

## Challenges of Technology Transfer: Focus on Gender-Related Factors Affecting Job Performance of Women Extension Agents in Niger State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The study examined the influence of gender-related factors on the job performance of women extension agents in Niger State. To achieve the study objectives, 130 women extension agents were purposively selected from the 3 zones of the State Agricultural Development Project. Data collected from the respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Likert scale and chi-square test. The major findings were that 60.8 percent and 31.5 percent of the respondents indicated that the role of mother and that of housewife respectively, affect their job performance efficiency. On the influence of organizational factors on job performance, the result showed that women extension agents were similar to male extension agents on motivation, level of autonomy and extent of power/responsibilities given by the employer. In addition, majority of the farmers (79.2%) have favourable attitude towards women extension agents. Cultural restraints, lack of transportation and religious barriers were the major obstacles in the career pathway of the women extension agents in the area. Further analysis revealed that significant relationship exists between mother role i.e family size ( $\chi^2 = 0.001, P < 0.05$ ) and job performance efficiency. To reduce role conflict, it was suggested that women extension agents be encouraged to plan their families through sound family planning and population policy.*

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### Introduction

With the present global recognition of the role of women in agriculture vis-a-vis their categorization as a vulnerable group, adequate attention ought to be given to women in the extension service delivery. The woman in

agriculture component was introduced in 1993, from the beginning of the National Agricultural Technology Support Project (NATSP), as an integral part of the extension component. It is expected to attend to the gender-specific farming and post harvest activities of agricultural

women through the Unified Agricultural Extension System (UAES) (Mahmood, 2005).

However, women when compared to men, they are usually rated low. Consequently, many women, even if they are as qualified as their male counterparts, are given less consideration for jobs. Such unequal treatment has generally been based on long standing stereotypes factors, which in several cases have blocked the chances of many women.

Recent findings have shown increased number of women in many fields of agricultural career, which used to be traditional areas for men. The slow or late appearance of women in these areas has been attributed to cultural norms/barriers and wrongly defined sex role and expectations.

In a developing country like Nigeria where women are expected to perform a vital role in agriculture, it is imperative to find out if the extent of women extension agent's job performance can be explained in terms of such factors as sex stereotypes and roles, the farmer's

perception of the women extension agents and the extent of responsibilities entrusted on them. Such a study would enable us to generate information on the effect of these factors on job performance of women extension agents in Niger State. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. identify the gender-related factors and roles that affect job performance;
- ii. determine the extent of responsibilities and autonomy given to women extension agents;
- iii. determine the attitudes of farmers towards women extension agents;
- iv. identify the obstacles faced by women extension agents in the area; and
- v. proffer some policy recommendations based on the finding of this investigation.

## Methodology

### The Study Area

The study was conducted in Niger State, which is located within latitude 8° – 10°N and longitudes 3° – 8°E. The State falls within the Guinea Savannah vegetation zone of Nigeria. The annual

rainfall varies from 1600mm in the south to 1100mm in the north. Average monthly temperature ranges from 23°C to 29°C. Soils are predominantly light and well drained. Major crops grown include rice, sugar cane, sorghum, millet, maize, cowpea, yam and melon. Livestock reared include goat, sheep and cattle (NSADP, 1994).

#### Data Collection

To achieve the objectives of the study, 130 women extension agents were purposively selected from the 3 zones of the State Agricultural Development Project. Data were collected through the use of questionnaire, which was administered to the respondents. Two set of questionnaire were used to collect the required information, one questionnaire was designed for the women extension agents and the other for the farmers in the localities covered by women extension agents. The questionnaire was structured in such a manner as to generate the relevant data.

#### Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics such as frequency and percentages were used in achieving objective one, two and four. In order to determine the attitude of the farmers towards women extension agents (objective three), attitude statements were presented and rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Responses to positive statements were scored as strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1), while responses to negative statements were scored as strongly agree (1), agree (2), undecided (3), disagree (4) and strongly disagree (5). (Oladele, *et al*/1999).

For the purpose of this study, sixteen attitude statements were presented and scored according to responses. The total attitude score for each respondent was calculated. Each respondent can score a minimum of 16 and maximum of 80, the farmer's attitude score was grouped into three categories: favourable, undecided and unfavourable (Laogun, 1999).

Chi-square test was used to

describe the degree of association between mother role i.e family size and job performance efficiency. This was used in drawing up statistical inference. Chi-square test was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to compare observed frequencies with expected frequencies in relation to job performance efficiency and family size. Family size was grouped into five categories to facilitate the analysis. After analysis, 0.05% level of probability ( $P < 0.05$ ) was used as indication of significant relationship.

