

# **Sarawak and Anambra States' Palm Oil Industries: A Comparative Study of the Challenges Faced by Women Small-Holders**

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**Abstract:**

**Background:** This study assessed and compared the challenges faced by women small-holders in 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 assessed the challenges faced by these women and how the challenges affect their businesses. **Materials and Methods:** 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.

**Results and Conclusion:** The findings of this study showed that the cultural difference between the research areas is one of the major reasons why the challenges they are facing differ. The findings also showed that respondents from Anambra face more challenges compared to those from Sarawak, and this negatively affects their businesses.

**Key Words:** Sarawak, Anambra, Palm Oil, Challenges, and Women Small-Holders.

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## **I. Introduction**

This study critically assessed the challenges faced by women small-holders in Sarawak<sup>1</sup> and Anambra<sup>2</sup> States' palm oil industries and how these challenges affect their businesses. As two important palm oil producing nations, Malaysia and Nigeria have come a long way in the industry. However, the challenges faced by women small-holders in Sarawak and Anambra and the effects of these challenges on their businesses have not been empirically examined by most past studies. In many instances, studies on oil palm like many other cash crops centers on men as the major producers, leaving out women as the major contributors towards the production of food crops (Mabel, 2008). This issue of focusing more on men's contributions towards the production of cash crop by most past studies is sufficient to create a social enquiry (Ibid.).

Studies have shown that women in cash crop production and commercialization always face lots of constraints (Ellis, 1998). For example, a study conducted by Asim (2007) in Papua New Guinea shows that women's contributions in cash crop production have been underestimated. Also, their contributions to cash crop sector are frequently overlooked, because most of their work is unpaid labour; either they are working on their family's oil palm farms or working with their husbands (Ibid.). However, none of these studies has clearly shown or discussed precisely the challenges faced by either the Sarawak or Anambra women in the production or commercialization of oil palm and palm oil. Thus, it is easy to agree with some of the earlier researchers, who argued on the existence of unspoken gender discrimination against women in cash crop among developing nations (Eade and Afshar, 2004).

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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).

Hill and Vigniril (2009) argued that these gender inequalities occur in different levels and methods of women's participation in terms of cultivating, producing and marketing of cash crops. They maintained that these negatively affect women's potential income in some of the high value cash crops like palm oil, rubber, and other crops they produce. It was also noted in the same study that the impact of gender specific constraints on the production and marketing of cash crops is enormous. Therefore, in order to bridge the research gap on this topic, this study critically assessed the challenges faced by women small-holders in Sarawak and Anambra States' palm oil industries and how these challenges affect their businesses.

## **II. Materials and Methods**

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>3</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 to face interview was conducted, while in Anambra video interview was carried out with the use of 'Skype Video'<sup>4</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>5</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.

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<sup>3</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.

<sup>4</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>5</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 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 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-igbos 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 (Geert, 2008). Respondents from Bau are located at a village called Sirekin, while respondents from Serian are located in kampung<sup>6</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>7</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 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.

### **III. Literature Review**

#### **Challenges Faced by Women Small-holders in the Cash Crop Industry:**

Some studies have thrown light on various challenges faced by women in agriculture, which are of different dimensions and magnitudes, owing to social and cultural differences. The gender discrimination that often prevails at all levels in many societies impact the sphere of women in different industries including the agricultural sector. The following sub-sections review different studies conducted on the challenges faced by women in the cash crop industry.

#### **1. Gender Segregation and Inequality**

According to Asiebe (2006), it is a common knowledge that gender inequality is one of the most pervasive forms of inequality, particularly because it cuts across other forms of inequality. However, critical elements for understanding the nature of gender inequality in different societies include; different rules, norms and values that govern gender division of labour and the gender distribution of resources, responsibilities, agency and power.

Another study also showed that some women are still left with a strong gender segregation of tasks in cultivating, processing, and packaging of some cash crop products (Sobere, 2007). What is more, the non-traditional and high-value agricultural export labour force, especially in cash crop production, is highly segmented and gender segregated. For example, men always do the mechanical tasks when it comes to the production of cash crops, while women are left to do the manual tasks (Ibid.).

