

**SMALL-HOLDERS IN SARAWAK AND ANAMBRA STATES' PALM OIL INDUSTRIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT**

**Anisiobi Anulika Loveline**

Faculty of Social Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

**Okpara Izuagba Uchenna**

Faculty of Social Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

**Nwanesi Peter Karubi**

Faculty of Social Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

**CITATION:** Anisiobi, A. L., Okpara, I. U. & Nwanesi, P. K. (2014). Small-holders in Sarawak and Anambra States' palm oil industries: A comparative study of women's involvement. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Entrepreneurship*, 1 (10), 375-394.

**ABSTRACT**

This is a comparative study that examined women small-holders' involvement in the palm oil industries of Malaysia and Nigeria. However, the core focus of this study is on women small-holders in the palm oil industry, who own their businesses solely and those that own theirs with their husbands, specifically in Sarawak and Anambra States. This study critically examined the roles or tasks done by these women. Qualitative method and non-probability sampling method, specifically purposive sampling was used to conduct this study. The instruments that were used to gather primary data are interview and observation; 32 respondents were involved in this study, 15 from Sarawak and 17 from Anambra. Face to face interview was conducted in Sarawak, while a technological tool (Skype video) was used to interview the respondents in Anambra. Given that this is a comparative study, its findings were analyzed in a comparative manner. The findings showed that there are some differences and similarities in the roles or tasks done by the respondents from Sarawak and Anambra, due to their cultural differences. It also showed that respondents from Anambra are more involved in the oil palm business, because unlike the respondents from Sarawak who only produce oil palm and sell the fresh fruit bunch (FFB) to the mills, those from Anambra extend their involvements in the business to the production and commercialization of palm oil.

**Key Words:** *Women Small-holders, Palm Oil, Oil Palm, Fresh Fruit Bunch (FFB), and Roles and Tasks*

## **Introduction**

This comparative study examines the involvement of women small-holders in Sarawak<sup>1</sup> and Anambra<sup>2</sup> States' palm oil industries. It investigates the roles or tasks done by these women, starting from the cultivation of oil palm, production of the palm oil, and their commercialization. This study also assessed how the aforementioned women carry out their tasks.

One of the major reasons for focusing on women oil palm small-holders in this study is because past studies have shown that palm oil holds significant potential to both Malaysian and Nigerian economies, and small-holders in both countries have made significant contributions to their economies (Paim, 2010 & Masud, 2011). Paim's and Masud's studies also showed that oil palm, as a cash crop, is an agricultural 'success story' to countries such as; Indonesia, Malaysia, and Nigeria, who produce and sell it in the domestic and global markets. This is why it is regarded as an important cash crop in Nigeria and a 'golden and booming crop' in Malaysia (Ibid.). Another reason for focusing on these women is because no in-depth study has been conducted on their involvement in the industry (Ibid.). Consequently, this study seeks to bridge the research gap by assessing the extent to which women small-holders are involved in the production and commercialization of oil palm and palm oil in Sarawak and Anambra. It also examined how the aforesaid women carry out their tasks.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theories and Trends in Feminization of Agriculture**

Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical discourse. It examines women's social roles, experience, and feminist politics in a variety of fields, such as anthropology and sociology, communication, psychoanalysis, economics, literary, education, and philosophy (Barrientos, 2003). While generally providing a critique of social relations, most of the feminist theories also focus on analyzing gender inequality and the promotion of women's rights, interests, and issues (Ibid).

A feminist economist, Katz (2003) relates the interest of her study more on feminist economics. She argues that feminization of agriculture is the measurable increase of women's participation in the agriculture sector, especially in the developing countries. She stated further in a broader view that the feminization of agriculture refers to women's increasing participation in the agricultural labour force, whether as independent producers, as unremunerated family workers or as agricultural wage workers. According to Katz's view, one of the major causes of feminization of agriculture is men's migration from rural areas to towns and cities in their countries or abroad, hence, abandoning agricultural work for more lucrative occupations. Katz added that such

