

The Role of Agriculture in the Economic Empowerment of Women in the Ejisu Juaben Municipality in the Ashanti Region of Ghana

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Abstract

Agriculture has been the main pillar of Ejisu Juaben Municipality's development contributing to the development of industry and all other sectors of its economy. Women are the most important actors in food chain beginning from production, marketing and intra household distribution of food as well as other post harvest activities. Women therefore remain the centre-piece of food security in the Municipality.

This notwithstanding, women in agriculture in the Municipality has limited access to resources than their male counterparts. These are in the areas of access to credit, agricultural extension services, land, market among others. The Study found out that all these limit the women's ability to increase their productivity and hence income. The Study therefore concludes that there is the need to reconsider issues of land tenure system, access to and control over productive resources such as credit and extension services. As these factors combine to either enhance and/or restrain their economic empowerment, the Study proposes that addressing such challenges will in the short to medium and long term improve upon their household, municipal and national food security.

Keywords: Agriculture, Empowerment, Women Empowerment, Women's Economic Empowerment, Women in Agriculture

1. Introduction

Empowerment is both a process and an outcome. Depending on how it is used, the two are indistinguishable. Empowerment has for the most part remained rooted in the local communities, in the needs of the 'poorest of the poor' especially women. Women's empowerment is therefore more than simply a 'motherhood' term for development agencies (Desai and Potter, 2008). According to the Ghanaian Times (2006), Women empowerment concerns itself with giving women the ability or opportunity to better their own lives and society in general. It has nothing to do with competition with men but rather partnering and complementing to ensure growth and prosperity for a nation.

Buvinic (2006), posited that women empowerment is not only a holistic concept but also multi-dimensional in its approach and covers social, political, economic and social aspects. However, she concludes that of all these dimensions of women empowerment, economic empowerment is of utmost significance in order to achieve a lasting and sustainable development of society.

It is within this framework that there is the urgent need now more than ever in designing programmes aimed at empowering the lot of women in Ghana to look out for ways to channel strategies to promote their economic empowerment of women. There is no doubt from the forgoing analysis that agriculture is key in this respect. The 2000 Population and Housing Census revealed that out of the number of women found in Ghana between the active labour force, 49.2% are into agriculture and its cognate sectors. This was attributable to the fact that traditionally/culturally, women in Ghana are mainly responsible for their household sustenance and wellbeing. To keep up to this task and other social expectations, they engage in agricultural production.

Despite the important role women play in the agricultural sector in Ghana, they have much more limited access to agricultural extension, credit, land, all of which combine to restrain their ability to increase their productivity and incomes and hence, their economic empowerment. Basically, women in Ghana still rely on traditional methods of farming as a result of the lack of parity in the sex composition of the socio-economic activities when it comes to their economic empowerment. The need therefore arises to have an in-depth study into the role of agriculture in promoting the economic empowerment of women as well as identifying hindrances in the process and how these hindrances can be overcome for future planning purposes.

2. Study Area

The geographical scope of the Study is the Ejisu-Juaben Municipality located in the Ashanti Region of Ghana as displayed in Figure 1. It is one of the thirty districts in the Region. The Ejisu-Juaben Municipality lies within Latitudes 1° 15'N and 1° 45'N and Longitude 6° 15'W and 7° 00' W. The Municipality occupies a land area of 637.2 km². It lies in the central part of the Ashanti Region sharing boundaries with six districts in the Region.

The districts are Sekyere East and Afigya Kwabre to the Northeast and Northwest respectively; the Bosomtwi and Asante Akim South Districts to the South; the Asante Akim North to the East and the Kumasi Metropolis to the West.

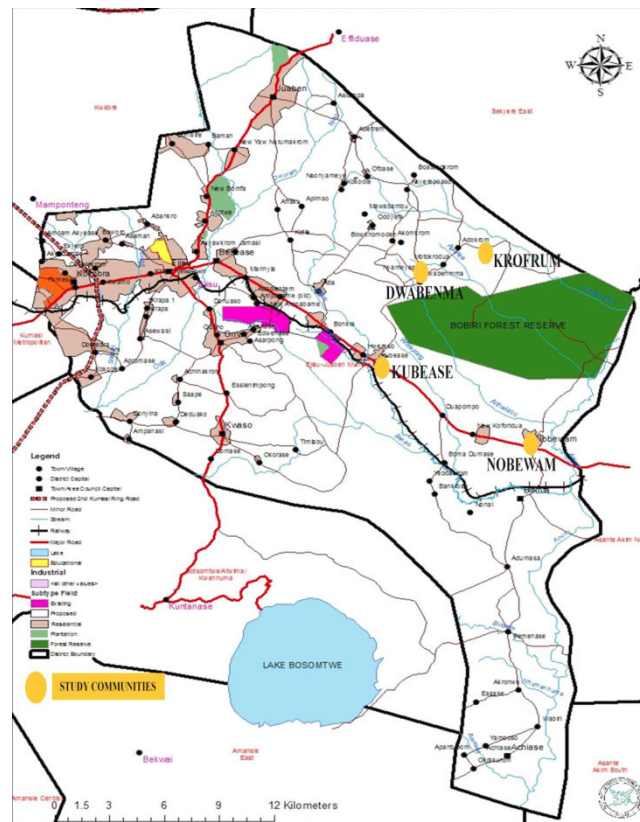


Figure 1: Map of Ejisu Juaben Municipal Area
Source: Ejisu Juaben Medium-Term Development Plan, 2010-2013

3. Approach and Method

The Research adopted an integrative approach which combined the relevant elements of qualitative, quantitative and participatory research techniques. This was developed based on interplay of deskwork and field survey in order to obtain a sample population to work with and also the right amount of information to support the Study. The Research is an empirical investigation to understand the issue under study. The approach used in this Research was a case study approach aimed at offering the opportunity for in-depth study of the phenomenon under investigation. The Researchers made use of a combination of primary and secondary data. The major sources of data used were however from primary sources. The sources of the primary data were obtained from field survey using instruments such as interview guides, questionnaires (structured – close-ended, unstructured - open-ended, matrix and contingency questions), field observation, personal interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) where necessary.

The primary data was obtained from sources such as individuals and groups. Institutional questionnaires were administered to Co-operative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) International, Ghana, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) and the Municipal Agriculture Department and through key informants' interviews. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Secondary data was also obtained from published documents, reports, journals, periodicals, the internet, magazines, newspapers, reports, national and other relevant state and non-state institutions that have interest in the agriculture and women economic empowerment.