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<sup>6</sup> A Kampung is defined as a village in Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia (Geertz, 2008).

<sup>7</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).

On the contrary, Dolan (2005) stated that some households in Indonesia use women workers for both manual and labour-intensive tasks associated with non-traditional and high-value agricultural cash crop production. Their reason is that such women are regarded as submissive and docile, thereby having greater dexterity for tasks that require care and patience.

Similarly, a study conducted by Rose (2008) also argues that despite gender segregation, women are still participating in cash crop. Her study also showed that, across the globe, women's direct participation in the production of cash crop products for global consumption has increased. Furthermore, their participations followed different paths on different types of cash crop, such as oil palm, cocoa, rubber, etc (Ibid). Also, in Mexico's central highlands where the key cash crop is maize, a study showed that in spite of high input costs, low prices for maize, and lack of support, which in a broader view means a low return, some women still produce different kinds of maize for export not really for income purposes, but to help make ends meet (Don, 2009).

According to Greal (2006), women's low participation in the national and regional policy-making, their invisibility in national statistics and low participation in extension services have made issues that concern them in cash crop to be neglected. Similar to the above view, Franklin (2011) who examined nine countries in Africa found that, while men are present in greater degrees in agricultural/rural organizations, women are often not represented in the higher levels of leadership. According to his study, the most striking example is in Zimbabwe, where despite the fact that women constitute 75% of the members in the Zimbabwe Farmers Unions only 5% of the officials are women.

Conversely, Adnond (2006) asserted that sharing of political power and decision-making between genders varies substantially from country to country and among different cultural and ethnic groups of different countries. He supported his argument with a country in Africa, Sudan, by stating that the largest number of women decision-makers is found in Sudan, where 14% of the office holders in agricultural co-operatives are graduate women. As a result of this, Adnond further argued that the issues women are facing in the cash crop industry are far from their absence in the policy making body. This is because; even with their presence in the policy making body they are still facing some other problems (Ibid.).

## **2. Fierce Competition Among Sellers**

It was indicated from a study conducted in Mexico by Edward (2009) that one of the challenges faced by female farmers, which include both the producers of food crops and cash crops is fierce competition among them. His study found that maize is one of the staple foods in the country, and as a result, there are a lot of women that produce and sell this. As such; there is fierce competition among the sellers. The above view agrees with one of the theories developed by Michael Porter, which is known as Porter's five forces. One of the forces is 'existing competitive rivalry between suppliers' (Porter, 1985). Porter's theory highlighted that the market is always competitive, especially among sellers that sell similar kinds of products or services.

## **3. Diversification and Lack of Focus**

Based on one of the strategic management theories (i.e. growth strategies) also known as Ansoff Matrix that was developed in the year 1957 by Igor Ansoff, who is known as the father of modern strategic management, "diversification consists of related and unrelated" (Ansoff, 1957:5). According to Ansoff, related diversification has to do with an organization going into another business line that is similar to its current business, while unrelated diversification has to do with an organization going into a completely different business (Ibid.).

In relation to the above view, some prior researches have proven that unrelated diversification is more risky than related diversification, because most organizations that engage in it may lack adequate experience in the new line of business (Donald, 2011). Nonetheless, diversification generally involves a lot of risk (Ibid.). This also agrees with the findings from Draco (2012), who discovered in his study that with the aim of meeting up with the family needs by increasing the family income, some households that are into agriculture tend to diversify into other non-agricultural businesses. As a result of this, most of them tend to lose focus in their agricultural businesses (Ibid.).

## **4. Lack of Land**

Studies have shown that female-headed households tend to have smaller landholdings than households headed by men, and their small lands are always less fertile and more distant from the homestead (Morrison, 2007). On the other hand, Gladwin (2009) argues that direct empirical evidence of the gender-disaggregated effects of land on the probability of producing cash crops has not been conducted in many countries, though a number of studies have found that households with smaller plots of land hardly engage women in acquiring a land. As a result of small plots of land acquired by some women in agriculture, most of them tend to find it difficult to produce in a large scale (Fafchamps, 2003).

