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CONSTRAINTS TO PARTICIPATION IN WOMEN-IN-AGRICULTURE PROGRAMME IN ABOH MBAISE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The study assessed the participation in women-in-agriculture programme in Aboh Mbaise local government area of Imo State, Nigeria. Multistage sampling procedure was used in selecting 120 women. Data were collected with a set of structured questionnaire and were analyzed using mean and percentages. Results showed that all the WIA packages were available in the study area and the women participated in all of them. Major constraints to participation in WIA programme were inadequate capital (91.5%) and illiteracy (69.5%). It was recommended that the WIA programme should be sustained and upscaled and that credit facilities should be made available to the women.*

KEYWORDS: Constraints to participation, women-in-agriculture programme, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is as an engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor (World Bank, 2007). In sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 80% of the population lives in rural areas and 70% of this population is dependent on food production through farming or livestock keeping for most of their livelihood. Small-scale farming provides most of the food produced in Africa as well as employment for 60% of the working people (PELUM Association, n.d.). In Nigeria, CIA (2012) reported that it contributes about 40% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and employs about 70% of the working population. It also maintains that it is the largest economic activity in the rural areas where almost 50% of the population lives. In 2011, agriculture contributed 40.19% (crop; 35.78%, livestock; 2.58%, forestry; 0.51%, fishing; 1.31%) and in 2012 its contribution was 39.19% (crop; 34.83%, livestock; 2.55%, forestry; 0.50%, fishing; 1.31%) to the gross domestic product (National Bureau of Statistics, NBS, 2012 & 2013). About 80% of Nigeria's domestic food production comes from household farmers, particularly crop production and forestry while fishery and livestock are largely supported by imports (NBS, 2013).

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes (SOFA Team & Doss, 2011).

Findings from a study financed by United Nations Development Programme in Nigeria found out that women make up some 60 - 80% of the agricultural labour force, depending on the region and they produce two-thirds of the food crops (Yemisi & Aisha, 2009). This therefore means that they are more involved in agricultural production than men as much as 73% are involved in cash crops, arable and vegetable gardening, while postharvest activities have 16% and agroforestry 15% (Abdullahi, n.d.) According to Auta (2004) women in Nigeria produce, process and market about 80% of food, manage 70% of all small-scale enterprise and about 33% of all households which is sustained by women. Ani (2004) observes that they perform such tasks as weeding, hoeing, sowing and harvesting, particularly of food crops. In the Eastern part of Nigeria as he maintains, they are responsible for growing such crops as cassava, yam, cocoyam, maize and maize. In the northern part of Nigeria, Fulani women are responsible for the production of milk and other dairy products. As Tologbonso *et al*. (2013) posits, development, food security and poverty alleviation will not be truly achieved without rapid agricultural growth. Increase in agricultural productivity is central to growth, income distribution, improved food security and alleviation of poverty in rural Africa (FAO, 2002). Thus, women considering their contributions to agriculture and other economic activities should be empowered. Adekanye *et al*. (2009) and Madukwe (2008) observed that agricultural extension service in Nigeria is characterized by inefficiencies. But the problem is more compounded in the case of women because of the unified agricultural extension system. In this system, men are always the first and perhaps the only target recipient of the planned change in agriculture (Tologbonse *et al.,* 2013). Available evidence shows that women still lag behind in terms of extension contact, accessibility to training and other indices of development education for agriculture (Tologbonso et al., 2013). It is in response to this situation that the Women in Agriculture (WIA) programme was introduced.

WIA programme was introduced in Imo State in 1991. The programme sought to improve agricultural extension programme for women. It ensured that extension service in every state in Nigeria has female extension workers at every level of operation from state headquarters to the villages. The structure of the programme itself is decentralized and integrated into the extension service (Saito & Gadzame, 1996). The major activity of WIA is to form women groups and assist them establish group farms. It is through these farms that extension agents transfer recommended technologies. The WIA programme also paid attention to off-farm activities of women (Odurukwe *et al*., 2006).

