

ENSURING WOMEN HOUSEHOLD FOOD AVAILABILITY THROUGH ACCESS TO PRODUCTIVE RESOURCES IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Women's legal status as individuals and their rights regarding economic activity are mind with uncertainty. The study investigated rural women access to productive resources in Abia State, Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used in the selective of the sample size. In the first stage, three local government areas were randomly selected. From the three agricultural zones in Abia State followed by a selection of 2 communities and 2 villages from the communities. Finally 20 rural women from each village who were actively engaged in farming were also randomly selected bringing the total to 240 respondents. Data were collected through the use of questionnaire and Focused Group Discussion (FGD). Data collected were analyzed using simple descriptive and inferential statistics like linear regression. Major findings show that the women were between the ages of 50 – 55 years with mean monthly income of ₦20,000. On level of access to productive resources, land had a mean score of ($\bar{x} = 1.9$), capital ($\bar{x} = 1.42$), credit ($\bar{x} = 1.0$), information ($\bar{x} = 2.08$) and labour ($\bar{x} = 1.33$). On hypothesis testing, the results show a positive and significant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and their access to productive resources. The coefficient of age, marital status, educational level and income were positive and significantly related to productive resources at 1% level. Therefore the study recommends the importance of strengthening the legal status of rural women in Abia State as the basis for reinforcing their economic and land-use rights (including productive resources) to enhance food availability in households.

Keywords: Women empowerment, food access and, land-rights.

INTRODUCTION

Following the institution of the millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, women empowerment has continued to receive strong recognition and attention internationally and locally. In Nigeria where women constitute a significant proportion of the population and contribute largely to the work force in 9+9the agricultural sector, empowering them becomes a serious issue to consider.

According to Sako (1999), empowerment is the process of strengthening the existing capacities of the disadvantaged groups in society so as to enable them perform towards improving themselves, their families and the society as a whole. He further maintained that it involves the provision of enabling environment for their productive and intellectual abilities to be realized. Enemuo (1999) viewed empowerment as a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation of the economic, social psychological, political and legal circumstance of the powerless. Ojobo (2008) defined women empowerment as a process of enabling women to develop the capacity to actualize their potentials Enemuo (199) posited that empowerment in the case of women entails not only positive changes in these critical respects but also the dismantling of the cultural norms and traditional practices that devaluing disempowered and disposes women.

Several attempts have been made to improve the lots of rural women in Nigeria such efforts include formation and implementation of such policies and programmes as the Better life for Rural Women (1987) etc. This programme and policies have not yielded the desired results in empowering rural women and this calls for alternative strategies.

Household food access is the ability to acquire sufficient quality and quantities of food to meet all household members' nutritional requirements. Access to food is determined by physical and financial resources, as well as by certain social and political factors (Sen, 1989). Individuals can have sufficient access to food only when they have adequate income on other resources to purchase or barter or to obtain appropriate food needed to maintain consumption of an adequate diet nutrition level (USAID, 1992). Food access depends on the ability of households to obtain food items through purchases, gathering, current production on stock or food transfer from relatives or members of the community. The mere presence of an adequate supply does not ensure that households can obtain and consume food, hence household access to food is a factor depending on its affordability factor, women lack of access to land and other productive resources resulting from nature of land inheritance and scattered unproductive plots normally given to women.

Man has depended on the land for his food, raw materials for clothing and shelter. No nation, city or rural area can survive as an entity without land (Oliyiwole and Adeleye, 2006). Land tenure can be defined as the rights and institutions that governs access to and use of land (Adams, 2006). Tenure system involves a system of rights, duties and responsibilities concerning the transfer, alienation and ownership, security of land and its resources. The law functions as an instrument of control by promoting or inhibiting access to economic and social resources. The most important resource in the rural sector is productive agricultural land, but other important resources and recently, information and communication. These productive resources is unequal between men and women in Abia State, customary land tenure gives women only limited access to land, as they are not beneficiaries through inheritance. Although customs dictates that their ability to do so is also restricted. Unmarried daughters are usually given the most unproductive plots (Field observation).

