

WOMEN FARMERS AS VERITABLE TOOLS IN RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF MICHAEL OKPARA UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE UMUDIKE MODEL COMMUNITIES IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Owing to the short fall in agricultural production as result of ineffective labour, women have responded as veritable tools in boosting food production to the nation. The study was carried out in the model communities of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike (Umudike, Umuariaga and Ndoro) which are in Ikwuano Local Government Area of Abia State. A total of 150 respondents were randomly selected for the study. Data were collected through a well-structured interviewed schedule and oral discussion. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and focus group discussion. Findings showed that majority of the farmers were females. Results revealed that almost all the women were involved in farm activities to enhance the wellbeing of their communities and the entire nation. It further revealed that inadequate farm materials, inadequate capital, inadequate health facilities, inefficient market, bad road, and community conflict were their major problems. Inadequacy of farm materials has been a problem because when they are not sufficient, farmers found it difficult to produce on a larger scale. It was also observed that large percentage of the respondents was married. This means spouses take decision on agriculture and rural development activities in the host communities. Result revealed that, the respondents were predominantly Christians. In conclusion, women farmers in MOUAU selected model communities in Abia State are predominantly Christians.

Keywords: Women Farmers, Veritable Tools, Model Community and Development

Introduction

Women constitute half of the world's population and about 565 million of them reside in the rural areas (Akpabio, 2005). Rural woman refers to the female as opposed to the male component of rural population. Human being is divided into two categories according to their physical, biological characteristics- external and internal genitalia, gonad activity, hormonal states and secondary sexual characteristics. These intrinsic biological differences resulted in women being able to bear and suckle children. Women have been sufficiently projected as potential sources of increased Gross National Product. Improving women's access to agricultural extension services in the model communities have therefore been major concern of the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike. The university adopted three model communities namely, Umudike, Umuariaga and Ndoro in Ikwuano Local Government Area of Abia State. Women play important roles in these communities where they physically produce 70 – 80% of domestic food crops, hence helping to ensure community and national food security (Kanu,2011 and Mba *et al.*, 2011). Women ensure household food security because they carry greater household expenditure (Ani, 2007). Women have been found to be involved in agricultural production services in the study areas. Report showed that they are responsible for 100% of the work in food processing and 60% in marketing. Women in the study areas were found to be raising livestock like sheep and goat on a smaller scale to improve their wellbeing. Considering the effort of these women, the MOUAU has provided the women

farmers with efficient, effective and appropriate technology, training and information that will boost their productivity.

In MOUAU, part of the efforts made in improving the wellbeing of women farmers resulted in empowering the women, reduction of malaria attack, reducing the illiteracy level, record keeping, home management among others. According to Kanu (2011), women were not mere dependents, rather participants. So development efforts should be carried out on the assurance that development that benefits men will also benefit women. This implication is that, women experience considerable difficulties in securing access to agricultural services such as farm lands, agricultural inputs, credits, steady market facilities and technical assistance. Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike has achieved the following in the Model communities and these include establishment of women farmers group within the three functional Model Communities. This interactive relationship between the University and the communities are now well established. Loans were given to the women farmers to establish agricultural businesses. They mobilize women farmers group for re-orientation and empowerment. Conferences are scheduled regularly on women dynamics. MOUAU also conducted medical services, health and nutritional intervention to the women farmers in the Model communities. The objective of the University is to let women farmers understand the critical roles of the women in the community (Kanu, 2011).

Methodology

The study was conducted in the model communities of MOUAU in Ikwuano Local Government Area of Abia State. The study population was 150 farmers. Three model communities (Umudike, Umuariaga and Ndoro) were purposively selected as the host communities of MOUAU. Five farmers group were randomly selected from the list of the farmers group in each selected community. Then, ten farmers were randomly selected from each of the selected farmers group to give fifty farmers in each community given a total 150 respondents for the three communities. Data were collected using both primary and secondary methods. Primary data collection was obtained by interviewing the respondents through Participatory Rural Appraisal and Focus Group Discussion method while secondary data were from literature, research journals, report papers and documents. In order to characterize the respondents, issues on their socio economic characteristics such as age, marital status, level of education degree obtained, occupation (major and minor) were ascertained and difficulties faced by farmers were identified. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as tables, frequencies and percentages.

