



ANALYSES OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES IN ORLU AGRICULTURAL ZONE, IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Poverty eradication programmes have been attempted in Orlu Agricultural zone of Imo State but failed to meet its stated objectives. The study investigated participation of women in community poverty eradication programmes. Multistage sampling procedures were used to select 180 respondents from communities in the study area. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions and participatory observation to elicit necessary information. Data collected were analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics. Major findings revealed that 62% of the project embarked upon by the women were identified, out of which 56.4% were completed, 35.5% on-going, while 8% were abandoned. For level of participation, the result shows that attendance to meeting had a mean score of 2.32, payment of dues (2.47), project initiation (2.12), planning (2.44), organization (1.90), implementation (2.6), monitoring (1.60), and evaluation (1.61). Important (significant) variables influencing level of participation in community development programmes among the women include: years of schooling (3.221***), age (1.666*), access to credit (2.138**), household size (-4.993***), and monthly income (-2.232**). The study shows that the women participated actively in poverty eradication projects and therefore recommends that the women should pay more attention in organizing themselves to be able to access credit, monitoring and evaluating the projects. There is also need for free and affordable education to enable the women access and process information that will enhance participation in projects.

Keywords: Participation, Poverty Eradication Projects, and Women

Introduction

Rural women are involved in both farming and non-farming activities, and key development actors; playing significant roles in the domestic and socio-economic life of the rural society by supporting their households and communities in achieving food and nutrition security, generating income and improving rural livelihood and overall wellbeing. However, despite the contributions of women to development, much attention has not been given to these rural women. These women often face more serious constraints than men; have little or no access to land, credit, health facilities, experience diseases, hunger and are ignorant. Development interventions design programmes and activities undertaken by government, NGOs, and international agencies to improve and enhance the productivity of an existing production system. Rural development has been described in different ways by different authors, depending on the discipline or line of thought, and

provision of socio-economic needs, ranging from improvement in agricultural production, employment, qualitative health care, improved nutrition, and quality education (Obasi, 2010). Some agricultural interventions in Nigeria include: National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), Strategic Grains Reserve Programme, Small-Scale Fishery, Small Ruminant Production, Pasture and Grazing Reserve, Accelerated Crop Production, Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), FADAMA, Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP), and Special Programme on Food Security (SPFS). These programmes promote utilization of land resources through subsidized land development, supply of farm inputs and services and credit extension to farmers, plus institutional support for product marketing cooperatives. Interventions in non-farm opportunities include: Small and Medium Enterprise (SME), Small

and Medium Enterprise Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) etc. Health scheme interventions in Nigeria also include: Diseases Eradication Schemes, Expanded Programme on Immunization, and Primary Health Care (PHC) Scheme, which aims at providing at least one health center in every Local Government Area (LGA) and the Guinea worm Eradication Programmes, with the assistance of donor agencies (like UNICEF), which support health interventions to control diarrhea, guinea worm, and promote changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices relating to water use, excreta disposal and general hygiene (Lewu, 2008).

Since independence, various government regimes established programmes targeted at developing rural areas, but not much impact has been made on rural lives as poverty is still endemic in the area, Egwuonwu (2018). Each regime comes with its own programmes and policies, thereby neglecting the old ones. The governments hardly involve the participation of the rural communities in decision making and their approach had been top down. Those who designed the programmes do not involve the poor who are the prospective beneficiaries. It is believed that the target group should have been involved in the planning and design stages. Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012) identified one major factor that has contributed to the failure of rural development agencies to achieve their noble goal of poverty eradication in Nigeria as policy of centralized control of the programmes; made up of elites who do not have the characteristics of the deprived social groups or even from private sector. For the success of any development intervention, the participation of people is very important. Failure of past development interventions has been hinged on the lack of participation. Participation means involvement of the people from the beginning of the project in the planning, implementation and evaluation (Masanyiwa and Kinyashi, 2008). Participation is a process of acting together with different interests, deciding together what is best and forming a partnership to carry out an activity (Tologbonse *et al.* 2013). According to Maduagwu (2007), participation of women in poverty alleviation programmes has helped to increase competition for enacting cooperative solutions for their families. It helps them not only become more effective in their participation in solving their problems but also in developing the skills for understanding the relative importance of problems and selecting appropriate options to address them. This has enabled women to take up opportunity to identify their poverty levels, deal with them and learn from their problems (Declam and Onoja, 2015).

