

Nigeria Women in Agriculture: Challenges and Way Forward

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Abstract:- The study was conducted to identify the challenges of women participation in agricultural production in Akoko South West local government Ondo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives addressed in the study were to: identify the socio-economic characteristics of women farmers; identify level of women participation in agricultural production activities; and, determine the way forward to increasing women participation in agricultural production. Both primary and secondary data were used for the study. The primary data were obtained using structured administered questionnaires to 120 respondents that were randomly selected. Frequency and percentage were used to identify the socio-economic characteristics of women farmers, and their level of participation in agricultural production as well as the way forward. Correlation analysis was used to analyze the relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and their level of participation in agricultural production. Analysis of data showed that, majority (75%) of the respondents were in their active age with fairly large family size and average educational status and income. Majority of the women were highly involved in agricultural production as more than half of them spend more than four hours of their daily activities on the farm during the farming season. It was also found that the major constraint of the respondents was low capital due to unavailability of credit facilities. The result of the correlation analysis revealed that, age, family size, education level and income were positively related to women's participation in agricultural production and all were significant at 1% level of probability. Marital status of the respondents is however, negatively related to the respondents' participation in agricultural production and it is significant at 5% level. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that there should be collaboration between the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Agriculture to achieve effective women participation in agriculture. In addition, credit facilities should also be made available to women farmers with collateral demands structured to accommodate their peculiarity.

Key words: *Women, Challenges and Agriculture*

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The sustainable production of food is the first pillar of food security. 68% of women work as farmers, farm workers and natural resource managers (Onyemobi 2000). In doing so, they contribute to national agricultural output, maintenance of the environment and family food security. In Nigeria the involvement of women in agriculture have attracted greater attention in recent years, the need to develop a suitable extension service that is gender specific and tailored to women farmers cannot be overemphasized (Brown et al., 2001). This is in recognition that women play very significant roles in Nigeria agricultural production, processing and utilization but are constrained under the unified Extension System by socio-cultural barriers, and by the current approach that rely almost exclusively on a network of contact farmers that are over 95% male farmers; little research on products - fruits, vegetables, small livestock which are mainly the responsibility of women farmers (Nnadozie and Ibe 2000).

The integration of women in extension is essential for the achievement of some goals such as increased food production, food self-sufficiency and sustained reduction of poverty and malnutrition. In Nigeria, the Agricultural Development Projects (ADP) of the different States of the Federation had made important advances in incorporating gender in agricultural extension, by modifying the ADP system midstream to provide for women farmers through the creation of Women-In-Agriculture (WIA) programmes in the department of Extension Services of the State ADPs with a gender focus (Oyebanji 1998; Onyibe 2001).

Agricultural development is a complex process and a challenging one as well. Rural women farmers play a vital role in food production and food security. They account for 70% of agricultural workers, 80% of food producers, 100% of those who process basic foodstuffs and they undertake from 60% to 90% of the marketing (Fresco, 1998). Four of ten agricultural workers in the world are women. (UN 1986) Women take part actively in farming activities and in processing farm products, in addition to their domestic and reproductive responsibilities. According to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development in 2008, women account for 75 percent of the farming population in Nigeria, working as farm managers, and suppliers of labour. Though women constitute a large portion of the farming population, women's possibilities in agriculture are

hindered by formal and traditional rules. Generally, the extent of gender involvement in agricultural production varies across ethnic groups in Nigeria. Sahel, 2014)

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to identify the challenges of Nigeria women in agriculture and to determine the way forward to the challenges and the specific objectives are:

- I. Identify the socio-economic characteristics of women farmers in the study area;
- II. assess the level of participation of women in agricultural activities in the study area;
- III. identify the constraints of Nigeria women in agriculture; and
- IV. determine the way forward to achieving greater number of women participating in agricultural activities

II. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Akoko South West local government of Ondo State Nigeria. It is located in the North Senatorial district of Ondo State which is situated in South Western part of Nigeria with an annual rainfall of 1300mm per annum, which commences in April and ends in October. The residents of the area are engaged in Agricultural and trading activities. Crops such as Yam, Cassava, Maize and Tomato are mostly grown in the area. Livestock rearing is also a major activity practiced in the area and this is supported by the availability of a vast fertile land which provides suitable pastures for the livestock.

Method of Data Collection

The data used for the study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected through the administration of structured questionnaires, while secondary information was obtained from journals, books and the internet.

Sampling Techniques

A multi stage simple random sampling technique was employed for selecting the respondents. From the existing three (3) districts in the local government, 6 villages were purposively selected in the first stage and 20 respondents were also randomly selected from each village in the second stage thereby giving a total of 120 women in the study area.

Analytical Techniques

The analytical techniques employed for the analysis in the study include:
Descriptive statistics and Correlation analysis

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic Characteristics of the Respondents

The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents considered in the study were, age, marital status, family size, level of education, farm size, primary occupation and access to credit. **Age:** The study shows that, 75% of the respondents were still in their active age categories (18-35 years) that facilitates the energy demanding labour in agricultural production. This supports the findings of (Bawa et al., 2010) who reported that women involved in agricultural seed systems activities in Borno State, North-East Nigeria, were within the economically productive age range of 18-35 years.

Marital Status: The study also indicates marital status of the respondents. It shows that majority (70%) of the respondents were married, while 30% were single. This suggests that other home in which married women were engaged could be one of the barriers to their effective participation in agricultural activities due to the idea of some cultural and religious belief that women are suppose to stay at home.

Household Size: It also contains information on family size of the respondents. The data show that more than half (56%) of the respondents have family size of six members and above, while those with below 6 constitute 44%. Those with large family size may participate more in agricultural activities in a day than those with small family size. This is because those with large family size have the advantage of family labour and division of labour at home to do more work on the farm.