Currently, there are an estimated number of 12,844 women in agriculture in the Municipality. Using that as the sampling frame and a confidence level of 90%, 100 household questionnaires were administered to women farmers.

4. Conceptual Considerations

4.1 Gender Approaches in Development Programmes

The changing perceptions about women and development have resulted in a gradual shift in the way women are

perceived within developmental thinking from that of victims and passive objects to independent actors. According to Vigneri and Holmes (2009: 3), there has been the widely acceptance of the increasingly important role of women in both social and economic development. This role is however hindered when women lack control over productive resources and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes at all levels. Gender development approaches vary but there has been the focus on women control over productive resources and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes at all levels. Over the years however, issues with gender specific programmes have focused on Women in Development (WID), Gender and Development (GAD) and the Empowerment Approach. For the purposes of this Study, the Empowerment Approach is discussed.

4.1.1 The Empowerment Approach

The Empowerment Approach as a Gender Approach in Development Programmes is concerned with the integration of gender¹ as a crosscutting issue in development organisation and in interventions. This has become well known in the development field and its cognates as ‘mainstreaming’. The Empowerment Approach has been associated with the Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). In the context of empowerment, DAWN focused on personal autonomy. According to them, autonomy for women, for the poor, and for the nations of the developing world means that they are able to make their own choices in the realms of politics, economics and society (Snyder and Tadessa 1995).

DAWN through the Empowerment Approach sees autonomous women’s organisations as the medium through which targeted measures should reach women and that Empowerment Approach calls for participation and seeks to create self-reliance. In this context, empowerment becomes a process that cannot be given to or for women, but has to emerge from them. This conception of empowerment as a dynamic, enabling process in turn has implications for political action and for development agencies (Karubi, 2006: 79).

It is against this theoretical background that the tone is set for subsequent discussions on agriculture and women economic empowerment in Ghana. The Study focuses on the agricultural sector which has been at the centre stage in recent development policies and agenda.

4.2 Empowerment

The various definitions of empowerment depict both diversity and commonality. Most of the definitions have however focused on issues of gaining power and control over decisions and resources that determine the wellbeing of one’s life. Inherently, it is an ideology endowed with potential for assisting development growth, especially for women in developing nations (Karubi, 2006: 89). DAWN sees empowerment as representing the transformation of power relations throughout society, increased wellbeing, community development, self-sufficiency, expansion of individual choices and capacities for self-reliance. This definition perhaps seems to substantiate one of the few specific empowerment definitions that centred on women’s development (ibid). In a similar manner, Kabeer (2001) defines empowerment as the process by which women take control and ownership of their lives through the expansion of their choices.

It must be emphasised that due to the abstract nature of empowerment, some of their explanations and usages are outside the scope of this study. For instance, the World Bank defines empowerment as the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which both build the individual and collective assets of the poor and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organisational and institutional context that govern the use of these assets (World Bank Poverty Analysis 2003). In addition, the 2003 World Bank Annual Report and other World Bank reports since the early 1990s, recognises that empowerment is very vital to the overall progress in development as it “ensures that all people have the ability to shape their own lives by providing opportunity and security and fostering effective participation and social inclusion” (p.13).

From the above, empowerment has a specific focus in women’s development concerns in the developing countries. There is the need therefore to explore the tenants and focus of women and their economic empowerment.

4.3 Women Empowerment

Women empowerment has been identified as a panacea to promote gender equality and poverty alleviation among poor women (Anjali et al., 2005). Mayoux (2000) laid out a framework that is useful for developing strategies for women’s empowerment when she sees empowerment as a process of change in power relations that is both multidimensional and interlinked. In addition, most researchers have linked empowerment to women’s development. For instance, Hainard and Verschuur (2001) see empowerment as a process of developing negotiating skills from the bottom up ... to redress unequal power relations and produce new development paradigms and hence to successfully empower women. They added that both gender and empowerment concerns should be integrated into every service provision area. Adding to this, Mayoux (2000) asserts that women should be incorporated in the economic, political and social spheres as well as at the individual, household and community levels in order to overcome gender inequality. In addition, Jejeebhoy (2000) identifies social institutions as highly influential in shaping a woman’s autonomy. He believes that these

institutions should provide comprehensive, direct and context-specific strategies to empower women. These strategies include creating gender consciousness, enabling women to mobilize community resources and public services, providing support to the challenges of traditional norms and providing access to vocational and life skills to increase women's access to and control over economic resources.

Women's empowerment is however not an easy outcome to measure. There is therefore the need to go beyond standardized indicators and focus on context specific indicators that refer to social relations. These indicators might include factors such as the distinction between individual and collective awareness, increased self-esteem and an analysis of grass-roots organizations (Hainard and Verschuur, 2001). In addition, Hashemi et al., (1996) posited that the methods used to measure women's empowerment in one society can be deemed completely irrelevant in another. Therefore, cultural factors in each society also need to be taken into account. Table 1 shows the various dimensions of empowerment and particularly focusing on women's empowerment.

Table 1: Dimensions of Empowerment

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Household</i>	<i>Community</i>	<i>Broader Arenas</i>
<i>Economic</i>	Women's control over income; relative contribution to family support; access to and control of family resources	Women's access to employment; ownership of assets and land; access to credit; involvement and/or representation in local trade associations; access to markets	Women's representation in high paying jobs; women CEOs; representation of women's economic interests in macroeconomic policies, state and federal budgets
<i>Socio-Cultural</i>	Women's freedom of movement; lack of discrimination against daughters; commitment to educating daughters	Women's visibility in and access to social spaces; access to modern transportation; participation in extra-familial groups and social networks; shift in patriarchal norms (such as son preference); symbolic representation of the female in myth and ritual	Women's literacy and access to a broad range of educational options; Positive media images of women, their roles and contributions
<i>Familial/ Interpersonal</i>	Participation in domestic decision-making; control over sexual relations; ability to make childbearing decisions, use contraception, access abortion; control over spouse selection and marriage timing; freedom from domestic violence	Shifts in marriage and kinship systems indicating greater value and autonomy for women (e.g., later marriages, self selection of spouses, reduction in the practice of dowry; acceptability of divorce); local campaigns against domestic violence	Regional/national trends in timing of marriage, options for divorce; political, legal, religious support for (or lack of active opposition to) such shifts; systems providing easy access to contraception, safe abortion, reproductive health services
<i>Legal</i>	Knowledge of legal rights; domestic support for exercising rights	Community mobilization for rights; campaigns for rights awareness; effective local enforcement of legal rights	Laws supporting women's rights, access to resources and options; Advocacy for rights and legislation; use of judicial system to redress rights violations
<i>Political</i>	Knowledge of political system and means of access to it; domestic support for political engagement; exercising the right to vote	Women's involvement or mobilization in the local political system/campaigns; support for specific candidates or legislation; representation in local bodies of government	Women's representation in regional and national bodies of government; strength as a voting bloc; representation of women's interests in effective lobbies and interest groups
<i>Psychological</i>	Self-esteem; self-efficacy; psychological well-being	Collective awareness of injustice, potential of mobilization	Women's sense of inclusion and entitlement; systemic acceptance of women's entitlement and inclusion