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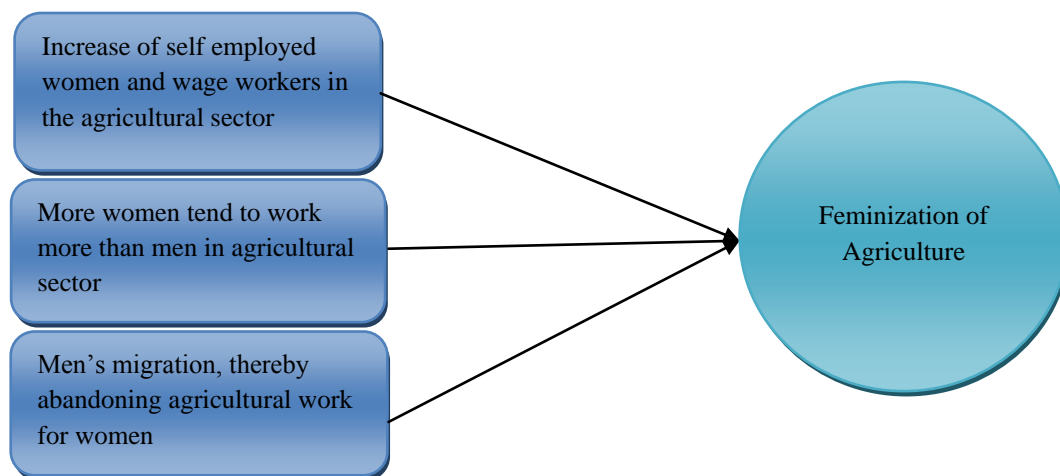
<sup>1</sup> Sarawak is one of the 13 States in Malaysia (Abdalan, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Anambra is one of the 36 States in Nigeria (Segun, 2008).

abandonment has led to increase in the tasks left for women in the farm, especially when the process requires some mechanization. Aside from men's migration, she included other causes of feminization of agriculture by providing two more definitions, which are stated below:

1. An increase in women's participation rates in the agricultural sector, either as self employed or as agricultural wage workers; in other words, an increase in the percentage of women who are economically active in rural areas.
2. An increase in the percentage of women in the agricultural labour force relative to men, either because more women are working and/or because fewer men are working in agriculture (Katz, 2003:31).

The diagram below illustrates the causes of feminization of agriculture by Katz:



Source: "*Feminization of Agriculture*" (Katz, 2003).

### Figure 1: Feminization of agriculture

#### Issues on Trend in the Feminization of Agriculture

One of the criticisms in the feminization of agriculture is lack of data and the most common criticism is the conflicts on how to interpret the available data (Reardon, 1995). According to Whitehead (2009), presently, the increase in women's participation in agriculture can be interpreted in several ways. One of the ways is that more women are working in the agricultural sector than they were previously. The second is that men are working less in the agricultural sector, and women have remained constant; thus, the number of women is rising. The third possibility is that neither has changed. Therefore, without accurate data, it is difficult to differentiate the regional trends from the universal (Ibid.). Whitehead further argued that the developing world is broad and poorly understood and it is likely that a trend affecting one region will not be applicable to another.

Other areas of critics in relation to the feminization of agriculture have been discussed by some past studies. For example, Makuo (2006) argues that though feminization of agriculture has shown women's ability in carrying out tasks in agricultural production, their involvement in cash crop has not yet shown that they are making enough income from their involvement. He added that this could be as a result of so many challenges they are facing, which may be in one way or the other limiting them from being successful either as an individual entrepreneur or collectively with their husbands or their extended family members.

Similarly, Braden (2006) who explains his view on the same issue contends that some women who engage in both food and cash crop production have also broadened and deepened their involvement, in order to increase their family's income. He further explains that they do this by increasingly shouldering the responsibility of their households' survival as well as responding to economic opportunities in the commercial agriculture. Braden concludes that these responsibilities can also limit them from becoming successful in their agricultural businesses, thereby reducing their individual or family's income.

Broadening the notion of feminization of agriculture, Von (2009), on the other hand, claimed that the trend in the feminization of agriculture is dangerous and leads to food insecurity. He stressed that women's involvement in agriculture, especially in cash crop production, is likely to influence local food availability in two ways;

One of the ways is that resources will be shifted from the growing of food crops, which is the major category women belong to in agriculture; thus, making food supplies in the local markets to decrease. Secondly, if female workers earn higher incomes from their cash crop productions, the income would be spent on food. Thus, local or community food supplies would decrease, while food demand increases. This will cause the prices of the local food to increase (Ibid.:44).

On the contrary, the findings of a past study by Razavi (2009) disputed the above view. Razavi highlighted that;

The increase of women in the agricultural production in relation to cash crop does not result to low availability of food crops or frequent increase in the prices of food as most women can be very multi-tasking, whereby they produce both food and cash crop at the same time; thus, making both available. It has also been a potential benefit to female farmers and the rural population to shift from local food production to export or cash crop production, because women's involvement in cash crop can transform a region from net importing to net exporting (Ibid.:30).

On the other hand, the study by Randolph (2008) argues that the involvement of women in cash crop cannot be an avenue of assurance for more food in the society, because most women usually produce on a low scale. Also, the increase of cash crop through women's involvement has been

one of the effects of adjustment packages in many Third World countries. This has been strongly resisted by a number of voluntary agencies under the Food First Banner (Ibid.).