Educational Status: The study further reveals data on the educational qualification of the respondent. The information show that most (49%) of the respondents had primary education and those with secondary and tertiary education constituted 21% and 20% respectively, while 10% of the respondent never went to school. It could be deduced from this findings that only 45% of the respondents had both secondary and tertiary education, whereas majority (55%) of them had low level of education. This situation could also act as barrier to adoption of improved technology and modern ways of agricultural production. Farmers' education generally has been

found to enhance production among food crops farmers, apparently resulting from their efficiency in using new production technologies (Ani, 2006).

Farm Size: The distribution of the respondents according to their farm size as depicted in the study shows that 40% of the respondents have below one hectare of land under cultivation. Those with 1 - 2 hectares of land were 45% and those with more than 2 hectares of land constituted 15%. The distribution shows that majority (85%) of the respondents cultivates below two hectares of land and as such they are mostly small-scale farmers.

Primary Occupation of Farmers: An assessment of the primary occupation of the respondents indicates that, majority (51%) are engaged in farming as their primary occupation and 22% are traders, while 27% are civil servants. Thus, majority of the respondents in the study area are highly engaged in agricultural production.

Level of participation of women in agricultural activities in the study area

The results of the assessment of the respondents' level of participation in agricultural activities indicated that, 16% of the respondents do not have farms, while majority (84%) owned their own personal farm.

Further analysis of those that owned farms reveals that 54% acquired their land through the process of borrowing from other individuals, 26% acquired theirs by inheritance and 19% acquired their land through purchase and the rest (6%) of the respondents got their land through lease. Land ownership acquired through inheritance and purchase guarantee production security and freedom and also aids in the acquisition of credit facilities.

The study also indicated that 34% of the respondents have access to credit while 66% does not which could also be one of the challenges faced by women participation in agricultural production. According to some historians, women first initiated agricultural practices and demonstrated the art of science of farming. Women played a key role in the conservation of basic support system such as land, water, flora and fauna (Swaminathan, 1985).

In order to determine the challenges of women's participation in agricultural production, a correlation analysis was carried out to establish the relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and their level of participation in agricultural production. Six independent variables were correlated and they include, age, marital status, family size, educational level, access to credit. In collaboration with the findings of Ogunbameru et al. (2006) the challenges include inadequate capital (16.9%), lack of adequate storage facilities (16.4%), high rate of illiteracy (14.0%), lack of market (8.4%) and inadequate access to land (7.1%).

The correlation test shows that only marital status had negative correlation at 5% level of significance. This indicates that marriage tends to affect the respondents' participation in agricultural production negatively. This could be attributed to the fact that most Nigerian men believe women should spend more time indoors taking care of their children and domestic activities than working. (Nuhu et al., 2014)

The coefficients of age, marital status, family size, income, educational level, access to credit facilities positively at 1% level of significance. This indicates that a unit increase in the values of the coefficients of the variables will influence the respondent's participation in agricultural production positively. Age has a positive coefficient at 1% level of significance. This suggests that as the age of the respondent increases, her participation in agricultural activities also increases by reason of more involvement in agricultural production. This could be due to the responsibilities attached to adulthood. The coefficient of educational level is positive at 1% level significance; this indicates that for a unit increase in the coefficient of educational level, the respondents' participation in agricultural production also increases. In other words, as the respondent improves on her educational level, she becomes influenced to participate in agricultural production. (Nuhu et al., 2014) also reported that highly educated farmers can get information on modern agricultural production techniques from a wide range of sources such as extension agents, electronic or print media, internet etc.

The analysis also reveals that access to credit is positively significant at 1% which indicates that women involved in agriculture participate better if they have access to credit.

Constraints of Nigeria women participation in Agriculture

In identifying the challenges faced by women in agriculture the following findings were made:

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate inputs	19	15.83
Lack of technological knowhow	83	69.16
High rate of Illiteracy	37	30.83
Lack of means of implementation	23	19.16
Inadequate finances	78	65.00
Lack of land ownership rights for women	56	46.67
Gender inequality	49	40.83

Way forward to increasing women participation in agricultural production

The following way forward on how to increase women participation in agricultural production has been deduced from the analysis of the study:

Educational empowerment of rural women

Economic empowerment of rural women

Capacity building through proper training of rural women

Easy access to credit

Easy access to land

Creation of awareness of the rural women to how they can impact positively on the economy

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, women farmers in the study area are faced with a lot of challenges for participation in agricultural production. Some of the challenges are: inadequate finances, poor access to information and training, inadequate inputs, Lack of land ownership right, Gender inequality, Religious belief, Cultural belief, Lack of technological knowhow, High rate of illiteracy and Lack of means of implementation.

Therefore, so as to facilitate effective women's participation in agricultural production activities the study has derived some way forward. Which could in one way or the other increase women participation in agricultural production activities thereby enhancing economic growth in the study area and Nigeria at large.

The findings also revealed that the socio-economic characteristics of the women farmers have a positive relationship with their effective participation in agricultural production.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

Economic Empowerment of women: Government and commercial banks should provide agricultural credit facilities and loans that will take into cognizance the peculiar nature of women in terms of collateral demands.

Educational Empowerment of Women: Government and NGO's should extend scholarships programme to the study areas and the need for sensitisation of the rural women on the importance of education as it relates to agricultural production.

Creation of awareness: Awareness should be created to rural women on how they can impact positively on the economy through agricultural production

Uprooting of all Obnoxious Traditional Practices that Impede the Rights of Women: The Nigerian government should collaborate with traditional rulers in Nigeria and other stakeholders to ensure that all harmful and traditional practices which target only women, are uprooted

Capacity building: Proper training of the rural women on the use of farm inputs and technological driven machine for fast work on the farm and higher yield.

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