Source: Malhotra et al. (2002)

According to Buvinic (2006), women empowerment is not only a holistic concept but also multi-dimensional in its approach and covers social, political, economic and social aspects as depicted in Table 1. However, he concludes that, of all these dimensions of women's empowerment, economic empowerment is of utmost

significance in order to achieve a lasting and sustainable development of society. This sets the tone for discussions on women's economic empowerment.

4.4 Women's Economic Empowerment

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) there is a strong link between the vulnerability of impoverished women to underemployment and low returns on labour, especially since most employed women are part of the informal economy (Kessides, 2005). A study conducted in Africa found that 92 per cent of job opportunities for women outside of agriculture were in the informal economy (ibid). This exposes poor women to greater financial risks, lower standards of human development and limited access to resources from social institutions. Many other studies have recognized the importance of economic empowerment of women in improving the status of impoverished women. Buvinic (1996) states, "the most straightforward vehicle to 'empower' poor women is to increase their productivity in home and market production and the income they obtain from work".

The ILO has proposed various ways for increasing women's access to land and other assets as strategies to combat this problem (Kessides, 2005). Mahmud (2003) contends that providing security of tenure will encourage more women to use their domestic space for income-generating activities. Other recommendations include investing in human capital such as training for productive employment, providing financial resources with a focus on credit, expanding wage employment opportunities, improving social protection for female workers and empowering women through greater organization.

Income-generating activities are seen as "entry points for channels of communication and vehicles by which women can meet their needs" (Rogers and Youssef, 1988). They provide effective ways to address inequalities in the areas of health, education and poverty alleviation. Many researchers have recognized that improvements in health care, nutrition and education can only be sustained with an increase in household income and greater control by women over their financial resources (Hashemi, 2004). Economic empowerment projects usually focus on income-generating activities, which allow women to independently acquire their income. Income-generating activities encompass a wide range of areas, such as small business promotion, cooperatives, job creation schemes, sewing circles and credit and savings groups (Albee, 1994). In all these areas, the active role of agriculture in women economic empowerment cannot be underestimated.

4.5 Women in Agriculture

Agriculture for the purposes of this Study adopts the definition given by the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (2009) as all production, marketing, and processing activities related to agricultural products, including crops, livestock, agroforestry, and aquaculture. Agricultural labour means human efforts in these areas; agricultural wage labour consists of those activities that are remunerated. Agricultural labour, given this definition, can take place on-farm (for example, agricultural production activities such as planting, weeding, harvesting, milking, or fishing) or off-farm (for example, agro processing activities such as cleaning, cutting, packaging, labelling, or marketing). Agriculture is not synonymous with the rural sector, although most agricultural activities take place in rural areas. Agricultural labour can be unpaid (such as on-farm family labour), paid-in-kind (such as barter or labour exchange), self-employed (such as marketing of one's own produce).

Three (3) out of every four poor people in developing countries live in rural areas, and most of them depend directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihoods. In many parts of the world, women are the main farmers or producers, but their roles remain largely unrecognized (The World Bank 2009 et al.). Agricultural productivity and efficiency is limited by gender inequalities and in so doing, undermine development agendas. Failure to recognize the different roles of men and women is costly because it results in misguided projects and programs, forgone agricultural output and incomes and food and nutrition insecurity. It is time to take into account the role of women in agricultural production and to increase concerted efforts to enable women to move beyond production for subsistence and into higher-value, market-oriented production (ibid).

As countries industrialise, total labour in agriculture has declined and this trend will continue as countries industrialize. However, over half of all labourers worldwide rely on the agricultural sector. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, 70 percent or more of the labour force works in agriculture. In many regions more women than men are employed in agriculture. In the Middle East, more than twice as many women work in agriculture as men and in South Asia, close to one-third more women are working in the sector than men (International Labour Organisation, 2006). Most work in agriculture is onerous and the returns are lower than in other sectors. Improving the quality and quantity of jobs in rural areas and in agriculture, for both women and men, has been identified as a means of promoting economic growth and reducing poverty (Heintz 2006; World Bank 2007).

Increasing labour opportunities and returns for poor women in rural areas is pro-poor and improves family and social welfare as increasingly evidenced in literature. Increasing women's earnings and share of family income has been shown to empower women by strengthening their bargaining power in the household. Empirical

evidence shows that women invest more than men in the development of children; thus, higher levels of employment and earnings for women not only contribute to current economic growth but also have intergenerational implications as shown in Figure 2. A global increase in women-headed households, which are asset-poor, heightens the importance of improving employment opportunities to reduce poverty. The contribution of women's work to family and society is significant, through their productive and reproductive roles; however, if the quantity and quality of that work are poor or if they reinforce patriarchal gender practices, the negative effects on their health and that of their children can attenuate the development impact. Yet, to the extent that the empowerment of women is an end in and of itself, responsible employment for women can increase confidence, promote participation in community activities, and contribute to a perception on the part of women of a better life (Vargas-Lundius, 2007).

