

Strategies for Improving Women Participation in Agriculture in Abia State

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Abstract

This study was to evolve strategies that could be put in place for improving women participation in agriculture in Abia state. Specifically, the study determined strategies which each of the following should put in place for improving women's participation in agriculture in Abia state; agricultural based non-governmental organization (NGOs) and relevant government bodies. It was survey. Population was made up of Agricultural Extension workers, registered Agric-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and registered rural women farmers in the area of the study. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis. Findings include 15 NGOs strategies. These included among others; provide credit and financial facilities for women in agriculture (WIA) ($\bar{X} = 3.44$), strengthen technical and entrepreneurial skills of WIA ($\bar{X} = 3.45$), invite successful women farmers to give career-talks and serve as role models to rural women ($\bar{X} = 3.46$) and assist rural women to attend agricultural shows, field trips or work-visit ($\bar{X} = 3.40$). Other findings are 21 government strategies. These include; provide adequate social amenities to rural women farmers such as good roads ($\bar{X} = 3.39$), create agricultural policies that will favour WIA ($\bar{X} = 3.07$), enhance women knowledge of basic farming activities ($\bar{X} = 3.39$), establish new agricultural training centers and strengthening existing ones ($\bar{X} = 3.46$), help women acquire agricultural land ($\bar{X} = 3.27$) and others. It was recommended, among others, that the government should promote a more agricultural financial supportive for the women.

Keywords: Agriculture, Women, Extension, Workers, Participation, Strategies, Rural, Development.

Introduction

Agriculture remains central to national economies, reason why the international development community / bodies have recognized agriculture as one of the key ways for economic growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the people. Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their participation 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 (Anderson , Reynolds, Biscaye , Patwardhan and Schmidt, 2020).They are often seen as the primary drivers of the development of national economies and local communities. This is because; women constitute more than 40 percent of the global share of the labour force in agriculture, which rises to more than 75 percent in sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2018). In SSA, rural households that are small-scale farmers contribute more than 75% of agricultural production (FAO, 2018). This contribution is a result of the fact that women constitute the most significant proportion of the share of the labour force in agriculture. However, gender inequality which adversely affects their overall performance and output has persistently manifested in a number of ways: high level of poverty (World Bank, 2014), vulnerability to external and uncontrollable hazards, low

strength or energy level (Nwaru, 2015), low educational attainment, poor anthropometric variables marginalization by agricultural extension, high productive and reproductive work load, and restricted access to productive resources (World bank, 2014). These indicators favor the men folk, thus justifying current government efforts to empower women and enhance their productivity. Noteworthy in this regard are such program as the Women-in-Agriculture (WIA), Better Life for Rural Women (BLP) and Family Support Programs (FSP), as well as the activities of Women Development Associations, Women-in-Development Associations (WDA), Women-in-Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) Programs. These were targeted at reducing marginalization of women and promoting gender equity and equality. The current Commonwealth 'Gender Mainstreaming' policy applied to agriculture is a deliberate attempt to consider the different needs and circumstances of male and female farmers, and use same as criteria for fashioning out agricultural and rural development strategies for greater productivity. Gender has been recognized as an essential variable for analyzing the roles, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities, incentives, costs and benefits in Agriculture(Umeh&Nwachukwu, 2015). The WIA extension program was established by the Federal Agricultural Coordinating Unit (FACU) in all the Agricultural Development Programs (ADP) of the Federation, and was

designed to make the agency (ADP) address gender-specific agricultural production and post-harvest technology issues. Specifically, Women in Agriculture (WIA) was designed to; developed innovative gender-specific programs for women farmers in close collaboration with research institutions, promote the development and use of appropriate agricultural technologies which reduce drudgery and meet the needs of women, assist in linking women farmers to sources of credit, support group/individual women activities aimed at increasing the animal protein resources of the country, improve skills of women in food processing, utilization and marketing, organize women into cooperatives to gain credit, information etc, and encourage women farmers keep livestock to improve their nutritional status (Osabohien, Olurinola, Matthew, Azuh. and Aderounmu 2021). Women in agriculture have been able to transfer a number of agricultural technologies to farmers in Abia State.

