MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF WOMEN IN SHEA BUTTER PROCESSING IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper examines the challenges faced by women farmers involved in Shea butter processing in Kwara State, Nigeria which is a major livelihood crop in the area. It highlights their socio-economic characteristics, the processing method used in processing and the constraints faced by the women Shea butter processors. A well structured interview-schedule was used to elicit information from 180 rural women involved in Shea butter processing in Kwara State, Nigeria selected through a three-stage sampling technique. The major respondents' severe constraints in Shea butter processing were inadequate know-how, inadequate extension services, high cost of processing equipments and inadequate access to credit facilities. Chi-square analysis revealed that there is a significant relationship between educational status, contact with extension agent, years of experience and the constraints in Shea butter processing. The paper concludes that a robust extension programme needs to be packaged to build the capacity of the women and provision of accessible credit facilities which will boost the production efficiency of the women processors and their output thus leading to more income and improvement in living standard of the women and their families.

Keywords: Constraints, Livelihoods, Nigeria, Processing, Shea butter, Women

Introduction

Women play a very important role in transforming the agricultural sector of any community (Ayoade, 2012). Therefore, they are a force that must be reckoned with in order to unlock the agricultural potentials of Nigeria. Various successive governments have devised different programmes towards revitalizing the agricultural sector via rural development but most of the objectives of these programmes could not be achieved (Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2009). One of the major deficiencies of these programmes was the neglect of women who are responsible for carrying out 70% of the agricultural labour, 50% of the animal husbandry related activities and 60% of food processing activities (Annon, 2006). Ogunlela and Mukhtar (2009), in their study stated that the role that women play and their position in meeting the challenges of agricultural production and development are quite dominant and prominent. Their relevance and significance, therefore, cannot be over emphasized.

Findings from a study financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) revealed that women make up some 60-80 percent of agricultural labour force in Nigeria (World Bank, 2003), depending on the region and they produce two-thirds of food crops. Akankpo and Asa (2006) also confirmed these trends in gender involvement in agriculture in the eastern part of the country that females are more involved in agriculture than male. Yet, in spite of these, female farmers in the country are among the voiceless, especially with respect to inclusion and influencing agricultural policies. Majority of such policies which are aimed at increasing food security and food production, tend to either underestimate or totally ignore women's role in agricultural production (Nwosu and Okon, 2013).

Shea nut being an important crop in the Nigerian rural household is exclusively processed by rural women and children. It is regarded as an "opportunistic business" for them. In recent years, Shea tree has gained importance as an economic crop because of the heavy demand for its butter both locally and internationally mainly as cocoa butter substitute for the production of chocolate, following increasing international interest in Shea butter as a cocoa butter equivalent in confectioneries, pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries. Shea nut products are used domestically and exported. The main importer is Europe. Nigeria is the largest producer of Shea nut in West Africa, producing about 58% Shea nut in 2008 (Garba, Nwanwe and Oisakede, 2011).

Shea nut is processed primarily mainly through the traditional method which involves minimum mechanically inputs and heavy drudgery. The Shea butter thus produced is considered unsuitable for export because it is difficult and expensive to store as it deteriorates very rapidly. The locally produced butter is therefore consumed locally thereby fetching low prices for the producers. Despite its tendency to provide all year round employment for rural women involved in Shea processing, the sector is struggling with some challenges which is lowering the quality and quantity of the Shea butter being produced. This situation however could be improved upon and changed.

Therefore, it is pertinent and appropriate that the national economic search light on Agricultural transformation focuses on inclusion and meeting the needs of the rural women involved in agriculture with specific emphasis on those involved in the processing of Shea nut. This is because of its potentials to open new frontiers for the country in the world export market for Shea products. Consequently, in a view to shed light on ways of improving Shea butter processing and ameliorating the challenges decreasing the potentials of Shea butter in alleviating rural poverty through generating better income and livelihoods for the rural women, the study focused on the following objectives.

The broad objective of this study is to determine the challenges faced by women farmers in Shea butter processing in Kwara State, Nigeria.
The Specific objectives are to:

(i) describe the socio-economic characteristics of Shea-butter processors in Kwara State, Nigeria.
(ii). examine the processing method used by the women processors in Kwara State, Nigeria.