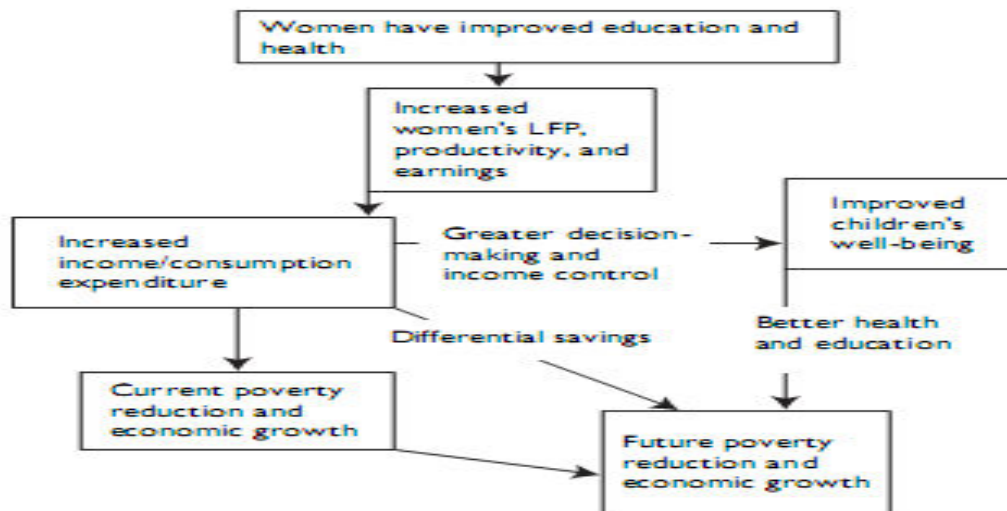


Figure 2: Relationship between Women Labour Force Participation (LFP), Poverty, and Economic Growth
 Source: Adopted from Morrison, Raju, and Sinha 2007

It is estimated that the agricultural workforce in the world is around 1.1 billion, of which 450 million are estimated to be hired farm workers (Hurst, Termine, and Karl 2005). The growing proportion of women in the labour force has been one of the most striking trends of recent times. This trend has led to a large body of literature debating on the “feminization” of labour markets (The World Bank et al., 2009: 317).

According to the World Bank et. al, 2009, women represent a larger proportion of labourers than men in the agricultural sectors of Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. Women also dominate in some Caribbean and Central American countries, especially in economies with low per capita income. However, irrespective of the increased proportion in agricultural wage labour markets for women, it still lags behind that of men in all regions. A further regional data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Regional Characteristics and Key Issues of Women's Agricultural Labour

Region	Characteristics of women's Agricultural labor force	Key Issues for women's agricultural labor
Central and Southeastern Europe (non-EU) and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Employment to population ratios: Women: 45.6%; men: 63.8% Working women in agriculture (2007): 19.2% Working women in wage jobs (2007): 78.5%	Low percentage of men and women in agriculture, but high percentage of women vs. men Formal market stronger in most countries Wage inequalities in formal market Young women's employment to population ratio higher than for young men	Rural productivity low Labour legislation not enforced Women not included in agricultural productivity-enhancing programs, such as training
Latin America and the Caribbean Employment to population ratios: Women: 47.1%; men: 73.7% Working women in agriculture (2007): 10.7% Working women wage and salaried jobs (2007): 64.6%	Considerable variability across countries High on-farm labor (some countries) Low ratio participation in agriculture in comparison to men's participation Growing women's informal labor market participation High rates of occupational segregation	Women's employment opportunities in rural and urban areas low Occupational segregation Social protection for women in growing informal agricultural labour markets
North Africa Employment to population ratios: Women: 21.9%; men: 69.1% Working women in agriculture (2007): 32.6% Working women wage and salaried jobs (2007): 58.4%	Lowest women's employment levels of all regions Only region where women's employment in agriculture increased Wage labor concentrated in urban areas More women in rural areas than men due to migration High percentage of women as on-farm labor Women responsibility for small livestock	Low productivity of on-farm labour Heavy household labor burdens Social constraints to market work Limited access to nonagricultural employment

Source: International Labour Organisation 2008; World Bank 2007

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Agriculture Activities in the Municipality

Agriculture dominates the local economy by the preponderance of the number of the people it employs. The Sector employs 55.6% of the total employed labour force. While about 87.2% of the people engage in agriculture as full-time and part-time employments have their farms located within the Municipality, only 12.8% have their farms located outside the Municipality.

5.1.1 Crops Production

The major crops cultivated in the Municipality include food crops - maize, plantain, cassava, rice, cocoyam and vegetables and tree crops - cocoa, oil palm and citrus. Table 3 shows the output of the various crops in tons per season. Although crop farming in the Municipality is not done in large quantities, most of the food crops grown are mainly sold for income and the rest consumed by the households. Few of the agricultural produce are processed: Cassava into gari; maize into corn dough and oil palm into palm oil and palm kernel oil. The tree crops are however grown mainly for commercial purposes.

Crop production in the Municipality is dependent on rainfall. Basic farm tools such as cutlass and hoes are used. These certainly do not promote and encourage large-scale production for commercial purposes. To overcome this, there is the need to adopt and intensively mechanized agriculture.

5.1.2 Livestock Production

Animal Husbandry activities range from large through small to domestic keeping of poultry, goats, sheep, cattle and pigs with their total stock shown in Table 3. About 80% of animals are kept under the semi-intensive system where the animals are allowed to forage out of their keeping places and return indoors later. All commercial

poultry keepers however use the intensive system of production.

Table 3: Major Crops Grown and their Output per Season (Tons) in the Municipality and Top Ten Animals Reared in the Municipality

Crop Production		Livestock Production	
Type of Crop	Output per Season (Tons)	Type of Animal	Total Stock
Maize	5,400	Sheep	8,097
Plantain	32,300	Goats	9,842
Cassava	81,200	Pigs	11,100
Rice	1,632	Poultry local	118,198
Cocoyam	16,660	Poultry exotic	501,000
Yam	4,560	Cattle	1,400
Cocoa	2,500	Duck	1784
Oil palm	22,100.11	Turkeys	92
Citrus	16,970.54	Rabbit	56
Pepper	52.7	Guinea fowls	1273

Source: MoFA, Ejisu-Juaben Municipality, 2011

5.1.3 Summary of Major Agricultural Produce in the Municipality

The major agricultural produce and their percentage production in the Municipality are:

Food Crop:	53.0%
Tree Crop:	25.5%
Industrial Crop:	1.5%
Poultry/Livestock Farming:	19.5%
Non-traditional Enterprise:	0.5%

N/B: Non-traditional enterprise includes Black Pepper, Pineapple, Beekeeping, Mushroom, Grass cutter and Snail rearing.

5.2 Farming Systems

The major farming practice in the Municipality is mixed farming (90.1% of the farmers). Whilst the farmers cultivate food and tree crops, livestock and poultry are also kept in the backyard as a supplementary source of food and income. The remaining 9.9% of the farmers practice mono cropping.

