

LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION AND BENEFITS OF THE NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR FOOD SECURITY (NPFS) AMONG RURAL WOMEN IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study assessed the level of participation and benefits of the National Programme for Food Security (NPFS) among rural women farmers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The National Programme for Food Security (NPFS) is a five year nationwide Programme for Food Security launched in 2001 in Nigeria with the objective to increase and stabilize food production rapidly and sustainably through the wide spread dissemination of improved technologies and management practices in areas with high potential, and to create an economic and social environment conducive to food production as well as reaching some 30,000 farming families in each selected areas (FGN, 2006) Primary data were collected through field survey with well-structured questionnaire and interview schedule and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results obtained indicated that radio was the major source of information to majority (28.3%) of the rural women participants. More so, majority (84.40%) of the women were not involved in planning NPFS programmes. Further analysis showed that majority (56.7%) of the rural women farmers merely participated in decision making process at information receiving level. Borehole facilities (39.4%) and community seed production (36.1%) were the major components benefited by majority of the women. It was concluded that the objectives of NPFS has not been effectively realized among the rural women due to their low level of participation in programme planning and implementation. Involvement of stakeholders in planning process ensures successful implementation of programmes since their felt needs are factored in during the process.*

KEYWORDS: Participation, Rural Women, Benefits, National Programme for Food Security, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in national development in Africa with respect to food production has been generally acknowledged. Onyibe (2004) reported that women constitute 70-80 percent of the agricultural labour force in Nigeria. The contributions of women range from such tasks as land

clearing, planting, land filling, weeding to fertilizer application/rearing domestic animals, among others. Therefore, involvement of women in agricultural development programmes such as NPFS is a welcomed development. The National Programme for Food Security (NPFS) in Nigeria jointly introduced and implemented by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) and the United Nations (FAO/UN) is committed to ensuring food security, reducing poverty and improving the nation's economy (Clover 2003, FAO, 1996). As a result, and as first step towards the Millennium Development Goals target of reducing by half the number of hungry people by 2015, the Federal Government of Nigeria operated a pilot project of the NPFS in 3 sites of Kano State (FGN, 2006). Based on the successful experience, a five year nationwide National Special Programme for Food Security (NSPFS) was launched in 2001 with the objective to increase and stabilize food production rapidly and sustainably through the wide spread dissemination of improved technologies and management practices in areas with high potential, and to create an economic and social environment conducive to food production as well as reaching some 30,000 farming families in each selected area (FGN, 2006).

In meeting this objective, Government decided to implement the programme with its own human and financial resources estimated at US\$45million while Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) provided technical and managerial support on demand to the Government (FGN, 2006). The components of this programme include activities aimed at improving household food security through water control, such as on-farm irrigation, capacity building, and water management, crop intensification and diversification, soil fertility improvement, livestock improvement, aquaculture, and inland fishery, animal diseases and trans-boundary pest control. The field activities have been launched in all thirty six States. A total of 109 sites were selected to be developed on the basis of one site per Senatorial District. The Priority areas were selected on the basis of existing secondary data relating to potential of bringing about rapid improvement and their representative of major agroecological zones. Subsequently, selection of sites in each state was based on Participatory Rural Appraisal and Needs Assessment conducted by States/local implementation teams. The scale of intervention involves 250-300 farm families in each site (Federal Ministry of Agriculture, 2001). The implementation is in phases. To achieve the above, a Need Assessment Survey was carried out in 2001 in all the thirty six States and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, and the results show that all the States required assistance in various enterprises.

According to Ani (2004), participation in rural programmes means mobilizing rural farmers to take active part in the programme. Participation is of paramount importance in planning any programme relating to farmers' needs. While highlighting on the need of involving rural farmers in planning extension programmes geared towards boosting food production, Warren (2003) noted that rural farmers resist change until they are fully integrated into the programme where their needs and aspirations are prioritized. Realization of these changes can be facilitated by active participation of the beneficiaries from planning to implementation. In his opinions, Nwaniki (2007) maintained that lack of participation has been one of the forces inhibiting food production and food security in developing countries like Nigeria. By implication, food security cannot be achieved without active participation of the beneficiaries of such programmes at both the planning and implementation phases.