Although the program has recorded great achievements nationwide, women's low participation (Etuh, 2012) has been attributed to ignorance, low income, low level of education, lack of input and credit facilities and poor communication. In most cases, these women have limited or closed access to land and credit and other productive resources. Thus, development assumes special significance for two important reasons; first about two thirds of the population still lives in villages and there cannot be any progress so long as rural areas remain backward (Katz, 2013) and

secondly, the backwardness of the rural sector would be a major impediment to the overall progress of the economy. While poverty affects many households, there appears to be gender influence on the manifestations of poverty. Survey carried out by Umeh and Nwachukwu(2015) on inequality and poverty in rural Nigeria showed that across the country, 40 percent of male farmers and 72 percent of female farmers cultivate less than one hectare of land per household. Women play a major role in the production, processing and marketing of food crops. Despite the integral role women play in the agricultural sector, Yokying and Lambrecht (2020)opined that their contributions are not valued or recognized, nor are they reflected in the National Accounting Systems or given prime considerations in agricultural policy processes. Chinsman (2013) reported that because of the gender division of labour and responsibilities for household welfare, women bear a disproportionate burden. The female share of the agricultural labor force in the country and Africa as a whole has greatly decreased, from 45 percent during the period 1990- 1995 to almost 34 percent in 2011, while men's contribution has considerably increased from 66 to 55 percent during the same period (FAO, 2018). The above is in spite of the critical roles they play in agricultural production, processing and marketing; household commitments including childcare; and farm and home decision making, etc.

Various factors militate against women as they participate in agriculture in Abia state. It is necessary

to evolve strategies that could help ameliorate the challenges. Such strategies could culminate into meaningful support for the women. Supporting the women could come in form of governmental and agricultural based non-governmental strategies and is a sure way of breaking the vicious cycle that leads to rural poverty and the expansion of slums in the cities (Obayelu, Ogbe and Edewor, 2019). Government related strategies are plan of action designed by the government or through their ministries to achieve a long-term or overall aims while non-governmental related strategies are plan of action designed by a person or a group of people to find solutions to problems facing humanity. The strategies should consider women as a critical factor in development, by paying particular attention to their challenges and need for social skills both within and outside the agricultural sector. Such strategies are put in place; they would likely improvements in women's participation in their various farm activities. It is therefore of utmost important to evolve strategies for improving women participation in agriculture in Abia state.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study was to evolve strategies that could be put in place for improving women participation in agriculture in Abia state. Specifically, the study determined strategies which each of the following should put in place for improving women's participation in agriculture in Abia state:

1. agricultural based non-governmental organization(NGOs).
2. relevant government bodies.

Methodology

Design of the study: Design of the study was a descriptive survey.

Area of the Study: The study was carried out in Abia state. Women in Agriculture (WIA) programme are active in the state. Women in Abia state in both urban and rural areas, play a major role in the production, processing and marketing of food crops. Despite the integral role they play in the agricultural sector, their contributions are not valued or recognized because of the gender division of labour and responsibilities for household welfare, women bear a disproportionate burden.

Population for the study: The population of the study was made up of 176 rural women who were registered members of WIA, 67 Extension workers, 13 registered Agricultural-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the area of the study. These gave a population size of 256 respondents. Since the population size was manageable, there was no sampling, hence all the 256 respondents were involved in the study.

Instrument for data collection: The instrument for data collection was questionnaire. It was developed based on literature review and the specific objectives. It had a 5-point response scale of Strongly strategy (SA), Strong strategy (SA), Undecided strategy (UNS), Disagreed strategy (DS) and Strongly disagreed strategy (SDS) with

corresponding values of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The instrument was face validated by three experts in agriculture. Their corrections and suggestions were utilized to improve the draft of questionnaire. Cronbach reliability method was adopted to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items, Alpha coefficient of 0.81 was obtained.

Data collection method: A total of 256 copies of the questionnaire were administered with the help of three trained research assistants to the respondents. The entire copies of

questionnaire were retrieved. This represents 100 percent retrieval return.

Data Analysis Techniques: Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for answering research questions. A criterion mean of 3.00 was used as the benchmark for decision making for each item. Thus, item with a mean of 3.00 and above was regarded as agreed strategy, while below 3.00 was disagreed strategy. Decision was based on the grand mean ($\bar{X} \geq 3.0$).

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation on the Agricultural based Non-governmental Organization (NGOs) Strategies for Improving Women Participation in Agriculture in Abia state.

i/N	Agriculture-based NGOs Strategies	\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	\bar{X}_3	SD ₃	\bar{X}_g	R
	NGOs should:								
1	provides credit and financial facilities for women in agriculture (WIA)	3.46	.56	3.40	.99	3.47	.70	3.44	Agreed
2	strengthen technical and entrepreneurial skills of WIA	3.32	.61	3.36	.94	3.68	.47	3.45	Agreed
3	invite successful women farmers to give career-talks and serve as role models to rural women	3.47	.70	3.23	.75	3.69	.46	3.46	Agreed
4	enhance women knowledge of basic farming activities through establishing new agricultural training centers and strengthening existing ones.	3.68	.47	3.10	.50	3.46	.56	3.41	Agreed
5	provide fertile land(s) in support of rural women's entrepreneurship.	3.69	.46	3.26	.77	3.32	.61	3.42	Agreed
6	assist women to acquire land for farming	3.18	.58	3.53	.47	3.47	.70	3.39	Agreed
7	assist rural women to attend agricultural shows, field trips or work-visits	3.66	.56	3.20	.62	3.36	.94	3.40	Agreed
8	participate in women training courses in action-oriented methods	3.31	.73	3.32	.61	3.68	.47	3.43	Agreed
9	maintain a field presence in remote locations, where it is difficult to keep government staff in post	3.40	.64	3.47	.70	3.69	.46	3.52	Agreed
10	work with farmers to draw on local knowledge systems in the design of technology options.	3.40	.64	3.68	.47	3.18	.58	3.42	Agreed
11	assist in providing storage facilities to make year - round women agricultural	3.31	.73	3.69	.46	3.66	.56	3.55	Agreed