Considering the farming systems, bush fallowing, which is a system whereby a land is left for a period of time to regain its fertility is being practice by 48.5% of the farmers. The length of fallow period has been drastically reduced due to the growing population and the increasing demand for lands for uses other than agriculture. Continuous cropping is practiced by about 45.5% of farmers. This has resulted in loss of soil fertility and adversely affected output levels. The remaining 6% of the farmers practice crop rotation.

5.3 Estimated Agricultural Land Area

Agriculture land area in the Municipality is estimated to be 180,931 hectares.

Area under Annual Crops:	76,265 Ha
Area under Tree Crops:	38,113 Ha
Area under Fallow:	60,393 Ha
Area under Forest:	6,160 Ha

5.4 Land Ownership (Land Tenure)

Land acquisition is also another issue of importance to women agricultural activities in the Municipality. There are basically three forms of land acquisitions in the Municipality. These are family (inheritance), self or by lease/hiring. Quite a significant percentage (54.5%) of the farmers use family lands. Those who own the land personally follow this. They constitute 28.8% of the farmers. The rest (16.5%) resort to the last option, which is by lease/hiring. The increasing pressure on land for both agricultural and non-agricultural purposes has resulted in land fragmentation and the resultant smaller farm sizes over the years. This situation has also impeded large-scale commercial production.

5.5 Average Farm Land

The average farm size in the Municipality is as low as 1.9 acres per farmer. This is far below the national average of 5 acres per farmer. The result is the smaller farm sizes that have in turn affected production and consequently income and therefore the standard of living of the farmers.

5.6 Women in Agriculture in the Ejisu-Juaben Municipality

The woman is said to be the backbone of agricultural workforce as well as the most important factor in the food chain which begins from farm production, market and intra household distribution of food. Women in most societies play a crucial role as food producers, providers and managers. Women farmers contribute immensely to agriculture in their capacity as farm owners, farm partners and farm labourers.

In times past women in agriculture were largely considered as farmers' wives and therefore their contribution to the Sector were to a considerable extent neglected. However, women are now recognized as more than just wives of farmers but also as farmers, farm labourers, food processors and distributors. Thus, women play a multi-faceted role in agriculture.

Out of the total women population in the Municipality who are active employed, 64% are absorbed by the agricultural sector. The number of women who are found in the agricultural sector is as a result of the fact that it is a major source food to feed the household and also generate some form of income to support the family. The major crops that the women in the Municipality grow are maize, plantain, cassava, cocoyam and some vegetables like pepper, tomatoes, okro and garden eggs. Some of the women also cultivate some cash crops like cocoa and oil palm. A few of the women especially those in Nobewan also cultivate rice. The women also rear livestock to provide a source of protein for the family.

The women in the agricultural sector are also involved in some form of commerce in terms of the sale of their crops to middlemen from Kumasi (the Regional Capital) and Accra (the National Capital). They are also into the processing of their crops in order to add value to them. This processing comes in the form of drying example cassava into konkonte (drying the cassava and milling into flour) and oil palm into palm oil.

5.7 Women Agricultural Activities in the Municipality

The rural nature of the Municipality coupled with the high illiteracy rate among the sampled women was the main reason for their massive involvement in agriculture. They are usually involved in sowing, weeding, harvesting and in later cases processing farm produce. When interviewed, the married woman asserted their much concern for their families in terms of providing their food needs coupled with the rising cost of food are their motivation for staying in agriculture. This way, they are always assured of the food needs for their families even in the lean season. They again posited that they are able to sell part of their produce to earn income to undertake other activities. This is particularly so during bumper harvest.

Mostly, the respondents were not involved in any other occupation aside agriculture as their main activity. The survey revealed that the women are engaged in two main agricultural activities; namely, crop farming (94.9%), animal farming (1.02%) with 4.08% are engaged in both activities. Some of the cultivated crops are maize, plantain, cassava, cocoyam, rice, yam, cocoa, oil palm, citrus and vegetables like garden eggs, okro and pepper. It was again evident that the women cultivate these crops because of the type of soil found in the Municipality. The Director at Women in Agricultural Development (WIAD) added that the pre-cambrian rocks of the Birimian and Tarkwaian formations found in the Municipality are generally suitable for agriculture activities and particularly for the above listed crops.

In their production activities, the women resort to the use of simple farm tools such as cutlasses, hoes, axes, pick axes and mattocks. The women lamented that in as much as they are aware of the limitations in the use of such simple farm tools, they have no other option due to the high cost of going into mechanized farming and the expertise that is needed to manage and maintain such form of farming equipment. The women rely on labour to cultivate their crops. This is as a result of the nature of agriculture in the Municipality and the workload that it comes with. Usually, the women who are involved in large-scale production hire labour to help them in the stages of tilling the land, planting the crops and ultimately during harvesting. This is mostly associated with the production of cash crops.

It became evident during the survey that only 34.7% of the women process their crop produce either for consumption or for sale. The women usually process cassava into konkonte², maize into corn dough for making kenkey² and banku² and rice is processed into polished rice. The low percentage of women who engage livestock production asserted that they are only able to rear animals that they can easily manage from their homes. Such animals include sheep, goats and poultry. The animals are usually sold to generate extra income to support the little they get from the crop farming. In some cases, they are consumed at home and serve as a source of protein for their families. The women said that the free-range system of the livestock production does not help in large-scale animal rearing which they do not have the funds to go into. The animals on the free-range therefore stray and sometimes do not return home while others sometimes eat poisonous plants that eventually kill them.

The 4.08% who are involved in both production systems saw it as a convenient way of farming as they are able to earn income from both sources. Again, they are able to meet their food needs from their farms without having to spend the little they earn on buying from different sources. In that way, they became self reliant in terms of meeting their food need. This was corroborated by one the respondents who asserted that:

"I am able to prepare and serve my household from my own farm. The only thing I sometimes do is to buy fish. I am therefore able to save some more from the little I earn to cater for my family".

5.8 Storage Facilities

The survey analysis revealed that the women have problems storing their produce and the situation is complicated during bumper harvest. This has resulted in high rate of post-harvest loses in the Municipality. The women either store their produce at home or in storerooms. The 72.72% who store their produce at home store in

their kitchens. Those who store in their kitchens were aware of the dangers of losing their produce in case it catches fire in the Kitchen but posited they have no option. The situation forces the women to sell their produce at cheaper prices. They therefore called for efforts to construct storage facilities in their communities so they can store their produce and sell when prices are high in other to make extra gains.

