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Constraints to Rural Women Farmers' Involvement in Food Production in Nigeria (Pp. 281-288)

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Abstract

The study aimed at identifying the problems rural Nigerian women farmers encounter in food production and the solutions. The sample comprised of 3,500 persons from Edo, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Delta, Oyo, Enugu and Anambra States of Nigeria. Questionnaires were used for data collection. Percentages, means and standard deviations were used for the data analysis. Findings indicated that the major problems encountered by the rural women farmers in Nigeria were poverty, illiteracy, lack of storage facilities, poor health status and poor yield. Some of the solutions identified were to give the rural women farmers adult education; teach them effective methods of food processing, preservation and storage, and the use of modern farm tools. It was recommended among others that the government should encourage more rural women to engage in food production.

Introduction

The population of Nigeria is growing rapidly. This has made food supply to be grossly inadequate to feed the growing population. This has led to malnutrition, increased rates of morbidity and mortality among the vulnerable groups-infants, toddlers and pre-school children. In Nigeria there is mass movement of people from rural to urban areas in search of more lucrative jobs. Nwabah (2005) attributed the mass movement of people from rural to urban areas to the emergence of petroleum industry, which brought

about much cash into the Nigerian system and left a vacuum in the rural areas (Richards, 1995).

Sessay and Odebiyi (1998) found that rural Nigerian women play an important role in food production and nutrition of their families with the women providing up to 80% of the food crops but the United Nations Development Programme (1997) has found that these rural women faced much constraints.

Anyakoha and Mbanefoh (2000) found that these rural women who face enormous challenges and constraints in their role as providers of household nutrition security are under-rewarded resulting in poverty, environmental degradation, lack of appropriate technology, education and health. UNDP (1997) observed that poverty has been a longstanding issue in rural areas and Olayemi (2002) remarked that poverty in Nigeria has been described as an essential rural phenomenon because a disproportionately high percentage of the poor live in rural areas. Anyakoha et al (1997) reported that technological supports are male-oriented and gender biased. They emphasized that such technological support by government cannot promote women's contribution in household nutrition security.

Many rural women farmers have poor health status. This could be due to heavy farm work, childbearing and rearing and poor nutrition. The rural areas in Nigeria do not have good roads and social amenities such as potable water, health care services and electricity. Anyakoha and Mbanefoh (2002) stated that where there were no motorable roads, women trek very long distance and this usually wore and tore the women down gradually. Mbanefoh (1994) observed that rural households do not often have enough to meet their basic needs. As such they spend 80% of their income on food leaving little on housing, health and education. Anyakoha and Mbanefoh (2000) concluded that the lives of poor rural households revolve round a continuous struggle for food and a continuous threat of seasonal food shortages or price increase which makes food hard to be obtained.

In order to increase food production and recompense the effort of rural Nigerian women farmers Nwabah (2005) recommended the application of modern farm inputs. Earlier, Oculi (1999) recommended the adequate use of fertilizers, pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, improved skills of developed countries, provision of infrastructural facilities, transport/communication networks, storage facilities to improve the marketing system. FAO (1992) recommended the application of appropriate technology in food preservation.

These included household and community methods and tools for preserving and processing perishable foods such as sea foods to increase shelf life, improve safety and nutrition quality.

In order to ensure adequate food production by rural women farmers to feed the teeming population of Nigeria, challenges and constraints which hamper the women's effectiveness must be promptly addressed. And adequate measures that serve as solutions must be vigorously sought and implemented. This paper aimed at identifying constraints to rural women's participation in food production and the measures for alleviating the problems.

Methodology

Survey research design was used to study constraints to rural Nigerian women farmers' in food production. The population comprised of Agricultural science teachers/lecturers, Nutritionists, Agricultural extension workers, students and literate rural women from Ondo, Oyo, Edo, Delta Lagos, Enugu, Anambra, Osun, and Ogun States of Nigeria. A sample population of 388 was taken from each of eight states plus 396 from Delta State making a total of 3,500 respondents. Questionnaire was used for data collection. It had a 4-point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree representing 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively on the section of the questionnaire on the constraints to women farmers' involvement in food production and possible solutions. The copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents by the researcher and research assistants. They were retrieved immediately after completion on the same day. The responses to each of the questionnaire items were arranged in frequency distribution tables and percentages, mean responses, and standard deviation of the items were computed. A mean of 2.50-4.00 was considered a major problem or solution. A mean that is less than 2.50 is not considered a serious problem or an ineffective solution.

Results

Findings showed that majority of the people 2537 (72.2%) were teachers. Others were agricultural extension workers and students. Table 1 showed that all the items (except item 14) have their means above 2.50. This indicated that the respondents regarded the items (except item 14) as major problems that rural women farmers in Nigeria encounter. Item 14 with mean below 2.50 showed that it is not accepted by the people as a serious problem of rural women farmers.

Table 2 showed that all the items 1-7 have their mean above 2.50, indicating that all the items were perceived as solutions to the problems that Nigerian rural women farmers have.

Discussion and Findings

Majority of women in rural areas in Nigeria are involved in food production. They face a lot of challenges and constraints, which adversely affect their level of food production. Some examples of such constraints are illiteracy, poverty, lack of application of appropriate technology. Anyakoha and Mbanefo (2002) had similar findings. Another problem is poverty. Poverty is a serious problem. This could result to lack of money to finance farming practices. People who are poor may not even have enough money to feed adequately. Such people will not be energetic enough to get involved in farming. This is because farming requires strength and determination. UNDP (1997) found that poverty has been a long standing problem in rural areas in Nigeria.

