

Mainstreaming Gender Issues in Agriculture Value Chain

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Abstract

Alleviation of general inequalities along the agricultural value chains is not only an important element for social justice but also constitutes key factor for improving productivity and growth. This research investigates the effect of gendered-conscious practices on producers and marketers of agricultural produce in Nigeria. Based on the analysis of showcases and the value chain development approach, the study points toward major changes in gender decision-making, land ownership, labour sharing, and health and education access, with a strong support from men counterparts. Results suggest that tackling gender imbalances results in higher household incomes, better business performances, and value chain upgrading as a whole. It is determined that gender mainstreaming is a 'win-win' strategy for both economic growth and social justice and that there should be targeted interventions that maintain gender equality in agricultural systems.

Keywords: Gender Mainstreaming, Gender Equality, Value Chain Development, Nigeria Agriculture

Introduction

According to United Nation (UN) Women (2016), mainstreaming involves **A**ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities-policy, development, research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation, resource allocation and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects. Creating and sustaining competitive and equitably-oriented value chains that help small-scale farmers, especially women, will require

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explicitly looking at gender issues and proactively integrating gender components into value chain analysis and development strategies. According to the United Nations (UN 2001), gender mainstreaming is a means by which the gender equality will be realized. It is more than increasing women's participation as it places gender equality at the centre of planning, policy decisions, program budget and institutional structures and processes which recognizes the importance of incorporating women's and men's perceptions, experiences, knowledge and interests into these processes. Gender mainstreaming emerged as a response and a strategic solution to the shortcoming of women's- focused policies which failed to significantly address the gender disadvantage. Gender mainstreaming as a strategy "represents a shift of policy focus from women-focused policies to a more strategic attention of mainstreaming gender across all organizations as a means of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment" (Alston, 2016).

Value chain programs when designed with gender equitable principles, can foster both competitiveness and gender equity goals to enhance poverty reduction impacts. In this paper value chain is defined as an analytical as well as an operational model. The model takes up the fact that a product is rarely directly consumed at the place of its production. It is transformed, combined with other products, transported, packaged, displayed until it reaches the final consumer. Sulaiman and Davis, (2012) defines a value chain as "the sequence of all production and marketing steps, ranging from primary production through processing and distribution up to the retail sale of the product and finally to its end users". These steps are sometimes referred to as nodes: for example, the "input supply node" or the "production node". It is obvious that agricultural value chains can be characterized as consisting of context, actors, and supporters. In this process the raw materials, intermediate products and final products are owned by various actors who are linked by trade and services, and each add value to the product. Various types of public and private services, like business development services, electricity, transport, financial services, etc., are as important as favorable framework conditions that are laws, regulations and their enforcement.

The value chain model supposes that by understanding interactions between all these actors, it is possible for private and public agencies (including development agencies) to identify points of intervention to (1) increase efficiency and thereby increase total generated value, and to (2) improve the competence of intended actors to increase their share of the total generated value. (Roduner, 2007). There is

an extensive body of research by World Bank, IFPRI and others, which shows that gender inequalities are a key constraint on economic growth and food security, and a key cause of poverty, not only for women themselves, but also for their families and communities (Farnworth and Ragasa, 2008; Mayoux and Mackie, 2009). Women's importance in supplying national and international markets with both traditional and high-value products such as textiles, coffee, and cocoa has increased significantly over the past few decades. However, gender inequalities and discrimination at all levels mean that women are marginalized or excluded from the more profitable agricultural and manufacturing chains and/or the profitable parts of these chains. Women-owned businesses face many more constraints than those of men, and receive fewer financial and non-financial services (Farnworth and Ragasa, (2008); Mayoux and Mackie, 2009); and the many studies of women's enterprise commissioned for ILO's WEDGE programme.

Gender inequalities in control of productive assets, such as land, mean that even where women do the majority of the work in cultivation they are generally invisible as 'helpers' of 'male farmers'. Women rarely control household income, particularly from crops marketed by men, even where production is dependent on women's unpaid role in cultivation and care work. Despite the importance of women in most value chains and official commitments to gender mainstreaming, 'gender' continues to be widely seen as a sideline 'women's issue' in most value chain development – an additional 'problem' on top of all the other competing objectives and priorities in economic development interventions (environment, HIV/AIDS, etc.). Gender analysis remains weak in most 'mainstream' livelihood, market, and value chain analyses, and largely ignored in manuals and capacity building (Farnworth and Ragasa, 2008; Solidaridad, 2009). As a result, women are not only often excluded from value chain development (VCD) interventions, but gender inequalities may actually increase, exacerbating the unacceptably high gender disparities on all human development and rights indicators. This is the case even in intervention.

