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PERCEIVED ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The study investigated perceived role of women in agriculture and in community development in Imo State. The Descriptive survey design was used for the study and the population of the study was two thousand one hundred and twenty eight (2,128) women in agricultural extension programme selected from 8 LGAs in Imo State. The study was guided by three research questions. The sample size is 198 respondents. A-24 items researchers structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents. The Pearson Products Moment Correlation Co-efficient was used to establish reliability index of 0.72. Data collected for the study was analyzed using mean statistics. The findings of the study revealed among others; women in agriculture produce food stuffs that are consumed in Imo State. Agricultural productions generally promote women's economic status and participation in community development in Imo State. Based on the findings, the study recommends among others things; trained adult Educators in agriculture should be giving chance in the training and organizing workshops for the farmers in the rural communities in various areas of agricultural tasks and needs, in order to achieve excellent prospects in agriculture.

Keywords: *Perceived role of women in Agriculture, Community Development.*

INTRODUCTION

The increasingly women's roles in agriculture and agricultural productivity in Nigerian have held a high esteem and significance in every aspect of contemporary human life, economy and societal development. Many women in Nigeria have found a foothold in agricultural activities in every rural community. As a matter of fact, agriculture is an avenue through which survival and development opportunities are made open to mankind and the nations. For decades, agricultural sector promotes and greases every area of governance and economy of many nations. Even our great nation, Nigeria depends on agriculture to sustain its citizenry and national building in one way or the other. According to Onyimonyi (2020), agriculture has been an age long road map in the rise of humans' civilization and socio-economic growth and sustainability which today enjoys. Similarly, Obiozor and Nwachukwu (2017) state that the complete wellbeing of people is dictated by the nutrient food supply to the body for healthy living and good functioning.

Agriculture is conceptually viewed by scholars as a science, art, or practice of cultivating the soil for growing of crops and rearing of animal. While agricultural programmes encompass among others: farming, animal husbandry, horticulture, mining, agronomy, fishing, beekeeping, forestry and so on. Nwaokezuike (2015) reveals that Nigerian economy is heavily dependent on mineral resources (oil) seconded by agriculture. In a like manner, The Federal Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) submit that women accounted for 25% of the farming population in Nigeria, working as farm managers and suppliers of labour in agriculture and distribution of farm produce across neighboring countries. George and Ali (2016) opine those women farmers are the brain box driving a nation's agricultural economy and sustained development. From this juncture, there is the need to examine the role of women in agriculture.

Globally, women are involved in multiple roles in agricultural. According to Afigbo (2008), women play a significant and crucial role in agriculture and its allied fields. In collaboration, Akuakanwa and Dim (2018) assert that about 187 million women worldwide are involved in growing agriculture, spearheading their production, work as paid labourers, they are cultivators and managers of certain agricultural industries. Consequently, Alajipo (2019) maintains that agriculture in both methods and products has its detailed significance in women's role in social process. Although, the nature and extent women participate in agriculture varies from nation to nations. But regardless of all the variations; women are prominent and active in agricultural activities than men in sub-Saharan African (SSA) which Nigeria is not excluded (George,&Ali,2019).

In Nigeria precisely. women virtually partake in all sectors of the Nigerian agriculture ranging from sowing, weeding, irrigation, agriculture feminization, fertilizer application, harvesting, food processing, storage and marking. They feature prominently in small scale local industry and manufacture of other agricultural activities like non-agricultural products and agro-businesses (Otty,2021). Again, Otty (2021) reveals that the Eastern women, particularly the Igbo women in agriculture pioneered the production of palm oil, kernel and so on which strengthened their economy and participation in societal development.

In a related situation, Attu (2017) states that uninformed and idle women fail in community development activities while the skilled and educated women are invaluable in the social development. Ihejirika (2015) views agricultural extension education as a process of helping farmers to acquire skills, knowledge and a clearer view to their agricultural production and developing their abilities for future development. Trainings, technical advice and information given to the rural farmers by the Ministry of Agriculture is to enable the Nigerian citizens in agriculture acquire valued competencies for increased agricultural production and economic growth for their participation in community, state and national development (Aisha,2019). Furthermore, there are series of empirical evidences that revealed that informed and skillful women in agriculture have decisive role in food security and in agricultural production right from the pre-colonial era period to the contemporary time. Consequently, Otty (2021) reveals that competencies women gain in agricultural extension education boost their agricultural economy and prepare them to embark on more successful self-help development projects. This implies that acquisition of agricultural education programmes is an important element for women's agricultural economic enhancement and participation in community development exercises.