Anyakoha and Mbanefo (2002) stated that where there were no good roads, the women trekked very long distances. They found that the long distance trekked often wore and tore the women down gradually. Apart from this, the lack of good roads often makes women farmers to sell off their farm proceeds to consumers at the farm gate at low prices or face the problem of the food stuffs getting spoilt. This type of loss discourages farmers and eventually leads to food insecurity.

In order to overcome the problem of poor yield, Nwabah (2005) recommended the application of modern farm in-puts. The planting of high yielding variety of food crops can guarantee rapid increase in food production.

The problem of pest/rodents is usually a great source of post harvest food losses. This could discourage farmers to reduce their investments in food production. Environmental degradation is caused by erosion. Anyakoha and Mbanefo (2002) noted as a serious problem is becoming very common. Erosion usually wears off the top fertile soil result to low crop yield.

The study also identified solutions to the problems that confront Nigerian rural women farmers. The joining of cooperative society was upheld as a solution to give the women farmers access to loan they need to finance farming. Another solution is the giving of rural women adult education. Emphasis can be in the area of food production, processing, preservation and

storage. If these areas are taught the heavy post harvest losses experienced by the farmers will be greatly minimized. The provision of processing and storage facilities by the government could minimize post harvest losses and promote food security.

The construction of good roads will make transportation easier and cheaper for farmers to market their farm produce. Education of rural women farmers in the use of modern farm tools is also very important. Such tools could serve as work simplification measures that could increase the proportion of land cultivated leading to increase in food production. Such tools make the farming less strenuous.

Conclusion

The study identified the constraints to rural women's participation in food production. Some of such constraints are poverty, low crop yield and difficulty in acquiring loan. These problems need to be addressed through the cooperation of the rural women farmers, community and the government. The most urgent and effective area that need attention is the area of food storage and processing.

Recommendations

- 1 The role played by women farmers in rural areas should be commended.
- 2 The government should encourage more rural women to participate in food production.
- 3 The government should give loans to rural women farmers to invest in food production.
- 4 Women in the rural areas of Nigeria should be given Adult Education, which should include farming education.
- 5 Post Harvest Education should be given to the rural women farmers.
- 6 Nutrition Education should be given to the rural Nigerian women farmers in order to improve their nutritional status.
- 7 The rural women should be given Health Education as a means of improving their health status and should be made aware of the

available health facilities in their localities, which they should adequately utilize at affordable prices.

Table 1: Problems Rural Women Farmers Face in food production

S/N	Problems	Strongly Agree (score 4)	Agree (score 3)	Disagree (Score 2)	Strongly Disagree (Score 1)	Mean \bar{X}	SD
1	Poverty	1870	1330	30	358	3.31	0.49
2	Environmental degradation e.g erosion	8	3210	-	-	2.99	0.50
3	Illiteracy	1504	1809	-	-	3.45	0.49
4	Use of crude implements for farming	57	2812	-	-	3.02 2.90	0.14
5	Lack of technological knowledge	661	2416	219	-	3.08	0.41
6	Lack of access to technological tools/equipment	2520	664	50	-	3.76	0.46
7	Availability of little finance	1591	1662	-	-	3.49	0.50
8	Use of inadequate processing methods	1411	1860	62	-	3.40	0.50
9	Lack of food storage facilities	1670	1503	-	-	3.53	0.50
10	High post harvest losses	668	1986	-	-	3.25	0.43
11	Poor roads	1560	1711	-	-	3.25	0.43
12	High transportation cost to market food items	1200	1227	644	-	3.18	0.75
13	Poor health status	1230	760	622	-	3.23	0.81
14	Low level of education	690	662	613	1200	2.27	1.18
15	Difficulty in getting loan to finance food production	729	229	1498	-	2.81	0.90
16	Problems of pest, which destroy foodstuff	1994	1303	-	-	3.60	0.49
17	Consumers are not usually willing to purchase food items at moderately high cost	819	767	1311	301	2.62	0.99
18	Poor crop yield	1666	1630	4	-	3.50	0.50
19	Difficulty in obtaining high yielding crop varieties	1633	1660	-	-	3.50	0.50
20	High cost of fertilizers.	1822	720	662	-	3.36	0.80

Table 2: The solutions to the problems that Nigerian rural women farmers face in food production

S/N	Solutions	Strongly Agree (Score 4)	Agree (Score 3)	Disagree (Score 2)	Strongly Disagree (score 1)	Mean \bar{X}	Standard Deviation
1	Women need to join cooperative societies for acquisition of loan	1241	1903	-	-	3.39	0.49
2	Giving rural women farmers adult education especially in the area of food production	1912	650	611	-	3.50	0.50
3	Teaching women effective methods of food processing, preservation and storage	1333	670	676	-	3.25	0.83
4	Provision of good roads in rural areas for easy transportation to sell off farm produce	990	356	1344	-	2.87	0.92
5	Education in the use of modern farm tools	1570	675	45	699	3.04	1.22
6	Government provision of processing and storage facilities	2270	1001	-	-	3.69	0.46
7	Prevention/reduction of post harvest losses through the use of adequate preservation/storage methods	1263	1099	250	650	3.03	1.11

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