However, Song (2007) also argues that whether national food availability is actually affected by cash crop production as a result of more women in the industry depends on the degree of competition for scarce resources. He further argues that involving of women in cash crop production does not increase its competition with national food availability; rather, the foreign exchange earned from cash crops produced by a nation will offer a potential increase to their national food availability. Similarly, some developing countries are encouraging the increased production of cash crops through women involvement in agricultural sector as a way to generate foreign exchange earnings and fiscal revenues, and this increases the income of women small-holders and the employment opportunity for the rural people (Barham, 2009). Another study suggested that countries should make an appropriate choice of policy to promote the production of export and cash crops for the domestic market (food and non-food) by involving more women in the cash crop production, in order to increase the economics of scale of the agricultural sector (James & Clarence, 2009).

Conversely, Holloway (2005) asserted that whether this potential increment for the improvement of food is actually realized as a result of the contributions of women in the cash crop agricultural sector will depend on national policies and other factors. Overall, it is certainly not assured that increasing of foreign exchange from exportation of cash crops products as a result of more women involvement will actually be used for food importation or for the acceleration of food production to maintain or increase the availability of food (Ibid.).

Even though this argument has become unnecessarily polarized, study by Sorby (2003) revealed that there was no stark dichotomy between food crops and cash crops when relating it on the increment of women's involvement in cash crop production. His argument revealed that many cash crops also serve as food crops. That is to say, the involvement of women in the cash crop industry can indirectly result to the increase of food for consumption. Sorby used a study conducted in Gambia to back up his argument. There, he reveals that they adopted groundnuts at the expense of their traditional food crops (i.e. millet and sorghum), but used some of that revenue to purchase rice to make up the shortfall in food provisions. Also, women often grow small amounts of groundnuts to supplement basic staple foods with peanut sauce (Ibid.).

Sorby's study also added that food crops do not always compete with cash crops as a result of women's involvement in the agricultural sector, especially cash crop, because both are sometimes complementary through intercropping<sup>3</sup> practices. In relation to the above argument, another study conducted in Northern Ghana by Krakue (2011) highlighted that if there was competition or food insecurity as a result of more women in the cash crop industry, then it was as a result of the unequal distribution of resources often at regional level, rather than increase in the

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<sup>3</sup>Intercropping simply refers to the cultivation of food and cash crops on the same farm land (Gabriel, 2010).

participation of women in the cash crop production. Krakue also added that women in the agricultural sector, especially those in the cash crop industry, have been increasing as well as their output, thereby leading to more exportation of cash crops like cocoa in Ghana.

### **Global Status and Perspectives on Women in the Agricultural Production of Cash Crop**

According to a study by Conley (2001), data have shown that women are active in the cash crop industry. They produce more than 50% of the cash crops grown worldwide. On the other hand, Jin (2009) argues that women's involvement, especially the tasks and roles they play in the production of cash crops like palm oil, cocoa, and rubber is still omitted in the statistics and surveys of most countries. It has also been discovered from a study by Buvinie (2000) that the roles women play in cash crop production and commercialization vary from country to country, and as such; their contributions and involvement may be hard to put down in black and white, due to these variations among nations. However, the same study by Buvinie claimed that in some developing countries, some available data have always shown the level of male contributions to the production and commercialization of different cash crops without including the statistics of women that are also involved. So, if the contributions of men can be assessed by researchers, those of women should also be assessed, in order to ensure equality between both genders (Ibid).

Another different view from Jason (2008) has showed that, in most cases, women small-holders are more increasingly responsible for small-scale food crop production with low levels of technology. He also added that even though men and women often have complementary roles in agriculture, the tendency remains for men to become more involved in this sector, especially when it is highly mechanized. As a result of this, women's contributions always remain insignificant in some of the available data in regard to their roles in cash crop production (Ibid.).

Barrientos (2003) argues against the earlier view from Jin on lack of data. He backed-up his argument by highlighting that, in Asia, women account for approximately 50% of cash crop production in the region, with considerable variation from country to country. For example, women account for 47% of the agricultural labour force in the Philippines, 54% in Indonesia and over 60% in Thailand (Ibid.). Also, in Southeast Asia, women play some vital roles in the production of cash crops like tea and rubber (Ibid.).

Another study conducted by Beneria (2007) in the Pacific also showed that women's participation in agriculture varies considerably. For instance, in Papua New Guinea where their population is overwhelmingly 87%, rural women comprise 71% of the agricultural labour force. They engage in the production of some cash crops like coffee and oil palm (Ibid.). Another study conducted by Don (2009) in Fiji shows that women account for 38% of the agricultural labour. According to his study, throughout the Pacific, women play prominent roles in food and cash crops production and marketing. Also, a study conducted by Asiebe (2006) showed that in the European Union, the percentage of the economically active population of women in agriculture ranged from 2.3% in the United Kingdom, 10.4% in Ireland and 4% in Slovenia.



