

STRATEGIES FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION FOR PROMOTING FOOD SECURITY AND REDUCE UNEMPLOYMENT IN ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

The study examined the strategies for empowering women participation in agricultural production for promoting food security and reduce unemployment in Enugu State, Nigeria. Three specific purposes guided the study while three research questions were answered. The study adopted survey research design. The population for the study was 26 university lecturers of Agricultural Education from University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Enugu State University of Science and Technology. There was no sampling since the population size was manageable. A structured questionnaire containing 26 items was used for data collection. The instrument was face validated by three experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha method. The reliability coefficient of 0.89 was established. Data were collected through direct contact with the respondents; and analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that women need empowerment in different areas of agriculture such as crop production, fish farming, bee keeping, snail rearing, pig farming, poultry production, pest and disease control, storage of agricultural produce, processing of crop and animal produce and others. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that the state government should provide training for women to acquire relevant skills needed in agricultural production and initiate policies that will target women's access to land, technology and empowerment in order to enhance agricultural production, ensuring food security and reduce unemployment.

Keywords: Food Security, Agricultural Production, Women Empowerment, Unemployment

Introduction

There have been a lot of concerns in recent time over the looming danger of food crisis in many nations, including Nigeria. According to FAO (2013), food security is obtained when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Food security in relation to this study is a situation whereby food is sufficiently made available to the people by providing adequate access to food and proper utilization and stability of food even at difficult times.

Nigeria's situation on food security is highly precarious and pernicious. Given the increased food shortage, Nigeria in the present circumstance can be said to be food insecure (Adeleke & Ogunsusi, 2019). The practice of agriculture is what can ensure that food security is achieved in Nigeria (World Bank, 2001).

Agriculture is the cultivation of crops, raising and breeding livestock, processing, storage, distribution and marketing of agricultural products for man and industrial usage (Okaro 2009, Ali 2018). It contributes about 70% of the Gross Domestic product (GDP),

accounts for about 90% of foreign exchange earnings and employs about 70% of the working population (Okadi, 2012). Contextually, Agriculture is the practice of cultivating the soil, keeping animals and the preparation of plants and animals' products for use.

Agricultural production is the use of cultivated plants or animals to produce products for sustaining or enhancing human life. Contextually, Agricultural production is the utilization of grown plants or animals by women to make sustainable products for ensuring food security. Women are key players in the agricultural world. In the view of Ashby (2008), women provide 43% of the agricultural labour force and also produce most of the food consumed locally. Yet women represent a discriminated and disadvantaged group compared to men and this often prevents them from realizing their full potential. Empowering women through agricultural production will promote food security and reduce unemployment (Leloup & Ryckmans, 2006).

Employment generation alleviates poverty and increases the level of economic activities translating into economic growth. Chappelow (2020) stated that

unemployment occurs when a person who is actively searching for employment is unable to find work. The author added that unemployment is often used as a measure of the health of the economy. Unemployment in the context of this study is the inability of people to find work or job to do as a result of the non-empowerment of women in agricultural production.

The rate of unemployment in Nigeria is not only alarming but a national embarrassment needing meaningful and tangible action. Therefore, women must be empowered through agriculture in order to eliminate unemployment and ensure food security.

Women Empowerment means that women gain the ability to challenge and combat their oppression. Women empowerment is the provision of women with the means, skills, and opportunities to be independent, make their own choices and lead a life free of all sorts of violence and discrimination (Rogers, 2018). In relation to this study, women empowerment is equipping women with the necessary skills, abilities, providing modern farm inputs, facilities, equipment and training them in modern agricultural production in order to ensure sustainable food security.

There is need to train women in modern agricultural production in order to ensure sustainable food security. Rogers (2018) stated that the training of women demands that they gain experience in large scale agricultural production on modern farming. The big capital requirements like modern farm inputs, land acquisition and other factors push women away from taking up modern agricultural production for sustainable food security.