Community as a concept means a group of interdependent and inter-related people who function in a common geographical area and engage in common needs, interests and activities; and having some form of organization that provides different functions and with a view of achieving common set goals and objectives. Community is a living entity and a center of action and unity where a group of people live, interact to one another and share in common basic condition of life (Oyebamiji, &Adekola, 2008). This is to say that people live and work in the community and enjoy some social amenities for their comfort.

On the other hand, ''development'' in community development connotes improvement in the social, economic, political and in the welfare of the physical and natural environment of the people. Development in community development context involves radical changes in institutional, social administrative structure, improvement in income output, custom belief etc.

Quoting Onyeozu (2007),development goes with growth, social change, evolution, advancement, modernization and increase in agricultural produce and food security. It also goes with advancement towards peoples' ability to lives and to make things better for themselves in their community.

Community development as a development strategy is predicted on the capacity of the people and the government. To Onyeozu (2007), community development is an educational method, with its primary purpose to improve social and economic change of the community for better living. As an educational method, it encourages people/women to take action and work out their own solutions to their problems rather than receiving ready-made solutions. This signifying that community development as a social process of action demands social sensitivity, group consciousness and active group endeavours. Thus, it functions best in the locations where all strata of the society and other community members are moved with sense of solidarity towards problem solving (Oyebamiji, & Adekola,2008). It is in the community education that women gain the vision of community development and how to make their community more livable and developed. Community development projects among others are: creating livable environment for the people, provision of portable water supply, installation of functioning electricity, schools, technological advancement, health centres, hospitals etc.

Furthermore, Obih (2017) opines that all human development in the right direction starts with women. Women are therefore taken to be the fundamental human resource in every society. Nigerian women are goal getters in every useful area of human life. No nation can boost its environmental healthiness and economic development without women's input. To Okukpon and Akerele (2015), societal development without women is always unrealizable. This statement stems from the acute recognition that women in their unique roles and agricultural income play active parts in community development. In Imo State, According to Ikwuegbu (2015), women have established themselves as leaders in bringing about every positive change in the communities. Afigbo (2008) observes that women participation in community development is an important element and a sure way to speedy development in the rural communities. Such community development programmes as: scholarship awards or grant, participation in water borehole projects, community health centres/maternity, church building and renovations, organizing skills acquisition programmes for the less privileged women in the community and other desirable values essential in the community. All these summed up as proven indicators of women participation in community development. The ways and manners women in agriculture play a leading role in the emergence of community development is becoming increasingly active and recommendable (Ikwuegbu,2015). In fact, women have

enormous tasks and strategic roles in agriculture and seemly indicators in community development in their communities and States.

In Imo State, there are existing agricultural extension education centres and programmes and women farmers have benefited from them for good yield in agricultural produce. Therefore, it is upon this seemly that the researchers became interested to investigate on the Perceived Role of women in Agriculture on Community Development in Imo State.

Objectives of the Study

1) Examine the extent women farmers acquire competencies from agricultural extension programmes existing in Imo State.
2) Find out the extent of women involvement in agriculture in Imo State.
3) Ascertain the extent women in agriculture contribute in community development in Imo State.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study is two thousand one hundred and twenty eight (2,128) women farmers in Imo State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 198 respondents from8 LGAs (Ikeduru, NgorAkpala, Ahiazu Mbaise, Osu, Isiokpo, Nwagele, Obowo and Isiala Mbano) for the study. Three research questions and A-24 items of researchers structured questionnaire were used. The Pearson Products Moment Correlation Co-efficient was used to establish a reliability index of 0.72 which indicated that the instrument was reliable enough to collect data for this study. The data collected for the study was analyzed using descriptive mean statistics. A-4 Point rating scale questionnaire of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), (LE), Low Extent and Very Low Extent (VLE) were used in addressing research questions. Mean value with 2.5 and above was considered significant; while mean value below 2.5 is insignificant.

