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Women Empowerment Programmes For Improved Agricultural Productivity Among Rural Women in Kogi State

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ABSTRACT

Improvement in agricultural productivity is a prerequisite for enhancement in household food security. The study examined whether the empowerment of rural women can facilitate the improvement of agricultural productivity in Kogi State which is currently experiencing increased household food insecurity due to recent crisis between farmers and Fulani herdsmen, most especially in rural areas. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised the entire women living in rural areas in Kogi State. multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 150 rural women for the study. In-depth interview and focus group discussions were the major data collection tools used for the study. The qualitative data collected from interview and focus group discussion were analyzed using thematic approach of qualitative data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that, there was poor implementation of women empowerment programmes for rural women in Kogi State . The findings also revealed among others that the agricultural productivity of rural women in Kogi State was declining over the last decade due to the lingering crisis between the rural farmers and the Fulani herdsmen. The study recommended among others that, the Kogi State Ministry of Women Affairs should proactively initiate women empowerment programmes that will help to empower the women economically and politically, increase their literacy level, most especially financial literacy and grant the women access to soft loan credits and improved seedlings to help improve their agricultural productivity.

Keywords: Women empowerment, rural women, agricultural productivity, household food security, Farmers-Fulani crisis

INTRODUCTION

Improvement in agricultural productivity is a prerequisite for enhancement in household food security. The recent high cost of food in Kogi State is an indication that agricultural productivity among farmers is declining in recent years due to the lingering crises between the farmers and Fulani herdsmen. According to Fabiya, et al. (2017), in most developing countries, which include Nigeria, agriculture is an essential sector considered as the backbone of rural areas which many people rely upon for survival and food security. Similarly, Mkwambisi, et al.(2017), opines that, despite persistent economic growth around the world, food insecurity remains as a pressing problem in many parts of Africa. This implies that the decline in agricultural productivity in Kogi State is a challenge on the household food security.

The agricultural sector has a unique potential for empowering women and providing diverse opportunities, most especially in the area of improved productivity (Wambui, 2021). The author furthered that; women are the major producers of small-scale food which is the major source of food

security for many house hold, hence if women are employed, it might improve agricultural productivity of many households. In Africa, women constitute 52% of the total population, contribute 75% of the agricultural workforce, produce and market 60 to 80% of food (Kwesiga, 1999; Afolabi, 2005). This implies that empowering women is empowering over 75% of the agricultural workforce. According to International Food Policy Research Institute (2012) women play a critical and potentially transformative role in agricultural growth in developing countries, but they face persistent obstacles and economic constraints limiting further inclusion in agriculture. These challenges limit their contributions to improved agricultural productivity which is a prerequisite for enhanced household food security.

Agricultural productivity is usually measured as the market value of the final output. Dharmasiri (2020) defined agricultural productivity as the ratio of agricultural outputs to inputs. While individual products are usually measured by weight, which is known as crop yield, varying products make measuring overall agricultural output difficult. Similarly, Ball, and Richard (2018) stated that, agricultural productivity which measures the increase in outputs not accounted for by the growth in production inputs, is a closely watched economic performance indicator because of its contribution to a healthy and thriving economy. Improved productivity indicates greater output from the same amount of input. It means higher efficiency with which a farmer can transform resources into goods. Thus, productivity growth is our opportunity to create more from less. According to Tandji, et al. (2021) Improved productivity drives economic growth, meaning an economy can produce and consume more and more goods for the same amount of work. Improved productivity can help maintain a healthy work/life balance, and some people even enjoy their work more and feel less stressed when they're productive.

Women empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in decision making process and access to power, land, bank loan, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, peace and societal development (Ekesionye & Okolo, 2012). According to Longwe (2017), women empowerment involves the transformation of patriarchal societies through a process of enlightenment, conscientization and collective organization. Empowerment in this context means assistance which may be in form of cash, materials or training provided to women to enable them influence changes in their socio-economic status and to use their capacities to harness the hidden potentials in material and human resources that is required to improve their agricultural productivity.

Women can be empowered through provision of education and training opportunities to improve their skills and enhance their access to credit facilities which is a requirement for improved productivity. Empowerment will also increase women access to resources because it is believed that empowering women would reduce the incidence of poverty, increase employment opportunities and household income which will eventually lead to sustainable economic development (Adeleke, et al 2016). Also, improving the wellbeing of rural women and offering them several opportunities will give them the potential to create positive impact on the next generation (Diuro, et al., 2018). It is unfortunate that rural women are at disadvantaged position especially in the aspect of being empowered for agricultural production.