The remaining 27.28 who have access to storage facilities are those who are involved in commercial cash crop production and can afford to pay for proper storage facilities. For instances, the women who are involved in the production of rice have access to the government stores in the Municipality. The Juaben chief also has a storeroom where palm nuts are stored.

5.9 Marketing of Agricultural Produce

Marketing of agricultural produce forms a very important component in the agriculture production cycle. The cycle is only complete when produce gets to the final consumers. Roads conditions linking the farms to the markets are in deplorable states and thereby making it difficult to transport agricultural produce. The deplorable state of these roads coupled with inadequate storage facilities accounts for high post-harvest loses in the Municipality. To guide against this, the women farmers are forced to sell their produce at cheaper prices to avoid loses.

5.10 Market Accessibility

Marketing of agricultural produce by women in the Municipality is highly unorganized. There are two major ways that the women in agriculture in the Municipality are able to market their goods. The first is through the middlemen. The middlemen come in the form of traders who move from the cities to buy the farm produce directly from the women on their farms. These middlemen take advantage of the poor state of the roads linking the farms to the market centres and buy the produce at cheaper prices. The situation is worsened in the rainy season when the roads are not motorable.

The second available option is when the women themselves take the produce to the market centres. The women who want to sell their produce at current market prices and as such resort to this option complained of drivers charging exorbitant fares due to the low passenger-vehicular ratio in the villages as well as the poor nature of the roads. There are other farmers who adopt both media. The women who use this option complained in one voice as presented in Box 1:

Box 1

When we do not have the fare to transport our produce to the marketing centres ourselves, we prefer to sell them in markets in our villages rather than being cheated by middlemen who do not know the stress we went through only to cheat us and enjoy from our labour. We are aware this denies us the opportunity to take advantage of markets opportunities that exist in other bigger markets within the Region but we want it that way.

Source: Field Survey, January 2012

The major markets available to the women farmers include the Konongo market, Ejisu market, Central markets in Kumasi and Accra. In transporting their produce to such markets, 29.5% of the women use middlemen, 22.5% directly transport their produce to the market while 48.0% use both media.

6. Contribution of Agriculture to Women Economic Empowerment

The survey analysis revealed that women in the Municipality engage in agriculture for varied reasons. The most prominent reason from the responses was their need to earn financial resources to take care of the family and also take care of their food as well as other personal needs. The interactions as well personal observation during the field work pointed to the fact that agriculture has done quite a lot of good to the women by helping them to have some form of economic freedom and also meeting their basic needs. Agriculture's contribution to women economic empowerment in the Municipality is discussed as follows.

6.1 Incomes from Agricultural Activities

The rural nature of the sampled communities, the high illiteracy rate among the sampled women as well as their lack of skills making them occupationally immobile were found to be the main reasons of their involvement in agriculture. The women therefore depend on agriculture as the only available means to meet their livelihood. It also became evident from the survey that the women have no other occupation making agriculture their only source of employment.

One major limitation of the Study was the inability of the women to accurately provide information on their incomes and expenditure. They were however able to provide how much they earn on the average per year as depicted in Table 3.3 and how the incomes are expended as expanded in item 3.12. Again, the high illiteracy among the women has resulted in their inability to keep proper records of their business transactions.

Table 4: Income earned by Women in Agriculture per Year

<i>AMOUNT (GH¢)</i>	<i>PERCENTAGE</i>
-99	5.1
100-300	16.3
301-600	32.7
601-900	17.3
+901	28.6
Total	100

Source: Field Survey, January 2012

With a daily minimum wage of GH¢ 4.48 in Ghana, the minimum income per year in Ghana is GH¢ 1,612.80. The survey analysis as depicted in Table 4 shows that the women in agriculture in the Municipality earn less than average yearly income in Ghana. This accounts for the high level of poverty among the women in agriculture in the Municipality. These women are not able to meet their basic needs from the prevailing market prices of goods and services. The plight is worsened as they have no other source of employment to earn extra income from the little they get from agriculture. Only 36.4 percent of the women responded as having other form of employment. These employment sources are however related to their agricultural activities either in the form of commerce (selling their agricultural produce themselves in the marketing centres) or industry (processing their agricultural produce).

The women are usually involved in the cultivation of food crops like cassava, cocoyam among others. These crops do not have high prices and as such the current situation. The 28.9% of the women who earn more than Gh¢ 900 are usually involved in the cultivation of cash crops like cocoa and oil palm. The current situation does not make agriculture attractive to the youth in the Municipality. The youth see agriculture as occupation not for people who want to succeed in life. This mentality has been frustrating CARE International Ghana's efforts at training the youth in small-scale farming in the Municipality as lamented by its project facilitator.

6.2 Uses of Earnings/ Income

The women asserted the little they earn from the sale of their produce gives them some amount of financial autonomy at the household and community levels and thus empowering them economically. Their incomes are used to supplement food budget, invest in their children's education and health as well as contributing to community development.

6.3 Investment in Health

About 26.5% of the respondents were widowed and 11.3% divorced. These women have the sole responsibility of investing in the health of the dependents and themselves. The 62.2% who are married also responded as contributing to the health needs of their dependents. This they do by purchasing drugs or settling the hospital bills of their dependents. When asked about their knowledge of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), all respondents have one form of knowledge or other about it and they responded contributing in paying the premium of family members.

6.4 Investment in Education

The women again asserted that they are at the forefront when it comes to educating their children especially the single parents (the divorcees and the widowed). The money earned from the sales of the produce is often used to meet the cost of their children education. Even though the women did not have the privilege of higher education, they aspire to see their children go higher on the educational ladder. They are therefore involved in covering both the overt and covert costs of their wards education with sometimes the men playing very little or no role.

6.5 Acquisition of Personal Assets and Meeting other Material Needs

Without depending on their husbands, the women are able to acquire for themselves some personal assets. They have been able to use their incomes to purchase their own farm. The women were however not happy about the fact they have not been able to acquire bigger property like their own houses because they earn little from their activities of which part and/or all is used to cater for the food, education, health and material needs of their families. The women are again involved in other social expenditures such as funerals, church contributions, community development levies as well as paying taxes.

6.6 Investment in Family Food Budget

Women always pay particular attention to the wellbeing of their families. This is much more so when it comes to meeting the food needs of their families. The married women asserted that their husbands have entirely left the food needs of the family into their hands. Their husbands even look up to them to provide the food needs of the family without adding anything most of the time. This they are able do with the produce from their farms. When the need arises, they are able to buy the food items they cannot get on their farms from the little they earn.