The promise of this “win-win” solution is behind the decision to increase the ability of women and those who are of low income to drive growth, by linking these groups to new opportunities throughout market and agriculture value chains (Global Hunger and Food Security, 2009). From production to processing to disposal, gendered patterns of behavior condition men's and women's jobs and tasks, the distribution of resources and benefits derived from income generating activities in the chain, and the efficiency and competitiveness of value chains in the global

market. Households and Markets Interact in Ways that Affect Access to Land, Labor, and other Assets. Social Institutions Reflect Social Norms, Leading to a Gender-differentiated Labor Force. Legal Frameworks Embody Social Beliefs, e.g., inheritance laws and property rights that restrict people's ability to access and accumulate wealth according to gender categories. Value chain programs seek to achieve systemic change in firms and across the chain in ways that promote upgrading and competitiveness.

According to USAID (2010), change within agricultural value chains involves shifting production systems that draw on indigenous or local knowledge in favor of ones that depend on technical knowledge from input suppliers or buyers and meet consumer preferences. Marketing systems move from spot interactions to more dependent and predictable relationships governed by contractual arrangements. These shifts can provide small producers with important advantages through increased farm incomes, but also affect gender roles and relations. Change in gender relations can result from: New Technologies that Change Labor Patterns, Time Allocation, and Income Control. Shifts to High-Value Crops that Alter Patterns of Control over Resources and Benefits. Formalization of Ownership and Household Financial Management Practices.

Addressing women to achieve poverty alleviation and food security objectives is also an economic choice: projects addressing gender and addressing the economic empowerment of women are far more likely to improve family livelihoods and well-being of family and children (Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), 2011). Different perspectives influence which arguments are most convincing. Rural entrepreneurs are more easily persuaded by the economic/ business arguments, while local NGOs might be more attracted by the social justice argument. For a bilateral or multilateral donor, the food security argument will be appealing. Development organizations are not always aware of existing gender inequalities, their causes and how to address them. Time does not always allow for a gender analysis before an intervention is developed and implemented. On top of that, gender expertise is often lacking and resistance exists among people in different organizations. Therefore, bringing in gender in value chain thinking not only requires a combination of expertise and knowledge, but also convincing arguments for different target groups.

FAO (2011), research shows that farmers are 20-30 percent less productive than men, but not because they manage their farm less, the main reason for the gap between men's and women's performance is that the former have access to resources seldom available to female farmers – including land, financing and technology, among other things. In addition, women do not share fairly in benefits such as training, information and knowledge. But if women had the same access to those resources as men, they would produce 20-30 percent more food and their families would enjoy better health, nutrition and education. If women had equal access to agricultural resources and services, food security would be greatly improved and societies would grow richer, and not only in economic terms.

This article seeks to fill in the gaps in the argumentation on the absence of transformative approach in gender mainstreaming, the superficial integration of gender in agricultural policies, and the unconsolidated debates on gender and value chain development. The main argument is the fact that even if the gender mainstream has advanced, it still has its limits due to structural obstacles, and only a more radical, inclusive and systemic approach can lead to authentic emancipation and sustainable development.

Benefits of Mainstreaming Gender Issues in Agriculture Value Chain

Mainstreaming gender issues in agriculture value chains in Nigeria is essential for promoting gender equality and addressing gender disparities in rural areas. Women play a significant role in agricultural production in Nigeria, yet they often face unequal access to resources, markets, and decision-making power. By mainstreaming gender issues, agricultural interventions can better address the specific needs and priorities of women farmers, leading to increased productivity, improved livelihoods, and enhanced food security (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), 2019; UN Women, 2019).

Women make up nearly half of the agricultural labour force in Nigeria, and the agricultural sector is the most important source of employment for most women in the region (Udemezue and Odi, 2021). However, many barriers inhibit women's production and prevent women from fully benefitting from their agricultural activity. For example, women's agricultural work is often not "visible", meaning that it is not captured in official measures of agricultural labour; thus, women's work is often undervalued. In addition, women are often excluded from owning land or

agricultural assets, and so they are often unable to join farmer's cooperatives. Women also have limited access to labour, capital and agricultural information. Lastly, gender norms in many contexts promote restrictive conceptions of what constitutes acceptable activities, roles, and spaces for men and women. All of these inequalities constitute what is often referred to as a gender gap in agriculture, according to which women are neither able to be as productive nor to benefit as much from their agricultural activity as men do.