Another study carried out by Dumebi (2008) showed that, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the rural population has been decreasing over the past few decades in the same proportion with female workers in agriculture. For example, 55% of the population was engaged in agriculture in 1990, only 25% worked in agriculture in 2007. On the other hand, Fletcher (2008) argues that in Latin America and the Caribbean, the percentage of female-headed households in cash crop production is increasing significantly, due to male migration, armed conflicts, abandonment and single motherhood. The same study also added that in some African countries like Ghana, where women have traditionally performed the majority of work in cash crop production, agriculture is becoming increasingly a predominantly female sector. Contrary to the above views, a recent study by Edon (2010) argues that women's contributions in the agriculture of some nations are still underestimated in their official data collection and censuses as most of them are mainly engaged in cultivating food crops and raising small livestock for domestic consumption.

### **Research Methodology**

Qualitative method was used to carry out this study. The use of qualitative method allowed greater spontaneity and adaptation of the interaction between the researchers and the respondents. For example, it enabled the researchers to ask mostly open-ended questions. The open-ended questions gave the respondents the opportunity to respond in their own words, and their responses had more in-depth meaning than simply 'yes or no' or 'agree or disagree' as it is in quantitative method (Nkwi, 2001).

Another reason for using qualitative method is that the use of open-ended questions and probing gives respondents the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses as quantitative method does (Ibid.). In addition, the open-ended questions used in this study helped to evoke responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to the respondents, unanticipated by the researchers, and rich and explanatory in nature.

The research instruments that were used to gather data for this study are interview<sup>4</sup> and observation. One of the reasons for using interview and observation is that they are optimal for collecting in-depth data on individuals' personal histories, perspectives and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored (Nkwi, 2001). In the case of Sarawak, face

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<sup>4</sup> The interviews were conducted in Sarawak with the help of two local research assistants, who helped to translate the questions and responses from English Language to Bahasa Melayu and vice versa. This helped the respondents to clearly understand the questions they were asked before answering them. The research assistants were selected based on their strong command for both English Language and Bahasa Melayu, which is Malaysia's official language. This was not a problem in Anambra, because Nigeria is an English speaking country.

to face interview was conducted, while in Anambra video interview was carried out with the use of 'Skype Video'<sup>5</sup>.

Interview and observation were also used, because they help to paint a picture of what happened in a specific event, tell researchers about the respondents' perspective of such event and also give other social cues (Nkwi, 2001). Social cues, such as; voice, intonation, and body language of the respondents gave the researchers a lot of extra information that was added to the verbal answers of the respondents. This level of detailed description (both verbal and non-verbal) gathered through the use of interview and observation shows a hidden interrelatedness between the emotions of the respondents and the events. In addition, the use of interview and observation in this study helped the researchers to easily inform the respondents whenever they need more examples or explanations from them. As a result of this, the researchers did not only learn about specific events, they also gained insight into the respondents' personal experiences, especially how they perceived and interpreted their perceptions, and how the events affected their thoughts and feelings (Ibid.). As such; the researchers clearly understood the process of an event, instead of what just happened and how the respondents reacted to it.

The population of this study is women small-holders in Sarawak and Anambra States' palm oil industries. However, non-probability sampling method, specifically purposive sampling was used to select a total of 32 respondents that represents the entire population; 17 in Anambra and 15 in Sarawak. The researchers arrived at this number of respondents in both research areas as a result of theoretical saturation<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, the population of this study is those that have been in the oil palm business for 4 years and above. The reason for this is because, based on what was discovered from a prior study, it takes most oil palm 3 to 4 years to produce their first Fresh Fruit Bunch (FFB) (Ameer, 2010). Thus, selecting respondents that have been in the business within this period of time simply means that they have more experience in the business compared to those that are few months or a year old in the business.

In Sarawak, the research population specifically includes Bidayuh and Iban women small-holders in the palm oil industry. It was discovered that these ethnic groups are regarded as natives in Sarawak, and as a result, they own more lands when compared to other ethnic groups

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<sup>5</sup> 'Skype video' was used to interview the respondents in Anambra, because it is user friendly and convenient. It provided a conducive environment, and as such; the respondents were devoid of any pressure. Thus, the respondents provided information freely and willingly. It also gave the researchers the opportunity to arrange for other interviews with the respondents whenever they need more information without flying back to Nigeria, especially when a new information is provided by the respondents from Sarawak. The use of this technique in Anambra was achieved with the help of two research assistants that were employed by the researchers.

<sup>6</sup> Theoretical saturation is a phase of qualitative research, whereby the researcher cannot predict at the onset of the study how many people or groups of people will need to be sampled during the entire study (Glaser, 1992). It is recognizable when the addition of further data yields no extra information to the properties of the categories already developed (Ibid.).



in the research area (Frederick, 2003). Consequently, this gives them more opportunity to be oil palm small-holders than others (Ibid.); thus, making them the right population for this study. These women include those that own their oil palm businesses collectively with their husbands, those that own the business solely such as widows, and those that manage the business in the absence of their husbands, due to their migration to other states or countries.

