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Comparative Analysis of Socio-economic Characteristic of Rural Women Cooperators in Nigeria: Evidence from Benue State

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ABSTRACT This study was conducted to examine the influence of socio-economic characteristics on communication of agricultural innovations amongst women cooperators and women non-cooperators in Benue state. The objectives of this study were to: (1) Describe the socio-economic characteristics of women cooperators and non-cooperators in Zone C, Agricultural and Geopolitical Area of Benue State. (2) Examine the socio-economic factors that distinguished communication levels of rural women cooperators and non-cooperators in the area. Three women cooperative societies and non-cooperative members were randomly selected. From each of the three cooperative societies, 25x3 = 75 respondents and 75 women non-cooperators were interviewed using simple random sampling techniques. On the whole, 75x2=150 women cooperators and non-cooperators were purposively and randomly interviewed. The results showed that apart from age, there were significant differences in the socio-economic characteristics of cooperators and non-cooperators. Nine variables were positively related to communication of agricultural innovations for cooperators, while three variables were significantly related to communication of agricultural innovations by non-cooperators. On the part of women cooperators, socio-economic characteristics all together affected communication by about 46%. Out of these, contact with extension, membership of cooperatives, level of formal education, farm size and agricultural credit accounted for 40% of the variance. Contact with extension agents ranked highest with 15% of the variance. For non-cooperators, the selected variables accounted for about 20% of the variance in communication. Out of this, household size, level of formal education, age and non-farm income accounted for 18% of the variance in communication. Contact with extension agents is surprisingly not making significant contribution. This may be explained by the availability of information sources like friends, neighbours and relatives etc and the fact that non-cooperators could not arrange for extension agents for visits. It is recommended that for extensive information dissemination of agricultural innovations, extension service which is public goods be extended equally to both organizational members and non-members. In view of the fact that not many people who handle agricultural and cooperative matters are aware of what cooperatives stand for, cooperative education should be carried out at all levels of the society. This will help to broaden the financial base and increase their number and size distribution to impress the crucial importance of cooperatives in the process of socio economic development upon the generality of the people.