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Constraints of Oil Palm Production in Ife Central Local Government Area of Osun State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT The study investigated the constraints militating against oil palm production in Ife central Local Government Area (LGA) of Osun State, Nigeria. Specifically, it determined the proportion of tree crop growers that were involved in the cultivation of oil palm**.** The survey was carried out in eight selected villages in Ife central LGA. Information which were elicited from 102 farmers using structural interview schedule were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Majority (92.9%) of the farmers growing tree crops were producing oil palm in wild state. Lack of land, fund and inadequate information about oil palm cultivation were the major problems confronting the farmers. Therefore, the farmers should be encouraged to form cooperative societies to solve the tripartite problems.

INTRODUCTION

The oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) is one of the important economic crops in the tropics (Anyawu et al., 1982). Oil palm locally called "Nkwu" (Igbo) and "Ope"(Yoruba) in Nigeria is native to West African humid tropics, the Congo basin and central Africa, growing wild in secondary forest (Ugochukwu et al., 1999, Akinyosoye, 1976). Researches have established that oil palm trees do better on plantation farms when planted on a deep, slightly acidic loamy soil with pH 5 – 6; under a climatic condition: humid tropics with 250cm rainfall well distributed; and long hours of light. It is mainly propagated by seed through pre-nursery and field nursery practices (Ugochukwu et al., 1999). It is the most important source of vegetable oil of all oil-bearing plants, it is the highest yielding. It has overtaken coconuts in the export field. At the present time, the oil palm exists in a wild, semi- wild and cultivated state in the three land areas of the equatorial tropics, Africa, South East Asia and America (Hartley, 1988).

International Potash Institute (1957) identified the principal product of oil palm to be the palm fruit, which is processed to obtain three commercial products, which include palm oil, palm kernel oil and palm kernel cake. The uses of oil are many and varied (Adegbola et al., 1979). Locally it is used for cooking, soap making and lamp oil. It is also used in metal plating. The palm kernel oil however, is used for soap making, as a source of glycerine, for manufacturing of margarine, cooking fats and for making pomade. The residue after extraction of oil is called palm kernel cake, which is useful in livestock feeding. Komolafe, *et al* (1990) outlined that the leaves of oil palm are used for making brooms and for roofing materials. The thicker leaf stalks are used for walls of village huts. The bark of the palm frond is peeled and woven into baskets. The main trunk (tree) can be split and used as supporting frames in buildings. A sap tapped from the female flower is drunk as palm wine, which is a rich source of yeast. The palm wine can be allowed to ferment and then distilled into a gin locally known as "Akpetesin" in Ghana and "Ogogoro" in Nigeria (Akinyosoye, 1976). This local gin is still popular among the traditionalist as this now form the major intoxicant being used during sacrifice and ceremonies. The empty fruit bunch, the shell and fibre that remain after oil extraction are used for mulching, manuring and as fuel.

Hartley (1988) stated that Nigeria lost her foremost place in oil exports to Zaire and regained it only temporarily in 1964-1965. This has been lost to Malaysia as the largest oil palm producer in the world today because of her commitment to oil palm plantation production. Even in Nigeria today, the greatest bulk of oil palm and palm kernels is not derived from the cultivated oil palm but the groves of palms growing wild, often in a state of semi cultivation (International Potash Institute, 1957). However, plantations available in Nigeria include an area of over 1,600 hectares

of oil palm research station near Benin (Hartley, 1988), Okitipupa oil mills with over 12,088 hectares and Okomu oil contemplating acquisition of about 900 hectares among others (Guardian, 1996).

Ife Central Local Government Area (LGA) was perceived to be agriculture dependent locality. But, it was observed that despite the importance of oil palm and its products, and its position in the world trade, its plantation in small, medium or large scale has not been adopted by farmers in the area. Rather, the oil palm produces from the area are derived from the wild. Therefore this study seeks to investigate the constraints militating against plantation oil palm production in Ife Central LGA.

Specific Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives are to:

1. determine the proportion of tree crop farmers that are involved in the cultivation of oil palm.
11. identify the problems inhibiting farmers from cultivating oil palm;
111. identify the various processing methods of oil palm in the study area; and
1V. examine the various uses of oil palm product in Ife Central LGA.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Ife Central LGA of Osun state. Eight villages and one hundred and two farmers were selected using simple random sampling techniques. Information were elicited from the farmers using structural interview schedule, on the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers, problems inhibiting oil palm plantation, method of oil production and uses. Key informant interviews of the head of the villages were also carried out to elicit information on the fundamental problems still persisting after the social survey.