Results and Discussion

Result as shown on Table1, for research question one indicates that women in agriculture acquire competencies in agricultural extension programmes existing in Imo State to a very high extent. This is shown in the mean values of items number 1-8 which indicated high means that are greater than the criterion means of 2.5respectively and as well were considered significant to the study. In addition, a grand mean of 3.12 also indicates that knowledge women gained in agricultural

Table 1. Responses on Mean Analysis on the extent women in agriculture acquire competencies from agricultural extension programme existing in Imo State

S/N	Items	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	MEAN	DECISION
1	Knowledge women gained boost their agricultural productivity	**127 (508)**	**51 (153)**	**22 (44)**	**9 (9)**	**3.61**	**Significant**
2	Improve their agricultural potentials	**86 (344)**	**50 (150)**	**41 (81)**	**21 (21)**	**3.02**	**Significant**
3	Improve skills in food production and packaging	**115 (460)**	**55 (165)**	**15 (30)**	**13 (13)**	**3.37**	**Significant**
4	Gain skills in the use of modern tools in agricultural	**95 (380)**	**45 (135)**	**48 (96)**	**10 (10)**	**3.14**	**Significant**
5	Awareness of good planting seasons	**80 (320)**	**36 (108)**	**68(136)**	**14 (14)**	**2.92**	**Significant**
6	Gain marketing insights	**65 (260)**	**60 (180)**	**38 (76)**	**35 (35)**	**2.78**	**Significant**
7	Information on the importance of crop rotation	**75 (300)**	**65 (195)**	**32 (64)**	**26 (26)**	**2.95**	**Significant**
8	Insights on local storage	**93 (372)**	**65 (195)**	**22 (44)**	**18 (18)**	**3.18**	**Significant**

Grand Mean =3.12

extension programmes enhance their agricultural productivity, improve their potentials, food production and packaging, awareness of good planting seasons, marketing insights, information in crop rotation and insights on local storage to a very high extent. The result for research question one revealed that women in agricultural gain viable competences from agricultural extension programme existing in Imo State to a high extent.

The finding is in line with Ihejirika (2015), Ikwuegbu (2017) submissions that skills, knowledge, trainings and technical advice women acquire in agricultural education boost their agricultural production, develop their skills, give them clearer views and abilities for future development in agriculture and life endeavours.

Extent of women involvement in agriculture in Imo State

Result as shown in Table 2 indicates that women partake in crop planting, food production, livestock, agro-products and business, agricultural productions boost women's financial status and women in agriculture create job opportunities in their communities. Items number 9,11,12,13,1415 and 16. These constructs are considered to be significant because they had

mean values that are greater than the criterion means of 2.5 and were considered significant, and also

Responses of Mean Analysis on the extent of women involvement in agriculture in Imo State

Table 2

S/N	Items	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	MEAN	DECISION
9	Women farmers partake in crops planting and weeding	104(416)	44(132)	30 (60)	20 (20)	3.17	Significant
10	Partake in land cultivation	50(200)	42 (126)	48 (96)	58 (58)	2.42	Insignificant
11	Food production for society consumption and export	130(520)	40 (120)	18 (36)	10 (10)	3.46	Significant
12	Livestock rearing and business	98 (392)	46 (138)	3 5 (70)	19 (19)	3.13	Significant
13	Agro-products production and sales	99 (396)	66 (198)	8 (16)	25 (25)	3.21	Significant
14	Cassava processing	105(420)	55 (165)	19 (38)	19 (19)	3.24	Significant
15	Agricultural productions boost women's financial status to solve personal and community tasks	130(520)	30 (90)	30 (60)	8 (8)	3.42	Significant
16	Create job opportunities for the unemployed people in their communities	132(528)	43 (129)	15 (30)	8 (8)	3.51	Significant

Grand Mean =3.20

Indicates that women's role in agriculture is to a high extent in Imo State. Item number10 with a mean value of 2.42 was considered insignificant because the mean value is below 2.5 which indicates that women do not partake much in land cultivation. Also, with a grand mean of 3.20the result reveals that women are involvement in agriculture in Imo State to a high extent. This finding is in concordance with Afigbo (2008) assertion that women have invaluable input and notable roles in the Nigeria agricultural socio-economic development across the country.

Women in agriculture's contribute in community development in Imo State

Result in Table3shows that women in agriculture contribute in community development in Imo State. This is shown in the mean values of item 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23. These constructs are said to be significant because their mean values are greater than the criterion mean of 2.5respectively.