Another study by Henstridge (2007) argues that one of the major problems women in the cash crop industry are facing is not mainly as a result of lack of land. He gave his reason by stating that most women are rarely in position of power, and as a result, they face more insecure property rights. On the other hand, men in position of power in the local political hierarchy have more secured land rights than women (Ibid.). Henstridge used examples from African countries, such as Benin Republic, Togo and Gabon to argue further. He further argued that some programmes and policies developed by most of these countries are far from addressing the main concerns of women. Most women small-holders are neither involved in the policy making decisions nor are they directly consulted to articulate their needs. Despite legislative and tenure changes in favor of small-holders, women continue to be placed in a disadvantaged position in terms of access to land (Holmes, 2009).

#### **5. Less Access to Labour**

A study conducted by Goetz (2008) argues that there is lower productivity on female plots compared to male plots within households. He further clarified his argument on this issue by stating that "labour tends to be more intensively applied on men's plots when compared to that of women". Similarly, Peterman (2010) found that female-headed households in Ethiopia have lower land productivity, due to insufficient access to male labour and oxen, and low substitutability among other factors of production.

Contrary to the above views, Quisumbing (2008) argues that in Ghana's Western region, land is being transferred from husband to wife if the wife helps the husband to establish cocoa fields. Also, the adoption of labour intensive cocoa farming increased the demand for women's labour in Ghana. However, Quisumbing added that the impact of this increased demand of labour needs to be looked into by researchers and discussed further, since it may cause an increase in the total working hours of women. Moreover, women in poor households face particularly serious time constraints, because of their various livelihood activities and childcare responsibilities (Ibid.).

#### **6. Less Access to Credit**

Overall, farmer's ability to obtain credit is often correlated with land tenure and agricultural productivity (Evenson, 2001). A study conducted by Doss (2009) shows that it may be difficult for a farmer whose land is not titled to obtain credit, and this is a common circumstance for many farmers. He added that getting credit may also be tied to the lender's perception of the farmers' ability to repay a loan. In this regard, to receive credit, farmers have to prove their ability to produce a marketable surplus, which in turn, is associated to the type and size of the land they work on (Bell, 1990). Therefore, since women have less quality land and are perceived as producing more for home consumption and less for the market, they may have a harder time obtaining credit when these criteria are employed. In addition, in some countries, institutional biasness towards providing financial services to the head of the household discriminates against women who are not head of the household (Vigneri and Holmes, 2009).

#### **7. Migration Theory**

At present, there is no single and coherent theory of migration, only a fragmented set of theories have been developed largely in isolation from one another, which are sometimes, but not always segmented by disciplinary boundaries (Douglas, 1993). Unlike other migration theories, the economics of migration theory by Stark (1986) showed that men's migration, which is one of the major causes of feminization of agriculture does not only occur as a result of individual decision to maximize more income. Rather, it is also a family and household's collective decision made not only to maximize expected income, but also to minimize risks and lessen the constraints associated with a variety of market failures, apart from those in the labor market.

Overall, the economics of migration theory shows that most men do leave their wife in charge of their agricultural business, in order to reduce the family risk of making a low income. They always achieve this by working mostly in another sector other than the agricultural sector in the urban areas or another country, in order to increase their family income. This is one of the reasons for the feminization of agriculture (i.e. increase of women in agriculture) in many countries (Ibid.), including Malaysia and Nigeria.

