

Participation of Women Local Leaders in Women-Based Rural Development Projects in Osun State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT An investigation was conducted into the participation of Women Local Leaders in women-based rural development projects in Osun-State, Nigeria. The study was conducted in all the six administrative zones of the state. Six rural Local Government Areas (LGAS), one from each zone where women-based rural development projects were concentrated and 18 women groups (three from each LGAS) were purposively selected for the sampling. Structured interview schedule was administered to 108 women local leaders sampled from the women groups. Descriptive statistical techniques like frequency and percentage distribution, means and standard deviation were used to analyze the data. Correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between the variables investigated in the study. Results showed that women local leaders participated in 12 women-based rural development projects out of which nine are production projects while three are processing projects. The women-leaders were also involved in all the activities/operations at all stages of programme development such as problem identification, decision-making, plan of action, implementation and evaluation. There was positive and significant relationship between participation of women local leaders and levels of education ($r = 0.228$) and marital status ($r = 0.210$). Other variables with negative but significant relationship are external orientation ($r = -0.353$) and occupation ($r = -0.297$).

INTRODUCTION

Women are found to be useful in every spheres of life, hence their roles are not limited to child bearing and home management. Nigerian women constituted almost half (49.6%) of the total population according to 1991 population census. These women were responsible for 60-80% of the food produced in the country in addition to their traditional reproductive and community management roles (FAO, 1996). Population experts confirmed that to establish, promote and maintain sustainable development, both men and women should participate equally in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes that affect them. It has been found that many of the programmes or technologies introduced to the rural areas failed because majority is targeted towards men. Sizya (2000) affirmed that introducing a technology to only half of its potentials users would limit its adoption, and therefore suggests that both genders should be involved in learning about the technology.

Boserup (1970) identified the problem facing women as gender inequality in which women are not giving the same opportunity as their men counterpart in developmental process. They must

not be mere passive beneficiaries but active participants in the developmental process. To overcome this inequality problem the International conference on Population Development (ICPD, 1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW, 1995) provide the impetus for incorporating gender concerns in population and development programmes. Women empowerment was recommended as a means of bridging the gap of inequality between the women and men. According to Sara Longwe (1991) women empowerment refers to a process of interconnected cycles of five different levels such as welfares, access, conscientisation, participation and control where one is leading to another. With this process, women needs to be sensitized first to be aware of their potential on such accesses of welfares where they have relative advantages e.g. nutritional status, food supply and income generation. They should be made aware of the unlimited resources and potential in their environment and give access to them; they should be made to work-harder and stand against wrong belief system and taboos restricting their accessibility to resources; they should be mobilized and encouraged to participate fully at all stages of programme development affecting them and that women should

also occupy position of authority where they can also shape their destiny without being subservient to men or their dominance.

However, for sustainable development to take place through empowerment, women must be organized into functional groups. Leaders of such groups must be effective. And effective leadership places emphasis on how to strengthen the socio-economic characteristics of leaders and how well to manipulate them to enhance group cooperation and goals. In many traditional societies, it is customary for women to provide the major support for themselves and their children. This is done either by supplying the family with homegrown foods or by obtaining cash through sales of their own produces. The situation is more pronounced especially these days when many adult males have left the rural areas to enjoy social amenities and in search of white-collar jobs (daily or monthly wages) in the cities. This and other reasons have led to increase in the population of women-headed household (Lily et al., 2001). The other reasons for the increment are destruction of traditional family patterns due to natural disasters and conflict, changes in work and social patterns due to globalization and of course the evil effect of Acquire Immune-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

This therefore suggests that for women to perform such roles as leadership, economic, reproductive and social roles attributed to them, there are some inherent characteristics which are personal, social and economic in nature to the women. These inherent characteristics might be the predisposing factors to women-leaders participation in rural development programmes that had been introduced by both government and non-governmental organization. The study provides answers to the following questions:

- (i) What projects have been introduced to rural women in the study area?
- (ii) What is the level of participation of women local leaders in such projects?, and
- (iii) What are the personal, social and economic characteristics of women local leaders influencing their participation in rural development programmes?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study was to investigate the participation of women local leaders in women-based rural development projects in Osun State, Nigeria. The specific

objectives are to:

- (i) Identify the women-based rural development projects introduced to women of Osun – State.
- (ii) Determine the women leaders' level of participation, and
- (iii) Establish relationship between personal, social and economic characteristics of women local leaders and their participation in rural development programme

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Structured, pre-tested and validated interview schedules were used to collect information from 108 women local leaders selected from 18 women groups purposively selected from 6 Local Government Areas (LGA) of the 6 administrative zones of Osun State. Women local leaders were selected using a combination of positional and social participation techniques. Members of the group were asked to identify the leaders of their group, and those whose names were mentioned by 1 to 3 informants were selected and interviewed. Data were collected on the type of women-based rural development projects introduced, participation of women local leaders and their personal social and economic characteristics.