	production possible								
12	assist in providing basic amenities like good roads, water supply among others for rural women farmers	3.26	.68	3.18	.58	3.31	.73	3.25	Agreed
13	assist in providing farming inputs such as fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides and distribute to rural women farmers	3.26	.68	3.66	.56	3.40	.64	3.44	Agreed
14	develop new and improved crop varieties and livestock through research.	3.24	.76	3.31	.73	3.40	.64	3.32	Agreed
15	assist in providing quality extension services to rural women farmers.	3.22	.75	3.40	.64	3.31	.73	3.31	Agreed

\bar{X}_1 = mean scores of Extension workers; SD_1 = standard deviation of Extension workers; \bar{X}_2 = Mean scores of women; SD_2 = Standard deviation of women, \bar{X}_3 = mean scores of NGO; SD_3 = standard deviation of NGO, \bar{X}_g = Grand mean; R = Remark.

Table 1 shows the mean rating of the respondents on the 15 items had their grand mean ranged from 3.25 – 3.55 and were all above the cut-off value of 3.00 on a 5-point rating scale. These however indicated agreed. Therefore, the mean of 3.25 – 3.55 showed that the respondents are in agreement with the identified the non-government organization strategies for

improving women participation in agriculture in Abia state. The standard deviation of all the 15 items ranged from .46 to .70 which showed that the respondents were not too far from the mean and the opinion of one another in their responses on the non-government organization strategies for improving women participation in agriculture in Abia state.

Table 2: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation on the Governmental Strategies for Improving Women Participation in Agriculture in Abia State.

S/ N	Governmental strategies Government should:	\bar{X}_1	SD_1	\bar{X}_2	SD_2	\bar{X}_3	S_3	\bar{X}_g	R
1	provide credit and financial facilities for WIA	3.81	.39	3.31	.73	3.00	.94	3.37	Agreed
2	provide adequate social amenities to rural women farmers such as good roads.	3.44	.55	3.40	.64	3.32	.46	3.39	Agreed
3	create agricultural policies that will favour the WIA.	2.72	.72	3.31	.73	3.18	.64	3.07	Agreed
4	enhance women knowledge of basic farming activities.	3.10	.94	3.26	.68	3.04	.72	3.39	Agreed
5	establish new agricultural training centers and strengthening existing ones	3.32	.46	3.26	.68	3.81	.39	3.46	Agreed
6	help women acquire agricultural land	3.31	.73	3.28	.70	3.22	.75	3.27	Agreed
7	arrange for successful women farmers to give career-talks and serve as role models to rural women	2.98	.64	3.24	.76	3.44	.55	3.22	Agreed

8	enable women participate in agricultural decisions affecting them	3.44	.55	3.40	.64	3.32	.46	3.39	Agreed
9	enable women acquire technical and entrepreneurial skills to improve their engagement in value chains	3.38	.78	3.31	.73	3.20	.94	3.30	Agreed
10	enhance capacity of relevant institutions to provide gender-sensitive services and equipment to rural women	3.69	.46	3.26	.77	3.32	.61	3.42	Agreed
11	provide financial and other basic life incentives in rural areas	3.18	.58	3.53	.47	3.47	.70	3.39	Agreed
12	provide storage facilities to make year - round women agricultural production possible	3.66	.56	3.20	.62	3.36	.94	3.40	Agreed
13	evolve solutions to agricultural development through research.	3.40	.64	3.31	.73	3.24	.76	3.32	Agreed
14	provide farming inputs such as fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides and distribute to rural women farmers	3.31	.73	3.28	.70	3.22	.75	3.27	Agreed
15	expose rural women to agricultural field trips/work-visits organized in technological firms, experts and professionals	3.38	.78	3.31	.73	3.20	.94	3.30	Agreed
16	provide quality extension services to rural women farmers.	3.69	.46	3.26	.77	3.32	.61	3.42	Agreed
17	provide appropriate quarantine services to rural women farmers.	3.24	.76	3.22	.75	3.22	.75	3.23	Agreed
18	create awareness to improve women farmers' agricultural knowledge in new technology usage	3.81	.39	3.31	.73	3.00	.94	3.37	Agreed
19	establish and identify agricultural marketing channels for women farmers.	3.44	.55	3.40	.64	3.32	.46	3.39	Agreed
20	give awards to best women farmers in rural to encourage hard work among them	2.72	.72	3.31	.73	3.18	.64	3.07	Agreed
21	establish standard farms in every rural areas for women to boost their agricultural production	3.10	.94	3.26	.68	3.04	.72	3.39	Agreed

\bar{X}_1 = mean scores of Extension workers; SD_1 = standard deviation of Extension workers; \bar{X}_2 = Mean scores of women; SD_2 = Standard deviation of women, \bar{X}_3 = mean scores of NGO; SD_3 = standard deviation of NGO, \bar{X}_g = Grand mean; R = Remark.