Results and Discussion

Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Women Farmers

Result shows that majority of the farmers were females (61.0%). This means that their contributions are higher in household food production. The observation agreed with Kuye (2004) and Obasi (2005), who emphasized the active involvement of women in agriculture and that they accounted for 70% of agricultural workers, so developing them mean development of agriculture and the nation. This work is in contrast with the findings of Eluwa (2007) which said that men are deeply involved in agriculture than women. This distribution further showed that majority of the farmers surveyed fall within the age bracket of 20 - 40 years (50%). The result was associated with active age of strength and muscles. This if channeled into agriculture will lead to development. The work further agreed with Kanu (2011) who opined that, most farmers are below, 50 years thus; they are very active and desirous of improving their lives. In addition to that, result revealed that 69.3 % of the respondents were predominantly Christians. Only a negligible percentage (7.3%) was Muslims while 23.3% were traditional worshipers. From this result, I may conclude that MOUAU selected model communities in Abia State are predominantly Christian communities. This work is in line

with Nwosu (2007) work on distribution of respondents according to religious affiliation in Abia State where by 99.06% were Christians. More so, it was recorded that, the major occupation of the people was farming (77.3%). About 22.7% of the respondents obtained a living from off farm activities. Also in minor occupation, off- farm accounts for about 68.0% and on - farm was 32%.It was also observed that large percentage of the respondents were married (70%). This means more spouses taken decision on agriculture and rural development activities in the host communities. This in consonance with previous observation by Fakeya (2000) that said that married life adds more labour to agriculture. From the result on education, the highest percentage of literate farmers had primary education (37.3%) followed by secondary school education (20.7%). It means that, highly educated ones had gone to the city in search of job and enjoyment of township life

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of women farmers according to their socio–economic characteristics

Variables	Umudike N = 50		Umuariaga N = 50		Ngoro N = 50		Total N =150	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Sex								
Male	20	40	23	46	15	30	58	38.0
Female	30	60	27	54	35	70	92	61.0
Age (years)								
20 - 40	25	50	24	48	26	52	75	50.0
41- 60	15	30	18	36	14	28	47	31.3
61- 60	10	20	8	16	10	20	28	18.7
Religion								
Christian	36	72	38	76	30	60	104	69.3
Tradition	10	20	10	20	15	30	35	23.3
Muslim	4	8	2	4	5	10	11	7.30
Major Occupation								
On –farm	40	80	36	72	40	80	116	77.3
Off – farm	10	20	14	28	10	20	34	22.7
Minor Occupation								
On-farm	14	28	14	28	20	40	48	32.0
Off-farm	36	76	38	76	30	60	102	68.0
Marital Status								
Single	10	20	15	30	20	40	45	30.0
Married	40	80	35	70	30	60	105	70.0
Education Status								
No-formal education	6	12	10	20	11	22	27	18.0
Primary sch. Education	19	38	20	49	17	34	56	37.3
Sec.Sch.Education\ GCE	11	22	10	20	10	20	31	20.7
OND/NCE	8	16	5	10	7	14	20	13.3
HND/BSC	6	12	5	10	4	8	15	10.0

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Activity Profile of Men and Women farmers in Cassava Enterprise in the Study Area:

Participatory and Focus group discussion (FGD) revealed that, men and women were involved in the production, processing and marketing of agricultural produce, example cassava. However, women played major roles in the processing and marketing of the crop. FGD revealed that in the three model communities of MOUAU that the result are the same (Table 2).