### Results and Discussion

#### Gender-related Factors and Roles

Entries in Table 1 show that 60.8 percent of the respondents noted that the role of a mother is adversely affecting their potential level of performance. Similarly, 31.5 percent of the respondents indicated that the housewife role also affect their work performance efficiency. Most of the respondents pointed out that as mothers, they have difficulties in shedding the role of mother and

housewife, a situation that they stressed resulted into role conflict with consequent effect on their job performance. A somewhat similar view was stressed by William (1987), Bajah and Bonzimo (1989) who conducted similar studies and reported that stereotypes and socio-cultural factors are some of the factors that are responsible for low participation of women in science and technology, which include agriculture.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents on the basis of gender-related factors and roles that affect job performance (n=130).

Gender-related factors and roles	Frequency	%
Menstruation period	11	8.5
Pregnancy period	23	17.7
General bias	4	3.1
Role of housewife	41	31.5
Religion	25	19.2
Role of mother	79	60.8
Other home domestic works	8	6.2

Source: Field survey, 2007.

#### Organizational Factors

All the respondents (100%) in

Table 2 reported that women extension agents are similar to men colleague on motivation given by the employer and that there is no limitation in the level of autonomy, power and responsibilities given to women extension agents. Adjudged from these findings, it can be safely concluded that organizational factors are likely not to have negative effect on potential level of job performance of women extension agents.

**Table 2: Effect of organizational factors on job performance**

Organizational factors	Yes	No
Women extension agents are similar to men colleague on motivation given by the employer.	130 (100.00)	-
There is no limitation in the level of autonomy given to women extension agents	130 (100.00)	-
The extent of power and responsibilities given by the employer is equal for both women and male extension agents.	130 (100.00)	-

Source: Field survey, 2007

### Attitude of Farmers

Majority of the farmers (79.2%) have favourable attitudes towards women extension agents. They considered the women extension agents to be honest, sympathetic and reason along with clientele. However, some of the farmers who have unfavourable attitudes were found to be less satisfied with women extension agents because of their inactiveness and limited access. Hence women extension agents should take cognizance of this and make conscious effort to improve on this credibility quality.

**Table 3: Distribution of farmers based on their attitudes towards women extension agents**

Farmers attitude score	Frequency	%
16 – 37 Unfavourable	16	12.3
38 – 59 Neutral	11	8.5
60 – 81 Favourable	103	79.2

Source: Field survey, 2007

### Obstacles Faced by Women Extension Agents

Cultural norm/barriers top the list of obstacles faced by women extension

agents in Table 4. Majority of the respondents (39.2%) reported that cultural norms and other societal barriers are adversely affecting their job efficiency. This may not be unconnected to cultural restraints that prevent a woman from direct contact or conversation with a strange male without the permission of her husband. Even with husband's permission, there is still limit to the level of interaction. Other constraints include lack of transportation and religious barriers accounting for 27.7 and 19.2 percent respectively. The women extension agents complained of transportation problems, which according to them limit their abilities to embark on adequate extension services.

Table 4: Percentage distribution of respondents based on the obstacles faced

Obstacles faced	Frequency	%
Lack of transportation	36	27.7
Lack of accommodation	4	3.1
Cultural norms	51	39.2
Poor cooperation of farmer	14	10.8
Religious barriers		25
Total	130	100

Source: Field survey, 2007

### Relationship between Mother Role and Job Performance Efficiency

A chi-square test value of 15.911 infers a statistically significant relationship between the mother role (family size and job performance efficiency, indicating that if the family size of women extension agents increases, their job performance efficiency will be adversely affected. This is because of the greater time needed to take care of families, which usually leads to role conflicts. According to Imonite (1996) the resulting role conflict is one of the major reasons for low output especially among women.

Table 5: Relationship between mother role (family size) and job performance efficiency

Mother role (family size)	Job performance efficiency		Total
	Yes (efficient)	No (inefficient)	
Expected	25.7	45.3	71
Observed	18	4	22
Expected	14.1	26	40
Observed	5	1	6
Expected	37.2	50.8	88
Observed	18	1	19
Expected	39	31	70
Total count	79	81	160
Expected	79	81	160
Chi-square (asymptotic)	15.911		
Chi-square (Exact)	15.107		
Significance (2-sided)	.000		

Source: Computed from field survey data, 2007

Note: Significant at P<0.001

### **Conclusion**

The role of mother and housewife affect job performance efficiency of women extension agents in the study area. However, majority of the farmers have favourable attitudes towards women extension agents, which is an indication that the farmers are willing to make the job of women extension agents a success. Major obstacles in the career pathway of women extension agents are cultural restraints and lack of transportation.

### **Recommendations**

The female extension agents should be encouraged to reduce their family size. This could be achieved through sound family planning and population policy/deduction. This will enable them to have enough time for their jobs instead of the current trend of spending more of their time on families care.

To further sustain the present high level of favourable attitude shown by the farmers in the area, the women extension agents should be encouraged to improve

on their creditability qualities. Specifically, they should be more active in discharging their duties. In order to alleviate the problem of cultural restraints which prevent women from having conversation with a strange men, the women extension agents should as much as possible be use to reach the female farming populations.

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