On the other hand, in Anambra, the research population is specifically women small-holders from the Igbo ethnic group. In the Igbo community, the involvement of women in oil palm business is like a tradition or culture (Ovieh, 2006). They have so much knowledge in regard to this research topic. One of the reasons is that many of them have been in the business helping their mothers from when they were still teenagers before they got married and started their own businesses in their matrimonial homes. They are always involved from the beginning of the cultivation of oil palm to its commercialization (Ibid.).

Some of these women do not only produce and sell oil palm fruits; they also produce and sell one of its associated products, palm oil. This is one of the obvious differences in their characteristics when compared to the research population in Sarawak. Another reason for focusing on women from the Igbo ethnic group is that Anambra is predominantly an Igbo community. The few non-Igbo in this community are government workers. They neither own lands nor engage in agricultural activities in the community (Felix, 2008). Unlike the respondents in Sarawak, in Anambra, the research population is the Igbo women small-holders, who run their businesses without their husbands. This category of respondents includes married women and widows. These women always inter-crop oil palm with other food or cash crops like cassava, maize, yam, and other legumes. The in-depth knowledge and experience they have in regard to this research topic makes them the right population for this study (Ibid.).

The study areas in Sarawak are specifically Bau and Serian. Bau is a district under Kuching division, while Serian is a district under Samarahan division (Geertz, 2008). Respondents from Bau are located at a village called Sirekin, while respondents from Serian are located in kampung<sup>7</sup> Turong, Kampung Tarat and Kampung Raeh. The major reason for choosing these areas is that the data from the pilot study conducted before the fieldwork showed that there are many oil-palm small-holders in both districts (i.e. Bau and Serian).

On the other hand, the study area in Anambra is Ihiala<sup>8</sup>. It is a city and one of the local governments located in Anambra State (Mba, 2009). It is also a local administrative capital of the zone and a local government to several towns; such as Azia, Okija, Mbosi, Iseke, Orsumoghu, Ubuluisuzor and Uli. It lies in the agricultural belt of the State. One of the major reasons for choosing Ihiala as a research area in Anambra is that it accommodates many women

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<sup>7</sup> A kampung is defined as a village in Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia (Geertz, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Even though Ihiala is a city or a local government, it is also a town on its own, meaning that it has a boundary between it and other neighboring towns like Azia, Okija, Mbosi, and Iseke (Mba, 2009).

oil palm small-holders (Ibid.). In a nutshell, the choice of these research areas in both Sarawak and Anambra enabled the researchers to easily gain access to the respondents and collect data that clearly reflects their opinions.

## **Research Results**

This section describes the demographic characteristics of the respondents of this study. It also assessed the tasks done by them and how they perform these tasks.

### **Demographic Characteristics**

In terms of Sarawak, the age distribution of the respondents showed that 40% of them were between 51-55 years, followed by 27% who were between the ages of 46-50. About 20% of the respondents were between 41-45 years, while 13% of them were between 56-60 years. On the other hand, in terms of Anambra, the age distributions of the respondents showed that 29.4% of them were between 56-60 years, followed by 17.6% who were between the ages of 51-55. Also, about 17.6% of the respondents were between 46-50 years, while 11.8% of them were between 31-35 years. About 11.8% of them were between 41-45 years, while 11.8% were between 61-65 years. The findings showed that the respondents from both Anambra and Sarawak comprises of both old and young people.

In terms of Sarawak, the findings of this study showed that the respondents are Ibans (60%) and Bidayuhs (40%). This shows that there are many women oil palm small-holders from both ethnic groups. On the other hand, all the respondents from Anambra are Igbos (100%). This is because; the state is dominated by the Igbo ethnic group.

In terms of Sarawak, the marital status distribution of the respondents showed that 93% of them are married, while only 7% is a widow. Similarly, in terms of Anambra, the marital status distribution of the respondents showed that 88.2% of them are married, while only 11.8% are widows. This is similar to the findings of the study conducted in Malaysia by Zeal in 2008. Zeal stated that “most women entrepreneurs are married, while few of them are single” (Zeal, 2008:67). This is because; most married women are able to get financial support from their husbands when starting their own businesses (Ibid.).

The academic qualifications of the respondents were quite well distributed across six categories. In terms of Sarawak, the findings of this study showed that 27% only have primary education, while 20% of them do not have formal education. A similar trend was observed by Terry (2004). In a study conducted in West Malaysia, Terry found that most female oil palm small-holders only have primary and informal education. Other respondents have University degree (20%), lower secondary education (13%), higher secondary education (13%), and only 7% has a diploma. On the other hand, in terms of Anambra, the findings showed that 35.3% only have primary education, while 23.5% of them do not have formal education. Other respondents have

lower secondary education (17.6%), higher secondary education (11.8%), and 11.8% of them have diploma.