Stark also gave instances in relation to why the feminization of agriculture occurs through men's migration. According to her, occurrences of losses can make a man (husband) in a farm household to migrate to other cities or foreign countries, in order to increase the family income. For example, whenever a farm household puts time and money into sowing some cash crops, they are betting that the investment will pay off at a future date in the form of a product that can be sold for cash to purchase desired goods and services or which can be consumed directly for subsistence. In some cases, human or natural events may hinder them from achieving these goals by reducing their harvest, and leaving the family with insufficient income, thereby becoming unable to satisfy their basic needs. So when this happens, the man may agree with his wife to migrate where he can find a job that can help to sustain the family, so as to reduce the risk of low family income, while leaving the wife to continue with the farming. This results to the feminization of agriculture (Ibid.).



**Figure 1:** Economics of Migration Theory

**Source:** “*Economics of Migration Theory*” (Stark, 1986).

#### **IV. Results and Discussions**

This section describes the demographic characteristics of the respondents of this study. It also assesses the challenges faced by women small-holders in Sarawak and Anambra States' palm oil industries and how these challenges affect their businesses.

##### **1. 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 Bidayus (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.

##### **2. Challenges Faced by the Respondents from Sarawak and Anambra and the Effects on their Businesses**

This section examined and compared the challenges faced by the respondents from Sarawak and Anambra states, and the effects of these challenges on their businesses.

###### **2.1 Comparison on the Inability of Women to Harvest FFB and its Effects**

Harvesting of the FFB by any Igbo woman is an abomination. Thus, compared to 0% respondents from Sarawak, this has been a very big challenge to 100% of the respondents from Anambra, both the young and the old. Some of them, especially the younger ones lamented bitterly during the interview that they have the energy to do the harvesting, but the customs of the land do not allow them to do this. From their overall views, one of

the ways this challenge affects their businesses is by increasing their labour cost. All of them said that they are always faced with lots of losses as a result of so many dry oil palm fruits whenever there is shortage of harvesters; thus, resulting to low profit margin.

Another overall effect of this challenge discovered from the respondents was that they are always left with doing a lot of loose fruits picking. According to them, picking of these loose fruits is labour demanding and time consuming. They claimed that it requires lots of bending, squatting, and standing-up repeatedly. Some, especially the older ones, also mentioned that after doing this task, they feel very fatigue and sick. As a result of this, sometimes, they employ and pay more workers to help them out; thus, increasing their labour cost.

On the other hand, the above issue contradicts with the views of all the respondents from Sarawak, because they can harvest the FFB.

## **2.2 Comparison on Migration of Men and Scarcity of Labour and their Effects**

Data gathered from this study showed that migration of men from the rural to urban area or another country is one of the challenges that respondents from both research areas are facing. Compared to 47% of the respondents from Anambra, only 13.3% respondents from Sarawak admitted this issue as one of the challenges they are facing. One of the respondents from Sarawak, Mrs. Sandra<sup>8</sup>, who is managing her oil palm business alone as a result of her husband's migration, shared her view regarding this challenge and how it affects her business. Below was her view:

My husband migrated to the capital city, Kuala Lumpur, in search of a better job since 2 years ago, shortly after we started our oil palm business, thereby leaving me with our 4 children in the Village. Owing to the fact that it takes oil palm a minimum of 3 years to mature before one can harvest and sell the FFB, my husband decided to leave for the city to generate more income for the family. He could not withstand the long time oil palm takes to mature. One of the ways that this challenge affects my oil palm business is that it increases my cost of labour. For example, I pay more workers to assist me and the children in doing some of the tasks like spraying, harvesting, etc. The cost of labour would have been less if my husband were around to perform some of the tasks with us.

The above view agrees with the view of Stark (1986). Stark argued that one of the major causes of feminization of agriculture is men's migration from the rural areas to cities within their countries or other countries; hence, abandoning agricultural work for more lucrative occupations. Such abandonment has led to the increase of tasks left for women in the cash crop production.