Responses on Mean Analysis of the extent women in agricultural contribute in community development Imo State

Table 3

S/N	Items	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	MEAN	DECISION
17	Women in agricultural participate in food procurement and sustainability in Imo State.	140 **(560)**	31**(93)**	19**(38)**	11 **(8)**	3.53	**Significant**
18	Electricity installation	77 **(308)**	54 **(162)**	30 **(60)**	37 **(37)**	2.86	**Significant**
19	Borehole water projects	131 **(524)**	40 **(120)**	16 **(32)**	11 **(11)**	3.47	**Significant**
20	Community health centre/maternity building	128 **(512)**	32 **(96)**	23 **(46)**	10 **(15)**	3.43	**Significant**
21	Church building and renovation	127 **(508)**	51 **(153)**	10 **(20)**	10 **(10)**	3.49	**Significant**
22	Scholarship award to the less privileged children	111**(665)**	60 **(180)**	14 **(28)**	13 **(13)**	3.36	**Significant**
23	Organize skill acquisition programmes to empower poor women in the community	133 **(532)**	34 **(102)**	10**(20)**	21 **(21)**	3.41	**Significant**
24	Participate in community leadership like men	52 **(208)**	50 **(150)**	40 **(80)**	56**(56)**	2.49	In**significant**

Grand Mean =3. 26

While the mean value of item number 24 is2.49and was below the decision mean of 2.50 and indicates that women do not participate in community leaderships like men. Hence, the respondents' responses indicate that women in agriculture contribute in community development programmes in Imo State to a high extent. In addition, a grand mean of 3.26 is also an indication that women in agriculture participate immensely in electricity installation, borehole water supple, market stalls, church building and renovation and so on in Imo State. This finding is in line with Afigbo (2008), Attu (2019) assertions that women are the brain box in community development projects in their respective societies. they embark on with their efforts and resources.

Agricultural extension education is invaluable in teaching farmers on how to improve their agricultural production. It is through agricultural extension education that the community people/women acquire the vision for community development plans and how to make their community more livable and developed. Women in their various groups mobilize their efforts and material resources to discover and solve their community felt-needs projects. In essence, the earnest of women's role in agriculture has great influence and elevation in their involvement in social process. Consequently, Njoku (2001)stresses that the role of women in agriculture is lucrative and essential to be overlooked in the community development research contents. Hence, rural communities and their development are women's problem and concern. No wonder

Afigbo (2008) submits that women have invaluable input, skills and notable history in the Nigerian agriculture to socio-economic development across the country.

Though, Ezeala (2017) contends that women's work and actions are restricted to the matters concerning domestic work and children. Tradition has been the common issue showing itself in all cultures and women roles in community development is no exception. Ezeala (2017) further deposits that woman's projects are always inferior and unrealizable which discloses their unbalance nature. Women are marginalized and suppressed in the community to the extent their ideas and decision- making in the social development are not regarded even when they are correct and better than their men counterparts. The United Nations Development Programme UNDP 2010 reports cited in Okonkwo and Mbara (2018) state that in Africa, women constitute the majority of people working in agriculture which is important in everyday life and living standard yet they are tagged non-essential in their communities. As well, they play important roles in their families and the society alike yet they are the most disenfranchised members of the very society the toil to, build and sustained.

That notwithstanding, Otty (2021) reveals that women are in every angle of development; they are the agents of community development; they established and maintain important relationships and cooperative networks in their communities and even to the world. They produce bulk food for both domestic and agro-businesses cum raw materials used in local consumption and export. They also have veritable reports in the employment creation of the rural poor which in turn curbs poverty, dependency, idleness and so on which in tune promote Nigerian economy and secured future generation.(Attu,2017). Njoku (2001), Hanachor (2013) submit that Nigerian women in their different occupation and Organizations have made giant remarks in the development projects to the extent that the history of Nigeria cannot be complete and interesting without given reference to women's efforts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study revealed that women in agriculture in Imo State take part in almost the whole aspects of agricultural tasks and production in Imo State. Based on the findings of the study, the paper recommends the following:

1. Efforts should be put in place to safe guide women from cultural bias in the societal development.

2. Government should endeavour to design quality agricultural extension programmes for the farmers as that will metamorphose their agricultural roles and participation in community to a very large extent.
3. Trained Adult Educators in agriculture should be giving chance in training and organizing workshops in various areas of agricultural tasks and needs in the rural communities in order to achieve excellent prospects in agriculture.

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