

## CONSTRAINTS FACED BY SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN FARMING IN MAKURDI AREA OF BENUE STATE OF NIGERIA

G. O. John<sup>1</sup>, U. D. Omede<sup>2</sup> and B. N. Kalsariya<sup>3</sup>

1 Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Agriculture Makurdi, Benue State Nigeria

2 Nahshon and Salmon Ltd; EN0014, AA1 Layout, off Funtaj Road-Kuje, FCT Abuja-Nigeria

3 Associate Professor, Polytechnic in Agricultural, Junagadh Agricultural University, Sidsar, Junagadh – 362001 India

E-mail : ugbedave@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*Smallholder-farming households conduct most of the production in rural areas, the belief is that smallholder production plays an important role in rural livelihood strategies. How significant that role is or could be is not altogether clear. One hundred and twenty (120) semi-structured questionnaires through random sampling of respondents were administered in this research. Majority of the respondents (67.5%) indicated that they were challenged by limited access to fertilizer for farming and only 32.5% of the respondents indicated adequate access to fertilizer in the study area. The data showed that 45.0% of the respondents had inadequate access to chemical while 55% indicated sufficient access to chemical. Majority of the farmers 70.0% indicated that they were affected by inter-tribal war while 30% of the farmers indicated that they were not.*

**Keywords :** constraints, smallholder farmer, food security, government, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

The evolution of smallholder farming, can be said to have started as far back as the commencement of farming. Commonly, the 'smallholder' label implies that one is talking about subsistence farming with low competitiveness and market orientation (Syngenta, 2012). The concept involves a form of farming in which nearly all the crops or livestock produced are used to maintain the farmer and the farmer's family leaving surplus for sale. It is usually the prevalent type of farming practice common in developing countries with about 80% of food output produced by them (IFAD, 2012).

Smallholdings and their operators in Makurdi and in Nigeria as a whole share similar characteristics even though they are widely dispersed over a large expanse of land. According to Ijere (1992), a farm is considered small scale if it ranges from between less than 1 to 5.99 hectares. In India the figure is less as about 85% of their farms are 2 hectares and below (Syngenta, 2012).

Food is a basic human need and the basic source of nutrient needed for human existence, agriculture is therefore, expected to ensure adequate supply of food to the people. Hence, since smallholder-farming households conduct most of the production in rural areas, the belief is that smallholder production plays an important role in rural livelihood strategies. How significant that role is or could be is not altogether clear.

Several reports have shown a consistent increase in production of staple food in the country especially between 1999 and 2005. There has also been an acclaimed 8% annual growth rate in the agricultural sector in the past years, suggesting that Nigeria has attained self-sufficiency in major staples such as maize, sorghum, millet and are currently the major producers of yam, cassava and cocoyam in the world (FAO/FMARD, 2006). Nevertheless, records indicate that about 70% of Nigeria's population still lives on less than ₦100 (US\$ 0.7) per day as opposed to two (2) US\$ per day. In addition, 9% of Nigeria's population was chronically undernourished between 2000 and 2002. This is less than the regional average of 33% for sub-Saharan Africa. However, the 9% (about 11 million) chronically undernourished Nigerians translate to about 5.4% of the total number of undernourished people in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole (FAO/FMARD, 2006). This means that the increased aggregate food production has not translated into improved household food and nutrition security. Chronic malnutrition is still wide spread, and the problem of food insecurity is prevalent in many areas across the country as the gap between food demand and food supply is still eminent (FAO/FMARD, 2006).

At the State level, Benue State also known as the "food basket of the nation", has a large percentage of its agricultural sector consisting of smallholder farmers who are responsible for the state's agricultural performances. Yet, there tends to be little development in the state and the level of food insecurity, poverty and unemployment in the

state is a matter that calls for due attention. As a result, the contribution of these smallholder farmers has been poorly understood and often under estimated. Thus, this research aims at exploring the constraints faced by small holder farmers as they contribute to food security in the study area.

**OBJECTIVE**

To identify the constraints to smallholder farming in the study area

**METHODOLOGY**

**The Study Area**

The selected area of study is Makurdi local government area of Benue state. It is geographically located in the middle belt zone of Nigeria and lies between longitude 8° and 9° East and latitude 7° and 8° North. Guma bounds the local government area to the north, to the south it is bounded by Gwer, to the west by Gwer-west and to the east by Gboko local government areas of the state respectively. It has a total land area of 835.62 square kilometers The farmers grow a wide range of crops and livestock. The major crops grown include rice, groundnut, sorghum, millet, beneseed, cowpea, sweet potatoes and cassava. Makurdi comprises of a mixture of various tribes but the predominant tribes here are the Tiv’s while other substantial tribes are the Idoma, Igede, Igbo, Hausa Igala and Jukun.

**Sampling procedure and sample size**

The researcher administered one hundred and twenty (120) semi-structured questionnaires through random sampling of respondents in the research location. The research location comprises of eleven (11) council wards but only the wards relevant to the research were selected they are; Agan, Bar, Central south mission, Clerk mission, Fiidi, Modern market, North bank I and North bank II. With the assistance of enumerators, the questionnaires were administered to the respondents and their responses recorded.

**Method of data collection**

The researcher obtained data for the study using primary source of data in the study area. The primary data were obtained by administering semi-structured questionnaires randomly to one hundred and twenty (120) smallholder farmers (respondents) chosen from relevant wards within the study area.

**Method of data analysis**

Descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency and percentage distribution was used to measure the distribution of some of the socio-economic characteristics like age, sex,

level of education, occupation, household size, income and farm size.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Constraints to smallholder farming**

Inputs in farming by smallholder farmers play an important role in influencing their agricultural production. Table 1 showed the problems faced by smallholder farmers in performing their farming activities.

**Table 1: Constraints to smallholder farming**

(n=120)

Factor	Frequency	Percent
<b>(A) Fertilizer Adequacy</b>		
Enough	39	32.5
Not enough	81	67.5
<b>(B) Chemical Adequacy</b>		
Enough	66	55.0
Not enough	54	45.0
<b>(C) Seed Adequacy</b>		
Enough	71	59.2
Not enough	49	40.8
<b>(D) Labour Adequacy</b>		
Enough	90	75.0
Not enough	30	25.0
<b>(E) Land Adequacy</b>		
Enough	94	78.3
Not enough	26	21.7
<b>(F) Crisis/war</b>		
Affected	84	70.0
Not affected	36	30.0
Source: Field survey		

Majority of the respondents (67.5%) indicated that they were challenged by limited access to fertilizer for farming and only 32.5% of the respondents indicated adequate access to fertilizer in the study area. The data showed that 45.0% of the respondents had inadequate access to chemical while 55% indicated sufficient access to chemical. Those that have enough seed were 59.2%, while those that do not have were 40.8%. The statistics for labour showed that 75% of the farmers had enough labour for their farming activities while 25.0 did not. The percentage of the farmers that had enough land was 78.3% while 21.7% did not have. Majority of the farmers 70.0% indicated that they were affected by inter-tribal war while 30% of the farmers indicated that they were not.

## CONCLUSION

Government should ensure that rural dwellers who constitute majority of smallholder farmers are supported with everything necessary to improve smallholder farming, which for now is the back-bone of internal food supply in the country. Inter-tribal clashes and fights should be reduced to the barest minimum for farmers to be able to engage in farming activities by the government.

Access to credit, labour, land and other inputs by farmers should be ensured by both local, state and federal government structures to improve household food security situation. Policies that will make credit from government and other non-governmental agencies accessible to rural farmers will go a long way in addressing their resource acquisition constraints and eventually improving household food security in the country.

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