Since after introduction, the WIA programme has recorded much success both in terms of clientele coverage and adoption rates of the disseminated technologies (Odurukwe *et al*., 2006). It has however been observed that most of the studies on WIA programme in Nigeria were conducted either at the state level or agricultural zones (Ovwigho & Ifie, 2014; Tologbonse *et al*. 2013; Ifenkwe, 2012; Odurukwe *et al*. 2006) and none has been conducted to ascertain how the programme has fared at levels below the state and agricultural zones. Meanwhile, a programme could be adjudged successful at the zonal or state level but it may not really be at lower levels. It is against this background that the study seeks to assess participation in WIA in Aboh Mbaise LGA of Imo State, Nigeria. In pursuit of this, it is necessary to ask the following research questions: What are the various WIA packages available in Aboh Mbaise local area of Imo state? What is the participation of the women in the programme? What factors constrain the programme in the study area.

Purpose of the study

The broad objective of the study is to assess the constraints to participation in WIA Programme in Aboh Mbaise local government area of Imo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. identify the various WIA packages available in the study area;
2. assess participation in the programme by women in the area; and
3. identify constraints militating against participation in the programme by the women.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Aboh Mbaise local government area of Imo State, Nigeria. It is among the 27 LGAs in the state. It has an area of 184 square kilometers and a population of 19,582 people (National Population Commission, 2006). Aboh Mbaise is bounded in the North by Ahiazu Mbaise and Ikeduru LGAs, in the North-West and South –West by Ngor-Opkala and Owerri North LGAs, while in the North-East and South-East it is bounded by Ezinihitte Mbaise LGA and Ngwa South LGA of Abia State (www.imostate.gov.ng). Farming is the major occupation of the people and the major crops grown include maize, cassava, cocoyam, yam and leafy vegetables while goats, sheep, and domestic fowls are the major livestock reared (Umunakwe, 2011).

The population for the study comprised all women in the LGA who are registered members of WIA. A multistage sampling technique was used to select the sample. The first stage was the selection of four autonomous communities out of the nine autonomous communities that make up the LGA using simple random sampling technique namely Nguru Ahiato, Enyiogugu, Okwuato and Nguru Nwenkwo. The second stage was the selection of five villages from each of the six selected communities using simple random sampling technique to have a total of 20 villages. The third stage was the selection of six women from each village, from the list of all the registered women in the villages obtained from Imo State agricultural development programme office, using simple random sampling technique to give a total of 120 women which constituted the sample size. Availability of WIA packages in the study area was measured by providing a list of WIA packages obtained from literature and agricultural development programme headquarters and the respondents were asked to indicate the ones that were available and their responses were recorded on a 3-point likert scale of 3 = Highly Available, 2 = Available and 1 = Not Available. The mean of the scale was determined as 2.0 and any item with score $\geq$ 2.0 was taken as available in the area. Participation in WIA programme was measured by providing a list of WIA packages and the respondents were asked to indicate their level of participation in each on a 3-point likert scale of Highly Participated = 3, Participated = 2 and Not Participated = 1. The mean of the scale was determined as 2.0 and any item with a mean $\geq$ 2.0 was taken as being participated in by the respondents. Constraints to participation in the programme were determined by providing a list of all the possible constraints that could limit participation in the programme and responses were recorded. Data were collected with the aid of a set of structured questionnaire which was validated. Data were analyzed using percentages, mean and charts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

WIA packages available in the study area

Entries in Table 2 shows that all the packages of WIA programme listed were available in the study area. This implies the availability of activities that could enhance the income generating ability of the women in the area. According to Tologbonse et al. (2013) and Odurukwe et al. (2006) WIA was designed to help improve the economic and social conditions of rural women. The result also reveals the commitment of the agricultural extension service in the state in delivering WIA programme to the people. This would enhance women's access to extension service.

Table 2: Distribution of the women according to the available WIA packages

WIA Packages	M	S.D
Soap, cream, powder and detergent production	2.48*	0.79
Livestock production	2.58*	0.54
Crop production	3.15*	0.37
Processing of agricultural produce	2.69*	0.78
Skills on utilization of agricultural produce	2.96*	0.86
Fish farming	2.53*	0.70
Marketing of agricultural produce	2.82*	0.56
Use of improved agricultural technologies	2.81*	0.45
Formation of women cooperatives	2.85*	0.42
Linking farmers to sources of credit	2.22*	0.50

* = Available WIA Packages, M = Mean, S.D = Standard Deviation
Source: Field Survey Data, 2014