Women are noted to produce the bulk of agricultural labor force and produce staple crops upon which households rely for nutritional security (Lagman, 2006). However, the lack of inadequate accesses to agricultural inputs and services can reduce their contributions to food production which will endanger the entire family's nutritional security. According to FAO (2011), if women's access to productive resources were the same as men's, women's contribution could reduce the total number of hungry people by 12 – 17%.

In most polygamous households, land allocation may depend on a wife's industriousness, her number in the number of wives, the number of male children she had produced or any other which dreamed up by her husband. As a result of these when her status changes, she has no guarantee of the tenancy on a plot from one cropping season to next. These women also have little control over the use of the crops they grow. All these factors create significant obstacles for women and their economic development. And because the time of planting is determined by the onset on the rains and because much of African experiences only one extended rainy season the add for workers during the early weeks of the rainy season exceeds all available rural labour supply, status of women as the basis for reinforcing the economic and land-use rights and improving their productivity (CTA, 2000). It s arguable that equity in land rights is

a pre-requisite to modernizing subsistence agriculture in agrarian economies (Alden, 2011). Such equity would constitute a positive move towards improving the productive and economic capacity of women. Challenges in striving to make ends meet in agriculture. Access to and control of productive resources like land, farm equipment and inputs are male dominated. Rural women who face enormous challenges and constraints in their roles as providers of household mutation security are under rewarding, resulting in poverty, environmental degradation, lack of appropriate technology etc. According to Lambrou ad Piana (2006), the ability to adapt to change in the climate at the household level depends on control overland, money and credit. Rural women are responsible for more the 58% of the food grown world wide and for 70% in Africa. Women also comprises 67% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries (FPRI, 2000) (CTA, 1993) cited that women account for 70% of agricultural workers, 80% of food producers and 100% of those who process basic foodstuff. Their ability to do this effectively is sometimes hindered by their access to import resources like income, land availability, production power and education. Many women are ignorant of the legal provisions through which they can claim their rights to land. They usually obtain land entitlement through a rural relative, but there is no guarantee that they will retain those rights in the event of the persons death. With such unpredictable rights, women cannot exercise the full range of land rights. Even when they do know their rights, many are reluctant to demand for them for fear of being reprimanded socially isolated for questioning cultural norms.

In a country where most of the population is still dependent on agriculture and over 70% of the labour force is supplied by women there is need to strengthen the legal rights of women on productive resources. Therefore, the paper tries to investigate rural women access to productive resources as an empowerment strategy to ensure availability of food in households; with the following specific objectives to;

1. ascertain the socio-economic characteristics of the women
2. determine the level of access to productive resources
3. examine the level of empowerments of the respondents
4. identify the factors influencing the agricultural activities .
5. determine the factors influencing their access to productive resources in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Abia State of Nigeria which was created on the 27th August, 1991. The state is appropriately within latitudes $4^{\circ} 41'$ and $6^{\circ} 14'N$ and longitudes $7^{\circ} 10'$ and $8^{\circ} 1'$ the geographical location makes it a land-locked state. It is one of five states in the South East agricultural zone of Nigeria. Abia State comprises of 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs) grouped into three agricultural zones. Multistage sampling procedure was used in the selection of sample size. 3 local government areas were selected from the zones. In the second stage 2, villages were selected from each local government area and in the third stage. 2 villages were selected ad finally 20 rural farm women were selected bringing the total to 240 respondents. Primary data were collected through semi-structured questionnaire, focus group discussion and participants observation. Secondary data were explored from existing materials from internets and journals. Participants observation was triangulated with interviews and secondary data to minimize errors and increase the validity of data collected. Data collected were analyzed using simple descriptive and inferential statistics like regression model.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and their access to productive resources was tested using linear regression model. The implicit form is stated below;

$$Y = F(X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4, X_5, X_6, + e)$$

Where, Y = dependent variable (dummy variable, access 2, no access 1) and $X_1 - X_6$ (independent variable)