Anyanwu *et al.* (2014) stated that for any change to be considered as development, such change must denote progress and must result in upliftment of quality of human life. However, since rural development is important in the direction of self-help, a way of improving the development of rural communities is by understanding the activities or roles played by women in carrying out projects towards poverty eradication in

rural communities. Poverty can be viewed as the lack of basic amenities which makes life pleasant. About 45 to 50 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa lives below international poverty line with \$1 per day (Nwobi and Onwuasoanya, 2014). Agreeably, the problem of poverty is so enormous that its reduction remains a priority to the various governments of the third world countries, Nigeria inclusive (Nwobi and Onwuasoanya, 2014). Poverty eradication is the most difficult challenge facing Nigeria and its people, and the greatest obstacle in the pursuit of sustainable socio-economic growth (NEEDS, 2005). Poverty reduction or eradication has appeared as a most priority of every regime in Nigeria. Poverty reduction or eradication is concerned with increasing income level of individuals and households in order to enable them cater for their basic necessities of life (Danjuma *et al.* 2013). Nwankwo (2010) noted that women's poverty may be directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources including credit, land ownership and inheritance, lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in decision making process

Despite these series of poverty alleviation programmes to empower people economically, many rural dwellers still complain about scarcity of human basic needs (Eze, 2014). Thus, government programmes were not able to address some of the rural community needs; therefore communities resorted to self-community development projects in addressing some of their needs in Imo State, especially in Orlu Agricultural Zone, where women participate actively in community poverty eradication programmes Egwuonwu (2018). The study analysed women participation in community poverty alleviation programmes in Orlu Agricultural Zone, Imo State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study area was Imo State, made up of three Agricultural Zones: Owerri, Okigwe and Orlu. The population of the study constitutes all rural women that were engaged in one poverty eradication projects or the other. Multistage sampling procedure was used in selecting the respondents. In the first stage, Orlu Agricultural Zone was purposively selected because of numerous poverty eradication projects being executed by the women in the zone. The second stage was the selection of 3 Local Government Areas (LGA) and 3 communities in each LGA in the third stage. In the fourth stage, 2 villages were selected from each community, and then 10 women who are actively involved in community poverty eradication projects selected lastly; giving a total of 180 respondents. Data were collected with the aid of structured questionnaires, Focus Group Discussion and Participatory observation. The data collected were analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics. A 3-point likert type scale was used to access the level of participation of the women in community poverty eradication projects thus; never (1), sometimes (2) and always (3). Respondents with mean

score of 2.00 and above imply participation, while respondents with mean score less than 2.00 imply no participation. To determine the mean likert level = $X_s = \Sigma X$. X_s of each item were computed by multiplying the frequency of each response pattern with its appropriate nominal value and dividing the sum with the number of respondent to the items. This can be summarized with equation below;

$$X_s = \frac{\Sigma fn}{N} \dots (1)$$

Where,

X_s = mean score

Σ = summation

f = frequency

n = likert nominal value

N = number of the respondents

$$X_s = 1+2+3 = 6/3 = 2.00$$

Effect of some socio-economic characteristics on level of participation in community poverty eradication programmes was analyzed using ordinary least square regression. The implicit form is expressed thus:

$$Y = F(X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4, X_5, X_6, X_8) + e \dots (2)$$

Where,

Y = Level of participation (sum of the mean responses)

X_1 = Marital status (dummy variable; married =1; otherwise = zero)

X_2 = Educational level (number of years of formal education)

X_3 = Age (years)

X_4 = Household size (number of people living under one roof)

X_5 = Income (measured in Naira from major occupation)

X_6 = Membership of social organization (member 1; otherwise = 0)

X_7 = Farming experience (years)