Agricultural development is not only a means against hunger for every poor household but also raises income nearly four times more effectively than growth in any other sector (World Bank, 2016). Empowering women in agriculture will enhance their productivity, increase their income, create jobs and enhance the status and values on the job. Hence, there is need to empower women agriculture production so as to bring about food security and reduce unemployment in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to ascertain the strategies for empowering women participation in agricultural production for promoting food security and reduce unemployment in Enugu state, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. identify areas of agriculture where women should be empowered.

2. determine challenges militating against women empowerment in agriculture.
3. determine strategies for enhancing women empowerment in agriculture

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the areas of agriculture where women should be empowered?
2. What are the challenges militating against women empowerment in agriculture?
3. What are the strategies for enhancing women empowerment in agriculture?

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The study was carried out in Enugu State, Nigeria. According to Eze, et al. (2017), Enugu State lies between latitudes 5° 56' North and 7° 06' North of the equator and longitudes 6° 53' East and 7° 55' East of the Greenwich meridian. The state is very good at agricultural production because of its fertile soil. The population for the study consisted of 26 university lecturers of Agricultural Education from University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Enugu State University of Science and Technology. There was no sampling since the population size was manageable. A structured questionnaire containing 26 items with response options of Strongly Agree (S.A), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (S.D) with nominal values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively were used for the data collection. The instrument was face validated by three experts from the Department of Agricultural Education, University of Nigeria Nsukka. Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument and reliability coefficient of 0.89 was obtained.

The instrument was administered to the university lecturers of Agricultural Education in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Enugu State University of Science and Technology. The data collected for the study was analyzed using mean to answer the three research questions and standard deviation to determine the closeness or farness of the responses from the mean. The decision was that any mean response which is 2.50 and above was considered 'Agreed' while any item with a mean point below 2.50 was considered 'Disagreed' by the respondents.

Research Question 1: What are the areas of Agriculture where women should be empowered?

Table 1: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Lecturers' responses on the areas of Agriculture where women should be empowered

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Crop production	3.81	0.66	Agreed
2	Fish farming	3.47	0.14	Agreed
3	Storage of agricultural produce	2.88	0.46	Agreed
4	Bee keeping	2.92	0.53	Agreed
5	Snail rearing	2.59	0.44	Agreed
6	Pig farming	3.06	0.63	Agreed
7	Poultry production e.g. broilers, layers	3.92	0.26	Agreed
8	Pest and disease control	2.63	0.34	Agreed
9	Processing of crop produce	3.55	0.72	Agreed
10	Processing of animal produce	3.81	0.59	Agreed
11	Grading and branding of agricultural produce	2.52	0.48	Agreed
12	Marketing of agricultural produce	2.97	0.69	Agreed

Key: SD = Standard Deviation

The data presented in Table 1 revealed that areas of agriculture where women should be empowered had mean ranging from 2.52 – 3.81, indicating that their mean values were above the cut-off point of 2.50. This implies that items 1-12 were accepted as the areas of agriculture where women should be

empowered. The standard deviation values ranged from 0.14 – 0.72 which indicates that the respondents were close to one another in their responses.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges militating against women empowerment in Agriculture?

Table 2: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Lecturers' responses on the challenges militating against women empowerment in Agriculture

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD	Remark
13	High cost of the equipment needed for the empowerment	3.32	0.26	Agreed
14	High cost of maintaining the equipment after empowerment	3.37	1.13	Agreed
15	Lacking of technical skills needed for maintaining the materials/equipment	3.72	0.54	Agreed
16	Lack of policy support for women empowerment in Agriculture	3.80	0.82	Agreed
17	Negative culture that restricts women access to land	3.90	0.63	Agreed
18	Poor access to credit facilities.	3.46	0.61	Agreed
19	Problem of gender inequality against women	3.37	1.12	Agreed
20	Non-participation of women in agricultural cooperative society	2.73	0.54	Agreed

Key: SD = Standard Deviation

The data presented in Table 2 revealed that the challenges militating against women empowerment in agriculture had mean ranging from 2.73 – 3.90, indicating that their mean values were above the cut-off point of 2.50. This implies that items 13-20 were accepted as the challenges militating against women

empowerment in agriculture. The standard deviation values ranged from 0.26 – 1.13 which indicates that the respondents were homogeneous in their responses.