In terms of Sarawak, 73.3% have been in operation between 4-10 years, while 26.7% of them have been in operation between 11 years and above. In contrast, in terms of Anambra, the findings showed that 88.2% of the respondents have been in operation between 11 years and above, while 11.8% of them have been in operation between 4-10 years. This shows that most of the respondents from Anambra have been in the oil palm business longer than those in Sarawak.

In terms of business ownership, 93.4% of the respondents from Sarawak own their businesses with their husbands, while 6.6% own their business alone. On the other hand, in terms of Anambra, though some of the respondents use their husbands' lands to plant their oil palms, 100% of them own their businesses alone.

### **Tasks Done By Respondents from Sarawak and Anambra and How They Perform Them**

This section shows how involved the respondents from both Sarawak and Anambra are in the production and commercialization of oil palm and palm oil. This was achieved by identifying the tasks they perform and how they carry them out.

#### **Buying and Planting of Oil Palm Seedlings**

Data collected in this study shows that buying and planting of oil palm seedlings is one of the tasks done by both respondents from Sarawak and Anambra. The finding shows that 53.3% of the respondents from Sarawak buy the oil palm seedlings and the same percentage admitted that they also do the planting. One of the respondents, Mrs. Rose<sup>9</sup> who is also a part-time teacher, explains her view in the above task;

I always follow my husband to purchase the seedlings and sometimes, I go alone in his absence. We buy the oil palm seedlings from a nursery company that has a license to sell it. After the transaction, we will be issued a receipt by the company. This receipt is very important, because we always present it to the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) when our fresh fruit bunches (FFB) matures. The reason for this is to get a license that will qualify us to sell our FFB to the mill. This process also applies to all the small-holders that use license to do their businesses. So, the receipt is a proof that we bought our oil palm seedlings from a nursery company that also has a license to sell the seedlings.

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<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that this is just a pseudo name. That is to say, it is not the real name of the respondent. This also applies to other names used to identify different respondents in this study. The reason for this is to protect the respondents from any form of problem that may arise if their real names were disclosed.

Overall, the data collected in this regard shows that the use of license is to enhance quality control. According to Omar (2011), Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) Licensing Regulations 2005 states that any person that moves, sells, purchases, exports, imports, stores, surveys or tests any oil palm product must be licensed. In issuing the license, MPOB imposes conditions and quality determinations to regulate trade and to promote quality practices to ensure that the products or services rendered is of the highest quality (Ibid.).

Similarly, the finding shows that 100% of the respondents from Anambra admitted buying of oil palm seedlings as one of their tasks. However, in contrast to the data collected on Sarawak, not all of the respondents in Anambra do the planting. Out of the 100% that admitted buying the oil palm seedlings as one of their tasks, 88.23% of them admitted that they also do the planting, while the remaining 11.77% (two respondents) do not do the planting after buying the seedlings.

Both respondents gave their reasons for not doing the above task. One of them, Mrs. Akuoma, who has been a small-holder for over 18 years, briefly states her reason below;

After buying the oil palm seedlings, I leave the planting task for my 5 female grown-up children that I trained on how to plant the seedlings. I only monitor what they are doing.

On the other hand, the other remaining respondent simply said that her relatives and few of her workers do the planting for her. From the data gathered during this study, there is a clear difference between what the respondents from Sarawak and Anambra said on how they carry out the task of buying oil palm seedlings.

Mrs. Akuoma's view was also used to represent the views of other respondents in relation to this process. She confidently said;

I do not think there is any company at all that needs to have a license before it can sell the seedlings. I do not buy mine from a company that has a license to sell them. As far as I am well convinced of the quality of the seedlings, I can buy them from any seller that has a better price. I and my friends who are also in this business usually buy the seedlings mainly from the markets. There you can see different sellers of different species of oil palm seedlings. So, all we need to do is to make a choice of the species, negotiate the price and then buy them. We are also not required to have a license before we can sell our oil palm fruits in the market after they have matured.

Aside from the planting of the purchased oil palm seedlings, the data collected shows that the respondents from Anambra also obtain their oil palm seedlings through the dispersal of animals, birds, water or flood, and drop and roll dispersal method. Mrs. Mgbakwo, who inter-cropped her few oil palms with cassava in one acre of land, narrated her experience below;

Sometimes, oil palm fruit will be dropped by birds or animals on my farm lands where I plant other food crops. I always discover these dispersed fruits after it has grown into seedlings and when this happens, I will start to take care of them by spraying manure around the root, in order to enhance the growth. However, in some cases, if I discover that the dispersed fruit is at the wrong place in the farm land, I will replant it in the appropriate place. Some of them are not always in a very good condition even after nurturing them. So, I only produce few good ones through this method. Whenever there is opportunity for this method, I only use it to support the good quality ones I bought from the market. Nonetheless, this is another way I use to save the cost of buying seedlings from the market.