(iii). identify the perceived constraints of the women in Shea butter processing in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Kwara State Nigeria. The state is geographically located between latitude $7^0 20^1$ and $11^0 05^1$ north of the equator longitude $2^0 5^1$ and $6^0 45^1$ east of the prime meridian (Ogunlade, Oladele and Babatunde 2009). The State is divided into 3 senatorial districts which are Kwara South, Kwara Central and Kwara North and it has 16 local Government Areas (LGA). Shea butter is been processed majorly in seven (7) LGA which are distributed across the four (4) agro-ecological zone. These are Kaima, Baruteen, Patigi, Ifelodun, Ilorin South, Ilorin East and Moro Local Government Areas. The population for the study was all the women involved in Shea butter processing in Kwara State, Nigeria. A well structured interview-schedule was used to elicit information from a total of 180 respondents. A three-stage sampling technique was employed in the selection of the respondents. Purposive selection of one LGA each from the four (4) Agricultural Development Project administrative zones was carried out in order to allow for effective coverage of the varying ecological diversity. Random sampling technique was used to select three communities from each of the selected LGAs. Fifteen (15) female Shea butter processors were then randomly selected from each of the 12 communities.

In this study, data that were collected include the socio-economic characteristics of women Shea butter processors such as age, marital status, educational attainment, processing experience, source of information used, the level of preference for each source and contact with extension agents. The dependent variable was the constraints to Shea butter processing. This variable was measured as follows:

Constraints to Shea butter processing: Respondents were presented with a list of items and they were asked to rate their perception of these items as severe constraints on a 5-point likert type scale of Very severe (5); Severe (4); Some-what severe (3); A little severe (2) and Not severe (1).

Chi-square analysis was used to determine the relationship between selected socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents and the constraints encountered in Shea butter processing.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 presents the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. Findings from the study revealed that majority (72%) of the rural women farmers involved in Shea butter processing fall within the age range of 20 – 39yrs. The mean age of the respondents was 38 years. This implies that those involved in Shea butter processing are youthful and agile thus indicating a high degree of prospect and viability in the production. This could also buttress the fact that Shea butter processing is a tedious task which might be difficult for the aged to do. This agrees with the findings of Fakayode *et al.* (2013) who reported that Shea butter processors were mostly agile young women and disagrees with Ademola *et al.* (2012) who

revealed that Shea butter processing was dominated by the aged, weak and laggards. This implies that there is great prospect in the sector due to the active age group involved if they are availed the opportunity because they have the physical strength to process Shea butter on a larger scale.

Majority (82.8%) of the respondents were married which showed that they have family responsibility ties that will require more financial commitment. A little above average (53.3%) of the respondents had no formal education. This attribute may limit the innovativeness of the women processors. This is in consonance with the report of Matanmi *et al.* (2010 and 2011) who revealed that a large number of the Shea butter processors in Kwara State had no formal education. The implication of this may be low rate of information seeking and adoption of better processing technology by the women.

Respondents experience as regards Shea butter processing was also examined. Table 1 shows that majority (78.9%) of the respondents had 11years and above experience in Shea butter processing. This finding corroborates Fakayode *et al*, (2013) who also reported that Shea butter processors in Kwara State are well experienced. This justifies the age range of the women and the starting age in processing as being early as possible. This suggest that the Shea butter processors will use their experience positively if they are trained because the more the numbers of years of experience, the more matured, coordinated and accurate the women are expected to be in handling various challenges. The result further revealed that Most (71.1%) of the respondents had no contact with extension agents. This implies that extension agents do not visit Shea butter processors thereby limiting their knowledge on modern and improved techniques of processing.

As revealed in Table 1, more than half (54.4%) of the women processors do not have access to credit facilities. This implies that most of them depend on their personal funds. They will thus limit the amount of money they can access to carry out their processing activities thereby reducing their level of productivity.

As further revealed by table 1, majority (64.4%) of the processors use the traditional method of processing. This may be due to the fact that they have little or no knowledge about the modern methods as a result of lack of access to adequate extension services. It could also be because they lack access to modern equipments. The use of the traditional method of processing as opined by Ademola *et al.* (2012) and Carette *et al.* (2009) is a very tedious nature of Shea butter processing. This usually reduces the scale and efficiency of production and restricts the marketability of their products to local markets due to lot of impurities thus limiting the amount of income accruable to the women processors.