X_8 = Access to credit (access 1; otherwise = 0)

e = Error term

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the projects executed by the women and its status during the study. The results show basic projects executed were 16 market stalls with 56.3% adjudged completed, 43.8% on-going, while 10.8% were abandoned by the women. The table also show that among 7 school building projects observed, 2(28.6%) have been completed, while 5(71.43%) were still on-going, with none abandoned. Nine civic centres were observed, out of which 9(55.6%) were completed, while 4(44.4%) were still under construction. Six cottage industries were observed and all have been completed. For road construction/repair, 2(50%) of the roads has been completed, while 2(50%) also were still under construction. For bridges, 4(57%) were completed, 1(14.3%) on-going, while 2 (28.6%) were abandoned. For drilling of boreholes, all the 3 borehole drillings were completed as at the time of study. The results actually revealed that the women were actually involved in poverty eradication projects. The implication is that these poverty eradication projects will create structures to strengthen their economies. This result is in line with Nikkah and Redzuan (2009) that community participation creates an enabling environment for sustainability by allowing user groups to select the level of service, for which they are willing to pay. Also, Deji (2007) also indicated that participation of women is significant to the success and sustainability of rural development projects, and level of their participation determines the extent to which the project succeeds.

Table 1: Poverty eradication projects and their status executed by the women in the study area

Variables	Observed	Completed	On-going	Abandoned
Construction of markets	16	9(56.3%)	9(43.8%)	3(10.8%)
Construction of schools	7	2(28.6%)	5(71.43%)	-
Construction of Health centres	10	4(40%)	6(60%)	-
Provision of civic centres	9	5(55.6%)	4(44.4%)	-
Cottage industries	6	6(100%)	-	-
Community road construction	4	2(50%)	2(50%)	-
Building of bridges	7	4(57.1%)	1(14.3%)	2(28.6%)
Drilling of borehole	3	3(100%)	-	-
Total Projects	62	35(56.4%)	22(35.5%)	5(8.6%)

Field survey, 2018

Results in Table 2 show the level of participation of women in poverty eradication projects in the study area; attendance to meeting had a mean score of 2.32. The result signifies that attendance to meeting was encouraging. This in turn indicates strengthening group work, which diffuses discouragement and abandonment of project work and fine-tuning appropriate strategies in carrying out the project. It is also during meetings that ideas are conceived, needs analysed, and basic information about the project that leads to a decision-making. When people are involved in a meaningful exchange of ideas, they are likely to spread to friends

and neighbours. Olawakpam and Eni, (2012) noted that all community segments benefit from increased meetings attendance because their interest and viewpoints have a greater probability of being voiced. Payment of dues had a mean score of 2.47. The implication of the result is that having come up with detailed estimate of all the projects, it will determine the amount of money to be fixed as dues and registered payment will help to curtail unnecessary abandonment of the projects. Project initiations had a mean score of 2.12. Most of the women are very close to the community and some have travelled and exposed to the

kind of projects that are supposed to impact positively on the standard of living of members of the communities. In support of the results, Ogbonna and Okoroafor (2004) indicated that one of the merits of participation is the involvement of people in development activities taking place in their communities will likely result in better decision making. Project planning had a mean score of 2.44. Since women are close to the environment, they might have great ideas and suggestions made could be very essential and beneficial in implementation of the projects. Implementation had a mean score of 1.61. Women have important insight as to how the technology may affect them and so participate actively in the implementation process. Monitoring had a mean score of 1.65. This may likely enhance the knowledge of community members on the potential changes such infrastructure may require

and the necessary adjustment to be made. This appears to be an essential role in community poverty eradication projects, because project monitoring ensures projects embarked upon are carried out to completion. According to the women, most of the monitoring activities were done by their husbands most often. This could be the role they play especially in ensuring judicious use of funds, and enforcing the right of use of materials and standards. Evaluation had a mean score of 1.61 which was the least score. Project evaluation is a process used to determine if the design and delivery of project are effective and proposed outcomes met. The women did not participate actively in evaluating the projects, thereby leading to abandonment and lack of sustainability. The grand mean of the result was 2.14, implying that the women participated in all the stages.