Table 2 shows the mean rating of respondents on the 21 items had their grand mean ranged from 3.07–3.46 and were all above the cut-off value of 3.00 on a 4-point rating scale. These however indicated agreed. Therefore, the mean of 3.07– 3.46

showed that the respondents are in agreement with the identified governmental strategies for improving women participation in agriculture in Abia state. The standard deviation of all the 21 items ranged from .39 to .94 which showed that the respondents

were not too far from the mean and the opinion of one another in their responses on the governmental strategies for improving women participation in agriculture in Abia state.

Discussion of Findings

The findings were discussed based on the following sub-heading derived from the study objectives and research questions: non-government organization strategies and government strategies for improving women participation in agriculture in Abia state. The findings in mean rating of the respondents on the 15 items had their grand mean ranged from 3.25 - 3.55 and were all above the cut-off value of 2.50 on a 5-point rating scale. These however indicated agreed. This showed that non-government organization strategies such as; non-government organization strategies, provides credit and financial facilities for women in agriculture, strengths the technical and entrepreneurial skills of women, invite successful women farmers in all areas to give career-talks and serve as role models to rural women, enhance women knowledge of basic farming activities through establishing new agricultural training centers and strengthening existing ones, provide fertile lands in support of rural women's entrepreneurship, assist women to acquire land for farming, assist rural women to attend agricultural shows, among others improves women participation in agriculture in Abia state. This finding is supported by the view of FAO (2018) who stated that private sectors should

be engaged in contributing to an enabling environment to support of rural women's entrepreneurship and creation of farm and non-farm decent employment opportunities. Furthermore, the outcome of the study is supported by the view of Obayelu, Ogbe and Edewor(2019) who suggested that policy makers should endeavour to provision of credit facilities for youths commercial banks. More so, Fernandez (2013) revealed that it is the group-organizing and human resource development skills of NGOs which have tended to complement the technical skills and facilities available to government and that NGOs are concerned to develop local capacities for experimentation which build solely on farmers' indigenous knowledge or on this and relevant "outside" ideas. This strategy may contribute to rural advancement in its own right, and the capacity it creates may prove a useful independent source of innovations in the absence of usable technologies from government. The views and observations of the authors cited on the non-government organization strategies for improving women participation in agriculture in Abia state helped to justify the findings of the study on research question 1.

In Table 2, the mean rating of respondents on the 21 items had their grand mean ranged from 3.07-3.46 and were all above the cut-off value of 2.50 on a 4-point rating scale. These however indicated agreed. Therefore, this means that governmental strategies such as; provide credit and financial facilities

for women in agriculture, provide adequate social amenities to rural women farmers e.g improved transport system, create agricultural policies that will favour the women in agriculture more, enhance women knowledge of basic farming activities, establish new agricultural training centers and strengthening existing ones, help women acquire agricultural land, arrange for successful women farmers to give career-talks and serve as role models to rural women, enable women participate in agricultural decisions affecting them, enable women acquire technical and entrepreneurial skills to improve their engagement in value chains, enhance capacity of public institutions and service providers, among others improving women participation in agriculture in Abia state. This outcome is in line with Maertens and Swinnen (2009) who stated that provision of economic opportunities and autonomy; access to economic resources, including credit facilities, land ownership and inheritance; access to education and support services and in the decision making process increases individual participation agricultural productivity. More so, the result is also inline with the view of FAO (2018), who stated that government strengthening the technical and entrepreneurial skills of rural women to improve their engagement in value chains and providing credit and financial facilities are some of the ways to support the women in agriculture. The views and observations of the authors cited on the government strategies for improving women participation in agriculture in

Abia state helped to justify the findings of the study on research question 2

Conclusion

This study identified 15 agricultural-based NGO related strategies and 21 government strategies that could be put in place for improving women participation in agriculture in Abia state. These strategies covers numerous areas including, technologies, training, agricultural input among others.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations are made;

1. All government agricultural development programmes in Abia state should make use of the findings of this study to improve women participation in agriculture.
2. Agricultural-based NGOs who were involved in the study should find ways of supporting the women in their agricultural activities.
3. Agricultural extension agents should intensify their work with the women in their farming activities.

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