Participation of women local leaders in women-based rural development programme is the dependent variable. This was measured by the involvement of women leaders in the various stages of all development projects identified. Basically there were twelve women-based development projects, and five stages such as problem identification, decision-making, and plan of action, project implementation and project evaluation. Participation in all the activities at the five stages of developmental projects carries a maximum of 30 points and minimum of zero point. The mean and the standard deviation were calculated and used to establish the levels of participation. Statistical techniques like frequency counts, percentages and correlation were used to analyze the data collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rural Women Based Development Projects

Data in Table 1 show that women local leaders participated in 12 women-based rural development projects in their localities. Nine of the projects are production projects while three are processing projects. A close look at the projects

indicates that seven are agricultural related or on-farm projects e.g. group farming (16.6%), animal rearing (3.7%), vegetable production (14.8%) and crop production (3.7%). Other includes oil palm processing (48.1%). The rest five are off-farm projects, which are project evolved as small-scale rural industries. These are soap making (25.9%), pottery making (4.6%), tie and dye (5.5%), mat and bag weaving (17.5%) and cloth weaving (5.5%).

Table 1: Rural women-based development projects

Projects	Frequency N = 108	%	N = 108 Check in column No. 2
<i>Production Projects</i>			
Group farming	18	16.6	
Animal rearing	4	3.7	
Soap making	28	25.9	
Pottery making	5	4.6	
Tie & Dye making	6	5.5	
Mat and bag weaving	19	17.5	
Cloth Weaving	6	5.5	
Vegetable Production	16	14.8	
Crop Production	4	3.7	
<i>Processing Project</i>			
Oil-palm processing	52	48.1	
Cassava processing	54	50	
Soybeans	16	14.8	

Source: Field Survey, 2001

Participation of Women Local Leaders

Data in Table 2 show that women local-leaders were found to be involved at all the stages of project development. All the respondents (100%) were involved in decision making, formation of plan of action and project implementation. A large majority (98.1%) participated in project evaluation while a little less (78.7%) of the women leaders were involved in problem identification. Detailed analysis showed that women leaders were more of project initiator (38.9%) at problem identification stage. This was followed by information seekers (17.6%). Most of the decisions taken were reached by balloting (40.7%) and debating till consensus is reached (45.4%). Majority of the women-leaders were involved in many activities that enhanced formulation of effective plan of action. For example many were involved in providing information (93.5%), location of project site (87.0%) and arrangement of meetings (59.3%). They were also participating in discussion (87.0%) and provision of inputs (47.2%). At the implementation stage, women local leaders were also involved in many activities such as provision

Table 2: Women local leaders by stages and levels of participation in women-based rural development projects.

Participation	Frequency	%
<i>Stages of Participation</i>		
Problem identification	85	78.7
Decision making	105	100
Plan of action	108	100
Project implementation	108	100
Project evaluation	106	98.1
<i>Level of Participation</i>		
16.4 and below (Low)	19	17.59
16.14 – 21.41 (Medium)	55	50.92
21.42 and above (High)	34	31.48

Mean: 18.78 Standard deviation: 2.671

Source: Field Survey, 2001

of personal labour (97.2%), provision of hired labour (77.8%) and contribution of funds (65.7%). Only 13.9% of the women leaders provide land for project implementation. Majority of the women leaders were also involved in many project evaluation activities such as visits to the project sites (71.3%) giving advice on the use of inputs (88.9%), giving of suggestions (72.2%) and follow up exercise (50.9%). The types of participation identified in this findings ranges from passive participation where people provide information to self-mobilization participation where people takes initiatives independent of external institutions. This is in conformity with the participation typology (Pretty and Vodouhe, 1997).

Level of Participation

Data in Table 2 show that majority of the women local leaders were in the medium participation category (50.92%), 31.48 percent were in the high participation category while 17.59 percent were in the low participation category. The mean participation was 18.78 with standard deviation of 2.67, which falls within the medium participation level category. Going by the participation typology of Pretty and Vodouhe (1997), majority of the respondents (68.51%) can be said to have not gone beyond functional participation where people forms group to meet predetermined goals related to the projects meant for promotion of externally initiated social organization.

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Women Local Leaders

Data in Table 3 show that majority of the

women leaders were between the ages of 26 years and 55 years with the average of 40.5 years. Many of the leaders were married (70.4%) while very few were either single (13.8%) or widowed (13.0%). Majority of them belong to the two orthodox religions i.e. Christianity (50%), and Islam (50.9%). Majority of the women-leaders engage in multiple occupations. About 39% engage in full time farming while 52.8% take farming as part time job i.e. engage in trading. The average farm size was 3.88 acres with standard deviation of 1.04. Many women leaders (43.5%) have much larger area of land between 2.6 acres and 5 acres, 15.7 percent have cultivated land area between 5.1 acres and 7.5 acres, a small majority (33.3%), has farmland less than 2.5 acres while 4.6 percent cultivated over 7.5 acres of land. The results are indication that the women local leaders engaged in direct farming which might enable them to provide food for the family and supplement family income from the sales of their farm produce. About 32.0% of leaders had less than 10 years of farming experience while majority (47.2%) had between 11 years and 20 years of farming experience. Only 14.0% had between 21 years and 30 years of farming experience while only 7 percent had over 30 years of farming experience. These results are indication that the women-local leaders depends more on agriculture.