The FAO (2011), estimates that if women had the same access to agricultural resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30 percent, which could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4 percent, and reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17 percent. While gender mainstreaming often requires focusing on women—because they are a vulnerable and marginalized population in many contexts in comparison to men—it also requires a robust awareness of men's roles and activities. It is also increasingly recognized that men should be involved throughout the gender mainstreaming process, as a lack of men's involvement can severely limit the success of mainstreaming efforts. In addition, there are men in many contexts who are also vulnerable and marginalized, as well as women who are not. Engaging as many people as possible in discussing gender roles, marginalization, and vulnerability will help to ensure that gender mainstreaming efforts succeed and that they help those most in need. While gender critically influences agricultural activities, other factors are also important to take into account: socio-economic status; age; caste; location; and ethnic group. These can also affect the opportunities and challenges facing farmers. Additionally, gender roles vary by geographic region and by time. Gender mainstreaming efforts therefore should seek to continuously gather information on gender roles in their programme areas, should recognize the diversity within various social groups, and should be conscious of the ways in which the interaction of multiple social characteristics can create challenges and opportunities for the diversity of male and female actors that are engaged in agricultural value chains.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Gender equality refers to “women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in the public sphere” (Reeves and Baden 2000). In other words, gender equality entails the fact that both men and women are born

free and have the right to develop their personal abilities and free to make choices in their lives without any imposition from socially set strict gender roles.

The concept also includes recognizing and equally valuing men's and women's different needs and aspirations (Holzner et al., 2010). The term empowerment according to Kabeer (2005), "refers to the process by which those the concept empowerment can be explored: (i) agency represents the processes by which choices are made and put into effect" ;(ii) resources refer to the medium through which who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability" and "empowerment relates to the process of change.

Kabeer (2005) further identified three interrelated dimensions through which agency is exercised" ;(iii) "...achievements refer to the outcomes of agency." In her recent publication, Naila Kabeer proposed the conceptualization of empowerment to draw on women's own evaluation of changes in their lives as well as exploring theoretically-derived criteria that assess social changes (Kabeer 2017). Women's empowerment basically appeared as a reformist approach of change that concerned mainly with transforming gender power relations in terms of demanding rights for women and justice for the society in general, and challenging and transforming the existing economic, social and political structures (Cornwall and Rivas 2015). Empowerment involves increasing the capacity of those who have previously been denied such capacity to take action of their own choices, enhancing their ability to challenge existing structures of inequalities embedded in their society, developing women's sense of self-worth and collective identity, working towards changes in women's lives, increasing capacity to exercise the autonomy to control over their own lives, and ability to renegotiate their concerns with those who matter to them, and developing the ability to actively take part and recognized as active citizens as men in all sphere of development that shape their societies and hence ensure the democratic distribution of power and opportunities (Kabeer 2017).

The terms gender equality and women's empowerment appeared to be used in the 1980s and 1990s by feminists as a means to bring women's rights into the international development agenda and it was fully embraced by international donor agencies, NGOs and government organizations (Cornwall and Rivas 2015). It has been well recognized as development main priority and has got the attention of development's main player to commit resources to women's issues and it has also caught the attention of "the philanthropic wing of big business" (Cornwall and

Anyidoho 2010). Since its inception, the language of gender equality and women's empowerment has become an integral part of the development process subsequently it has become one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which promotes gender equality and empower women, as well as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (Fielding and Lepine 2017). While worldwide impressive gains have been recorded towards attaining gender equality and women's empowerments particularly in terms of narrowing the school enrolment gap, there are still areas where gender inequalities continue to persist especially in the so-called third world countries where women have still limited/no access to the formal labour market and scant opportunity for formal employment particularly at higher managerial position (Jager and Rohwer 2009).

Gender equality and women's empowerment are development objectives in their own right because development means not only overcoming income poverty, or better access to justice but narrowing gaps in well-being between men and women (World Bank 2012). Malhotra, et al (2002) describe "gender equality as a development objective in itself and as a means to promote growth, reduce poverty and promote better governance," likewise promoting women's empowerment has similar dual rationale: it is a development goal in itself as social justice is mandatory for human welfare and intrinsically worth valued and on the other hand "women's empowerment is a means to other ends." But as Kabeer (2005) noted in MDGs gender equality and women's empowerment is considered as an end in itself rather than as a means of achieving other goals. Achieving gender equality helps to reduce poverty and vulnerability as inequality of gender perpetuates particularly women's and girls' poverty and vulnerability (Jones et al., 2010).

