



Women Empowerment through Farming Activities and Self-Reliance: Empirical Evidence from Niger State of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Socio-economic empowerment is a serious challenging task facing Nigerian rural women today. For the development of family, community and country, women play an important role and therefore it is necessary to make them socially and economically strong and capable according to their interest areas. This paper seeks to examine socio-economic benefits of participation in farming activities among rural women in Niger State of Nigeria. Women empowerment through farming activities which is the focus of this paper is a mechanism through which rural women are able to increase self-reliance in order to promote their well-being. A sample of 150 women farmers were selected from a study population of 320 through simple random from all the Senatorial Districts of Niger State and a schedule was designed and administered among the respondents. The results revealed that household size and marital status have significant impact on women participation in farming activities. Most of the respondents were illiterate with non-formal education which directly informed their participation in farming activities. The study concludes that there is high rate of involvement of women in farming activities in the study area; hence most of the respondents emphasized positive changes in their socio-economic wellbeing. The paper therefore concludes that women involvement in farming activities is a mechanism for rural women empowerment and poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Socio-Economic, Empowerment, Participation, Farming Activities

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1. INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic empowerment is a serious challenging task facing Nigeria rural women today. As the world economic profile of women showed, they represent more than 50% of the world population and make up 40% of the official labour force, perform 60% of all working hours, receive 10% of world income and own even less than one percent of the world property (Mann, 2006). Nigeria women who represent more than half of Nigerian's population suffer many disadvantages as compared to man in terms of participation earnings and literary rate. They are relegated to the background as they lack the educational, economic and political power necessary to actualize their innate potentials. Considering the population of women in Nigeria, a conscious or unconscious under representation of women in educational, economic, social and political programmes could lead to a serious setback and thus the need for women empowerment (Amake, 2010). There is an emerging need to improve women status which should start with social and economic empowerment. Women empowerment would be able to develop self-esteem, confidence, realize their potentials and enhance collective bargaining power and improve their wellbeing and self reliance. Thus, the increasing awareness and importance of women participation in farming practice and benefits derive calls for an in-depth study of women involve in farming activities in Niger State of Nigeria. The aim of this paper therefore, is to understand and describe the socio-economic benefits accrued to women participating in farming activities. Niger state is basically an agrarian federating unit of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.



1.1 Empowerment – a Theoretical Postulation

Empowerment is a familiar term that had been used in many development agencies that enhance on individual and groups to make decisions and transform those decisions into desired outcomes (Chally, 2007). Empowerment has two interrelated aspects that can be summarized as individual empowerment and collective empowerment. Each aspect has its own components (Mann, 2006). Individual empowerment relates to the way people think about themselves as well as the knowledge, capabilities, skills and mastery they actually possess (Staples, 1990).

A set of four components, including meaning, competence, self determination, and impact were found in individual empowerment. The goal of individual empowerment is actually to achieve a state of liberation strong enough to impact one's power of life, community and the society. Individual empowerment therefore develops when people attempt to develop the capabilities to overcome their socio-economic problems and attain self determination, self sufficiency and decision making abilities. Collective empowerment in other word, refers to the process by which individuals join together to break their solitude and silence, help one another, learn together and develop skills for collective actions (Boehm & Staples, 2004; Fetterson, 2002) Empowerment process is therefore not a constant, but rather a continuing development that involves many changes and whereby an individual or group is able to strengthen and exercise the ability to act to gain control and mastery over life, community and society. Empowerment thus is understood as a multi-dimensional process where people take control over their lives, gaining skills, building self-confidence and solving problems. It takes place at a hierarchy of different levels; individual, household, groups, community and societal and is facilitated by providing encouraging factors (e.g. exposure to new activities, which can build capacities) and removing inhibiting factors (e.g. lack of resources and skills) (Kabeer, 2005). Thus, woman empowerment would be able to develop self-esteem and confidence to improve their wellbeing. Therefore, the involvement of Niger State rural women in farming activities can lead to empowerment where they can gain control over their lives.

