

PARTICIPATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

In Nigeria traditional setting, more than 60% of the Agricultural production is carried out by women. They are responsible for a large proportion of women resources for economic activities in rural area. This percentage is progressively increasing as women get more involved in agricultural production while their male counterparts move into off- farm employments and the youths migrate to urban areas. This paper discusses the contributions of women in agricultural production in Kogi State Nigeria. Results indicate that rural women in Kogi State are highly involved in all aspects of food production including processing, storage and marketing. The paper further reveals that earnings from the agricultural products are directed towards the family upkeep. Recommendations are made to improve the productive output of rural women.

Key words: Participation, Rural women, Agriculture, Production, Food crops.

Introduction

Agricultural development in Nigeria and other developing countries aims at increasing Agricultural output, ensuring food security for the country as well as improving the quality of life of those involved in agriculture. The government has introduced a number of policy measures to improve the performance of the agricultural sector. These include: effective devolution of power to state and local government for agricultural development activities, reduction of import tariffs on agricultural inputs and machinery and provision of incentive for agricultural exports (Ajala 2010). This is to enable agricultural sector carry out its four major work roles of self-sufficiency in basic food commodities, increased production of agricultural raw materials to meet the requirements of industries; increased rural employment (Okundayo et al 2012). To achieve these functions, one needs to consider the contributions of the farmers in general and women farmers in particular, who are the main actors in the agricultural production.

In Nigeria, rural women farmers play significant role in food production and security. They are actively involved in carrying out agricultural activities and produce about 60-80% of agricultural food in the country (Buckland and Mogan 2011 and Onjobi 2013). They direct their earnings to meet the need of their families. The rural women combine their roles as wives, mothers, housekeepers with their invaluable functions as farmers, farm labourers among others (Ogorogie and Suleiton 2013). They work longer hours at home and in farms utilising labour intensive and crude farm implements with little to show for their efforts in terms of output and income. These rural women work relentlessly to increase their productivity with little recognition by their communities (Njoku 2014).

In Kogi state it has been observed that women farmers undertake most food production, processing, storage and marketing their household. Mostly they depend on farming as the only source of income and livelihoods. These rural women who mostly bear the brunt of the high food demand pressure have impressively ventured into more intensive agricultural

production activities. However, they always have different production objectives than men, more limited access to resources, less education, and more challenges in their time and energy because of their many responsibilities as home makers, farmers, marketers among others. The responsibility for getting food for the families lies on the women (Onweye 2012). Thus, it is not an exaggeration to say that rural women in Kogi state are the back-bone of the rural and urban food systems and so are increasingly significant with regard to food security (UNDP 2009).

The contributions of these rural women in recent times have increased. This is as result of the movement of their male counterpart into off- farm employment, emergency of more female headed households, increases population with corresponding high demand on agricultural food production (Barden and Edmon 2012). Moreover, the traditional methods of food production have become much inadequate to cope with the current food. Needs of the families. Therefore, any step to increase agricultural production should take cognizance of the great roles played by these rural women in food production, processing, storage and marketing, and should also consider ways of helping them improve, increased and sustain their agricultural production with increased income.

The objectives of the study were to determine the contributions of rural women farmers in various agricultural sectors with a view to identify their production challenges and recommending ways of improving and increasing their productivity and income.

Materials and methods

A thematic survey of rural women farmers in Bassa from Eastern and Kogi from Western agricultural zones of Kogi state Agricultural Development project (ADP) was carried out in March 2016. Six women groups in each of the two zones were visited. A total of 240 randomly selected women farmers were interviewed in the two zones respectively. Information on farming activities carried out and challenges encountered were obtained utilizing the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) method and a check list questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

The results indicate that the rural women farmers in Kogi state were actively involved in agricultural production: They grow food crops, tree crops and keep livestock and poultry. They process, store and market their agricultural products. They produce for family utilization and for sale.

It was however observed that research and extension are not adequately gender

sensitive to these study areas as they do not cover the production, processing and storage activities for which these rural women were responsible. As a result of that, the rural women farmers are still having challenges in production, processing, and storage and marketing (Table 1).

The challenges or felt needs of the rural women farmers in Kogi state are as shown in Table 1

Table 1: Production challenges of Kogi State rural women farmers

S/NO	CHALLENGES
1.	Lack of access to lands and high cost of labour
2.	Predicaments in marketing surplus crops especially during time of planting
3.	Heavy demands of women's time emanating from lack of time and labour – technologies saving
4.	Lack of security, especially against bad harvest and crop failure
5.	Food wastage and spoilage at various stages of harvest, processing, storage and marketing due lack of adequate storage and preservation facilities.
6.	Lack of incentives and full control over returns from their activities, poor market, infrastructure and low prices of these goods
7.	In adequate extension services, resources and inputs for improved food production
8.	Lack of social amenities like portable water, electricity, health facilities
9.	Lack of mobility in rural areas and improper function of the Extension Agent (EA) in rural areas.
10.	Lack of appropriate and suitable to technologies for the crops produced by women farmers.
11.	Unavailability of credit facilities
12.	Lack of education

Source: Field survey 2016

Rural women farmers still utilize low yielding and unimproved planting materials which are susceptible to pests and diseases, primitive and labour intensive farm implements, traditional farming practices, which have adversely affected agricultural production. Even after production, there are lots of losses and wastages of agricultural production due to lack of improved and efficient processing, storage, preservation methods and facilities (Sanglo and Hart 2008 and Nelson 2011). There is a constraint of marketing food crop in time of plenty and constraint of transportation which has resulted in low price of agricultural products.