From all the above analysis, improving women agricultural activities is a potential area for their economic empowerment. When given the needed support, women in agriculture in the Ejisu-Juaben Municipality can achieve income security and its attended investment of the women and thereby empowering economically.

7. Other Economic and Non-Economic Benefits

7.1 Participation in Decision-Making

Women engagement in decision making at the family level in most homes in Ghana is minimal. This is seen as the sole responsibility of men who are generally considered head of households and as such have the final say in any decision-making on family issues. The woman's contribution is often seen as intangible. At the community level, women involvement in decision-making is often missing in the Country. It is even a taboo in some communities for women to sit with men to deliberate on issues of community development. Their place is in the kitchen while the men meet and make all the decisions affecting the community.

The survey however proved otherwise. The massive income contribution of women at the family level has made it possible for them to have a say at family level decision making. They are involved in discussing issues such as children's education, marriage, family planning and deliberations on family property among others. The women agreed that this has been possible as they contribute to the upkeep of the family. The men therefore have no option than engage them in all making-decisions processes.

The women active involvement in family level decision-making due to their modest economic empowerment has culminated in them having a voice at the community level. The women agreed that their contribution to community development through the payment of their development levy warrants their involvement in community level decision-making. They therefore have the right to attend community meetings in order to express their views concerning the development of their area. These women now have leadership roles in their family, churches and the community at large. No matter the magnitude and dimension of the issues at stake, the women now have a say as they believe they are now outspoken and courageous enough for that. This they believe was made possible due to their economic empowerment.

7.2 Contribution to Community Development

Women in agriculture in the Municipality contribute either in kind or in cash to the development of their communities. The survey analysis revealed that the women are in one way or other able to support their communities to bring about development. It was observed that 66.7% of the women interviewed were able to support or contribute to the development of their communities financially. This contribution comes in the form of community donations or fundraising and community levies. The women are again able to offer themselves during communal labour and in some cases able to provide food during communal labour. The women are again able to contribute their quota in no small way during festivals and community durbars.

7.3 Self Esteem, Sufficiency and Respect

Self Esteem and respect are some of the major non-economic benefits that the women have acquired through the returns from their agricultural activities. For instance, in the communities, mothers who are able to cater for the educational, health, food and other material needs of their family are seen as being responsible parents. Their incomes also enable them to perform other social responsibilities which earn them respect from the other members of the society.

Again, the women are able to provide for themselves without depending on others for support. The women therefore do not depend on their husbands or other external family member for financial and material support. They said that the returns they generate from their activities help them finance personal and family expenses as well as paying for social services like education and health care. This has helped them to become self sufficient and thereby gaining self esteem and respect in their various communities.

7.4 Economic Liberation/ Independence

The women in the Municipality who are engaged in agriculture said they are at liberty to keep and use their incomes devoid of any influence. From the survey, 93.9% of the women agreed to enjoying economic independence. The women decide what to do with their incomes which are usually spent on food expenditure, investing in education and health. The women again asserted that part of their incomes are used as seed money for other investments especially in investing in their agricultural activities. This gives the women independence and financial autonomy and subsequently economic empowerment.

8. Major Challenges or Constraints to Women Agriculture Development

Notwithstanding the above benefits that women in agriculture in the Municipality enjoy, their activities are still confronted with a number of challenges as elaborated below.

8.1 Poor Farming Practices

One major challenge the survey analysis identified is the poor farming practice used by the women in the Municipality. They still use simple and obsolete farm tools as well as traditional farming methods. The women use hand tools like hoes, axes and cutlasses. These farming practices do not encourage large-scale agricultural production. This was identified as the main reason of their low yields and its associated low incomes. The continuous farming on the same piece of land coupled with their inability to fertilise the lands also affects their yield.

8.2 Seasonality of Activities

The agricultural activities in the Municipality are mostly seasonal. Farming is not done all year round because of the type of crops that are cultivated in the area. Crops like maize, cassava, plantain and even cocoa are not available all year round. This makes it very difficult for the women to get constant flow of income. As the women solely depend on agriculture for their livelihood, they are adversely affected during lean season. Again, due to their poor saving habits, they are very much hit during such period. There is always food insecurity in many homes during such periods with meals usually served once a day.

8.3 The Difficult Nature of the Work

Agricultural activities in the Municipality are mostly labour intensive. The women therefore hire labour to help them on their farms. This adversely affects their incomes with reference to their outputs and prices they get from the sale of agricultural produce. The hire labourers charge exorbitant prices for their services and thus negatively affecting their incomes. A high percentage of their incomes therefore go into hired labour.

8.4 Poor Road Conditions and Network

Another major challenge the women acceded to was the road conditions and network leading to the farming areas. In most cases, there are no roads leading to their farms. They therefore have to create their own paths to their farms. The few farms that have access to roads leading to their farms are nothing to write home about. Such roads are in deplorable states. This the women complained about bitterly. The situation is complicated during the rainy seasons. Their farms are always cut off when there are heavy downpours. They then need to find out ways and means to get to their farms with no hope of any road or path.

The problem raises its head the more during the harvesting period. There are always difficulties transporting their goods to the marketing centres. This forces 29.5% of the women to sell their produce to middlemen at lower prices. The 22.50% who directly take their produce to the marketing centres do so with regrets. The drivers looking at the road conditions and network charge higher fares. The 48% who adopts both media faces both challenges. Also, the women lose most of the produce due to such situations. These, as well as high labour cost coupled with lower yields negatively affect their income levels and hence livelihood.

8.5 Lack of Government Support

There is a general lack of government support to women agricultural activities in the Municipality. The survey analysis revealed that the women farmers do not receive any form of government support in their activities. One thing they complain is the lack of extension services. Extensions officers are expected to assist farmers in general in their farming activities but the government extension officers neglect this. In some instances, they complained that they are forced to pay for such services that they believe should be offered for free.

9. Institutional Support for Women in Agriculture in the Ejisu-Juaben Municipality

9.1 Women in Agricultural Development (WIAD)

Women in Agricultural Development (WIAD) is one of the directorates under the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA). It is a department responsible for women who are in one way or the other engaged in any form of agricultural activity. The main vision of the Department is to improve the living and working conditions of rural household especially women in terms of increasing their income, improving their nutritional status, health and life expectancy. WIAD focuses on the achievement of the following objectives:

- Food production;
- Food-based nutrition education and diet improvement;
- Food processing, preservation, storage, utilization and marketing and
- Farm and home management for efficient and effective use of resources.