On the other hand, 47% of the respondents from Anambra admitted that they have the same issue, but with some differences compared to the view of the respondents from Sarawak. In the case of their differences, the data that was gathered from them on this issue does not relate to their husbands' migration; rather, the workers especially harvesters. As mentioned earlier, 100% of the respondents from Anambra do not harvest the FFB, and this makes the issue of men's migration to be more serious to them. One of the respondents, Mrs. Ikpe, lamented that:

This issue of men's migration always creates shortage of labour among the small-holders in this village. For example, most of the young boys that do the harvesting job for me have migrated to cities like Abuja- the capital city, Lagos, Onitsha, etc. in search of a better job, thereby leaving me with few inexperienced harvesters. When there is a shortage of labour as a result of the migration of harvesters, the FFB will start to dry up or rot. The major effect of this challenge on my business is that when most of the harvesters migrate to the cities, the remaining ones always increase the price they charge for harvesting the FFB knowing that we have no other alternative (*she hissed*), because culture and tradition forbid us from harvesting the FFB. So, this increases my labour cost.

It was also noted from the data collected in this study that, aside from the fact that the scarcity of labour is one of the ways that the issue of men's migration affects 6.6% of the respondent from Sarawak and 100% from Anambra, some of the respondents still claimed that there is always scarcity of labour even without men's migration. In addition, the findings showed that 33% of the respondents from Sarawak admitted that the scarcity of labour is among the challenges they are facing, with or without men's migration. A specific view from Mrs. Agnes, whose husband did not migrate, was as follows:

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<sup>8</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.

Sometimes, during the national holidays, most of the workers do not come to work even though they are aware that they are not going to be paid for their absence and sometimes most of them will take an unexpected leave. So, when all these happen, there will be scarcity of labour. The major effect of this is that it reduces my productivity and that of my husband, because we find it difficult to complete our daily tasks during such periods, especially when we have much work to do in the oil palm farm.

Similar to the above view, compared to 33% of the respondents from Sarawak, 76.47% of the respondents from Anambra also admitted scarcity of labour as one of the challenges they are facing. Below is a specific view from one of the respondents, Mrs. Ocha, who also faces the above challenge:

When there are lots of loose fruits as a result of scarcity of labour, my production cost increases. This is because; whenever there are many loose fruits, I always hire and pay a lot of temporary workers to do the picking. Sometimes, some of the women workers that work in my oil palm farm and those that help me to produce palm oil will not be present at work, because they are engaged with some house chores and meetings. How these affect my business is that when there is shortage in the number of women that help me in doing tasks in the oil palm farm, such as picking of the loose fruits, the loose fruits will get spoilt. When this happens, the selling price of the oil palm fruit will be reduced, due to their poor quality. Also, the effect of labour scarcity in relation to the women that help me to produce the palm oil reduces the quantity of the palm oil that I produce. The reason for this is because; the production of palm oil can be very tedious. Therefore, in order to produce large quantity, it requires more workers.

Another view from Mrs. Okoye, who does not only cultivate oil palm, but also produces palm oil, can be found below:

When some of my female skilful workers who have good knowledge and techniques on how to produce palm oil are pregnant, especially during the late months of their pregnancy, they always find it difficult to come to work. The effect of this on my business is that it makes me less productive.

### **2.3 Comparison on Lack of Adequate Technology and Cheating by Buyers and their Effects**

The use of many outdated technologies and machine is also another issue that respondents from Anambra pointed out as one of the challenges they are facing. In terms of them being cheated by the buyers, 35.2% of them admitted that their buyers cheat them with their local way of weighing the oil palm fruits when they want to sell them in the market. Mrs. Okori, who always sells her oil palm fruits at one of the markets (i.e. *NkwoOgbe*), narrated one of her usual encounters:

The weighing scale used by the buyers to measure the oil palm fruits is a locally made basket (i.e. *Nkata/Ekete*). The size of this locally made basket is never reliable, because it expands or shrinks when it gets older. This gives customers the room to cheat. They do this by using expanded baskets to purchase oil palm fruits from sellers like me. I do not have any choice but to sell to them, because if I do not do so, they will easily buy from other sellers in the market.