Ajayi (2005) noted that lack of access to productive resources such as land, credit, farm inputs, adequate extension services and appropriate technology inhibit the participation of rural women in food production and food security programmes globally. In his assertion, Nwaniki (2007) pointed out quite a number of factors that influence women's participation in food production and food security as location, marital status, ideologies influencing people's perception about males and females, culture, access to productive resources and modern farm inputs/labour costs. It is therefore worthy of note that participation of women in programmes on food production, food sufficiency and sustained reduction of poverty and malnutrition has been identified as one of the yard sticks for measuring the level of poverty and achieving food security in many farm households in developing countries. The idea of maximum participation connects to the notion that there are different levels of participation. With regard to information, input and decision-making and authority, the level of participation typically include in ascending order as adapted from Pretty (1994) and Biggs (1989) as the following:

Receiving Information: This is a situation in the level of participation where participants receive information from interventionists about the development programme and its components.

Passive information giving: This is a situation in the level of participation where participants can respond to questions and issues that interventionists deem relevant for making decisions about projects.

Consultation: Research findings has shown that at this level of participation, participants are asked about their views and opinions openly and without restrictions, but the interventionist unilaterally decide what they will do with the information.

Collaboration: Participants are partners in a project and jointly decide about issues with project staff.

Self mobilization: In this level of participation, participants initiate work on and decide on projects independently, with interventionists in a supportive role only.

It is feasible that the extent of achievement on any agricultural extension programme depends largely on the level of participation desired and adopted by the participants. Whereas some researchers indicate that there is no best level of participation, Pretty (1994) opined that only higher level of participation can lead to sustainable result. Among these researchers, self mobilization seems to be the most popular as it strives to do things in a fully participatory manner. As cited in Adekola (2008), Osuji, asserted that the elements of participation in a general conception include; taking part in decision making to identify needs; taking part in the mobilization of resources and planning of projects to be undertaken; taking part in activities to implement and putting the project in place; and taking part in monitoring and evaluation of projects. Oduran (1999) was of the opinion that community participation takes place at the various levels in the process of development. The Development programme and projects normally involve planning, including needs and resource identification and goal setting, execution, utilization, and assessment of impacts. Since the levels of participation are many, concern has been over the stage at which we must encourage community participation.

Agriculture in developing countries faces a huge challenge. While agricultural production is dwindling, mostly due to low participation of the farming communities in development programmes, among other reasons, population is on the increase. Perhaps, on this premise,

Gardener and Haiweil, (2000), cited in Douthwaite, (2005) predicted further increase in population of developing countries. Since the problem is more severe in sub-Sahara African countries including Nigeria, where the population is expected to grow by 13.2% by 2015 (Douthwaite, 2005) and where more than one third of children are underweight, there would be greater need for farmers' participation particularly the women, in agricultural programmes. Hence, the need to scientifically investigate rural women participation in NPFS in the study area. This study, therefore, investigated the level of participation as well as derivables from NPFS among rural women in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives were to:

- i. identify the sources of relevant information on NPFS to the women
- ii. ascertain the level of rural women involvement in NPFS (from programme planning to implementation); and
- iii. identify perceived benefits of NPFS among participating rural women farmers in Ebonyi State.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Ebonyi State of Nigeria, which lies approximately on latitude 7°03'N and longitudes 8°54'E and 9°04'E in the South East Nigeria. A multi-stage random sampling technique was used to select one hundred and eighty (180) rural women farmers who are beneficiaries of NPFS in Ebonyi State for the study. Firstly, purposive selection of two L.G.As from each of the three agricultural zones based on location of the programme was made. Secondly, three registered NPFS groups/co-operatives from each of the six selected L.G.As were selected. Thirdly, ten (10) participating women farmers from each of the registered groups were randomly selected to give a total of 180 (one hundred and eighty) respondents that constituted the sample size of the study. Well-structured questionnaire and interview schedule were used to collect primary data for the study. Descriptive statistical tools were employed in data analysis. Objectives I and II were analyzed with frequency counts and percentage while objective III was analyzed using mean scores derived from a 4 point Likert-type scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Major Sources of Information on NPFS to the Rural Women Farmers

The participation of rural women in NPFS would be greatly enhanced if they are adequately informed about the program. Analysis of sources of information on NPFS is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Respondents According to major sources of Information on NPFS in the Study Area

Source of Information	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	51	28.3
Television	8	4.4
Co-operative societies	18	15.6
Internet	2	1.1

Fellow farmers 28 15.6
 Age grade 4 2.2
 Farmers forum 46 25.6
 Extension agents 13 7.2
 Constant farmers 16 8.9
 Town crier 3 1.7
 Film show 2 1.1
 News paper news later 5 2.8
 Total 196*
 Source: Field Survey, 2014.