About 40 percent of the women leaders completed post secondary school education, 14.8 percent had secondary school education, and 33.3 percent did not complete secondary school while 6.5% had no formal education at all. This means that these entire women leader had one form of formal education or the other. The external orientation of the women leaders was high for majority. About (66%) had visited other villages within the local government area. A large majority (77.8%) had visited other settlements in other state of Nigeria. This high level of external orientation might be a predisposing factor to women local leaders participation is women-based rural development project.

Relationships Between Participation and Socio-economic Characteristics of Women Local Leaders

Data in Table 4 show resume a positive and significant correlation between participation of women local leaders in women based rural development project and level of education ($r = 0.210$) and marital status ($r = 0.210$). External

Table 3: Distribution of women local leader by their socio-economic characteristics

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
<i>Age</i>		
Below 25 years	7	6.5
26 years – 35 years	21	19.4
36 years – 45 years	38	35.2
46 years – 55 years	27	25
Above 56 years	15	13.9
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	15	13.8
Married	76	70.4
Widowed	14	13
Divorce	2	1.85
Separated	1	0.93
Total	108	100
<i>Occupation</i>		
Farming	41	38.9
Trading	57	52.8
Civil service	9	8.3
Total	108	100
<i>Size of Farm</i>		
Less than 2.5 acres	36	33.3
2.6 acres – 5.0 acres	47	43.5
5.1 acres – 7.5	18	16.7
above 7.5 acres	5	4.6
Total	108	100
<i>Years of Farming</i>		
Less than 10 years	34	31.5
11 years – 20 years	51	47.2
21 years – 30 years	15	13.9
Above 30 years	7	6.5
Total	108	100
<i>Religion</i>		
Islam	54	50
Christianity	54	50
Traditional	-	-
Total	108	100
<i>Level of Education</i>		
Illiterate	7	6.5
Primary school	6	5.6
Secondary school (not completed)	36	33.3
Secondary school	16	14.8
Post secondary school	43	39.8
Total	108	100
<i>External Orientation</i>		
Visit to other farms in the village	108	100
Visit to other villages with the local government	71	65.7
Visit to other villages in other local government	84	77.8
Visit to other states in the country	104	96.2

Multiple choices

orientation ($r = -0.353$) and occupation ($r = -0.297$) have a negative but significant correlation with participation. A percentage variation in participation as explained by each of the significant variables is as follows: external orientation (12.4%),

Table 4: Results of correlation and regression analysis showing relationship between participation and socio-economic characteristics of women local leaders

<i>Socio-economic characteristics</i>	<i>Correlations (r)</i>	<i>Coefficient of determination (r²) (Percent)</i>	<i>Regression coefficient (b)</i>	<i>T – value</i>
Age	0.155	2.41	-1.08	0.0766
Marital status	0.210*	4.4	1.22	0.1135
Religion	-0.067	0.5	-1.97	0.0388
Occupation	-0.297**	8.9	-0.6	0.3566
Size of farm	0.102	1	-0.04	0.9463
Years of farming experience	0.146	2.1	0.58	0.2583
Level of education	0.228*	5.2	2.94	0.0708
External orientation	-0.353**	12.5	1.76	-0.3951

Critical value of r (05) (106) = 0.195

Critical value of r (08) (108) = 0.254

*Significant at 0.05 levels

**Significant at 0.01 levels

occupation (8.9%), level of education (5.2%) and marital status (4.4%). Level of education had the highest prediction power among the variables investigated as indicated by the regression coefficient, (b = 2.94) followed by external orientation (b = 1.76) and marital status (b = 1.22).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Majority of the women local leaders interviewed are within the age range of 26 and 55 years with mean age of 40.5 years. The subjects had one form of education ranging from primary school to post secondary education. Most of them participated in both production and processing projects and were also found active at all the stages of rural development such as problem identification to project evaluation stages. However the participation of the women leaders in women based development projects was at medium level for majority of them.

Marital status, occupation, level of education and external orientation were some of the socio economic characteristics that had significant correlation with participation. It is believed that the characteristics that were found positive and significant should be encouraged among the women local leaders. These should also be incorporated in the training guide for the women leaders. More emphasis should be placed on

those characteristics that are found to be significant but have negative relationship with participation. Training of the women local leaders should emphasize how such negative relationship should be used to positive advantage of women development.

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