A growing body of literature shows a positive relationship between women's empowerment and agricultural productivity (Ogato, 2013; Doss, 2017; Oluwaseun & Luqman, 2019; Welk & Seymour, 2021; Anderson, et al., 2021). Doss (2017) affirmed that empowering women through availability of productive resources is key to increasing overall agricultural productivity, improving women wellbeing and reducing poverty. Empowering rural women has been found to significantly impact the livelihood of households, communities and the nation at large (Ogato, 2013). Closing the gender gap in agriculture is a critical strategy for boosting agricultural productivity, achieving food security and eradicating hunger (FAO, 2011). Despite these findings existing studies have revealed that, there is low women empowerment in most developing countries, including Nigeria. Oluwaseun and Luqman (2019) revealed low level of women empowerment in Oyo, Edo, Benue and Sokoto States.

Improved agricultural productivity is important for increased self-esteem for smallholders especially women due to the gains in food security and poverty alleviation (Alkire et al, 2012). This is particularly important for women in rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa where about 79 percent of them derive their means of livelihood directly and indirectly from agriculture (FAO, 2011). Studies have

established the significant effects of women's empowerment on agricultural productivity and the efficiency and welfare outcomes of project or policy interventions (World Bank, 2011, Wouterse, 2017, Diiro, 2018). Similarly, Swanson (2019) stated that, Improved productivity in the farm determines the efficiency with which crops are produced among farmers which makes food crops available at affordable prices. Therefore, improved productivity is usually measured as the market value of the final output. Improved agricultural productivity can raise living standards of the people as it will increase household food security.

There are challenges that affect the successful empowerment of women; some of which are men dominated society, high rate of illiteracy, inadequate access to credit loan facilities for women when compared to men, religious and cultural belief. Karim, et al. (2017) affirmed that rural women lack access to basic assets and social rights due to patriarchal nature of some communities which hinders their full participation in agricultural production and developmental process. Adeyeye, et al. (2019) identified low educational level as the major challenges affecting women empowerment in Nigeria. Since, there is continuous rise of food price in Kogi State in recent years, it is imperative to examine if empowering women can facilitate improvement in agricultural productivity which lower price for food stuff and improved affordability of food stuff in Kogi State that is currently experiencing low agricultural productivity.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine whether empowerment of rural women can facilitate the improvement of agricultural productivity in Kogi State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the status of women empowerment programme for agricultural productivity in Kogi State
2. Ascertain the extent to which women empowerment programme can facilitate improved agricultural productivity among rural women in Kogi State
3. Identify the challenges affecting successful empowerment programme of rural women for improved agricultural productivity in Kogi State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were asked to guide the study:

1. What is the status of women empowerment programme for agricultural productivity in Kogi State?
2. What is the extent to which women empowerment programme can facilitate improved agricultural productivity among rural women in Kogi State?
3. What are the challenges affecting successful empowerment programme of rural women for improved agricultural productivity in Kogi State?

METHOD

The study was a qualitative research approach. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised the entire women living in rural areas in Kogi State totalling 2,327,557 (Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission, 2021). Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 150 rural women for the study. In-depth interview was the major data collection tools used for the study. The In-depth interview guide was structured into two sections (A & B). The section A collected data on the monthly income level of the rural women, while the section B consisted of probing questions related to the research questions guiding the study. The first question sought to understand the status of women empowerment for agricultural productivity in Kogi State; the second question was to understand the extent to which women empowerment can facilitate improved agricultural productivity among rural women in Kogi State; while the third question focused on identifying the challenges affecting successful empowerment of rural women for improved agricultural productivity in Kogi State. The researcher with the help of research assistants carried out the in-depth interview in the local language of the participants. The qualitative data collected from interview were translated to English Language and later transcribed, then summarized using thematic approach of qualitative data analysis. The socioeconomic status of the rural women was analyzed using frequency and percentage and presented using chart.

RESULTS

A total of 150 rural women in rural areas in Kogi State were interviewed in their local languages and translated into English and then summarized thematically.

Table 1:



From the result above, 35 (23.3%) of the rural women earns less than 10,000; 43(28.7%) earns between 10,000-20,000; 32(21.4%) earns between 20,001-40,000; 18(12%) earns between 40,001-60,000; 9(6%) earns between 80,000-100,000; while only 2 rural women earns more than 100,000 thousand naira.

Research Question 1: *What is the status of women empowerment programme for agricultural productivity in Kogi State?*

Responses from the interview showed that, majority of the rural women were not empowered to function productively in the agricultural sector. From the responses, the rural women stated that, there was no specialized training programme provided to rural women to advance their skills to improve their agricultural productivity. The women were not provided with soft credit loans, improved seedlings, fertilizers, or specialized outreach services that enlighten them on the best farming practices to improve their productivity. Some of the women stated that, when they visited banks for loans, they were not given loans because they are women who do not have collateral. From the responses, it was evident that, the status of women empowerment among rural women in Kogi State was low, hence, majority of the women in rural areas in Kogi State were not empowered in areas relating to skills and resources to improve their agricultural productivity.