### **Comparison on Harvesting of the Fresh Fruit Bunch (FFB)**

Based on the general view gathered from the respondents of this study, the proper time to harvest the FFB is twice in a week. Compared to 0% respondent from Anambra, this is one of the tasks done by 53.3% of the respondents from Sarawak. One of the respondents, Mrs. Tracy, narrated her experience on this task;

Sometimes, I join my husband to harvest the FFB. But, I always harvest the short oil palm. When harvesting the tall oil palm my husband has to look up, due to the height of the oil palm and then drag the FFB with the use of a harvesting tool (sickle). So, I consider the one I do less tedious, because the height of the oil palm that I always harvest is not high. Also, the harvesting tool I use is chisel, whereby I have to stand on the ground and push the FFB with the tool. One of the reasons why I carry out this task with my husband is to keep fit.

Below are other reasons mentioned by Mrs. Linda who also manages her business with her husband. She said;

If you fail to harvest the oil palm for a long time, the FFB will dry up or rot and there will be so many loose fruits. When there are so many loose fruits you may need to pay more workers to help you to do the picking, thereby increasing your cost of production. So, in order to avoid all these, I always join my husband to harvest, especially when there is scarcity of harvesters, for example, during the National holidays.

Contrary to the above views, data gathered for this study showed that 100% of the respondents from Anambra do not admit the aforementioned task among the ones they do. *It is against the culture and tradition for any Igbo woman to harvest FFB*, Mrs. Mgborie states. Unlike the view of the respondents from Sarawak, the data gathered showed that the method of harvesting of FFB is different in Anambra.

Mrs. Mgborie illustrated further on why women do not harvest FFBs and the method used by men to harvest them;

The harvesters (men only) climb the oil palm with *udo nkwu*<sup>10</sup> and cut the FFB with *mma-oge*<sup>11</sup>. But, as for the short oil palm, they stand on the ground to harvest it. It is considered as *Alu*<sup>12</sup> for any Igbo woman to climb the tall oil palm for harvesting or to stand on the ground and harvest the short oil palm. As a result of this, we always hire male workers, mostly young able-bodied men to do the harvesting, especially when it has to do with the harvesting of the tall oil palm, which they have to climb.

### Comparison on the Picking of Loose Fruits

Based on the general views gathered from this study, loose fruits are the oil palm fruits that fall off from the FFB. This can occur in two different ways; before and during the harvesting of the FFB. According to Mrs. Cynthia, a respondent from Sarawak;

Before harvesting, there may be loose fruits, especially when you fail to harvest the FFB on time, while during harvesting, this can also occur when you are harvesting FFB that is already ripe. The application of force during the harvesting of FFB can make some of the ripe fruits to fall off from the bunch.

Picking of loose fruit is one of the tasks that respondents from both research areas admitted that they do. In respect to how the loose fruits occur, 100% of the respondents from both research areas stated that *picking of the lose fruits can be done before and after harvesting*. In addition to the aforementioned views of the respondents, Mrs. Oge, a respondent from Anambra, shared her experience on this;

This task can be very tedious, though it does not require so much energy to do, but it can take lots of time if there are many loose fruits to pick. My children and I always go in search of loose fruits every week. This is because; not all my oil palms are planted at the same time on every acre of my land. Some are planted one year or some years before others. This means that all the oil palm in each acre of land cannot ripe or be harvested at the same time, and as a result of this, I always pick the loose fruit whenever it is necessary. Failing to carry out this task every week will not only result in wastage, but it will also reduce my earning, because the fruits will either be rejected by the buyers or they will price it very low, and I will have no choice but to sell it off below the intended price.

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<sup>10</sup> Udo nkwu is the name of a rope used in climbing the oil palm in Igbo language.

<sup>11</sup> Mma-oge is a big machete or cutlass.

<sup>12</sup> Alu simply means abomination in Igbo language.



Another reason given by a respondent from Sarawak (Mrs. Jonas), which is similar to the above view, is that;

Leaving the loose fruits without picking them can make them dry-up and this will reduce the weight or size of the fruits. The selling price depends on the weight, so if it weighs less, it will simply result in low profit.