The data were collected in the months of January through February, 1997. The key informant interview was conducted between February and April 2003 to ascertain any significant changes in the fundamental problems since 1997 when the first survey interview was conducted. The key informant interview served as basis of confirmation of status quo in relation to oil palm plantation farming in the study area. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Type of Crops Produced

Data in Table1 show the type of crops produced by farmers. The farmers that engaged in tree crops production were 85 (83.3%) while 16.7% of them engaged in annual crops production only. Majority of the farmers between (60 – 65%) are involved in the production of tree crops such as cocoa (89.4%); citrus (67.1%); and kolanut (65.9%). Scattered about within the citrus, cocoa, and kolanut plantations are the oil palm trees that grow from the wild. Most farmers here produced tree crops more than annual crops because most tree crops are important economic and export crops. This is in line with the findings of FAO (2002) that tree crops such as oil palm (Elaeis guineensis), cocoa (Theobroma cacao), rubber (Hevea braziliensis), and protected economic woody plants are grown in plantations or in multistorey associations with root and tuber crops in the humid forests of West and Central Africa.

State of Oil Palm Production

Data in Table1 revealed further that out of the farmers producing oil palm, none of them was involved in growing oil palm on plantation bases but majority (100%) were producing oil palm in its wild groves state. Since the majority of the farmers were having wild oil palm grooves, it therefore implies that there should be some underlying factors preventing the farmers from cultivating oil palm. FAO (2002) revealed that

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by type of crops grown

Crops	*F*	*%*
Type of crops grown		
Tree crops	85	83.3
Arable crops	17	16.7
Type of Tree Crops Grown		
Cocoa	76	89.4
Citrus	57	67.1
Rubber	-	-
Coffee	-	-
Oil Palm	79	92.9
Kola	56	65.9
State of oil palm cultivation		
Groves	79	100
Plantation	-	-

besides the farm where oil palm tree is cultivated to produce palm fruits for palm oil industry, there are also wild grooves of oil palm which grow untended in the forest, found in clusters and are mainly the result of natural seed dispersal of Dura, the main variety found in the grooves. This report confirmed that apart from the study area, wild groves of oil palm are also present in many parts of Central and West Africa.

Problems Inhibiting Oil Palm Cultivation

Data in Table 2 show that land is the major factor limiting oil palm cultivation. Majority (81%) of the farmers were confronted with the problem of land, 34.2% had fund problems, 5.1% claimed that they faced climatic problems while 53.2% complained of inadequate information and cultivation knowledge about oil palm. About 54% of the farmers indicated the problem of improved planting materials and government support whereas none of the farmers had marketing and processing technique problems. It could be deduced that extension contact and activities with the farmers in the study area was still at minimal level.

Even though there was lack of deliberate extension efforts towards oil palm cultivation except documentary programmes on oil palm relayed on radio and television occasionally by the Nigeria Television Authority. However, group discussions and the key informant interview revealed other fundamental problems such as:

(i) tenure-right which is mostly tenancy-right through leasing and rent. All these did not allow tenant to cultivate new oil palm plantation. Since land in the study area is communally owned and also shared among community or family members, land acquisition through inheritance is the order of the day. In this situation, farm size become very small, thus prevent oil palm plantation. Tenant in this area can only grow food/annual crop.

(ii) Attitude of land owners to farming is negative because of the drudgery involved. And that most of them inherited the oil palm wild grooves from their parent which now serves as source of quick and regular income.

(iii) Long period of maturity of oil palm trees. Since land or wild palm grooves had been fragmented due to inheritance, it becomes very difficult to open up new land which is unavailable for oil palm plantation; and

(iv) Regular communal crises- that always bring about wanton destruction of houses, farm for instance, setting of cocoa plantation, oil palm grooves and houses on fire did not encourage farmers to cultivate oil palm plantation.

