

**EXTENT OF RURAL WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN AGRO-BASED
 ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITIES IN IMO STATE NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed the extent of rural women involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities in Imo state, Nigeria. Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire from 120 rural women through random sampling procedure. Data collected were analyzed using frequency, percentages, mean and regression analysis. Majority (73%) of the women were married with an average age and household size of 37years and 7 persons respectively. Approximately 53% had primary education with 52% belonging to cooperative society. Average farming experience and farm income were 8years and ₦35, 424.74 respectively. A reasonable proportion (60%) had access to credit facilities. Results showed that the majority (53%) of the women were highly involved in agro-based entrepreneurial activities with crop production (95%), marketing (97%) and land preparation (87%) as the major agro-based entrepreneurial activities they were involved in. Women's involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities was found to be influenced by household size, membership in cooperative society and access to extension contact. The study further showed that inadequate capital (96.67%), high cost of capital (93.33%) and inadequate skilled labour (91.67%) were major constraints to women's involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities. This research therefore recommends that the women should be encouraged through enhanced access to loans and credit facilities. They should also be encouraged to belong to cooperatives and other societies which can access grants and loans as this would increase the extent of their involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities in the area.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Agro-based activities, rural women involvement

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of low standard of living, hunger and poverty is common in the rural areas which stem out from low level of food management capacity after production, post harvest losses and lack of entrepreneurial initiatives. Entrepreneurship in rural areas looms large to solve the problems of poverty, unemployment and rural transformation in developing countries Entrepreneurship is the act of organizing, managing and assuming the risks of a business (Okpukpara, 2011). Also, Shailesh, Gyanendral & Yadav (2013) viewed entrepreneurship as a dynamic process of creating incremental wealth). This wealth is generated by individuals who take major risks in terms of equity, time and career commitment of providing value to some product or services, the product or services itself may not be new or unique, but value must somehow be infused by the entrepreneur by

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securing and allocating the necessary skill and resources. According to Onwurafor & Enwelu (2013), all over the world, entrepreneurship particularly among women has become an important component of policy intervention, women's entrepreneurship is vital to the economy of a nation with respect to economic development and poverty reduction. Women entrepreneurs in Nigeria are major contributors to economic growth because without any doubt, they are generating employment. The contributions of women are no longer debatable as numerous scholars have stated that African women provide some 60-80% of food for family consumption and that the economic growth of some nations is attributable to female entrepreneurs (Iyiola & Azuh, 2014).

Women agro-based entrepreneurs are simply women that participate in total agricultural activities, who take the risks involved in effective utilization of human and material resources in a unique way, so as to take advantage of the opportunity identified in their immediate environment through production of goods and services (Emerhihi, Nnadi, Chikaire, Anyaoha, & Ejiogu-Okereke, 2017). Women entrepreneurs make a substantial contribution towards entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. Akerele & Aihonsu (2011) noted that entrepreneurship among rural women has been aided by the by the government or through credit institution with the provision of several factors such as provision of credit and training scheme. This is believed to serve as a road to development of entrepreneurship among rural women but yet after providing these listed factors which were mentioned above it seems to still pose in surmountable obstacles for rural women. Women are therefore becoming increasingly important in the socio-economic development of both developed and developing economies as they account for significant percent of the operators of small and medium enterprises (Egwuonwu, 2017; Kjeldsen & Nielson, 2000). Women entrepreneurs particularly in rural areas in Nigeria are faced with various challenges and obstacles in agro-based entrepreneurial activities such as Nursery production, land preparation/planting, production practices, harvesting, processing, storage and marketing. These challenges include; capital inadequacy, unavailability of the required infrastructures, shortage of man power, household chore burdens as women are usually discouraged from venturing or involving entrepreneurial activity.