Research Question 2: *What is the extent to which women empowerment programme can facilitate improved agricultural productivity among rural women in Kogi State?*

From the interview responses from the rural women, women empowerment programmes if properly provided can provide them with the skills and basic resources required to improve their agricultural productivity. Majority of the rural women believes that when the government provides them with improved seedlings, fertilizer and credit loans or grants for rural women they will invest it in their farming and enhance their agricultural production. Some of the rural women responded that, if they are eligible to credit loan from commercial banks like their male counterparts, they will utilize such fund to expand their farm which could lead to increased productivity.

Research Question 3: *What are the challenges affecting successful empowerment programme of rural women for improved agricultural productivity in Kogi State?*

Responses from the in-depth interview session with the rural women shows that, the government displays non-challant attitude towards women empowerment due to the culture of male dominated society and religion which have relegated the women to the background as mere housewives who are usually helpless and dependents in the society. Most of the women stated that, high rate of corruption

is a factor that affects the empowerment of women in Kogi State, while others were of the opinion that, majority of women empowerment programmes in Kogi State amounted to distribution of food stuff and money which in the real sense are not empowerment. Some of the women interviewed responded that, one of the challenges they encountered was low level of education and lack of ownership to properties that are requested as collateral during loans.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study revealed that, the status of women empowerment among rural women in Kogi State was low as majority of the women in rural areas in the state were not empowered in areas relating to skills and resources to improve their agricultural productivity. Most specifically, there was no specialized training programme provided to rural women to advance their skills to improve their agricultural productivity. The women were not provided with soft credit loans, improved seedlings, fertilizers, or specialized outreach services that enlighten them on the best farming practices to improve their productivity. Thus, there was poor implementation of women empowerment programmes for rural women in Kogi State. This is in accordance with the findings of Oluwaseun & Luqman (2019) which revealed low level of women empowerment in Oyo, Edo, Benue and Sokoto States.

The findings of the study revealed that, majority of the rural women believes that if they are empowered with the appropriate skills and advanced farming resources, they can enhance their household food security through improved agricultural productivity. Also, the study reported that, if the government provides rural women with improved seedlings, fertilizer and credit loans or grants for rural women they will invest it in their farming and enhance their agricultural production. This implies that, women empowerment is positively related to improved agricultural productivity, hence, women who are empowered are more likely to have higher agricultural productivity than women who are not empowered. The findings of the study correspond with the earlier findings of Doss (2017) who affirmed that empowering women through availability of productive resources was a key to increasing overall agricultural productivity, improving women wellbeing and reducing poverty. Similarly, Ogato (2013) reported that, empowering rural women had been found to significantly impact the livelihood of households, communities and the nation at large. The findings of the study also further justified the report of FAO (2011) that, closing the gender gap in agriculture was a critical strategy for boosting agricultural productivity, achieving food security and eradicating hunger.

The findings of the study revealed that, the major challenges affecting the delivering of women empowerment programmes to rural women in Kogi State for improved agricultural productivity are: the culture of men dominated by the society, religious belief, high rate of corruption and lack of attention by the government on the need to empower the women. The findings of the study corresponded with the earlier findings of Karim, et al. (2017) that affirmed that rural women lacked access to basic assets and social rights due to patriarchal nature of some communities which hindered their full participation in agricultural production and developmental process. Similarly, Adeyeye, et al. (2019) identified low educational level as the major challenges affecting women empowerment in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The study examined whether the empowerment of rural women can facilitate the improvement of agricultural productivity in Kogi State which is currently experiencing increased household food insecurity due to recent crisis between farmers and Fulani herdsmen, most especially in rural areas. Based on the findings, the study concluded that, the status of women empowerment among rural women in Kogi State is low as majority of the women in rural areas in Kogi State are not empowered in areas relating to skills and resources to improve their agricultural productivity. The study also concluded that the agricultural productivity of rural women in Kogi State is declining over the last decade due to the lingering crisis between the rural farmers and the Fulani herdsmen. The rural women believe that if they are empowered with the appropriate skills and advanced farming resources, they can enhance their household food security. The women identified high rate of political corruption, societal perception of women, and high rate of illiteracy among rural women among

others are the major challenges affecting the empowerment of women, most especially rural women in Kogi State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers suggested the following recommendations:

- Kogi State Ministry of Women Affairs should proactively initiate women empowerment programmes that will help to empower the women economically, politically, increase their literacy level, most especially financial literacy and grant the women access to soft loan credits and improved seedlings to help improved their agricultural productivity.
- The rural women in Kogi state should also be educated on home gardening to complement their fear of going to the farm far from their home due to fear of rape and killing them by Fulani herdsman.
- The culture of male dominated society and religion which have relegated the women to the background as mere housewives who are usually helpless and dependents in the society should be abolished.

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