The Department in the Municipality is mainly responsible for improving the lives of women who are engaged in agricultural activities in the Municipality.

9.2 Co-operative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) International

Co-operative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) International is a Non-Profit Organization (NPO) with a global confederation of 12 national member organisations working together to end poverty. The organization came into existence after the Second World War to help improve the lives of the marginalized; that is people who were affected negatively after the war. Currently, CARE International works to bring lasting change by:

- Building capacity for autonomy;
- Creating economic opportunities;
- Providing assistance in case of emergency;
- Contributing to strategic decision making at all levels and
- Addressing discrimination in all its forms.

CARE International Ghana was established in the Municipality in 2009 to help improve the lives of the local people. CARE International Ghana places special focus on working alongside poor women. This is because the

Organization has realized that when equipped with the proper resources, women have the power to help whole families and entire communities escape poverty. Women are at the heart of CARE International Ghana's community-based efforts to improve basic education, prevent the spread of disease, increase access to clean water and sanitation, expand economic opportunity and protect natural resources. As a result of the initiative, ten communities are benefiting from the Organization in the Municipality. These communities are Timeabu, Korase, Apenso, Ofoase, Nkyerepoaso, Odoyefe, Dwabenman-Krofoforum, Akoronwe, Esaase and Wadiri.

CARE International Ghana as an institution is thus biased towards women and thereby favours women more than men when it comes to giving support. The Organisation supports women in agriculture in the Municipality in the following ways.

9.2.1 Financial Training

CARE International Ghana is able to support women in agriculture to become economically empowered by giving the women some form of financial support. To do this, CARE International Ghana initiated a programme called Village Saving and Loans Association (VSLA). This Programme teaches women in agriculture in the Municipality about the habit of saving. The initiative is necessitated by the fact that without any proper financial management techniques, the women will become poorer and poorer. The Programme is therefore able to bring women groups made up of ten to twenty-five members together to save as a group. This is done by the women themselves and within the group. After some time, when one has saved enough, she can go for a loan to expand her agricultural activities.

The survey revealed that through this Programme, CARE International Ghana has been able to support women in seven out of the total ten women groups. Members are able to easily access loans without going through the cumbersome processes in securing bank loans and its attendant unfavourable conditions.

9.2.2 Capacity Building

CARE International Ghana in conjunction with MoFA and The Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) are able to help the women farmers build their capacity. These institutions provide training to women in agriculture in the Municipality to be able to become self sufficient in their agricultural activities. The training usually comes in the form of learning and practising new and modern techniques of agricultural production. Usually, the women are provided with seedlings and also shown how new varieties of seedlings are planted and maintained for improved yields. They are also given fertilizers to help enrich the nutrient level of the soil.

Currently, CARE International Ghana has 1000 members in the Ejisu-Juaben Municipality made up of 550 men and 450 women. The Organisation is again involved in the provision of training to the youth in the Municipality. It usually focuses on students in Senior High Schools (SHSs) and trains them to go into some small-scale farming. Most of these SHS students are females who use this as an opportunity to earn some income when they are on vacation.

10. Recommendations for Policy Action

This aspect of the research looks at the suggestions that can help women in agriculture in the Ejisu Juaben Municipality as well as policy makers in their attempt to empower women in the Municipality and country. From the analysis, the stakeholders involved raised a number of issues and these issues were found to affect women's economic empowerment.

10.1 Extension of CARE International Ghana's Activities to the Entire Municipality

From the contributions that CARE International Ghana has been able to give to the Municipality in terms of development and helping people especially women, they should extend their operations to other communities. This will help more people especially women farmers to enjoy their services and become economically empowered in the long run.

10.2 Adoption of VSLA by the Municipal Assembly

VSLA is a very good strategy that CARE International Ghana is using to empower a lot of the women in the few communities they are currently operating in. The Municipal Assembly should take advantage of this and collaborate with CARE International Ghana to spread the Programme throughout the Municipality so it becomes accessible to all.

10.3 Women Support through Training

MoFA should come to the aid of the women in the Municipality by giving them training on how to go about their agricultural activities and also in processing their produce to add value before marketing. There is the need for the women to be introduced to new and better farming practices through extension services. In this direction, there is the need to recruit and train extension officers to recognise gender-specific needs.

10.4 Provision of Storage Facilities

The Municipal Assembly should make it a priority to go to the aid of the women farmers by providing them with storage facilities. Other development partners can be encouraged to help in this direction. This will help the women to cultivate more because they will be able to get a place to store their excess produce. This will also

help prevent post harvest losses.

10.5 Improving on Transport Networks to Farms

The roads leading in and out of the farms should be made easily accessible by constructing new roads and tracks and repairing existing ones to aid in the transportation of produce from the farm gates to the market areas. This will reduce the amount of food that goes to waste and increase the amount that goes to the market centers.

10.6 Special Support

The women in agriculture in the Municipality should be giving a special kind of support by the Municipal Assembly and other development partners. This support can come in the form of scholarship for supporting education of children of women in agriculture and also healthcare of the women and their children. This has the potency of luring unemployed women into the agricultural sector.

11. Conclusion

Women's ability to generate income from agriculture is a good determinant of their economic empowerment. They are at the centre-piece of food security and hence the need to pay particular attention to women in agriculture. Agriculture has helped women in the Ejisu Juaben Municipality in diverse ways. Women are now able to have control over income; relative contribution to family support; access to and control of family resources. They are also able to have access to employment; ownership of assets and land; access to credit; involvement and/or representation in local trade associations and access to markets.

This has become necessary because there is no entry restriction into the agricultural sector. Women who have taken advantage of this have been able to be empowered themselves economically and thereby significantly contributing to the upkeep of their families and communities as a whole. The agricultural activities of women in the Municipality have helped sustain food security in the Municipality making it one of the best when it comes to food production and security.

In spite of this significant contribution of women to agriculture in the country, problems associated with land ownership, access to credit and agricultural extension services among others place constraints in the way of their ability to increase their productivity and thus their incomes. These notwithstanding, their persistence and hard work have gone a long way in helping them realise their dream of economic empowerment.

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Notes

1. Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). Gender roles and expectations are learned. They can change over time and they vary within and between cultures. The concept of gender is vital because it is applied to social analysis. It reveals how women's subordination (or men's domination) is socially constructed. As such, the subordination can be changed or ended. It is not biologically predetermined nor is it fixed forever as Sex is determined or fixed (Karubi, 2006: 74-75)
2. Locally processed foods

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