Participation in WIA programme in the study area

Table 3 reveals that the women participated in all the WIA programmes except for piggery (M = 1.80) and cattle production (M = 1.31). Their participation in almost all of the programmes reflects the relevance of the programmes to their livelihoods. People are more likely to participate in activities that are designed to meet their needs and improve their living conditions. A study by Ladele (1994) reported that farmers participated in WIA programme because it helped them to acquire more skills on agriculture in addition to providing support services. However, their non-participation in piggery and cattle rearing could be as a result of the capital-intensive nature of the ventures, socio-cultural factors or gender-related issues. Women in developing countries face limited access to credit and certain other resources which hamper their involvement in agriculture (Ani, 2004). However, a study by Odurukwe (2006) reported that women in Imo State, Nigeria participated in many of the WIA's programmes.

Table 3: Distribution of the women according to their participation in WIA programme

Programmes	M	S.D
Soap, cream, powder and detergent production	2.49*	0.78
Poultry production	2.43*	0.63

Piggery	1.80	0.86
Goat rearing	2.21*	0.76
Sheep rearing	2.13*	0.82
Cattle production	1.31	0.70
Cassava processing	2.80*	0.58
Maize processing	2.97*	0.49
Vegetable production	2.86*	0.50
Cocoyam processing	2.70*	0.59
Yam processing	2.33*	0.64
Processing of agricultural produce	2.78*	0.61
Skills on utilization of farm produce	2.62*	0.65
Fish farming	2.03*	0.80
Marketing of agricultural products	2.47*	0.71
Use of improved agricultural technologies	2.70*	0.67
Formation of women cooperatives	2.77*	0.61
Lining farmers to sources of credit	2.19	0.75

* = Programme the women are involved ina M = Mean, S.D = Standard Deviation
Source: Field Survey Data, 2014

Constraints to participation in WIA programme

Table 4 reveals that inadequate capital (91.5%) and illiteracy (69.5%) were the major constraints to participation in WIA programme in the area. Previous studies identified limited access to land, inadequate capital and credit facilities and ineffective extension service as problems of extension programmes (FAO, 1993; Saito & Weidemann, 1990). Others are lack of commitment by WIA officials, lack of encouragement, lack of storage facilities and high cost of labour (Nwaoha, 2008; Nwogu, 2008).

Inadequate capital could interfere with the adoption of improved agricultural technologies transferred through WIA. A study by Hertz *et al*. (2009) reports that women in developing countries are clustered in low-paying jobs; in extreme situations they are culturally not permitted to engage in waged labours such as in the Muslim societies (Igbokwe, 2005). This situation disadvantages them relative to their male counterparts in terms of income generation (SOFA Team & Doss, 2011). This could limit them from engaging in economic activities.

Similarly, Wakhungu (2010) reported that literacy level among girls and women in Africa is low. She stressed that the use and understanding of improved agricultural technologies is greatly aided by high literacy and educational level. Okoye *et al*. (2002) and Ajibefun & Aderinola (2004) concurred that educated farmers are more likely to be responsive to improved farming techniques. Thus, the women may not be disposed to adopting improved farming techniques and this could limit their productivity, thus increasing poverty rate.

Table 4: Distribution of the women according to constraints to the participation in WIA

Constraints	**%**
Size of the family	34.7

Family issues	9.3
Inadequate capital	91.5
Inadequate knowledge of improved technology	24.6
Poor provision of improved seed varieties and animal breeds	25.4
Illiteracy	69.5
Cultural barriers	16.1
Religious barriers	15.3

Source: Field Survey Data, 2014.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that many components of the WIA programme were available in the study area. Also, it showed a high level of participation in the programme as the women participated in almost all the components of the programme. This is expected to enhance the diffusion of improved agricultural technologies, improved agricultural production and improved living for the women in the area. However, some constraints were found to be militating against the success of the programme in the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The WIA programme should be sustained, promoted and upscaled. This can be achieved through the inclusion of more components or packages targeting rural women farmers into the programme. Also, the programme should cover more areas. Agricultural extension service delivery should be enhanced by recruiting more extension staff.
2. Credit facilities should be made available to the women. This can be achieved through the revamping of the moribund National Agricultural Banks. Similarly, the women can be encouraged to form and belong to farmers' groups.
3. Literacy level among women should be improved upon. This can be achieved by the removal of all impediments to female education. Adult education centres should be established in rural areas to capture women farmers.

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