1.2 Objective of Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the extent to women's empowerment through participation in farming activities by Niger State rural women. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine empowerment benefits (socio and economic) through participation in farming practices.
2. Identify the constraints militating against women participation in farming activities.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in rural areas of Niger State. The study is descriptive in nature as it has attempted to describe the socio-economic benefits derived through participation in farming activities in the study area. The sample size for this study came from a population of 25 communities who were involved in farming activities from the study area. The total population from the 25 communities was 320 and since the population is large and logically homogenous, the most convenience method of multi-stage sampling technique was adopted.

The sample size of 150 was then selected for the study. The research instrument for data collection for this study was through questionnaire. The suggested items in measuring socio-economic empowerment were originally developed by past researchers and reported high rating in validity and reliability (Shamola, 2009, Kabeer, 2005). The volume of each response to these items as measured with four point likert scale (1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly Agree). Data obtained from the respondents was coded, computed and analyzed using statistical package for socio sciences (SPSS version 20).

3. RESULTS

While trying to examine the dynamics of women participation in farming activities by Niger State women, socio-economic benefits derived from the practice as well as challenges faced by the respondents were identified to be very important variables as the respondents of this study are adults that could explain better what they felt about farming practices. This is shown in tables 1-3 below:



3.1 Economic Empowerment Derived through Farming Practices

The main idea behind this section (Table 1) was to measure the level of economic benefits derived by the respondents through participation in farming activities. The analysis showed that the overall mean score of economic empowerment was 4.20 and majority of the respondents are really privileged to enjoy many economic benefits. These include increased in their income which has the highest mean of 4.40, improved living condition and increased purchases power among others. The overall frequency thus indicated that women who participate in farming activities have high level of economic empowerment.

Table 1: Items Analysis of Economic Empowerment (n=150) Mean 4:20

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Low 1-2	Mode(2.1-3)	High (3.1-4)
1.	My income has increased	4.40	0.59	0.7%	2.4%	96.9%
2.	Mu living condition has improved	4.33	0.60	1.1%	4.3%	94.7%
3.	My purchasing power has increased	4.31	0.70	2.5%	5.7%	91.8%
4.	I contribute to my household	4.18	0.58	1.8%	2.5%	95.7%
5.	I save some money now	4.12	0.50	1.1%	2.8%	96.1%
6.	I solve financial problems	3.87	0.67	1.4%	2.5%	96%
7.	I can manage money now	3.86	0.56	1.4%	18.8%	79.8%
8.	I can assist my relations financially	3.82	0.54	12.5%	12.5%	75.0%
9.	I have some assets now	3.80	0.65	5.3%	25.9%	68.8%
10.	I have access to credit facilities	3.71	0.74	5.0%	31.2%	63.8%

Source: Field Work, 2017

3.2 Social Empowerment Derived through Farming Practices

This section (table 2) was used to measure respondent's level of social empowerment through their involvement in farming activities. The analysis showed that the overall mean was 3.80 and that most of the respondents of this study who participate in farming activities have got a lot of social benefits. Based on the analysis in table 2 below, respondents got social services such as improved life which has the highest mean score of 3.59, children's access to good education and better decision making ability among others. Thus, the result showed that respondents who participate in farming activities from this study area generally have high social empowerment.

Table 1: Items Analysis of Social Empowerment (n=150) Mean 3.80

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Low 1-2	Mode(2.1-3)	High (3.1-4)
1.	My life has improved	3.59	0.56	1.9%	57.7%	40.4%
2.	My children have access to education	3.35	0.53	1.0%	63.6%	35.5%
3.	I feel better making decision	3.31	0.49	31.1%	66.7%	32.3%
4.	I act on my own now	3.27	0.52	3.9%	64.4%	31.7%
5.	I learn new farming skills	3.13	0.55	8.6%	69.4%	22.0%
6.	I know many things now	3.12	0.69	17.1%	50.7%	31.6%
7.	I know more about life	3.10	0.46	5.7%	78.0%	16.3%
8.	I happily stay with my family	3.09	0.51	9.9%	74.1%	16.0%
9.	I know more about the society	2.92	0.47	15.2%	77.0%	7.8%
10.	I perform my social responsibilities	2.76	0.60	32.3%	58.5%	9.2%