***Multiple Responses Recorded.**

The result in Table 1 indicated that the major source of information on NPFS to the rural women was radio broadcast (28.3%). This was followed by farmers' forum (25%), cooperative societies (15.6%) and fellow farmers (15.6%). This implies that radio was the major source of information to the rural women. This conforms to the work of Adebayis et al., (2004) who opined that radio is the most important source of information to rural farmers in Ogun State, Nigeria. The study also justified participation in farmers' organization as major means of accessing information by Nigerian farmers. According to Udeze (2006), access to information has the potential to contribute to poverty reduction, food security, creation of employment opportunities and informed decision making by the rural farmers. The sources of information on NPFS available to the rural women nevertheless shows that they were disposed to accurate information on the programme since most of them received the information from reliable sources, i.e radio, farmers forum and cooperatives.

Level of Rural Women Involvement in NPFS (From Planning to Implementation)

It was necessary to ascertain the level of involvement of rural women in NPFS from planning to implementation. The results obtained are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Respondents according to their involvement in NPFS Programme Planning

Items Frequency Percentage
 Involved in planning 28 15.60
 Not involved in planning 152 84.40
 Total 180 100

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

The result of the analysis in Table 2 shows that most of the rural women farmers (84.4%) were not involved in planning the activities of the NPFS. This implies that the level of involvement of the rural women in the programme planning was low. Such approach to programme administration does not attract the much needed local support and are often bound to fail. To enhance the level of women participation in agricultural extension programmes, Ozo (2005) opined that rural women farmers should be fully integrated in all extension programme planning processes to ensure success

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of the Respondents According to their Level of Participation in Planning Decisions of NPFS Components

Level of participation	Frequency	Percentage
Receiving information	102	56.70
Passive information giving	50	27.80
Consultation	20	11.10
Collaboration	6	3.30
Self-mobilization	2	1.10
Total	180	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

The result of analysis in Table 4 generally shows that the beneficiaries of the NPFS were merely restricted to the lower levels of participation in the planning of the components of the programme by the programme administrators. Majority (56.7%) of the respondents' level of involvement in NPFS planning decision making process was receiving information while the least proportion of them (1.10%) participated at self mobilization level. This invariably indicates that the level of rural women farmers' participation in NPFS planning is undesirable and very passive since most of them merely received information on the programme content. The implication is that the programme may not be successfully implemented due to low level of participation of the beneficiaries in the programme planning. This result conforms to the work of Shitu., (2008) who opined that government programmes tend to fail partly because the beneficiaries are not sufficiently involved, thereby causing wastage of resources. Esenior, (1992) in Omoruyi, (2001) asserted that the top down approach to development issues which ignores the needs, aspirations, rights and inputs of the local people is not only old fashioned but increasingly becoming unacceptable.

Benefits of NPFS Sub-Components to the Rural Women Farmers

This refers to specific benefits that the rural women farmers (participants) gained through the assistance of NPFS. Analysis was carried out to identify the specific NPFS products/interventions accessed by women participants in the state. The result obtained is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Frequency Distribution of Respondents According to Benefited Sub-Components of the NPFS

NPFS Components	Benefits	*Frequency	Percentage
Bore holes	71	39.40	
Irrigation	5	2.80	
Diesel pumps for	0	0.00	
NPFS crop production	48	26.70	
Community seed production	65	36.10	
Input distribution	3	1.70	
Agro-processing	6	3.30	
Health and nutrition	7	3.90	
Poultry/broiler/layer production	4	2.20	

Ruminant upgrading 10 5.40

Pig rearing 8 4.40

Fish culture 2 1.10

Homestead orchard 0 0.00

None of the above 15 3.30

Total 120 100

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

*Multiple Responses Recorded

Result of the analysis in Table 4 indicated that among the sub-components of NPFS, the highest accessed intervention by the women participants was boreholes (39.4%). Others include crop production and community seed production at 26.7% and 36.1% respectively. Regrettably, the level of women enrollment and benefit from the NPFS components in the state was quite low. Out of the thirteen intervention areas mounted by the programme, women only benefited significantly from three, giving up the bulk of the benefits to the male counterparts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study had shown that rural women in Ebonyi State participated in National Programme for Food Security. However, their level of participation is low. As a result, the noble objectives of NPFS was not fully realized due to low level of participation of all the target beneficiaries of the programme. This study has further revealed the gender disparity in the planning and implementation of most human capacity building projects and interventions in Nigeria and Africa at large. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that sensitization of rural women to enhance their acceptance of development programmes as well as aggressive campaign on the benefits of such programmes should be ensured by the stakeholders before its take-off. Moreover, there should be enhanced as well as full integration of all target beneficiaries (rural women inclusive) in programme planning and decision-making process.

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