Comparatively, unlike 35% of the respondents from Anambra, all the respondents from Sarawak claimed that they do not get cheated whenever they want to sell their FFB at the mill, because they use a reliable weighing machine. Another area where outdated machines and technology is a problem to the respondents from Anambra is in the cultivation of the oil palm and the production of palm oil. Out of the views from 94.11% of the respondents that admitted this challenge as one of their major challenges, Mrs. Mgbeke's view was used to represent other remaining respondents, whose views were similar to hers. Below was her remark:

We still use cutlasses and hoes to clear the bushy land before planting the oil palm. We also use small hoes to weed. Our harvesters always climb the tall oil palm trees with ropes and they use cutlass to cut the FFB. In the case of producing the palm oil, the whole process is still not mechanized. For instance, I cook the fresh oil palm fruit with fire wood then pound it



using mortar and pestle<sup>9</sup>. During the time to press out the palm oil, after removing the palm kernel, I use hands to squeeze out the oil from the chaff.

The use of these outdated machines and tools reduce my productivity in terms of the cultivation, maintenance, and production of the palm oil, because my workers and I easily get tired while using them. For instance, my workers and I always find it difficult to clear a large portion of land within a short period of time. It has also not been easy for the harvesters to harvest a lot of FFB in one day by climbing the oil palm. Additionally, due to the tedious processes of the production of palm oil as a result of the usage of outdated machine, I produce low quantity of palm oil, thereby making less profit.

In contrast to the above views, the aforementioned challenge was not discovered from the respondents from Sarawak, because they do not produce palm oil. The findings also showed that they spray more weedicides compared to the respondents from Anambra who use hoes to weed.

#### **2.4 Comparison on the Issue of Agricultural Subsidies and its Effects**

It was discovered in this study from 33% of the respondents from Sarawak that small-holders with few acres of land like 1-5 acres are eligible to obtain government's subsidies, and this includes; the oil palm seedlings, cost of cultivating them, other maintenance and labour cost in regards to their oil palm farm until their oil palm is matured to be harvested. This means that they will keep on getting these subsidies until three years, which is when the oil palm is expected to mature for the first time before they will stop getting these subsidies. However, a view from the above 33% respondents showed that it always takes a long time to get the aforementioned subsidies. More light was thrown on this issue by one of the respondents, Mrs. Agnes, who has been in the business for 6 years with her husband. She explained that:

The approval of the subsidies always has to pass through some of the regional heads for approval. Sometimes, it may take 3- 4 years for one to get this kind of huge subsidies. It is a lot easier for a group of small-holders to come together, apply and get the subsidies than for a single individual or husband and wife to do that. For instance, my husband and I faced this challenge when we wanted to start up our business as small-holders. We started with 3 acres of land and it took us 3 years to get the government subsidy.

Another respondent, Mrs. Grace, who plants oil palm together with her husband on 2 acres of oil palm land and have been in the business for 7 years, added that:

My husband and I waited for the subsidy for over two years and when we could not wait any longer we put our savings together, including some financial assistance we got from our parents and started to cultivate our 2 acres of oil palm farm.

The views from this 33% respondents from Sarawak showed that the effect of this issue on their businesses is that it makes them not to venture into the business on time, thereby delaying their opportunity to start making profit and benefiting from the business. It also limits the growth of their businesses.

On the contrary, from the data that was gathered from 100% of the respondents from Anambra, the above issue is worst to them. Mrs. Ada, one of the respondents whose view on this issue tallies with the views of other respondents that admitted this as one of their challenges, stated that:

We do not get agricultural subsidies at all, let alone huge ones. The effect of this challenge is that it limits us from producing large quantity of oil palms and palm oil.

#### **2.5 Comparison on the Exploitation of Widows and its Effects**

The findings showed that women from the Igbo community do not inherit lands; they normally plant their oil palms on their husbands' lands. In some cases, this issue is worse, especially when a woman becomes a widow. Out of all the respondents from Anambra, who were interviewed during this study, the views from two widows showed that they are being exploited by their dead husbands' kinsmen in relation to land disputes. One of them, Mrs. Ofoegbu, lamented bitterly:

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<sup>9</sup> According to the views of the respondents from Anambra, mortar is a round and deep carved wood where the oil palm fruit is poured into, while the pestle is a vertical long carved wood, which is used for pounding the cooked oil palm fruit in the mortar to extract the palm oil.