Therefore, this study specific objectives were to; identify the socio-economic characteristics of rural women agro-based entrepreneurs; identify agro-based entrepreneurial activities in the area; ascertain reasons for women's involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities; determine the extent of involvement of rural women in agro-based entrepreneurial activities; identify barriers to women involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities and identify perceived strategies for overcoming the barriers to women involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities. The null hypothesis tested for the study was that the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents do not significantly influence their level of involvement in entrepreneurial activities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in Imo state, Nigeria. Imo State consist of twenty-seven Local Government Areas (LGAs), Imo state is divided into three agricultural zones; Okigwe, Orlu,

and Owerri. Imo state lies within latitudes 4°45' N and 7°15' N; longitude 6°50' E and 7°25' E (Nigeria Population Commission (NPC), 2006). The entire rural women in Imo state was the population for the study. The study adopted random sampling procedure in selecting two (2) LGAs each from the three zones in the state. Two communities were randomly selected from each of the LGA. Twenty (20) women were randomly selected from the six communities making a total of one hundred and twenty (120) respondents for the study. The data for the study were generated from primary source. The primary data were collected using structured questionnaire and complemented with oral interview. The data for this study were analyzed using both descriptive statistics (frequency, percentages and mean) to achieve the objectives and inferential statistics (multiple regression) for the hypothesis. Three-point Likert type rating technique was used for measuring level of involvement of women in entrepreneurial activities. The mean score of respondents was computed by adding up the weighted values and dividing by the number of scales to obtain the discriminating index of 2.0 e.g. Highly Involved = 3; Moderately Involved = 2 and Not Involved = 1, therefore, $3+2+1=6/3=2.0$ as cut off point. Inferential statistics was used for testing the hypothesis. Multiple regression analysis was used for the hypothesis which is: The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents significantly influence their level of involvement in entrepreneurial activities.

The explicit form of the model was

$$Y = (X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4, X_5, X_6, X_7, X_8, X_9, X_{10} + e)$$

Where Y = Level of involvement in agro-based activities (Total rating scores)

X₁ = age of women in years (actual age)

X₂ = education level of women (total number of years spent in school)

X₃ = marital status (dummy variable = married = 1 not married = 0)

X₄ = household size (number of individual in the household)

X₅ = farming size (Hectares)

X₆ = income (Naira)

X₇ = Membership co-operative society (yes = 1, No = 0)

X₈ = Access to credit facilities (Yes = 1, no = 0)

X₉ = access to extension services = (Yes = 1, No = 0)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic characteristics of the rural women

Table 1 shows that the mean age of rural women involved in agro-based entrepreneurial activities in Imo State was 37years. Majority (53%) had primary education, this implies that women involved in agro based activities were fairly literate. Olowe (2012) noted that one factor militating women entrepreneurs in the agro-based activities is knowledge level that is formal education. Also, majority (73%) were married with a mean household size of 7persons. Mean farm size was 1.25 ha, average income was ₦ 25,424.70. The result on income aligns with the works of Okpukpara (2011) who reported that women with high income participate actively in agro related activities. The result also shows that the majority (52%) were not member of the cooperative society, the study of Babasola and Fatusi (2009) reported that membership of social organization affords members vast opportunities about

modern women contemporary issues within their domain. Also, majority (60%) of the women had access to credit facilities, credit has a crucial role for involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities. Majority (88%) had no contact with extension service, extension is an informal educational process directed toward the rural population. The average experience in agro-based entrepreneurial activities was 8.25 years, this shows that the women entrepreneurs had reasonable years of experience which will undoubtedly enhance their involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities in the study area

Agro-based entrepreneurship activities

The result in Table 2 shows that reasonable proportion of the women identified crop production (95%) and marketing (92%) as entrepreneurial activities they were involved in. Other agro-based entrepreneurial activities were land preparation (87%), goatry (75%), crop storage (73%), crop processing (63%), snailery (56%), poultry (38%), piggery (20%), and nursery production (17%). The finding implies that women engage virtually in all the agro-based entrepreneurial activities. This is in line with Egwuonwu (2018) which stated that women in the rural areas work as agricultural labour, as farmers, co-farmers, family labour and manage the farm and farm enterprise. Their contributions to the production of fruits and vegetables in the homestead along with poultry and livestock rearing, vegetable and fish cultivation, tree planting and crop processing bring a substantial share in the total family income. Furthermore, Table 3 reveals that majority 52% of the women were moderately involved in agro-based entrepreneurial activity, while 28% were highly involved in agro-based entrepreneurial activities in the study area. This finding implies that the women were actively involved in agro-based entrepreneurial activities in the study area. Rahman (2008); Mohammed & Abdul Quadri (2012) confirmed this assertion that rural women constitute the major actors in all aspects of life and are involved in farming activity in order to support their family.