In spite of the production challenges identified in table 1, rural women in Kogi state have made significant contributions in various sub-sectors of agriculture such as food crop production, tree crop production, livestock production, cash crops, fishery production, forestry and environmental

management, post-harvest and marketing activities. Women constitute the majority of small holder farmers, provide most of the labour and manage many farms on a daily basis. Their contributions have assisted to increase agricultural production in the state in the last decade.

Food Crop Production: The rural women have contributed significantly so much in food crop production. They participate in agronomic practices of almost all the food crop production activities such as land preparation, planting, weeding, fertilizer application, pests control and harvesting.

Apart from yam, the rest of the other food crops are grown mostly by these rural women. The crops are grown basically for family consumption but excesses are sold to boost family income. They also engage in dry season vegetable production.

Livestock production: The rural women in the state raised small ruminants like sheep, goats, and rabbits, and also kept local birds. Cassava peelings and other by products of small-scale food production, combined with household wastes were important feed for their livestock. The women had a more integrated and holistic approach to crop and livestock, time and resource they use. Owning a few animals can be attractive, efficient subsidiary enterprise complementing crop production. Therefore, these animals were usually kept as a means of raising money for the family needs. However, the animals could be used by the family occasionally during festivals

Fishery production: Rural women contributed a lot in fish production. They handle and finance fishery businesses. They are mostly engaged in a host of post-harvest and non-fisheries activities such as harvesting of crabs, snails etc., for the existence and survival of their families. Women have the exclusive role of sorting, grading, salting smoking and marketing fishes. They performed the exhausting function such as collection of wood for smoking the fishes and for preservation.

Forestry and Environmental Management: Rural women in the state were the main collectors of fire wood, and at times also helped in collecting fodder and grasses for their livestock. It was observed that their constant need to these resources has caused wide spread degradation of forest areas. However, recently in Kogi state, the rural women were involved in planting trees around the houses. The rural women also gather the forest products such as vegetables, mushrooms, larvae of edible insects, snails, crab etc. to augment family meals.

Post Harvest Activities: The rural women are mostly responsible for processing, preservation, utilization and storage of food crop, tree crops, animals, fishes etc. They have contributed much in the processing of cassava, cocoyam, and maize into various food forms for family consumption and for sale. They processed and stored palm oil, palm kernel and also help in the processing of cashew for sale. They store seeds and planting materials for future uses. They embarked on poverty alleviation activities, income generation and agricultural business

to help improve the standard of living of their households.

Marketing Activities: The rural women in the state were actively engaged in the marketing of agricultural products. While almost all of them marketed the produce from their farms, some others travelled to the neighbouring states and village markets to purchase some agricultural produce which they sold in the urban towns like Lokoja, Idoh, Ankpa among others.

Conclusion

If rural women farmers' opportunities, productivity, and earning potentials are well expanded and enhanced especially in the areas of food production, processing storage, utilization and marketing, there is bound to be a corresponding improvement in the well being of the members of the households in Kogi state.

This will subsequently, bring about increased agricultural production, better economic performance, poverty alleviation, overall better family condition and standard of living.

Recommendations

Since there is urgent need to increase and sustain agricultural production to meet up the demand of the ever increasing population, the productivity of rural women farmers must be elevated.

The following recommendations are made for improvement.

1. The rural women should be given full empowerment to enable them have access to land, have control over returns from their activities and products, have access to resources such as education, knowledge and skill, time, mobility and energy. They should be provided with the social amenities such as good roads, potable water, electricity, health facilities among others.
2. Research and extension should identify and understand the roles of rural women farmers in the farming systems and find ways of generating appropriate and sustainable technologies for these gender specific activities. This could be done by carrying out gender analysis to understand the gender roles in farming systems of Kogi state, analyse information about men's and women's

- activities, resources challenges and benefits.
3. Appropriate technologies which will increase and improve the women's productivity, income and living standard should be made accessible to them. The technologies that are appropriate for the activities, farming objectives, and production conditions of the rural women farmers should be developed.
 4. They should also be provided with adequate processing storage and preservation facilities for proper handling of the crops to prevent wastage and losses incurred during post-harvest activities.
 5. The Government should provide policies that favour high prices for the crops grown by these rural women. This can be made possible by removing the activities of intermediaries providing subsidies to prices of agricultural products, providing security to the crops and animals produced by rural women by paying compensation to the women when there are crop failures and natural disaster.
 6. Government should also make credit facilities more easily available and accessible to the rural women farmers to enable them improve their productivity and enhance their earning potentials.

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