Table 2: Level of participation of the women in community poverty eradication projects (N=180)

Variables	Always (3)	Sometimes (2)	Never (1)	Total frequency	x
Attendance to meeting	98(294)	42(84)	40(40)	418	2.32
Payment of dues	87(261)	90(180)	3(3)	444	2.47
Projects/programme initiations	73(219)	56(112)	51(51)	382	2.12
Planning of the projects	81(243)	98(196)	1(1)	440	2.44
Organising	62(186)	38(76)	80(80)	342	1.90
Implementation	79(237)	65(195)	36(36)	468	2.60
Monitoring of projects	35(105)	47(94)	98(98)	297	1.65
Evaluation of projects	21(63)	68(136)	91(91)	290	1.61

Grand mean = 2.14

Field survey, 2018

Figures in parenthesis are frequencies

Table 3 shows the result of the ordinary least square regression analysis of the relationship between level of women participation in community poverty reduction programme and their socio-economic characteristics. From the result, the R^2 of 0.588 implies that 58.8% of the variations in the level of women participation in community poverty reduction programme were explained by their socio-economic characteristics. The F-ratio of 6.809 which was highly significant at 1% probability level indicates the goodness fit of the model. The results, revealed that years of formal education ($P < 0.01$), household size ($P < 0.01$), monthly income ($P < 0.05$), access to credit ($P < 0.05$) had a significant relationship with the level of women participation in community poverty eradication programmes. Educational level (years of formal schooling) has a significant positive relationship with women participation in community poverty eradication programmes. This implies that as the educational level of the women increases, their level of participation in community poverty reduction programme also increases. Education enlightens and sharpens the mental state of an individual and makes an individual responsive to things that can better their welfare. An educated person will be willing to get involved on any project or programme that will contribute to the development of his or her community.

Household size (-4.993***) has a significant negative relationship with women participation in community poverty reduction programmes. This implies that as the

household size decreases, the level of women participation in community poverty reduction programmes increases. This is in line with *a priori* expectations. Large household size can be translated to increased responsibility, dependency and demand for resources, except when the household members are grown up adults. Women with large household sizes may have much responsibility that could affect their participation in community poverty reduction programmes. Coefficient of age (1.666*) was positive and significantly related to participation at 10% level of probability. This means that as the age of the women increased, the participation of women in community poverty eradication projects increases. This increase in participation could be due to the stability and sustenance of the goals/activities of the women over the years. Income had a significant negative relationship with the level of women participation in community poverty eradication programmes. This is contrary to the *a priori* expectations and could be due to the lots of activities and schedule always associated with high income earners, which may affect their involvement in most of the community poverty eradication programmes. Access to credit was positive and significantly related to women participation in community poverty eradication programmes. This is in line with the *a priori* expectations that access to credit give an individual the opportunity to easily attain or cope with stringent financial needs. This implies that as access to credit increases, the participation of the women also increases.

3: Regression estimates of the determinants of level of participation in community poverty eradication projects

Variables	Coefficient	Std. error	t-value
(Constant)	21.033	3.412	6.165***
Marital status	2.535	2.198	1.153
Educational level	0.476	0.148	3.221***
Age	0.116	0.070	1.666*
Household size	-1.271	0.254	-4.993***
Monthly income	-2.452E ⁻⁰⁵	1.098E ⁻⁰⁶	-2.232**
Membership of social organization	-0.157	1.307	-0.120
Farming experience	0.089	0.074	1.208
Access to credit	2.923	1.367	2.138**
F-ratio	6.809***		
R-square	0.588		
Adjusted R square	0.346		

Source: Field survey, 2018

*, ** and *** is significant at 10%, 5% and 1% level of probability respectively

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the women participated actively in community poverty eradication programmes in the study area. Out of the 68 projects initiated (52%) were completed, (32.4%) on-going and only (7.4%) were abandoned. The study therefore recommends that women should pay attention in the area of organizing themselves, monitoring the projects and evaluating them. They should embark on regular awareness campaign among their members on the importance of implementing viable poverty eradication projects, embrace leadership integrity, and increase frequency of meetings. This would promote unity among members especially on project initiation, and implementation among others.

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