Reasons for women's involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities

Table 4 shows the reasons for the rural women involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities. These were; desire for independence (93.33%), taking part in decision-making (91.67%), for increased women empowerment (83.33%), desirable changes in the community (80.00%), contribute to family income (75%), for ending poverty (56.67%), self-realization (55%), to create jobs (46.67%) and participating in policy making and governance (38.33%). The implication of the findings is that increase in the above reasons would automatically increase women entrepreneurial drive in agribusiness in the study area. This finding support the assertions of Iyiola & Azuh (2014); Onwurafor & Enwelu (2013), that the desires for independence and contribution to family income make most women get involve in agro-based entrepreneurial activities.

Women constraints to their involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities

Table 5 shows that women involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities is not without challenges. The finding revealed that inadequate capital (96.67%) was a major constraint to women involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities. Also, poor access to training

programs (93.67%), inadequate skilled labour (91.67%), high cost of manual labour (86.67%), and limited knowledge of marketing strategy (83.33%) were identified as constraints to involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities by the rural women. The above barriers are all in line with the result of Olowe (2012); Iyiola & Azuh (2014) who asserted that poor experience/training in entrepreneurship developments, long distance between home area and market area, poor access to capital, poor government support for entrepreneurs, inability to cope with the task of entrepreneurship and poor enabling environment has been the bane of poor entrepreneurship spirit and development among prospective entrepreneurs.

Perceived strategies for overcoming constraints to women involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities

Table 6 shows that perceived strategies to overcome the barriers of rural women involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities were access to credit and loans (86.67%), provision of and access to marketing information (71.67%), access to labour (66.67%), and removal of discriminatory loans/practices against women (63.33%) other strategies were provision of basic infrastructures (58.33%) and access to extension visits (25%). The greater proportion of the women (86.87%) perceived that having access to credit loans would help to combat the barrier of lack or inadequate finance for involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities in the area. This result is in line with Robert (2013) who identified access to credit facilities, extension contacts and provision of basic infrastructures among others as strategies in helping women involving in agro-based entrepreneurial activities.

Influence of women socio-economic characteristics on women's level of involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities

Table 7 shows the results of influence of women socio-economic characteristics on level of women's involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities in the study area. The multiple regression analysis produced the t-ratios. R^2 value of 0.70 and F-value of 54.41 at 5% level of probability indicating the overall significance of the model. The coefficient of multiple determination of 0.701 indicates that about 70% of the variation on level of women's involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities was explained by the joint action of the explanatory variables in the model. Specifically, from the results the coefficients for age, sex, household size, income, cooperative membership and access to credit were positive and significant at 5% level of probability. However, the positive influence of age implies that as age of women increases so their involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities increases as they have more responsibilities to take care of. Also, as household size increases so there is increase in women agro-based entrepreneurial activities. On the other hand, the positive influence of income on women involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities implies that income can boost involvement of women in entrepreneurial activity. Also, membership of cooperative positively influenced involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities this belonged implies that as the number of cooperative members increases the level of agro-based entrepreneurial activities increases. Again, as the women interact among themselves in their cooperatives, they exchange ideas that can help in their agro-based

entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, positively influence of women access to credit on women involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities cannot be over emphasize as increase in access to credit facility can make women to embark on many agro-based entrepreneurial activities in order to be financially dependent.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The desires of women for financial independence and contribution to family income made women to be involved in agro-based entrepreneurial activities in order to meet up with the family demands and also contribute substantially towards their community. However, inadequate capital, poor access to training programs, inadequate skilled labour, high cost of manual labour and limited knowledge of marketing strategy hindered women from benefiting fully in entrepreneurial activity. Therefore, the study recommends that credit facilities should be made available to women so as to enable them contribute meaningfully to their households. Also, extension agency should encourage the formation and memberships of social organizations among the women to enable them have access to information that can help them in their agro based agricultural activities and also enhance their involvement and contribution positively in agro-based entrepreneurship. There should be entrepreneurship training on food processing to give adequate training to potential women food processing entrepreneurs.