Source: Field Work, 2017

Women's Constraints in Farming Practices

The main idea behind this section (table 3) was to measure women's obstacles in farming activities in this area. The analysis showed that majority of respondents of this study has faced some challenges. Some of these challenges include: lack of enough capital, lack of technical and financial support from the government or any other external organization and lack of land tenure rights among others.



Table 3: Items of analysis of constraints (n=150) mean: 1.90%

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Low 1-2	Mode(2.1-3)	High (3.1-4)
1.	I have enough capital	2.36	0.67	61.0%	34.4%	4.6%
2.	I have government support	2.31	0.63	65.6%	31.2%	3.2%
3.	I have access to fertilizer	1.31	0.58	86.5%	12.4%	1.1%
4.	I have access to other farming equipments	1.97	0.58	86.4%	12.5%	1.1%
5.	I have land tenure rights	1.91	0.61	87.2%	11.7%	1.1%
6.	I have my husband support	1.90	0.60	88.0%	11.9%	1.1%
7.	I have access to enough rainfall	1.71	0.60	95.0%	3.5%	1.4%
8.	I have good market for my product	1.70	0.61	96.0%	2.5%	1.5%
9.	I get assistance from NGOs	1.59	0.60	97.0%	2.5%	0.50%
10.	My children assist me in the farm	1.58	0.59	98.0%	1.0%	1.0%

Source: Field Work, 2017

4. DISCUSSION

The study was designed to understand the socio-economic impact of farming activities on members. The result obtained from this study has shown the benefits and changes that respondents of this study have experienced in their lives as a result of their farming practices. The outcome of this study showed that most of the respondents of this study have benefited considerably in terms of socio-economic empowerment. It is evident that economically, the respondents have opportunities through their participation in farming activities to enjoy some economic benefits which include increased in their income. Most of them felt strong enough to meet unexpected financial challenges as a result of the increased in their purchasing power. Secondly, the outcome indicated that the respondents have got a lot of social benefits. Most of them felt that there is improved life and access to children's education. To this end, respondents are able to make good decision about themselves and their immediate families. They are able to articulate own strategy for change and promote better education for their children among others.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies (Fabiya & Danladi, 2007) when they observed that agricultural production has the potentials establishing capacity building and self-efficiency among women in socio-economic development. This practice by Nigerian women and indeed most African countries have been shown to have positive effects on women (Damisa & Danladi, 2007).

Although, the respondents of this study faced some challenges in this practice. These include: lack of initial capital, lack of government support and others, but the respondents were able to record high successes. It can be concluded that poverty is the compelling force for the women to participate in farming activities and the practice has proved to be a good strategy to alleviate poverty and women development. Farming as widely practiced today by Nigerian rural women has created impact upon their living conditions. It is understood from this study that farming activities are playing a vital role in empowering Nigerian rural women as most of the respondents have emphasized changes in their wellbeing.



5. CONCLUSION

The outcome of this study indicated that women in the area of study see farming practice as a major means of livelihood and, therefore, put high expectation of returns on the occupation. And as such majority of respondents of this study, have benefited considerably in terms of socio-economic development. The practice has clearly created impact upon the life pattern of Nigerian rural women especially those from Niger State.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends the following:

1. The government of Niger State should come out with mass enlightenment programme through ministry of agriculture on the need for active participation of citizens in agricultural production irrespective of educational status or sex.
2. There is need for state government to also encourage efficient and sustainable use of existing cultivate land, by further investing in agricultural research and extension, with a view to increase the agricultural output as well as the corresponding income for households especially for those investing in commercial agriculture.
3. There is need for state government to give technical support to women engaged in farming practices though modern agricultural equipment.



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