These findings are in support of FAO (2002) which reported that in most parts of Africa the farm culture is basically subsistence where the family cultivates a small plot for food needs and interplant tree crops. The farm holdings are small and scattered because the land tenure system does not permit large scale farming unless the government steps in to acquire the land for public use. Thus it is difficult to think of one family owning a large contiguous estate suitable for plantation. Akintibubo (2002) discovered that persistent crisis in the study area resulted to revocation of usufructural right on land; low yield of agricultural produce generally; and mass destruction of tree crops plantations. These findings perhaps may be responsible for non-existence of oil palm plantation in the study area. However, contrary to this, Oke (2002) revealed that majority of farmers in Egbedore LGA had oil palm plantation covering an average of three hectares of land. This is possible probably because the area is crisis free.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by problems inhibiting oil palm cultivation

Problems	*F*	*%*
Fund	27	34.2
Land	64	81
Inadequate information and cultivation knowledge	42	53.2
Lack of improved planting materials and government support	43	54.4
Marketing and processing techniques-		-
Climate	4	5.1
Others	-	-

*Multiple choice

Methods of Processing Oil Palm Products

Of the farmers producing oil palm, 40.5% lease out their oil palm for processing, while 59.5% were involved in processing their oil palm products personally (Table 3). None of the farmers made use of hand operated press and power operated mill. But all personal processors (59.5%) adopted traditional processing methods. Most farmers were poor and cannot afford hand-operated press; hence the output at single processing would always be minimal since it involved only

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by method of processing of oil palm

Method	*F*	*%*
Traditional processing	47	59.5
Hand operated press	-	-
Power operated mill	-	-
Lease out	32	40.5

manual labour. This is supported by findings of Oke (2002) that majority of palm oil processors adopted traditional technique of production in Egbedore LGA in a derived savannah area of Osun State in Nigeria.

Personal Characteristics of Respondents

The personal characteristics of the farmers such as age, sex, marital status and farming experience were considered important because of their impact on agricultural productivity.

Age: Data in Table 4 show that majority of the farmers (24.5%) were between 31 and 40 years of age, 23.5% fall between 41 and 50 years of age, while 21.6% were between 51 and 60 years age range. However, about 21% of respondents were between 61 and 70 years of age, 7.8% were between 71 and above years whereas about 2% were under 30 years of age. Most farmers (69.6%) were in their active period (between 31 and 60 years) when they can put in the most active part of their life for increased agricultural productivity.

Sex: Data in Table 4 also show that majority (79.4%) of the respondents were males, while about 21% were females. This is not surprising as more women venture into crop production daily for empowerment. In addition, death of husband and migration in search of greener pasture turned most of the women head of the household who takes care of the family farms and homes.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by personal characteristics

Characteristic	*F*	*%*
Age in years		
Below 30	2	1.9
31 – 40	25	24.5
41 – 50	24	23.5
51 – 60	22	21.6
61 – 70	21	20.6
71 and above	8	7.8
Sex		
Male	81	79.4
Female	21	20.6
Marital Status		
Single	12	11.8
Married	85	83.8
Divorced	3	2.9
Widowed	2	1.9
Farming Experience in years		
Below 10	15	14.7
11 – 12	29	28.4
21 – 30	20	19.6
31 – 40	22	21.6
41 – 50	16	15.7

Marital Status: Most of the respondents (83.3%) were married, 11.8% were single, while 2.9% were divorced and about 2% were widowed (Table 4). This implies that agriculture was very much practised by married people to make ends meet and cater for their children.

Farming Experience: Data in Table 4 further reveal that most of the respondents (28.4%) had 11-20 years of farming experience. About 20% had between 21-30 years of experience, 21.6% had between 31 and 40 years of experience, whereas 15.7% and 14.7% had 41-50 years and below 10 years of faming experience, respectively. Such farmers of so many years of farming experience are expected to go into oil palm plantation on very large scale but for the fundamental constraints identified.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the farmers were in charge of oil palm existing in the wild groves. Most farmers willing to cultivate oil palm were handicapped by various problems such as lack of funds, inadequate information and cultivation knowledge while lack of land was the major problem.

It is therefore recommended that extension workers should intensify efforts to educate the farmers on improved oil palm production management practices. Farmers should be encouraged to form cooperative societies to solve the tripartite problems of inadequate information and cultivation knowledge about oil palm, lack of funds and lack of land, by pooling their resources together. These groups could also be used as targets, mediums and agents of change.

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