I used to plant my oil palm in 2 acres of land own by my dead husband. One of the lands is within the house premises, while the other one is very far from our house and that was the land my husband inherited from his father. After my husband died three years ago, this land was on dispute for over one year. One of my dead husband's kinsmen connived with his fellow kinsmen to take away from me the land, which is far away from my house. After one year of the land dispute, injustice was passed by their chief head and they took away the land from me including all the oil palms I had in it. I now only have 1 acre of land where I plant my oil palm with other food crops. I planted more oil palms in the land they took from me compared to the 1 acre I have at home. This is a big challenge for me, because it has reduced the amount of oil palm fruit I produce, and as a result, I am not making enough profit from this business any more.

The other widow, Mrs. Oji, who is also a victim, told her short story below:

I have 2 acres of lands that are still on dispute, since the death of my husband and I still cannot tell my fate, until the last day when the head of the kinsmen will pass his final judgment. Though, the way I am seeing it, it is unfortunate that so many men are already at the side of my opponent.

Contrary to the above views from the two widows, such issue was not discovered from the only widow among the respondents from Sarawak. Overall, the findings above showed that the respondents from both study areas have some similarities and differences in the ways they face all the challenges identified in this study. Additionally, a lot of challenges faced by the respondents from Anambra were not faced by the respondents from Sarawak.

## **V. Conclusion**

This study critically assessed the challenges faced by women small-holders in Sarawak and Anambra states' palm oil industries and how these challenges affect their businesses. The findings showed that the research area in Anambra (Ihiala) is more patriarchal compared to those in Sarawak (Bau and Serian). For instance, 94.11% of the respondents from Anambra admitted that they cannot inherit lands; consequently, they find it difficult to acquire loans from the bank, since it is always used for collateral. On the other hand, none of the respondents from Sarawak see this as a challenge. Based on the fact that land inheritance by women is not against the culture or tradition of Sarawak, as the data collected shows, all of them admitted that they can inherit lands.

Obtaining agricultural subsidies is another area that the research areas have some differences. The findings of this study showed that 33% of the respondents from Sarawak complained that obtaining agricultural subsidies always takes a long time. As a result of this, some of them could not start their oil palm business on time, while some of them gave up on the subsidies after waiting for so long. This case is different from the views of the respondents in Anambra as none of them admitted to obtaining agricultural subsidies. These respondents stated that they do not get agricultural subsidies at all, let alone huge ones. They also claimed that this is a huge challenge to them, because it prevents them from producing large quantity of oil palms and palm oil. Overall, the findings of this study showed that respondents from Anambra face more challenges compared to those from Sarawak, because of the differences in their cultures.

Furthermore, based on the findings of this study and the literature reviewed, the following recommendations are made to promote and encourage women small-holders in Sarawak and Anambra states' palm oil industries:

1. In the case of Anambra, even though culture deprives the respondents of some of their rights and opportunities, government can still help them by providing them with some assistance like agricultural subsidies. On the other hand, in the case of Sarawak, the governmental body that is in charge of approving all the necessary documents for agricultural subsidies should reduce the unnecessary bureaucracy involved in the process. In other words, they should try to grant applicants approval on time, in order for them to start their oil palm businesses as soon as possible. Also, given that most of the respondents in Anambra claimed that they find it difficult to obtain loans from banks, government should assist them by providing them with financial support. This will help to increase their productivity and profitability.

2. Government should help small-holders to improve the tools they use in the cultivation and production of oil palms and palm oil, so that they can become more productive. This will also help to reduce the stress of

Anambra women small-holders, who produce palm oil by pounding the cooked oil palm fruits with mortar and pestle and squeezing out the palm oil with their hands.

3. 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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