Table 2: Activity Profile on Cassava Food Crop Enterprises in the Model communities of MOUAU for Men, Women

Cassava activity	Who is involved	Who controls	Who benefits
Production			
Umudike			
Land clearing	Men/women	Men	Both
Land cultivation	Men/women	Men	Both
Planting	Men/women	Both	Both
Weeding	Both	Women	Both
Harvesting	Both	Both	Both
Processing			
Peeling	Both	Women	Both
Grating	Men	Men	Both
Frying	Both	Women	Both
Marketing	Women	Women	Both
Umuariaga			
Production			
Land preparation	Men/women	Both	Both
Land cultivation	Men/women	Both	Both
Planting	Both	Women	Both
Weeding	Women	Women	Both
Harvesting	Women	Women	Both
Processing			
Peeling	Women	Women	Both
Grating	Men	Men	Both
Frying	Women	Women	Both
Marketing	Women	Women	Both
Ndoro			
Production			
Land preparation	Men/women	Both	Both
Land cultivation	Men/women	Both	Both
Planting	Both	Women	Both
Weeding	Women	Women	Both
Harvesting	Women	Women	Both
Processing			
Peeling	Women	Women	Both
Grating	Men	Men	Both
Frying	Women	Women	Both
Marketing	Women	Women	Both

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Problems encountered by Women Farmers in the Area of Study

The problems encountered by the respondents are presented in Table 3. The respondents listed the major problems to include inadequate farmland, trekking long distance to farms, capital, unavailability of fertilizers, high cost of labour, pest and disease infestation, weeds, lack of farm machineries, they demanded for garri processing machine and oil processing mill to reduce the drudgery involved in manual processing of these products. Result revealed that inadequate farm

materials (54.7%), inadequate capital of about 71%, inadequate health facilities (70%), inefficient market (57%), bad road (69%), and community conflict (55.3%) were their major problems. Inadequate capital if not checked hinders agricultural production. For the farmers to increase their production they need more money as this would help them to make purchases and increase their produce. Inadequate health facilities ranked second among the problems. A sick farmer cannot put in his best into farming and that affects production. Bad road was a problem in the study area so farmers found it difficult to convey their produce to the market thus, production was retarded. Inadequacy of farm materials was a problem because when they are not sufficient farmers found it difficult to produce on a large scale. Inefficient market was also a problem in the study area. Farmers' productions without ready market frustrate the farmers for larger production. These problems were in line with the work of Nwosu, (2007) on the constraints of adoption of labour-saving agricultural technology by women farmers in Abia State. This is shown in the table 3 below.

Table 3: Problems Encountered by women Farmers in the Area of Study

	Umudike		Umuariaga		Ndoro		Total	
	N = 50		N = 50		N = 50		N = 150	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Do you have access to land for farming?								
Yes	30	60	35	70	30	40	85	56.7
No	20	40	15	30	30	60	65	43.3
Are there adequate farm materials available to you?								
Yes	20	40	21	42	18	36	59	39.3
No	30	60	20	40	32	64	82	54.7
Do you have enough capital for farm operation?								
Yes	19	38	15	30	10	20	44	29.3
No	31	62	35	70	40	80	106	70.7
Do you have adequate health facilities?								
Yes	15	30	10	20	20	40	45	30
No	35	70	40	80	30	60	105	70
Do you have efficient market for the sale of your procedure?								
Yes	22	44	20	40	23	46	65	43.4
No	28	56	30	60	27	54	85	56.7
Are the roads in your community in good shape?								
Yes	15	30	14	28	17	34	46	30.7
No	30	60	36	72	33	66	104	69.3
Is there harmony in your community?								
Yes	23	46	24	48	20	40	67	44.7
No	27	54	26	52	30	60	83	55.3

Source; Field survey, 2015

Conclusion

In conclusion women play important roles in the communities where they physically produce 70 – 80% of domestic food crops, hence helping to ensure community and national food security (Kanu, 2011 and Mba *et al.*, 2011). Women carry greater household expenditure (Ani, 2007) and they are involved in agricultural production services. This ideology reflected in policies that affect their access to means of production and social relationships of production. From the result of this work irrespective of the way women are weighed down, they produce more than the men, so in measuring their contribution to programs, sociological, agronomic and economic indices should be used.

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