Research Question 3: What are the strategies for enhancing women empowerment in agriculture?

Table 3: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Lecturers' responses on the strategies for enhancing women empowerment in Agriculture?

S/N	ITEMS:	Mean	SD	Remark
21	Provide training for women in the skills needed to operate agricultural equipment	3.86	0.39	Agreed
22	Provide loan to women farmers at low interest rate	3.37	0.12	Agreed
23	Initiate policies that target women empowerment in agriculture	3.54	0.32	Agreed
24	Implement land policies to enhance access to land by woman.	3.52	0.48	Agreed
25	Encourage women to join agricultural cooperative.	2.94	0.51	Agreed
26	Initiate policies to reduce the influence of culture on women's access to technology and empowerment.	3.34	0.8	Agreed

Key: SD = Standard Deviation

The data presented in Table 3 showed that the strategies for enhancing women empowerment in agriculture had mean ranging from 2.94 – 3.86, indicating that their mean values were above the cut-off point of 2.50. This implies that items 21-26 were accepted as the strategies for enhancing women empowerment in agriculture. The standard deviation values ranged from 0.32 – 0.82 which shows that the respondents were similar to each other in their responses.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study with regard to research question 1 revealed that fish farming, poultry production e.g. broilers, layers, crop production, bee keeping, snail rearing, pig farming amongst others are the areas where women need empowerment in agriculture. This is in line with the findings of Chowdhry(2018), which noted that the following areas call for the empowerment of women: production of poultry, such as raising broilers and layers, management of pests and diseases, crop processing, grading and branding of agricultural products, marketing of agricultural products, and pig farming in order to fit into the modern agricultural production.

The findings of this study with regard to research question 2 revealed that lack of policy support for women empowerment in agriculture, negative culture that restricts women access to land, poor access to credit facilities, problem of gender inequality against women, non-participation of women in agricultural cooperative society amongst others are the challenges militating against women empowerment in agriculture. The findings is in agreement with Rogers (2018), which maintained that providing modern farm inputs to women for agricultural production is actually capital intensive as well as land acquisition, high maintenance costs for

equipment before and after empowerment, lack of technical expertise required for maintaining materials and equipment, lack of policy support for women's empowerment in agriculture, and bad culture that prevents women from accessing land. These big capital requirements and other factors are really pushing women away from taking up modern agricultural production for sustainable food security.

The findings in Table 3 revealed that providing training for women in the skills needed to operate agricultural equipment, providing loan to women farmers at low interest rate, initiating policies that target women empowerment in agriculture amongst others are the strategies for enhancing women empowerment in agriculture. These findings is in consonance with those of Doss (2011), which stated that encouraging women to join agricultural cooperative societies, implementing land policies to improve women's access to land, and launching policies to lessen the impact of culture on women's access to technology are all the ways to increase women's empowerment in agriculture.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that women need to be empowered in fish farming, storage of agricultural produce, bee keeping, snail rearing, pig farming amongst others for food security. Also, challenges such as lack of policy support for women empowerment in agriculture, negative culture that restricts women access to land, poor access to credit facilities, Corporate Agriculture (2012) Agriculture overview: Reinvigorating Agriculture is the priority of the Nigerian Government.problem of gender inequality against women, non-participation of women in agricultural cooperative society amongst others were hindering women from participating fully in modern agricultural production but these challenges can be

averted by providing training for women in the skills needed to operate agricultural equipment, providing loan to women farmers at low interest rate, initiating policies that target women empowerment in agriculture.

Basis of the findings, it was recommended that:

1. Since the Nigerian government has made available outfits for financing agricultural products such as the National Directorate of Employment, the Bank of Industries, the Bank of Agriculture, the Central bank assisted programmes through commercial banks; women should be encouraged to join agricultural cooperative societies to enable them get easy access to

loan which can fund the modern agricultural farming system.

2. Workshop should be conducted at least once a year to educate these women on the importance of modern agricultural farming system.

3. The state government should provide training for women to acquire relevant skills needed in agricultural production and initiate policies that will target women's access to land, technology and empowerment in order to enhance agricultural production, ensuring food security and reduce unemployment.

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