Where,

- X_1 = Age (measured in years as supplied by the respondents)
- X_2 = Level of income (measured in Naira from major occupation)
- X_3 = Educational level (measured in years of formal education)
- X_4 = Marital status (dummy variable; married 1; not married 0)
- X_5 = Household size (number of people living together in a household)
- X_6 = Farm size (measured in hectare)
- e = Error term

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Distribution of respondents on the socio-economic characteristics

| Variables | Frequency | Percentages |
|---------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Marital status | | |
| Married | 172 | 71.7 |
| Separated | 57 | 23.8 |
| Single | 11 | 4.6 |
| Age | | |
| 30 – 35 | 60 | 25.4 |
| 40 – 45 | 42 | 17.5 |
| 50 – 55 | 71 | 29.6 |
| 60 – 65 | 67 | 27.9 |
| Level of Education | | |
| Non-formal | 126 | 52.5 |
| Primary education | 71 | 29.6 |
| Secondary education | 43 | 17.9 |
| Tertiary | - | - |
| Income | | |
| 40 – 80 | 116 | 48.3 |
| 120 – 160 | 64 | 26.7 |
| 200 – 240 | 38 | 15.8 |
| 280 – 320 | 12 | 5.0 |
| Household size | | |
| 4 – 6 | 78 | 32.5 |
| 8 – 10 | 110 | 45.8 |
| 12 – 14 | 52 | 21.7 |
| Farm size | | |
| 1 – 2 plots | 64 | 26.7 |
| 3 – 4 plots | 62 | 25.8 |
| 5 – 6 plots | 59 | 24.6 |
| 7 – 8 plots | 57 | 21.3 |
| 9 – 10 plots | 4 | 1.7 |

Source: Field survey, 2014

The socio-economic variable of the rural women farmers in the study area were presented in Table 1. Majority of the respondents (72%) were married while those separated and the single areas constituted about (28%). Majority of the women (20%) were between the ages of 50 – 55 years of age. This then implies that farming is left in the hands of the agreed which may translate into low yields as the more energetic young ones could have move out of the village in several of white collar jobs. The most fundamental prerequisite for empowering women in all spheres of the society is education; from the result 52% of the respondents had no formal education, these women will not be able to access well-paid jobs, formal sector jobs. It is therefore necessary to improve their access to education which is the most important policy instrument to increase agricultural productivity and reduce poverty. Majority of the respondents (48%) earned between (N40 – 80,000) per annum from excess products. About 49% of the respondents had a household size of between 8 and 10 people living together and eating from the same pot. Large household size is a good indicator for availability of agricultural labour for the family even though it might not be quantified with quantity being produced. Majority of the respondents (27%) had between 1 – 2 plots of fragmented lands.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents based on level of access to productive resources

| Variable | High | Low | Very Low | Total | Mean |
|----------------|------|-----|----------|-------|------|
| Access to land | 186 | 182 | 87 | 456 | 1.9 |
| Capital | 45 | 142 | 154 | 341 | 1.42 |
| Credit | - | - | 240 | 240 | 1.0 |
| Information | 54 | 122 | 161 | 198 | 2.08 |
| Labour | - | 162 | 159 | 321 | 1.33 |

