods. They also complained of lack of space to store the melon (egusi) seeds.

Market Days of Melon seeds

Table 6 shows the market days in which the traders participate in selling melon seeds. The data revealed that 65% of the traders went on specific market days. These were Thursdays for Minna central market, Fridays for Paiko market, Wednesdays for Gwadabe market and Mondays for Chanchaga market. Bosso market does not have a specific market day for the marketing of melon seeds.

Table 6 Market Days of Melon (Egusi) Seeds

Market Days		
Daily market days	6	12.0
Specific market days	32	64.0
Both daily and specific		
Market days	12	24.0
Total	50	100

Source: Market Survey Data. (2002)

Transportation of the Melon Egusi seeds,

Table 7 shows that 72% of the respondents mode of transporting the melon seeds was through the use of Pick-up Vans. This is as a result of the fact that most traders buy from rural markets in rural neighbouring areas and the Pick-up Van is the most common and available mode of transport in such areas. The study went further to reveal that in 1999 traders paid an average of N800, in the year 2001, they paid an average of N1500 and the year 2002 traders paid an average of N2000 on transportation.

Table 7 Respondents mode of Transportation

	No	Percentage
Mode of transportation		
Wheel Barrow	8	16.0
Pick-up Van	36	72.0
Others specify	6	12.0
Total	50	100

Source: Market Survey Data, (2002)

Problems/Constraints faced by the traders

The traders revealed, that they were seriously constrained by inadequate capital to expand on the marketing of melon egusi in the State, despite the high production of egusi in different parts of the state. The traders revealed problems such as inadequate transport facilities, inadequate shops in the market to store their products and they also disclosed that as a result of lack of shops they suffer under the rains during raining seasons.

Summary and Recommendations:

The findings revealed that with the small quantities of melon seeds, which these women buy and sell, they still go home with relatively high gross margins of N29,890, N29,220 and N30,450 for the year 1999, year 2000 and 2001 per trader in the Minna central market. However, other markets such as Paiko market and Gwadabe market revealed that a number of the traders bought and sold the melon seeds per bag as against other markets which revealed sales per mudu.

With the gross margins reflected per trader despite the relative small capital the traders, trade with, it highlights the need to grant traders soft loans to expand the marketing of melon. More shops and storage spaces should be adequately provided for the traders and transport facilities.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that majority of the women involved in melon marketing are illiterate with no formal education. However, they still contribute income to their households, the community and the nation at large. The dividends of democracy can only be felt by meeting the needs of these women at the grassroots level. It is believed that the closest contact they have with the Government is through the local government, soft loans and available transport services e.g the Niger state transport services as suggested by the respondents could be embarked upon.

Appendix 1: Table 5. Cost and Income Analysis of Melon Marketing 1999 to 2001.

Year	Markets	Total Cost/Market ₦	Gross Income Per Market ₦	Total Gross Margin ₦	Gross Margin Per Trader ₦
1999	A	453,600 =	752,500 =	298,900 =	29,890 = 00
	B*	165,875 =	355,590 =	189,715 =	18,971 = 50
	**	2,271,400 =	2,438,800 =	167,400 =	16,740 = 00
	C*	329,200 =	532,675 =	203,475 =	20,347, = 50
	**	1,278,000 =	1,386,000 =	108,000 =	10,800 = 00
2000	D	636,390 =	926,275 =	289,885 =	28,989 = 00
	E	427,075 =	662,630 =	235,555 =	23,556 = 00
	A	716,240 =	1,006,460 =	290,220 =	29,220 = 00
	B*	253,260 =	392,280 =	139,020 =	13,902 = 00
	**	2,816,000 =	2,970,400 =	154,400 =	15,440 = 00
2001	C*	452,100 =	570,000 =	117,900 =	11,790 = 00
	**	1,785,000 =	1,911,600 =	126,600 =	12,660 = 00
	D	794,310 =	982,770 =	188,460 =	18,846 = 00
	E	748,245 =	945,000 =	196,755 =	19,675 = 50
	A	687,660 =	992,160 =	304,500 =	30,450 = 00
2001	B*	273,630 =	376,130 =	102,500 =	10,250 = 00
	**	3,546,400 =	3,722,800 =	226,400 =	22,640 = 00
	C*	633,600 =	803,460 =	169,860 =	16,986 = 00
	**	1,314,400 =	1,414,400 =	1,000,000 =	10,000 = 00
	D	870,320 =	1,111,728 =	241,408 =	24,141 = 00
E	641,250 =	860,800 =	219,550 =	21,955 = 50	

Source: Market Survey Data. 2002 (* Per mudu, ** Per Bag).

- A = Minna Market
- B = Paiko Market
- C = Gwadabe Market
- D = Chanchaga Market
- E = Bosso Market

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