Equality in women's access to employment and education opportunities will reduce household poverty as women administered resources produce better outcomes of human capital and capabilities within the household (Kabeer 2012). This means attaining gender equality in economic participation will enhance the inclusiveness of the growth because women's access to economic resources improves distributional dynamics within the household (Kabeer 2012). Kabeer (2017) further explained that the intrinsically matters argument for women's empowerment tended to be seen in policy circles as 'zero-sum' game with politically weak winners and powerful losers, on the other hand the instrumentalist argument of gender equality and women's empowerment that relates to the achievements of multiplier effects "offer policymakers the possibility of achieving familiar and approved goals

and “the persuasiveness of claims that women’s empowerment has important policy payoffs” in other development outcomes including family matter, economic growth, and poverty alleviation.

In 2012, the World Development Report of the World Bank on women indicated that attaining gender equality is smart economics that enhances the efficiency of economic performance and makes other development outcomes more useful to the society in different ways: first; gender equality removes structural barriers that prevent women from having equal opportunities in accessing productive resources and other social services such as access to education, employment, and other economic opportunities that generate better productivity gains; secondly, it will improve women’s position and capability, and enhance the benefits of other developmental outcomes including improving the lives of their children via nutritional status, education performance, health, and survival; third, gender equality paves the way for both men and women to be politically active and have equal chances to participate and influence the decisions concerning social, economic, and political issues (World Bank 2012).

Gender equality and women’s empowerment will address problems associated with difference in power relations between men and women that can be explained by roles assigned to individuals in the household and community as well as expected appropriate characteristics and behaviour which is informed by patriarchal structure and socialization that attributes power to men than women (UNFPA 2008).

Kabeer (2012) suggested that gender-equal access to resources can contribute to economic growth in two ways: first through family-controlled resources where women’s improved access allows them to invest the resources for the benefits of the family in general and the children in particular; second through a market-mediated way to enhance productivity of available human resources to the economy. The world development report also confirmed that improved women’s access to and control over the household resources will lead to more investment in their children’s wellbeing with positive effects on the economy (Kabeer 2017, World Bank 2012). Women’s endowments can be physical materials: land, capital and finance; human resources which includes knowledge, skills, and experiences; and social resources such as obligations and expectations reflect in the relationship and networking that contribute to enhance women’s ability to choose the lives they

value to live (Kabeer 2005). Hanmer & Klugman (2016) argues that increased resource endowments might not lead to increased agency for different individuals due to differences in underpinning structures of constraints; therefore, it is important to know the specific situation under which women access these resources.

The current study is a qualitative secondary data analysis. Existing literature on gender mainstreaming in agricultural value chains was gathered and synthesized using desk review methodology.

- Journal article databases like JSTOR, ScienceDirect and Google Scholar.
- Institutional publications, reports by respected organizations (FAO, IFAD, World Bank, USAID).
- Gender and Value Chain Development Policy documents and manuals.

The study adopted thematic content analysis to identify main themes, patterns, and debates in the literature. Inclusion criteria were determined by the study's focus, reliability of the sources, and the time of publication (20 years). Additionally, studies for which empirical evidence was unavailable or concentrated exclusively on areas other than sub-Saharan Africa and where there were no relevant lessons.

The data were systematically coded and analyzed within thematic categories of; women's access to resources, gender mainstreaming approaches, empowerment outcomes, and systemic challenges. From these sources, contradictions and convergences, and German lessons were identified through Critical Analysis and Synthesis methods.

Limitations of Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture Value Chain

Gender mainstreaming as an important political agenda that integrates gender aspects in policy decisions is believed to have the potential to transform social relations; so far these expectations have remained unfulfilled (Paterson, 2010). There have been intense discussions and disputes on its contents and assumed loss of transformation potential (Davids et al., 2014). It was indicated that in the early 1990s, gender specialists introduced gender mainstreaming instruments when gender equality and women's empowerment was top priority agenda. However, since late 1990s, efforts of gender mainstreaming have declined and faced resistances, this

indicates that “GM has been embraced and at the same time been vulnerable to evaporation” (Van Eerdewijk, 2014).

Gender mainstreaming has been criticized for not yet having substantive results on engendering meaningful policy change towards gender equality (Hankivsky, 2013). This implies that it has not been successful in fulfilling its transformative potential (Mukhopadhyaya, 2014). Davids et al (2014), noted that publications in the broad field of development studies and political science and international relations revealed that the change agenda of gender mainstreaming has not been achieved so far. Evidence shows that there is a huge gap between the rhetoric of mainstreaming gender and the implementation practices on the ground. Gender mainstreaming is misconceived by most implementing agencies, including government higher officials; consequently, women at the grassroots level received minimal benefits from gender mainstreaming (Alston, 2016).