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APPENDIX**Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of rural women**

Socio-economic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Age (Years)			
20 – 29	26	21.67	37years
30 – 39	54	45.00	
40 – 49	32	26.67	
50 and above	8	6.67	
Level of Education			
Primary	64	53.33	
Secondary	40	33.33	
Tertiary	16	13.33	
Marital Status			
Single	22	18.33	
Married	88	73.33	
Divorce	2	1.67	
Widowed	8	6.67	
Household size			
1-4	28	23.33	7 Persons
5-8	64	53.33	
9-12	24	20	
13 and above	4	3.33	
Farm size (Hectare)			
0.1 - 1.0	54	45	1.2ha
1.1 - 2.0	48	40	
2.1 - 3.0	18	15	
Income (₦)			
less than 21000	8	6.67	₦ 25,424.70
21000 – 30999	34	28.33	
31000 – 40999	44	36.67	
41000 – 50000	18	15	
above 50000	16	13.33	
Member of social organization			
Yes	58	48.33	
No	62	51.67	
Access to Credit			
Yes	72	60	
No	48	40	
Access to Extension agents			
Yes	14	11.67	
No	106	88.33	

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 2: Women involvement in the different agro-based entrepreneurial activity.

Agro-based entrepreneurial activity.	*Frequency	Percentage (%)
Crop production	114	95.00
Marketing	110	91.67
Land preparation	104	86.67
Goatry	90	75.00
Crop storage	88	73.33
Crop processing	76	63.33
Snailery	68	56.67
Poultry	46	38.33
Piggery	24	20.00
Nursery production	20	16.67

*Source: Field Survey, Data, 2019; *Multiple responses were recorded*

Table 3: Level of involvement in the agro-based entrepreneurial activity in the area.

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Highly involved	34	28.33
Moderately involved	62	51.67
Lowly involved	24	20.00

Source: Field Survey Data, 2019; Mean = 2.23;

Table 4: Reasons for involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities

Motivating reasons	*Frequency	Percentage (%)
Desire for Independence	112	93.33
Taking part in decision-making	110	91.67
For increased women empowerment	100	83.33
Desirable changes in the community	96	80.00
Contribute to family income	90	75.00
For ending poverty	68	56.67
Self-realization	66	55.00
To create jobs	56	46.67
Participating in policy making and governance	46	38.33

*Source: Field Survey, Data, 2019; *Multiple responses were recorded.*

Table 5: Constraints encountered by women in involvement in entrepreneurial activities

S/N	Constraints in Agro-Based Entrepreneurial Activities	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Inadequate capital	116	96.67
2	Poor access to training programs	112	93.33
3	Inadequate skilled labour	110	91.67
4	High cost of manual labour	104	86.67
5	Inadequate access to information and network	100	83.33
6	Poor infrastructural	90	75.00
7	Low level of business idea	88	73.33
8	Limited knowledge of marketing strategy	88	73.33
9	Household core burden	70	58.33
10	Indecisiveness	68	56.67
11	Limited access to formal of education	58	48.33
12	Poor financial management skills	48	40.00
13	Inadequate processing equipment	36	30.00
14	Inadequate raw materials	30	25.00
15	Inadequacy in applying modern processing techniques	24	20.00

*Multiple responses were recorded. Source: *Field Data Survey 2019*

Table 6: Perceived strategies for overcoming constraints to women involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities

Perceived Strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Access to credit loans	104	86.67
Provision of and access to market information	86	71.67
Access to labour	80	66.67
Removal of discriminatory loans/practices against women	76	63.33
Provision of basic infrastructures	70	58.33
Access to extension visits	30	25.00

Source: *Field Survey Data, 2019*

Table 7: Regression estimates of relationship of socioeconomic characteristics of rural women on level of involvement in agro-based entrepreneurial activities

Variables	Coefficient	t-values
(Constant)	0.461	5.363*
Age	0.138	3.049*
Education level	-0.234	-1.326
Marital status	-0.082	-0.760
Household size	0.265	2.071*
Farm size	-0.170	-1.083
Income	0.103	2.962*
Cooperative member	1.408	7.929*
Access to credit	-0.232	2.016*
Access to extension	0.394	1.087
R ²	0.701	
F-ratio	54.41	

*Significant at 5% probability level