Table 1: Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

Socio-Economic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean
Age			
≤ 29	10	5.6	
30-39	86	47.8	
40-49	38	21.1	38years
50-59	11	6.1	
60 and above	35	19.4	
Marital Status			
Single	15	8.3	
Married	149	82.8	
Divorced	7	3.9	
Widowed	9	5.0	
Educational Status			
No formal Education	96	53.3	
Quranic Education	41	22.8	
Primary school uncompleted	22	12.2	
Primary school completed	7	3.9	
Secondary school uncompleted	7	3.9	
Secondary school completed	5	2.8	
Attended tertiary institution	2	1.1	
Years of Experience			
1 – 10	38	21.1	
11 – 20	65	36.1	15years
21 – 30	47	26.1	
31 – 40	30	16.7	
Contact with Extension Agents			
Yes	52	28.9	
No	128	71.1	
Access to Credit Facilities			
Yes	82	45.6	
No	98	54.4	
Processing Methods			
Traditional	116	64.4	
Mechanized	9	5.0	
Both	55	30.6	

Source: Field Survey N = 180

Constraints to Shea butter Processing

The major perceived constraints according to their severity as indicated by the respondents in Shea butter processing were inadequate extension services with a Mean Score (MS) = 4.8, Inadequate know-how (MS = 4.1), high cost of processing equipments (MS = 3.9), unavailability of credit facilities (MS = 3.8), Uncoordinated marketing systems (MS = 3.8) and shortage of water for processing (MS = 3.6) as they ranked 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 4th, and 6th

respectively. Table 2 further showed that the other listed constraints items whose mean score were below 3.5 were of lesser severity to the women processors in the study area.

The constraints of inadequate know-how and inadequate extension services could be regarded as emanating from the ineffectiveness of the extension service as indicated in table 1. This is because with adequate extension contact with the Shea butter processors and good training, they would have been empowered to have the basic knowledge and information on the modern techniques of processing Shea butter which will make the production easier for them.

The constraint of high cost of processing equipments which limits its availability reveals that the processors do not have access to credit facilities which will assist them in purchasing machines for processing. This is in consonance with Ademola *et al.* (2012) who reported that limited processing equipments is a major constraints that limits both quality and quantity of Shea butter available for the market. Oyesola *et al.* (2010) also submitted that inadequacy in credit is a very severe constraint in Shea butter production among the rural practitioners. This is a major reason why the women processors stick to their inefficient traditional method of processing thus reducing their level and efficiency of productivity.

Table 2: Constraints to Shea butter Processing

Constraints	Mean Score	Rank
Occupied with household chores	2.9	7th
Dominance by Spouse	2.2	9th
Involvement in other non-farm activities	2.8	8th
Inadequate Know-how	4.1	2nd
Uncoordinated marketing system	3.8	4th
Inadequate extension services	4.8	1st
High cost of equipments	3.9	3rd
Unavailability of credit facilities	3.8	4th
Shortage of water for processing	3.6	6th

Mean Score was derived from Very Severe = 5, Severe = 4, Some-what severe = 3, A little severe = 2, Not Severe = 1. N = 180

Source: Field Survey

Hypothesis testing using Chi-Square Analysis

This hypothesis was tested in the study.

Ho (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between selected socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and their constraints in Shea butter processing.

Table 3 shows that there is a significant relationship between the respondents perceived severe constraints in Shea butter processing and their educational status, contact with extension agents and years of experience, thus the null hypothesis was rejected. The table

showed further that there is no significant relationship between respondents perceived severe constraints and their age groupings, marital status, access to credit facilities and processing method used, thus the null hypothesis was accepted. The implication of this result is that respondents' perceived severe constraints is most likely to be influenced by their educational status, contacts with extension services and years of experience while respondents' age groupings, marital status, credit facilities and processing methods may not have any significant influence on their perceived constraints.

Table 3: Relationship between selected socio-economic characteristics of respondents and their perceived constraints in Shea butter processing

Variable	df	X^2Cal	Significance	Decision
Age	3	1.535	0.108	Accept Ho
Educational Status	3	1.486	0.048	Reject Ho
Marital Status	6	11.589	0.235	Accept Ho
Years of Experience	3	5.224	0.022	Reject Ho
Contact with Extension	1	2.109	0.001	Reject Ho
Access to Credit Facilities	1	3.824	0.684	Accept Ho
Processing Method	2	9.605	0.069	Accept Ho

Source: Field Survey significant level = 0.05

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, challenges such as inadequate know-how, inadequate extension services, high cost of processing equipments and inadequate access to credit facilities were all identified to limit the productivity and efficiency of the women processors. This has reduced the level of their productivity and efficiency thus affecting the amount of income they can generate to support and take care of their families which in turn affects the quality of their lives and livelihood of their household.

The study therefore recommends an urgent provision of adequate extension services to the women processors in order to build their capacity to enhance quality productivity. Mechanized processing centres is needed for the application of new processing techniques not only to ease the drudgery involve in the traditional method of processing but also to boost production and ensure higher quality butter that will be well packaged to attract better price from both local and international markets. Credit facilities should also be packaged and made available to the women processors so as to boost their productivity to meet up with the domestic consumption and for export. This will allow the women to tap into the prosperity potentials embedded in Shea butter processing thus improving the livelihoods of the women and all their family members.

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