Source: Field data, 2014

Results on Table 2 show respondents level of access to production resources with the use of rating scale at the lowest discrepancy point of '2.0' the results show that all the variables except access to information had a mean score below the cut-off point which is 2. Their level of access on agricultural information was significant because apart from extension agents and their irregularities in attending to the needs of farm families, accord to Adebeyi (2008) cited that farmers in many cases learn greatly from other skilled fellow farmers or friends. Women are recognized as playing a vital role in maintaining and strategically using land and other natural resources in may communities, but unfortunately their access to land and tenure security is being influenced by the patriarchal systems that regulated women to minority positions ensuring that women only have access to land through spouse or male relatives. Labour was also not significant ($\bar{x} = 1.33$) farming are now in the needs of old people with the young ones migrating to urban areas, making labour availability expensive. Most of the rural women most of the time engaged their services outside their homes to get extra time. This will cause serious obstruction to increasing agricultural production and income from the rural women. According to the respondent, afraid of non-recouping the investment made on land to which I have only access but no secure property rights there is no need spending resources on land in provent technologies. The implication is that the deemed for productive enhancing investment will decline and aggregate agricultural productivity suffers. According to (Shivji *et al.*, 1998), secure property rights also are thought to influence agricultural production because such rights encourages efficient resources use (factor intensity). Access to credit was not significant with a mean score of ($\bar{x} = 1.0$). James *et al.* (2002) opined that women have little access to credit facilities. According to him financial institutions seldom take women constraints and needs into account, so women cannot qualify for loan because they lack the capital and collateral or because their business are small. Only few of the women stated that they had ever received loans from banks. But IFAD (2012) suggested a

scheme to make cheap credit available to smallholders through micro-finance banks, financial cooperatives and rural based financial institutions.

Table 3: Mean distribution of respondents on their level of empowerment in the study area

| Variables | Very high | High | Low | Total | Mean |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|---------|-----|-------|------|
| Mobility | 45(135) | 54(108) | 141 | 384 | 1.6 |
| Economic security | - | - | 240 | 240 | 1.0 |
| Ability to make small purchases | 28(84) | 37(74) | 175 | 333 | 1.4 |
| Ability to make big purchases | 13(39) | 21(42) | 206 | 287 | 1.2 |
| Involvement in major decision makings | 17(51) | 12(24) | 211 | 286 | 1.2 |
| Freedom from dominance of family | - | - | 240 | 240 | 1.0 |
| Political and legal awareness | 36(108) | 18(36) | 186 | 330 | 1.4 |

From table 3 above, it can be seen that all the means to the item statements were not significant (below) the bench mark of ($\bar{x} = 2.0$). The respondents held strong assertion to item statement 5 which is see as the most important issue among other items with mean score of ($\bar{x} = 1.0$) for involvement in major decision makings. Mobility which is the physical movement of the woman outside the house had a mean score of ($\bar{x} = 1.6$). Economic security had a mean score of ($\bar{x} = 1.0$). Economic security guarantees security of economic activities, networking and flourishing within a social system in terms of productivity and numeration that serve as end results of public economic activities. It is important to emphasize that giving women access to economic security implies economic empowerment (increased income, control over income and access to resources), decreasing default, as more women are able to repay loans; well-being meaning that women have more skills, more time and resources to contribute in the family. Ability to make small and big purchases had a mean score of ($\bar{x}=1.4$) and ($\bar{x}=1.2$) respectively. Involvement in major decisions makings had a mean score of ($\bar{x}=1.2$) and freedom from dominance of family and political and legal awareness had a mean score of ($\bar{x}=1.0$) and ($\bar{x}=1.4$) respectively. From this result, it is obvious that rural women in Abia State are not properly empowered. Since they contribute a significant proportion in rural communities, by their number and roles they play, they can be transformed into a vital tool for attaining security; that is by paying proper attention into their circumstances and potentials.

Table 4: Factors influencing women agricultural activities

| Variables | Frequency | Percentages |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Reliance on rain fed | 231 | 13.0 |
| Agriculture | 204 | 11.5 |
| Small holder land holdings | 238 | 13.41 |
| Poor planting materials | 240 | 13.52 |
| Weak agricultural extension services | 216 | 12.20 |
| Outdated land tenure system | 228 | 12.84 |
| Poor access to credit facilities | 215 | 12.10 |
| Poor access to market | 203 | 11.43 |