So far, the result of evaluation of gender mainstreaming as Brouwers (2013) presents have shown that in most cases, gender mainstreaming is considered as goal in itself, rather than as strategic means for achieving the long-term objective of gender equality, this is against the common conception that states, “mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a means to the goal of gender equality” (UN 2001); ii) although it is well accepted that gender mainstreaming leads to gender equality outcomes, these outcomes of gender mainstreaming are not well tested; iii) there is an assumption that the gender issue is entirely considered a women’s issue with little focus on gender relations (Chant and Gutmann, 2002). In this aspect, gender mainstreaming has made little progress in moving from Women in Development to Gender and Development as it equated gender to women alone; and iv) in gender mainstreaming more emphasis has been on women’s practical needs than their strategic needs (Brouwers, 2013).

Moser and Moser (2005) argued that while gender mainstreaming policies have been adopted by most institutions, the practical implementation remains unchanged much as expected and more importantly the extent to which the implementation of gender mainstreaming outcomes contributing to gender equality are not well captured. The limitations of mainstreaming gender arose from problems such as limited power of the gender personnel to influence, scant resource allocation for the implementation, failure to implement gender policy as stated in the paper “evaporation of gender policies” and the inherent gender-biased organizational

culture and discourses that makes the implementation of gender mainstreaming difficult, and some have taken gender mainstreaming as feminist agenda (Kusakabe, 2005). First, the way gender mainstreaming is understood and shared by gender implementers and practitioners matters: For instance, the failure to recognize gender relations as a power relation between men and women characterized by power imbalance; second, masculinist and patriarchal social norms that resisted gender mainstreaming to maintain men's status; third were organizational constraints such as time and money limitations; fourth, specific contexts in which gender mainstreaming is implemented (Mannell, 2012).

Paterson (2010) pointed out that the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming is limited by contextual and conceptual issues related to the construction of the gender experts who are responsible to make expert analyses, and this in turn has made gender analyses a mere 'technology of rule' through which expert analysis has become the basis for interventions. Paterson (2010) further argued that relying on gender expert analyses that is not scrutinized in the context of the organization might lead the gender system further obscured and fractured by the mainstreaming. The feminists' gender concepts and principles that shaped gender and development thinking and practice have been appropriated by neoliberal development discourse (Cornwall et al., 2008). The African Development Bank's comprehensive assessment on gender mainstreaming indicated that while almost all countries have gender mainstreaming policies and practices their actual implementation was limited to the project design phase and it was rarely integrated throughout the project cycle (UN, 2014).

Furthermore, in the evaluations on the gender mainstreaming the UN observed that gender mainstreaming practices and concepts have commonly encountered defensive resistance by staff and leadership in connection with deep-rooted cultural issues and some might resist the change in fear of losing their statusesque as the change involves redistribution of power and resource (Pittman, 2014).

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the study, Gender mainstreaming has resulted in local successes, raising the income level and decision-making capacity of women. Yet wider structural issues such as patriarchal attitudes and the exclusion of women from land ownership and financial services, also play their part in preventing any mass impact.

Hence, gender-sensitive value chain interventions would do well to go beyond participation numbers to transformation strategies and narratives to address power relations. Engaging men as allies, contextualizing interventions, and committing to resources over time is required.

In addition, the continued incorporation of gender into all project phases and institutional capacity building for gender-sensitive programming are still significant areas for development.

Gender mainstreaming in Nigeria's agricultural value chains has potential to ensure equity, increase productivity and meet the sustainable development targets. But real change isn't just about having visible women, it's about structural change. Policymakers and implementers need to integrate gender analysis throughout, invest in human resources and challenge structural barriers. Participatory approaches that take into account the differentiated needs of rural women and men should be considered in future interventions.

Then there is the need to invest in their education as well as provide credit lines for them and capacity building trainings for the women smallholder farmers. Empowering women in leadership positions in production organizations and cooperatives can enhance their decision-making power and result in more equitable distribution of benefits in the value chain. In addition, involving community leaders, men and young people in the promotion of gender equality can help foster the cultural changes required for lasting change. Gender sensitive indicators should be included in monitoring and evaluation frameworks for impact assessment. It is only through a multi-faceted and comprehensive strategy that such a process becomes sustainable and can lead to developments in agricultural value chains and rural livelihoods.

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