### **Comparison on the Selling of Fresh Fruit Bunch (FFB) and Oil Palm Fruit**

Only 33.3% of the respondents from Sarawak admitted that they sometimes accompany their husbands to the mill to sell their FFB. According to the view from Mrs. Grace, a retailer of vegetables and fruits who always work with her husband in their oil palm farm during her spare time;

My husband and I always hire commercial truck to transport our FFB to the mill where it will be sold and during this time we do not follow the truck driver, because we always give him all the necessary information such as a copy of our license, which he needs to present to the mill. In a nutshell, the mill already has our details with them, so they will only need to confirm them and bank in the money for us into our account. The only time I accompany my husband to the mill is when we use our own private car (Hilux). This is only when we have few FFB to sell. So, this does not happen often.

Additionally, the findings of this study showed that 13.3% of the respondents from Sarawak admitted that aside from selling the FFB, they also sell the loose fruits. This is too low when compared to the 100% of the respondents from Anambra who also do similar task. Mrs. Grace, who also admitted that she does this task with her husband, stated that; *I always accompany my husband to the mill whenever we pick so many loose fruits, which sometimes amount to 50 kg.*

On the contrary, unlike the data gathered from the respondents in Sarawak, it was discovered through the findings of this study that 100% of the respondents from Anambra do not sell the fresh fruit bunch (*ogbe akwu*<sup>13</sup>); rather, they only sell the oil palm fruits (*mkpuru akwu*<sup>14</sup>), which comes out of the bunches.

### **Comparison on the Production and Selling of Palm Oil**

From the data that was gathered from this study, the production and selling of palm oil is another area where respondents from both research areas have difference in the tasks they do. As discussed earlier, respondents from Sarawak always sell the FFB at the mill. It was also gathered from the interview that they neither produce nor sell palm oil.

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<sup>13</sup> Ogbe akwu is the name of fresh fruit bunch (FFB) in Igbo language.

<sup>14</sup> Mkpuru akwu is the name of oil palm fruit in Igbo language.

On the other hand, aside from selling oil palm fruits, 88.2% of the respondents from Anambra also produce and sell palm oil. The data collected showed that the production of the palm oil takes place in their various houses, while the selling of the palm oil takes place in the village markets. Overall, the findings above shows that the respondents from both study areas have some similarities and differences in the tasks they do and how they are being carried out. Additionally, it shows that some of the tasks done by the respondents from Anambra are not done by the respondents from Sarawak and vice versa.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study examined and compared the tasks done by women small-holders in Sarawak and Anambra states' palm oil industries and how they perform these tasks. One of the major similarities in terms of the tasks done by respondents in Sarawak and Anambra states is the 'picking of loose fruits'. The findings of this study show that all the respondents (100%) from both Sarawak and Anambra do this task. The findings also show that 53.3% of the respondents from Sarawak buy their oil palm seedlings by themselves and the same percentage admitted that they also do the planting, while 100% of the respondents from Anambra admitted buying of oil palm seedlings as one of their tasks, but 88.23% of them admitted that they also do the planting. The remaining 11.77% of them seek help from their children and workers.

Also, compared to 0% respondent from Anambra, 53.3% of the respondents from Sarawak harvest their Fresh Fruit Bunch (FFB). Additionally, compared to 33% of the respondents from Sarawak who admitted selling of FFB as one of the tasks they do, none of the respondents from Anambra mentioned this as one of the tasks she does. Rather, they sell the fresh oil palm fruits after they have been stripped off or removed from their bunch. In other words, they only sell the fruits of the oil palm that have already been removed from the FFB.

Moreover, producing and selling of palm oil is another major difference shown in the findings of this study. It was found that 88.8% of the respondents from Anambra do not only produce or cultivate oil palms; they also produce and sell palm oil. Conversely, respondents from Sarawak neither produce palm oil nor sell it. Overall, given that respondents from Anambra extend their involvement in the oil palm industry to the production and selling of palm oil, one can conclude that they are more involved in the oil palm industry compared to the respondents from Sarawak.

Furthermore, even though the roles and tasks of these women small-holders are hardly mentioned or represented on states' economic or labour statistics, it is obvious from this study that they are clearly misrepresented. The tasks and roles of these women clearly indicate great involvement, and could easily be described as a movement towards feminization of agriculture (see Katz, 2003) in the research areas. Additionally, the earlier discussions in this study appear to collaborate with the findings of this study.

Lack of statistical data on small-holders is a major problem for researchers, policy formulation, and program development. Gender statistics on the characteristics and business practices of small-holders are necessary for informed decision making and researches. Government statistical offices and their partners, such as Malaysia Palm Oil Board (MPOB) and Nigeria Institute for Oil Palm Research (NIFOR), are key players in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating key information to the government, researchers, and the general public. Therefore, it is recommended that attention be paid to collect sufficient and detailed gender statistics on the small-holders of both states. This will help the government to develop policies that will equally favour the male and female small-holders in both states. It will also help researchers to easily access lots of information about women small-holders, thereby selecting their research samples randomly. This, in turn, will enable them to generalize their findings.

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