**** Multiple response**

Source: Field survey, 2014

Results on Table 4, shows factors influencing the rural women in their agricultural production. About 13% of the women stated that they rely on rain for cultivation. The

problem of climate charged variability has made planting date difficult. We are no longer sure of rainfall and this has led to a decline in productivity. Also some of the rural women farmers (12%) complained about small holder land holdings. This method of land acquisition encourages subsistence farming on small plots which is unproductive or results in lower yields (Aileen, 2001). The table further revealed that some of the rural women 13% complained about weak agricultural extension system. Access to agricultural information enable practices to initiate or experienced agricultural production and increases the rural women cited but dated land tenure system as the problem undermining their productivity. Grahamed and Darroch (2001) found evidence that household that had more security of tenure were more likely to deemed and receive credit for agricultural invest financing and complementing inputs in South Africa. Also place and Otuska (2001) argue that customary land tenure institutions and the inadequate incentives they give to farmers to undertake long-term investment may hamper agricultural activities. Also about 13% of the women complained about poor credit facilities. Even though women are major producers in Nigeria, they have limited access to credit facilities and if land is the major asset used as collateral to obtain rural credits, women have limited access to credit facilities. Finally, about 12% and 11% of the rural women complained about poor access to market and storage facilities. Adequate information associated with sales and purchase, particularly market price.

Table 5: Factors influencing women access to productive resources

| Variables | Linear |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Age | 6.867 (4.372)*** |
| Education | 1.228 (4.850)*** |
| Level of income | 3.881 (4.000)*** |
| Marital status | 1.311 (4.358)*** |
| Constant | 8.884 (2.801)** |
| R ² | 0.837 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.802 |
| F-statistics | 2.783*** |

Source: Field survey, 2014.

Figures is first rows are coefficient, while figures in parenthesis are t-values

The result of linear regression of the respondents on access to productive resources is presented in Table 5. Linear log production function is selected as the lead equation based on (i) magnitude of R² (ii) the significance of F-value (iii) the t-values and (iv) the appropriateness of the signs of the regression coefficients. The F-ratio value is statistically significant at 1% which implies that the model is adequate for use for further analysis. The coefficient of determination (R²) was significant. This implies that the dependent variables explain at least % of the variability in their access to productive resources. The coefficient of age was positive and significantly related to productive resources at 1% level. Indicating that increase in age of the respondents increases their access to productive resources.

Education was positive and significantly related to productive resources at 1% level. This implies that the higher the educational level of the women the more access to productive resources (information and capital). Education enables the individual to know how to seek for and apply information in day – to – day problem solving. Dinesh (2012) believes that one of the prerequisite for information use is its accessibility. Information may be physically accessible but may not be intellectually so. Some of the women may posses the intellectual capacity but suffer from lack of financial capacity necessary for physical accessibility. Level

of income was positive and significantly related to productive resources at 1% level. This implies that women with higher income can have access to productive resources and thus were able to afford the services that will increase access to those resources.

Marital status was positive and significantly related to productive resources at 1% level. This implies that married women have more access to productive resources than unmarried women (Meer *et al.*, 1997) cited that women's legal status as an individual and their rights regarding economic activities are mired in uncertainty. They further stated that, their status are frequently determined through their husband or male relatives.

Based on the fact that most of the socio-economic characteristics were significant at 1% level and also the value of R^2 85% being high, we hereby reject the null hypothesis that says there is no significant difference between the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and their access to productive resources.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In order to ensure agricultural and wider economic development in Nigeria, it is necessary to ensure a viable future for rural women farmers and reconciled existing land rights. There is need for investment through equitable frame works for land access by rural women through strengthening market access, technical support, credit availability. In other words government must empower women through provision of credit facilities and incentives for large scale farming.

While land reform is essential, it is likely to be ineffective and perhaps even counterproductive unless there is a corresponding change in rural institutions that control production e.g. (banks, money lenders, input distributing agencies, extension services stores and marketing facilities, rural transport feeder roads).

It is important to ensure that land assets are registered in the name of beneficiary members of households, rather than only in the name of head of the household. A stronger focus is needed on economic and social rights and on their implementation in such areas as land reform and title deeds. Support mechanisms are needed to help women claim their legal entitlement, through awareness raising campaigns, legal aid resources and changes in land registration.

Women still remain important in the utilization of land. Increasing women access to land and other national resources will increase their contributions to food access and availability.

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